

THREADS OF MEMORY

AFFECT, ACQUISITION & ATTACHMENT IN CLOTHING CONSUMPTION

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Every morning you wait,
 clothes,
 over a chair,
 for my vanity, my love, my hope,
 my body,
 to fill you.
 I have scarcely left sleep,
 I say goodbye to water
 and enter your sleeves,
 my legs look for the hollow of your legs,
 and thus embraced
 by your unwearying fidelity
 I go out to tread the fodder,
 I move into poetry,
 I look through windows, at things,
 men, women,
 actions and struggles keep making me
 what I am,
 opposing me,
 employing my hands, opening my eyes,
 putting taste in my mouth, and thus,
 clothes,
 I make you what you are,
 pushing out your elbows,
 bursting the seams,
 and so your life swells the image of my life.

You billow and resound in the wind
 as though you were my soul,
 at bad moments you cling
 to my bones empty,
 at night the dark, sleep, people
 with their phantoms
 your wings and mine.
 I ask whether one day
 a bullet from the enemy
 will stain you
 with my blood
 and then you will die with me
 or perhaps it may not be
 so dramatic but simple,
 and you will sicken
 gradually,
 clothes,
 with me,
 with my body
 and together we will enter the earth.
 At the thought of this
 everyday I greet you
 with reverence,
 and then you embrace me
 and I forget
 because we are one
 and will go on facing the wind
 together,
 at night,
 the streets or the struggle,
 one body,
 maybe,
 one day motionless.

ODE TO CLOTHES

Pablo Neruda, 1957

Translated by W.S. Merwin

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I. PREFACE

Jonathan Anderson writes that “there is sometimes a very big difference between shopping and clothing.”

The American consumer views the fashion object first and foremost as a product. A bargain, a deal, a discount. The average shopper understands fashion to be synonymous with shopping, as an advantageous transaction. The shopper asks how they can get the most of their money: the largest quantity of items and the highest expression of status, beauty, or quality, at the lowest price.

It is not often that the average consumer thinks deeply about what it means to put on clothes. The act of getting dressed is one of default and auto-pilot, so natural and ingrained in the rhythms of the day-to-day that it takes extreme circumstance to consider clothing as more than mere routine. There must be an important occasion, a speciality gala, a landmark event for the consumer to contemplate the connotations of their clothing, or to realize the implications embedded in self-presentation.

Shopping of course occurs out of logistical necessity – we must acquire the means to cover our bodies in order to take part in normative Western society. We must clothe our skin to conceal the bareness of our flesh, to hide our scars and bruises and rawness from visibility. Yet shopping also occurs out of indulgence. In American consumption habits, buying fashionable items is often presented as a want rather than a need. The function of fashion is not really function at all. Fashion is instead seen to serve as an exercise of leisure, entertainment, and impulsivity that characterizes the fashion purchase to be an unnecessary indulgence. For this reason, the socio-cultural understanding of fashion is often conflated with frivolity and vanity. Engaging with fashion, or spending energy on being fashionable, is ascribed to the superficial and the privileged classes with enough disposable income and time to do so.

Yet clothing is not so trivial an act. What designer Jonathan Anderson reminds us in his distinction between shopping and clothing is that fashion holds the potential to function as more than a *thing* to buy and consume. That clothing is also the way that we come into being. An action, a practice, a ritual.

Through his quippy aphorism, Anderson opens the discussion of our relationship to fashion – and with it, our relationship to our own embodiment. Why should we think of clothing differently? How can we view clothing not as buying, but instead as being?

When considered purely in its relation to shopping, the fashion garment operates as a measurement of social currency and bodily capital. The shopper seeks legitimacy through the means of their transactions, searching for styles that communicate productivity, beauty, and desirability. The shopper worships the newest new and the latest trend. Fashionable objects authenticate their owner’s class status while stylish products express the shopper’s access to constant novelties. Clothes are seen as a means to a never-ending end, in which consumerism works infinitely to achieve for the consumer some solid proof: of economic success, of normative complicity, of legitimacy through the fulfillment of desire. Positioning fashion as a commercial exercise, as a contrived exchange, as money for the possession of gratification, both garment and body are fossilized into commodity objects.

When instead, fashion is understood as clothing, embodiment unfurls into a space of subjectivity. Rather than stabilizing the fashion object as a consumable product, the lens of clothing recognizes fashion as an exercise of identity articulation, expression, and transformation. To dress becomes a meditative act. One that merges garment and wearer in a joint state of actualization, one that implies a synergy between fabric and flesh. Clothing, in opposition to shopping, is an ongoing process of intention, awareness, and architecting the self within the world. To clothe the body is to mindfully inhabit one's space. A process punctuated and fraught, teeming over with emotion, meaning, and memory. Approaching fashion in this way, the garment departs from trend, novelty, or capital. The fashion object is instead appreciated as a vessel, talisman and souvenir, one deeply personalized and marked through the span of its lifecycle.

To view fashion outside of the commodity lens – to view clothing as a verb – is both uncommon and idealistic. Whether the consumer is fashion indifferent or highly immersed in the fashion cycle, the capital system ensures that this subjective approach to clothing is pushed under the radar. That the knowledge, exploration, and transformation woven into the garment are trivialized and reduced to a package bought-and-sold. Constructed upon an intricate hierarchy of politics and power, the capital economy profits when fashion is seen solely as shopping; when clothing is unsentimental and meaningless, products can be cyclically disposed of and replaced with new. Retail exists off of this obscurity. The fashion industry must generate revenue and requires consumer detachment in order to do so. Masking clothing as shopping is therefore crucial to its financial success. To encourage the consumer to think harder about the meaning woven into our clothing would cause the fashion industry to lose momentum as an instigator of perpetual newness.

THREADS OF MEMORY attempts to reorient the social understanding of fashion from a commercial product to an act of embodiment and enrichment. My intention with this project is to broaden the space for taking fashion seriously, for developing a consumer consciousness, and for horizontalizing the capacity for clothing to offer pleasure and joy.

Jonathan Anderson is both the creative director for the luxury atelier Loewe and the founder of his eponymous line JW Anderson. His designs often spin what is basic and recognizable into what is strange and avant-garde, confronting head-on the way that shopping and clothing intertwine; his work is both conventional enough to be commercially viable, yet interesting enough to generate introspection and allure. As a result, his clothing is everywhere. He has generated a cult of wearers that straddle the lines between satire and aesthetic, commodity and contemplation.

This project seeks to challenge Anderson. I propose that even the non-luxury consumer can incorporate the ethos of clothing into the necessity of shopping. That consumers can acquire garments in a way that is accessible and realistic, yet equally meaningful in the pursuit of self-discovery, representation, and embodiment. While there is no way for fashion to transcend its commercial role entirely, it is urgent that we begin to consider fashion critically. That we redefine fashion's value and potential in our lives, our spaces, our bodies: from transaction to transformation. Object to subject. Shopping to clothing.

II. ABSTRACT

The contemporary fashion industry is a severe perpetrator of overproduction and textile waste. In order to identify the consumer factors that could potentially mitigate the disposability of fashion items, I investigate the elements of obtaining, owning, and wearing clothing that encourage strong object attachment and possessive longevity. Drawing upon the field of affect studies, consumer theory, and critical fashion scholarship, I suggest that the mode of acquisition by which a fashion item is obtained has the potential to influence the owner's perception of its value and determine the degree of sentimental association to a garment. While bought-new, or *linear acquisition* models lack the social and emotional associations that stimulate strong affective responses in their consumers, I propose that previously-owned, or *circular acquisition* models contain elements of narrative, history, and memory that provoke heightened affective associations. To explore the relationship between method of acquisition and degree of object attachment in clothing consumption, I conduct a theoretical analysis of the potential affective capacities of linear vs. circular consumption models. To apply these hypotheses in practice, I further perform an auto-ethnographic case study cataloging fifteen fashion pieces from my own wardrobe. Adopting the affective analysis methodology of Tienhoven and Smelik (2021), I document the mind-body experience of wearing each of these garments and relate my affective responses to the method by which I obtained them. Emphasizing the particularly potent affects aroused by secondhand fashion items, I propose that previously-owned clothing pieces offer an increased likelihood of object attachment and enduring ownership through their embodiment of nostalgia, sentiment, and vitality. The implications of this project's findings extend to both environmental and individual benefits: while an increased engagement with circular consumption would mitigate the fashion industry's excess product, this practice simultaneously offers a restoration of meaningful relationships between consumers and their clothing. Ultimately this project seeks to analyze the impacts of acquisition on affective attachment, elongate the life cycle of clothing, and stimulate a mutual dialogue between garment and wearer.

III. INTRODUCTION

As a result of the contemporary fashion industry's severe overproduction, alternative consumer avenues for clothing acquisition have emerged to mitigate and redirect the surplus of excess garments. Exponential growth of the resale market, increased popularity of thrifting among Gen Z, and notable resurgence of clothing swap-meets on college campuses demonstrate circular acquisition to be an accessible and appealing method to obtain clothing separately from the linear retail model. While both fashion items 'bought-new' and 'previously used' are shown to trigger affective experiences in their owners or wearers, I suggest that the circular mode of acquisition imprints the fashion object with a distinct memory and history of origin: one that potentially alters the consumer's affective experience owning and wearing the item.

Drawing upon the fields of affect studies, consumer theory, and critical fashion scholarship, I first explain the role of affect in clothing as well the methods of apparel acquisition currently available to consumers. After contextualizing the generalized affective capacities of linear vs. circular acquisition models, I then test these hypotheses through an affective analysis of fifteen items from my own wardrobe. Adopted from Tienhoven and Smelik's use of Mark's Affect-Precept-Concept aesthetic analysis model (2021), my auto-ethnographic study relates the emotional and physical responses between wearer and garment to the mode by which the fashion object was obtained.

I argue that the purchase of a bought-new, or virgin¹ fashion item will elicit feelings of guilt, shame, and detachment (negative or low affect) in its consumer, while circular and secondhand clothing acquisition will conversely evoke pride, nostalgia, and attachment (positive or high affect). Informed by Walter Benjamin's (1935) notion that the replicated artwork is depleted of its *aura*, as well as Jean Baudrillard's (1981) theory that *hypercommodity market* causes the commercial product to undergo a symbolic de-signification, I suggest that the new mass-manufactured fashion object is sterilized of meaning and consequently engenders an apathetic relationship with its wearer. Conversely, the elements of provenance, history and heritage that foreground the acquisition of secondhand clothing symbolically embed the consumer in the narrative of the used garment's lifecycle: a transformative process that imbues the fashion item with sentimental, rather than commodity, value and informs the pre-owned item's increased affective attachment.

¹ The rhetorical trend of classifying unused products as 'virgin' goods is inarguably problematic. Associating virginity with possession not only conflates the body with a material product, but this definition further implies sexuality to be on par with ownership. The implication that an unused product is 'pure' while a used product is 'impure' is inherently misogynistic on behalf of its suggestion that value is constructed upon newness or chastity – that to interact is to blemish or to engage is to taint. I use the term 'virgin' only once here in order to draw attention to this issue, with the hopes that further scholarship on consumer theory moves away from this harmful denomination.

Drawing upon Lucia Ruggerone's seminal study on affect in fashion (2017) – which asserts that the extra-cognitive processes involved in the act of getting dressed characterize clothing as an infinite *becoming* – I propose that fashion items acquired through circular means particularly increase affective capacity in their transformative conflation of past and present and their continuous lineage of inheritance. Femke De Vries's notion of clothing as *souvenir* (2015) further supports the role of apparel as an affective container for memory and mortality, revival and reflection, introspection and experience: factors more frequently embodied by the scavenging for or inheritance of the secondhand garment.

In its cyclical passage from owner to owner, the garment obtained through circular acquisition additionally stimulates bodily affect through its collection of material trace and biological imprint. Ellen Sampson's application of affect theory to the field of archival fashion (2020) identifies the presence of the *absent bodies* that haunt previously owned clothing items to function as a symbolic confrontation with temporality and spatiality: one that triggers a nostalgic affect and a comparative consideration of selfhood in context with the lack of the original owner's presence. I interpret this increased emphasis on body, blemish, and belonging in the secondhand garment to operate as evidence of our embodied existence that heightens the wearer's affective response. Through the acquisition of used fashions, I propose that the consumer is forced to confront the affective qualities induced by generational inheritance and historical artifact.

In contrast, I theorize that fashion items acquired 'new' trigger an effect of alienation between the garment, the wearer, and their own body. Supported by the claims of Royte (2005) and Soëtsu (2019) that mass-produced objects lack a human presence, uniform as they are in their physical materiality, I suggest that such fashion products impose a fixed, packaged objectification of selfhood upon their wearers. I further draw from Ahmed's theory of 'happy objects' (2010) to illuminate the absence of sentimental affective triggers in the interaction with a brand new garment. In my claim that the sterility of the 'bought-new' fashion item renders a commodity body and estranges the wearer from an introspective, interpersonal or impactful mind-body response to the garment, I suggest the linear method of acquisition to generally garner a lower or less intense affective response in the consumer's relationship to the object.

An analysis of apparel acquisition methods bears critical relevance to the state of the climate crisis, as the fast fashion industry is responsible for immense carbon emissions, agricultural exploitation, and pollution of freshwater (UN, 2021). However, the implications of acquisition, specifically in regard to affect, are particularly pertinent to a necessary mediation of the fashion industry's unmanageable textile waste. If decreased attachment (low or negative affect) to a clothing item leads to increased disposability and increased attachment (high or positive affect) to a clothing item ensures a greater degree of endurance, then the link between acquisition and

affect can be applied to the practice of consumer patterns in order to halt the pace of apparel disposal.

Through an analysis of existing studies on fashion, acquisition, and affect alongside my own auto-ethnographic study of my wardrobe, I consider the ways in which the method of obtaining clothing holds the power to dictate and skew the affective connection/disconnection between the garment and wearer. From the results of my analysis, I conjecture that the practice of circular clothing acquisition increases the affective intensity induced by the fashion item. As a result, the consumption of vintage, secondhand, resale, and heritage fashion in place of mass-manufactured or bought-new clothing items endorses an environmental ethos of endurance, instills symbolic attachment, and ritualizes the act of dress into a transformative process of becoming.

IV. CLOTHING IS A VERB: FASHION & AFFECT

The body of fashion scholarship is littered with lines and battered with boundaries. As if our clothing gates us off into sectioned amphitheatres – extracting mind from body, individual from collective, rich from poor, gay from straight, right from left — critical analyses of fashion tend to emphasize clothing's definitive nature: the ways in which our styles of dress splinter us apart into concrete factions. Sociological perspectives on the function of fashion often abstract clothing into a symbolic or representational means through which we distinguish differences in culture, class, gender, religion or sexuality. Semiotic readings of fashion present it as a metaphorical language through which we communicate, articulate, and categorize identity (Davis 1995). Sensory historians and consumer theorists simmer fashion down to its fleshy bits, mapping the patterns of its trend cycles as a purely material product or conflating its materiality to a habit of ritualized embodiment (Ruggerone 2018).

Under these frameworks, the act of dressing the body is rational, representational, and linguistic. Motivations for clothing are put into words, explained, and intellectualized, or they are stripped down to their formal elements as sensual, textured, and solid. Extracting meaning from fashion in this way considers the conversation between wearer and garment to be one-sided, as if the act of clothing stems purely from the logical or functional agency of the dressed. These fields of fashion scholarship also isolate clothing from its wearer, often posing a stark differentiation between the study of the fashion object and the study of the fashion consumer. Much critical consideration of fashion adopts a Cartesian schism between mind, body, and garment; at times clothing is positioned as a reflection of the mind manifested onto the body. Other times fashion is suggested to operate as an embodied affirmation of the social zeitgeist. Ultimately in canonical fashion discourse, the act of selecting a garment and the act of wearing a garment appear to belong to two entirely separate fields of study.

Neglected in these sociological and philosophical lenses on fashion are the anti-intellectual, unconscious and emotional aspects of getting dressed. To address this lack, the realm of affect studies has emerged over the past decade as a supplement to the field of critical fashion theory. Affect, an infamously ambiguous concept, constitutes the body-mind feelings that are immune to localization: affect is the feeling that emanates or diffuses from body to body, body to object, or body to world. It is the atmosphere that hangs over the room, or the emotion not so simply pinned down as an isolated pang of sadness. Affect is the context that stirred the pang as well as the echoes of the pang that ripple outwards. Applied to fashion theory, clothing is therefore considered a physical vessel for affect, operating as the “condition of the emergence of emotions” (Mcintyre 2019): quite literally, the potential for the act of clothing to arouse *affects*. Clothing is not only the source that elicits the bodily-emotional pang but also the container for the pang’s ripples. A glamorous silk coat, for instance, both triggers the feeling of pleasure in its wearer and embodies the material evidence resulting from this pleasure, as its continuous use subjects the object to the marks of damage. Though the affective power of apparel is rooted in materiality, it results in an experience that is both bodily and emotional, physical and physiological. An affective analysis of fashion therefore reorients the consideration of what bodies are, or fashion is, into what bodies and fashion *do* (Tienhoven and Smelik 2021). Under affective theory, “clothes are not a predetermined category, but a proposition according to which a body is invited to continuously reinvent itself” (Manning 2016). Reorienting the understanding of clothing through this affective perspective broadens the capacity for self-invention and heralds a more dynamic understanding of body and world.

Particularly emphasized by the affect theories of Spinoza (1992) and Deleuze (1994) is the mutual quality of affect to transfer between entities, human or non-human. To these philosophers, affect constitutes a feeling that might rub off on its surroundings or collapse a material sensation into an emotional response. Critical fashion theory stresses affective experience to operate as a two-way relation between bodies and clothes (Ruggerone 2017). Just as we are touched by our clothing, our clothing is touched by us. Under this definition, the act of dressing the body catalyzes a fluid passage of energy between fashion object and its wearer. Ruggerone’s exploration of affect in the feeling of being dressed adopts the Deleuzian notion of mind-body conflation, that – quite opposite to much of sociological scholarship on fashion, which seeks to splinter mind from body and garment from wearer – instead contests the experience of being dressed to blur the body and the object (2017). Their qualities transpose onto one another such that wearing clothing operates as an “encounter” between human and garment, and “initiates a process of mutual becoming with either a positive or a negative outcome” (Ruggerone 2017). Just as we wear our clothing, our clothing wears us. Manning describes this as the “body-environment constellation” in which “bodying exceeds its putative limits” and personhood is co-created with the shape of its surroundings (2016). As we become our garments, they become us. The fabric, shafted even just for a few hours to the body, is no less a part of our physical form than our eyes or ears or thumbs. For the duration of their wear, the clothing item

goes where we go, is weathered with the rest of us. As we consume fashion, fashion consumes us: swallowed into the swathes of our garments, we are digested and metabolized like perfect innards. As they cover us, we fill their limp forms: a mutual completion of forms. Fashion as flesh.

Under the theory of affect, the act of getting dressed therefore becomes an merge between body and world in which the wearer constructs themselves upon the shape and connotations of their clothing. This affective perspective on fashion urges the wearer to approach the sensory and psychological aspects of clothing as a means to knowledge and recognition, as an understanding of the interconnectedness between forms, shapes, subjects and objects. Manning, for instance, asks us to consider merging the schism between garment and wearer, clothing and clothed:

“Why must we assume that this shaping hides a body? Why not instead take this shaping for what it is, as the event in itself, an event that includes a body-world co-composition? What if instead of assuming that the person is not the shape, we were open to a different concept of personing that included its architecting?” (2016.)

Ingrained in this notion of clothing as an instance of “mutual becoming” for both object and wearer is an ontological and transformative power in which our garments harness the capacity to fashion our identities. Hartley’s consumer narcissism theory (2021) suggests a unity between self and object in the acquisition of product. His claim that “consumerism facilitates the expansion of the self” by which “individuals expand beyond their corporeal limits through the projection of the self onto objects” supports the argument that the possession and use of fashion items enable its wearer to enact a transformation, a becoming, or an unfurling of personhood. However, this affective entanglement, “the transposition of thing into person and person into thing which take place through wearing” subjects enclothed existence to a pronged fate: the wearer’s merge with the fashion object results in either the expression of authenticity or the articulation of alienation (Sampson, 2020, Ruggerone).

If the clothing objects in our wardrobes embody and elicit meaningful affects, then the sense of self we construct upon wearing them will be equally meaningful. If we collect clothing items that contain stilted, hollow, or commodity affects, our bodies will ossify into similarly sterilized forms. In this way, the conditions through which we imbue our clothing with affective potential impact the conditions of our own physical and emotional state. An affective analysis of fashion therefore lends itself to the consideration of ontological and epistemological habits of embodiment. This project questions if the mode of acquisition practiced in order to obtain fashion items determines the nature of the ‘mutual becoming’ enacted by clothing: whether the body will unfurl into meaningful processes of self-introspection or stagnate as a cut-and-dry transaction of use.

Rather than a one-sided relation between the wearer and the fashion object, the ‘mutual becoming’ affected by clothing involves a two-sided, conversational dialogue. As a garment is worn, it whispers instructions and affirmations. Responsive, the wearer adjusts their posture, their energy, their mannerisms to perform accordingly. The clothing item demands of its wearer *you are working today, you are in character, you will behave properly in this blazer*, or it conversely murmurs *you are seductive, you are playful, you may indulge in the fluidity of this skirt*. The wearer replies to the affective instruction of the garment with a decisive treatment: *I will keep you in my closet and incorporate you into my life. I will become you, fill you, zip you and repair your holes. You will sustain a side of myself that I may only access in your embrace*. Or perhaps the wearer responds to the clothing item with dismissal: *You do not fit my needs. I have exhausted you as you have me. I do not have the will or the way to keep you in use. I will retire you and coax you into disrepair*. The fashion item can communicate to its wearer identity construction or negation; it may send zingy endorphins to the brain, the dopamine of gender euphoria (I feel like myself in this) or the cortisol of dysphoria (this is not me, I am underdressed, I am overdressed, I am a square peg stuffed in a round hole).

Clothing is therefore a container for the resulting affect, rendering the act of dress an allegedly “ordinary affect” (Mcintyre 2019; Stewart 2007): affective experience is essentially inevitable, yet the degree or quality of the kind of affect is dependent upon the positionality and context of the clothing act. A well-fitting pair of jeans can one day invoke pleasure, confidence, assurance and the next day invoke discomfort, constriction, insecurity. Confrontation with a wedding gown may merit excitement in one and shame in another. In this way affective analyses of wearing or owning clothing are unstable, inconsistent, and highly individualized. These nuances stem not only from the differing states of being in the wearer – from day to day or person to person – but also from the changing conditions of the fashion item itself, which may alter in material appearance or symbolic meaning through its collecting of physical marks of use and its acquisition of new associations in the mind of its owner. Ahmed (2010) affirms that these emotional associations contained within an object indicate the presence of “sticky affect” in which

“affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values and objects. [...] the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what we are near.”

Resulting from the ‘sticky affect’ present in a fashion item, the clothing object or accessory holds the power to contain memory and trigger emotional responses. Factors that might ‘stick’ to an object and stimulate an affective response include the conditions in which they were acquired, the instances in which they were used, or the emotions experienced while using it. Affect scholarship contextualizes the borderless nature of the affective object as more than its tangible qualities; “to experience an object as being affective or sensational is to be directed not only toward an object but to what is *around that object*, which includes what is behind the object, the

conditions of its arrival” (Ahmed 2010). In this way, an affective lens considers the object to transcend its materiality and subsume a meaning beyond its physical boundaries – absorbing the atmosphere it exists in and operating as a representational/material vehicle for the emotions or energies that have contributed to its present state of being. A knit cardigan under the affective lens is not merely mohair and blue, or tattered and unraveling: it is a tapestry teeming with traces of spirit. Threaded with the care of the artisan who constructed it upon the loom, hemmed with the joy of the consumer who found it hanging on the rack, etched with the vitality of the wearer who ran and worked and played it into shredded disrepair. The fashion item encases the emotional and physical instances it has endured and triggers in its owner an affective response to the reminder of these experiences.

In this study, I concentrate on the methods of acquisition, or ‘conditions of arrival,’ that result in a ‘sticky affect’ within a fashion item. Though the affects that reside in clothing and accessories can be positive, negative, or ambiguous, I focus predominantly on the factors that construct what Ahmed calls a “happy object” (2010). The nature of the affective relationship between object and owner determines the item’s lifecycle and ultimate fate; a positive affect or high affect hypothetically encourages consistency of use, and a greater likelihood that the object will be held onto, kept in the closet, and stowed away as an object of sentiment. While it is impossible to propose a definitive conclusion on the variables that guarantee the transformation of a commodity object into a ‘happy object,’ or an object of positive affect, I suggest that the conditions of circular acquisition often embed an apparel item with increased affective intensity in the inevitable passage of their ownership. In the circular business model, fashion items transfer from home to home or life to life, imprinted with the memory, history, and experience of all that has been worn into them. Secondhand clothing therefore tends to take on the affective connotation of ‘happy objects’ in that they are “objects..passed around, accumulating positive affective value as social goods” (Ahmed 2010). If “affect marks a body’s belonging to a world of encounters” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010) then the secondhand object is conducive to high affect in its guaranteed embodiment of continuous encounters between past and present, new and old, disrepair and revival.

V. AVENUES OF ACQUISITION

Critical to an analysis of the link between affect and acquisition in apparel consumption is a foundational understanding of the contemporary fashion industry’s current infrastructure. Emphasized here are the modes in which the clothing consumer is able to obtain products, as well as the rates of clothing disposal that an increased affective attachment to the fashion item could potentially offset.

As of 2023, 100 billion garments are produced per year (thredUp). In a world of 8 billion people, this number equates to 12.5 billion garments per person: an unfathomable statistic that

illuminates the severe degree to which fashion items are manufactured without realistic intentions for enduring ownership or product durability. The fast fashion business model – an industrial trend of shortened lead times between production and distribution, offshored labor, and rapid acceleration of new styles hitting the market (Choi 2013) – largely contributes to these high outputs of excess. Fast fashion giants such as H&M and Zara dominate the apparel industry with the appeal of democratized access to novelty trends at financially affordable prices. Under this system, the clothing consumer is encouraged to buy products with an inevitable expiration date, or as coined by De Vries, a *stylistic obsolescence* (2015), in which the object's aesthetic elements will grow undesirable with the emergence of a product of greater novelty.

Resulting from the fast fashion model's overproduction, United Nations' Environmental Programme estimates the industry to generate 92 million tons of textile waste each year (2021). This immense surplus of product, too large to entirely dispose of through landfill or incinerator, has encouraged the establishment and expansion of alternative avenues for handling the waste. To dispose of their unmanageable conveyor belt of stale fashion items, contemporary consumers practice methods of apparel regeneration and recirculation, including donation to a charity shop or thrift store; gifting to a family member, acquaintance, or friend; trade through social clothing swap-meets; or the exponentially growing resale market. These methods of placing fashion items back in circulation for the potential of new ownership – referred to here as modes of *circular consumption and acquisition* – rapidly increase in popularity alongside the rates of overproduction and overconsumption, as there become more and more products to displace. In tandem with the disposal of surplus fashion, then, is the emergence of commercial avenues for circular acquisition.

Though clothing trades, swap-meets, and exchanges grow in popularity at university campuses and community events in the West (Matthews 2016) and the familial inheritance of fashion items remains an internationally common cultural practice (Hill), the mode of circular clothing acquisition most frequently cited in consumer research is within the secondhand, vintage, and resale market. Annual revenue reports reveal that the secondhand industry stands at a net-worth of \$211 billion and is projected to double to \$350 billion by the year 2027 (thredUP). Generally considered as an umbrella term for the acquisition of previously-owned clothing, secondhand fashion encompasses thrift shops, charity shops, resale, vintage, and consignment. Resurging consumer interest in vintage fashion – particularly involving the revival of a garment over fifteen years old, often presented for sale as an object of curatorial, archival or historical value – significantly contributes to the economic expansion of secondhand.

Yet the growth of the secondhand industry particularly owes credit to the resale market. Under the resale model, shoppers sell unwanted fashion items to the resale company and are often lured into buying used products from the business in return. In this way, the resale market offers monetary profits to its consumer as well as the convenience of 'clearing out' the abundant

contents of their closets. Due to its appeal to the average clothing consumer, regardless of their lacking interest in fashion as artifact, resale has enabled the massification of circular acquisition methods. Online resale sites (notable players of Depop, Poshmark, 1st Dibs and TheRealReal) as well as brick-and-mortar resale stores (significant success of Buffalo Exchange, My Sister's Closet, What Goes Around Comes Around) have skyrocketed into mainstream clothing consumption such that the resale market stands as a tour-de-force worth \$17 billion (thredUp). Previously-owned fashion garments and accessories are offered to luxury and designer clientele at high-end consignment shops while some more casual resale establishments buy and sell mall-brand and fast-fashion pieces— making resale an acquisition method accessible to both ends of the consumer class spectrum. Interestingly, Generation Z is the primary demographic expanding the commercial bandwidth of circular business models, suggesting that as this consumer group emerges into the workforce, the secondhand economy and system will only continue to inflate (Manley 2023).

Environmental ethos certainly fuels some of the motivation for circular fashion acquisition. In opposition to the ecological and social casualties of the fast fashion industry, *sustainable* and *slow fashion* movements have erupted as advocates for conscious consumption in which circular and recycled fashion take the frontline (Pookulangara 2013). Buying just one clothing piece used – through circular acquisition – rather than new – through linear acquisition– “saves 88 gallons of water, saves 8.41 pounds of CO2 emissions, and 16.4 kWh of energy” (thredUP 2023). If every consumer globally were to conduct this small act of replacing one conventional purchase with an alternative acquisition method, it would result in the salvation of 2 billion pounds of carbon emissions, 23 billion gallons of water, and the offset of 4 billion kWh of energy. In action, these numbers are equivalent to taking 76 millions cars off of the road for a day, providing 46 billion days of drinking water for one person, and offsetting the energy it takes to watch 37 billion hours of Netflix (thredUP 2023).

However environmentally friendly the purchase of a used fashion item in place of a new fashion item may be, this study instead considers the ecological repercussions on the tail-end of the secondhand garment's lifecycle. I question whether the circular acquisition of a clothing piece influences the consumer's affective attachment to the garment, and whether the affective experience of sourcing a secondhand piece extends the longevity of its ownership or delays its eventual disposal. Fashion theorist Maria Mackinney Valentín proposes that the earthly benefits to secondhand are increasingly supplemented with ontological consumer advantages to personal expression in their embodiment of individuality, singularity, and rarity. She writes that “in the 2010s, pre-owned has been considered inherently sustainable in the context of climate concerns as well as aesthetically unique in the symbolic struggle against mass-production” (2017). Although they exist as already disposed products, I suggest that secondhand fashion pieces ironically hold the potential to merit lower likelihoods of disposability due to the unique affective experiences associated with their acquisition.

In my analysis of affect in relation to the fashion item, I attempt to identify the impacts of the fashion object's origin upon the consumer's level of attachment to it. Centering this investigation around linear/bought-new vs. circular/used methods of acquisition, I examine the consumer's emotional association with a garment as a symbol of their experience obtaining it – with the intention to apply the implications of this relationship to the mitigation of clothing disposability in the contemporary fashion industry.

VI. MECHANIZED DETACHMENT & DISPOSABILITY

In my analysis of the relationship between affect and acquisition in apparel consumption, I first concentrate on the affective factors present in a conventional, bought-new, or linear clothing purchase. Under the linear consumption model, the fashion object is bought unused from a fast fashion retailer, luxury corporation, department store, or even independent designer. Whether this purchase is enacted in-person or online, the item is expected to be purchased free of any blemish or wear, and in some strain of branded packaging, from clothing tags to shipping materials. Although the linear acquisition of a fashion item can be conducted in relation to artisanal, hand-crafted, or custom-made designs, I concentrate here on the affects generated by the more common mode of clothing acquisition: the fashion purchase from a corporate conglomerate that utilizes mass-manufacturing and industrialization to fabricate garments in large quantities. Primarily practiced by fast fashion and luxury retailers, this method of acquisition involves little to no contact with the person who created the object – a disconnect that I suggest results in a detached or low affect.

Ahmed's work in affect theory asserts that “the very tendency to attribute an affect to an object depends upon ‘closeness of association’” (2010). Under the fast fashion business model in particular, the stages of textile production and garment fabrication are often shunted to third-party factories in Eastern countries to exploit the cheap labor available there; a phenomenon that allows the retailer to remove themselves from both the arduous work of manufacturing as well as the legal culpability of inhumane working conditions (Choi 2014). Offshored labor thus creates not only an emotional but a *physical distance* between an object's maker, seller, and consumer. Due to the lack of supply-chain transparency in the contemporary fashion industry – as proven in the Remake Accountability Reports, which measure the 58 top retail giants on a public discretion index of accountability and average the annual ‘traceability score’ to a disheartening 0.9 out of 8 points – it is also common for the ‘bought-new’ consumer to have little to no awareness of where or how their garment was made (Remake 2022). Devoid of association with the designer who ideated the fashion item, the patternmaker who cut the blueprint for construction, or the sewer who assembled the piece, the consumer of the mass-manufactured item is simultaneously removed from the ‘closeness of association’ necessary to have an affective experience when owning or wearing it. Kremer describes this

apathetic quality of mass production as “the effect of making objects anonymous” through the castration of “distinct and unique traces of their makers” in favor of the “impersonal and untouched” (1992).

Consumer theorist Elizabeth Royte further argues that the spatial and geographic gap between an object’s maker and owner not only increases affective detachment but also exacerbates the likelihood of disposability:

“A lack of connection between those who make goods and those who use them contributes to the ease with which we turn our backs on our possessions. It is easier, for example, to throw out an ugly ceramic pitcher made in a Taiwanese factory than it is to throw out an ugly ceramic pitcher made by a well-meaning aunt or even an anonymous local craftsperson.” (Royte 2005).

While the bought-new fashion object can acquire a social affective attachment through the personal interaction with its maker – such as Royte’s anonymous “local craftsperson” or new fashion items purchased from small, independent artists– I focus here on the affective detachment particular to the *mass-manufactured product* acquired through the linear model. If it is ‘closeness of association’ that merits the ability for an item to cause affect, then the mass-manufactured garment is the sterile chill of severance and dissociation: from community, from authenticity, from humanness. Churned out by the thousands and vomited into circulation through mechanized production technologies, mass-produced styles lack the human touch and irregularity of craftsmanship that instill the fashion object with affective power. Sterilized and lifeless, the mass-produced garment is the ventriloquist dummy for artisanship and the gummy prosthetic for the ritual of design. As noted by art critic Yanagi Soëtsu,

“What machines produce is standardized beauty, calibrated and fixed.. Mechanization constitutes a kind of aesthetic strangulation. When machines are in control, the beauty they produce is shallow and cold. It is the human hand that creates subtlety and warmth. How could a machine give birth to the subtle surface elegance that is the lifeblood of folk craft, emerging during forming, trimming, and painting by skillful and experienced hands?” (2019)

Similar to Soëtsu’s notion of an object’s “lifeblood,” philosopher Walter Benjamin argues that an authentic artwork contains an inherent “aura,” which he defines as a “strange tissue of space and time” emblematic of the object’s immediacy, uniqueness, or “here-and-now” (Benjamin, 2011). The fashion object, as an aesthetic artwork, should hypothetically embody this artistic “aura,” this “lifeblood,” yet it is symbolically castrated of such energy – as well as its ability to affect – through the mechanized replication and appropriation of its likeness. Fast fashion giant Zara releases 450 million products a year and approximately 12,000 styles, calculating out an average

of 37,500 copies of the same design in circulation at one time (SCM 2020). Benjamin argues that the “technological reproduction” of the art object strips it of its aura and erodes its authenticity, “profoundly modifying [its] effects” (Benjamin). The effects, and simultaneously affects, of an artistic aura to move its consumer are not only modified in the fast-fashion process but systematically dehumanized and estranged. As an extension of the skin, clothing is made into existence by its very bodily association. When clothing is constructed without the mark of body but by the metal limbs of conveyor-belt capitalism, the association necessary to garner strong affect is effectively amputated.

The spirit of the “here-and-now” in a garment might be the hand-stitched button of a woolen trouser or a nylon jumper’s crookedly sewn seam, the meticulous drape of a hem or a pain-stakingly pressed pleat. Yet these attributes that mark the object as singular, as organic, as defective, even, are smoothed over in the calculated homogeneity of massified fabrications. In this way “machines .. rob work of its freedom, divest it of its joy” (Soëtsu). Mass manufactured garments bought-new are pasteurized and sanitized of their capacity to summon affective response in their wearer, cold as they are with the loveless touch of the artificially intelligent loom and the rigid uniformity of their composition. Lacking freedom and joy, the mechanized fashion item is thus immunized of intense emotional effect or strong attachment in its solitary existence, its ownership, and its embodiment.

The lack of spatial proximity, social connection, or artistic aura in the mass-manufactured fashion object therefore increases the owner's detachment to the object itself, rendering the mass-produced garment a low carrier for sentimental affect. A cotton t-shirt purchased from Zara, for instance, carries no inherent history, community, or personality with which the consumer may engage. As a result, the wearing of such a garment fails to generate a narrative for its wearer to imagine, empathize, or tap into. The mass-manufactured fashion object presents a blank canvas in which pathos is sold separately; though the item may take on affective associations through the duration of its ownership, it is purchased pure of already existing emotional triggers. Its acquisition alone does not stimulate immediate attachment, and without this predisposed propensity for affective experience, the ‘bought-new’ garment begins its lifecycle miles behind the circular fashion object that has been acquired with affective experience already worn into its fabric. Ultimately, the factors of mechanization and sterilization, or mass-production and newness, contribute to a detached affect and increased disposability of the fashion object obtained through the linear acquisition model.

VII. INDUSTRIAL ALIENATION & ESTRANGEMENT

Though the mass-produced fashion object of linear acquisition is constructed as a vessel of detachment in its very construction (with little social or human association), its relationship to the consumer simultaneously merits low, and at times negative, affective intensity through its

moral connotations. For the conscious consumer with sustainable shopping intentions, the ecological consequences of a bought-new or fast-fashion clothing purchase can provoke feelings of guilt, shame, or regret. Conducting a wardrobe study in which 34 participants documented the emotional reactions of new purchases over a period of three months, fashion scholar Magdalena McIntyre observed the “affective dissonance” that consumers often underwent upon purchasing a new clothing item (2019). After finding pleasure (positive affect) in the initial acquisition of the fashion object, subjects later expressed displeasure at the unnecessary or unethical nature of their consumption.

Interpreted as low or negative affects, the “conflicting” or “ambiguous” feelings generated by a compulsive purchase – as seen in McIntyre’s study – are not specific to the eco-cognizant consumer. Even the fashion indifferent are susceptible to the negative emotions stirred by the demands of the linear business model, whose greedy pace and relentless marketing tactics pressure its consumer to regularly indulge in impulse buys, unnecessary spending, and quickly expiring trendy purchases. The “passive form of language” demonstrated in the diary entries of McIntyre’s study reflects the consumer’s resigned “awareness of sales techniques” that compel them to purchase from the linear business model without a sense of agency or self-initiated desire (McIntyre 2019). In this way, the pressure to generate revenue under the mass-manufacturing model characterizes the linear clothing purchase as an exercise of capital, estranges the consumer from their own sense of autonomy, and prompts the shopper to experience the affects of passivity, ambivalence, and remorse.

The factor of market pressure in the linear production and consumption model further develops the affect of estrangement. Ahmed claims that “we become alienated—out of line with an affective community—when we do not experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are attributed as being good” (Ahmed 2010). Fashion marketing and merchandising rely heavily on emotional association in order to sell products, capitalizing off of affect in order to spur desire in the consumer to purchase a product that is presented to make them look ‘good’, or feel ‘good.’ As fashion theorist Femke De Vries suggests, the contemporary consumer is attracted to a clothing item not for its function, its aesthetic beauty, or material adornment but instead for its *symbolic value ornament*: a concept that conflates the feeling or experience that is sold alongside the item as a representative substitution for the materiality of the object itself (2015). Framing the fashion item as a conduit for “feelings, fantasies, and fun,” the fashion industry strategically profits off of the consumer’s vulnerability to affective experiences and promises the new acquisition of a garment to offer positive bodily-emotional responses. As “feelings are used to sell feelings,” the purchase and use of a clothing item is presented to us as a vessel for ‘good’ (de Vries, 2015). When instead, the purchase stirs the aforementioned feelings of discontentment, guilt, or dissatisfaction, the consumer is subjected to Ahmed’s proposed affect of alienation from their expected result. In this way, the appeal to pathos in the linear business model’s fashion advertising predisposes the consumer for disappointment and disposal of lackluster products—

illuminating “how the capacity of clothing to affect also leads to a wardrobe that is overflowing with unused items” (Mcintyre 2019). Acquisition of new mass-produced fashion objects therefore encourages vicious cycles of excess consumption and brews negative affect in its consumer.

Further contributing to the alienating affect often aroused by the acquisition of a mass-produced, bought-new fashion item is the ontological deterioration of clothing as an identity symbol. Often accompanying the ritual of dress is the practice of identity-articulation, in which the wearer cements their sense of self through the visual embodiment of their aesthetic affinities (Davis 1992). Explicit manifestations of enclothed identity include the act of donning a cross necklace to communicate religious denomination, sporting university insignia to denote institutional allegiance, or the use of uniforms to denote occupational positioning. Less literal style codings of identity indicate community values or political ideologies through the practice of conformity/nonconformity, including the aesthetic factions of goth, punk and grunge. If Ahmed argues affect to stem from ‘closeness of association,’ then the ability for an individual to associate their own essence or likeness with a fashion item logically increases the likelihood of strong affect or attachment. However, the merciless grip of trend continually drains the fashion object of symbolic meaning— draining too its ontological association and affective intensity.

Valentín posits that the phenomenon of retail conglomerates incorporating the emblems of countercultural groups into mass-manufactured commercial products has led to a *signification exhaustion* in which the semiotics of fashion’s visual messaging have lost connection between signifier and signified (2021). Honing in on the commodification of the heavy metal band t-shirt, Valentin notes that “high street brands such as K-mart, Primark, Topshop, and H&M have sold iconic metal T-shirts from bands such as Slayer, AC/DC, Metallica, Iron Maiden, Motorhead, and Black Sabbath,” to the casualty of truthful aesthetic communication. When the mass public considers the iconography of countercultural groups to be trendy, and non-punk listeners are wearing punk insignia, the product loses its “intrinsic meaning because the visual signs are removed from the culture that generated them” (Valentin 2021). What Valentin dubs *identity bootlegging* ruptures the association between sign (metal or punk aesthetics) and signifier (fondness of listening to metal or punk music), and simultaneously ruptures the closeness of identity association necessary for affective response. Signification exhaustion is not unique to the commodification of counterculture, however; cultural appropriation of ethnic and racial dress forms also fall into the graveyard of fashion victims. Lost is the consumer’s ability to make meaning out of their clothing and the clothing worn by others, leaving both the garment and its wearer a vessel alienated from their own bodies and detached from their own sense of self. The capacity for these trend-oriented products to affect their consumer erodes as the market is saturated by duplicates; the aura is diminished; the object is hollowed of meaning.

Artist Ron Athey contextualizes the ambiguity of commodity bodies, mourning the authenticity of self-presentation and aesthetic communication within subcultural groups:

“At one time all of these trappings have been brought on by, stood for, something or other. Environment, belonging, rebellion, campy morbidity, sexual identity, desirability, and fetishism... Nothing is pure.. Identity has become tricky in general. Popular culture and fashion has no shame these days. Is that a real gangbanger? Do dreads signify reggae? Are shaved heads Neo-nazi skinheads? Do those people sporting kink-wear practice SM? Is that butch-looking daddy a top? Not necessarily and probably not. Everything underground has been subverted, or at the very least diluted... Now that everything radical means nothing, I’m at a crossroads” (Athey).

Supporting the link between industrialization and alienation is Jean Baudrillard’s critique of the *hypercommodity* and *hypermarket*. He claims that the sublimation of the ‘real’ into the replicated copy – applied to the fashion market in the form of the authentic Metallica tee vs. the H&M duplicate – has effectively “suffice[d] to render both artificial” (Baudrillard 1994). It is the artifice of the mass-produced garment that drains the object of affective potential. Baudrillard further argues that in this instance of hypercommodity, “all depth and energy of representation have vanished in a hallucinatory resemblance” (Baudrillard 1994). This ‘depth’ and ‘energy’ are precisely the factors that imbibe an object with affective resonance. Without them, the consumer of the object is left with next to nothing to connect with, form attachment, or find pleasure in. Lacking authentic quality, the massified garment is a form flattened, a commercial roadkill: just as the clothing piece obscures the ‘real’ in its production/fabrication, the wearer falters in finding a sense of ‘real’ in their sense of self/body when they wear it. Detached from authenticity and meaning, the garment is made a caricature right alongside the body inside of it.

However tragic this loss of selfhood and identity may be for the consumer’s level of emotional well-being, stability, and contentment, the implications of this loss additionally produce a loss of wardrobe staying power. As fashion objects degrade in significance to the owner’s sense of personhood or individualism, they lose their power of ‘association’ to harness sentimental attachment, and with it, their power to rouse positive affective responses of joy, pleasure, nostalgia, attachment, or contentment. Estranged from the poignance of the garment, the consumer is unconvinced that the object is worth wearing or keeping.

Finally marking the acquisition of a bought-new mass-produced fashion item are feelings of depersonalization, dissociation, and dehumanization. Just as German philosopher Georg Simmel argues that modernity and mass production erect “an insuperable barrier ... between itself and what is most authentic and essential in it,” the linear fashion model obstructs the consumer from accessing their own humanness (Ruggerone 2018). As if God itself, the fashion industry births its own spitting image: its consumer faithfully bears the symbols of capital (the logo) upon their

body, a dogged devotee of branding and a walking advertisement. Entrenched in logos and clothed in credence, the consumer practices a branded iconography. They walk down the street as head-to-toe marketing, so alienated from their own sense of self that they must wrap their skin in commercial packaging. Branded insignia – be it the LV or the doubled Gucci G’s or the instantly recognizable Nike Swoosh – thus marks the body not as human but as product. Its fabricator, its follower, and its messenger all in one. Departed from their humanness, the wearer of the brand label becomes the conductor of the commercial agenda. The body becomes capital itself.

VIII. RESTORING AURA

If the purchase of a new fashion item under the linear business model often arouses low or negative affects, how can the contemporary consumer create a meaningful relationship to their clothing? How can the wearer find attachment and fulfillment in their fashion objects? If there is no light at the end of the tunnel to abolish and restructure the fashion system, “how can mass-produced, anonymous, commodity-like objects acquire sacred status?” (Hartley 2021). I suggest that circular acquisition models more readily offer the consumer the opportunity to experience positive affects and generate social or emotional attachments to the items in their wardrobe.

Though the fashion object acquired through circular models – such as thrift, resale, and vintage – often exists as the surplus of the very mass-manufacturing methods that so alienate the consumer from finding meaning in the product, fashion theorists argue that the extended lifecycle of such a product revives it with restored meaning. While the new mass-produced garment is previously demonstrated to have depleted its humanness or its aura, secondhand items are conversely “found to hold a sense of aura or authenticity because of an imagined past that may be activated in a personal fashion narrative” (Valentin 2017). Through the passage of ownership, the secondhand garment and the act of consumption itself acquire a social history, and with it, a visceral vitality. Despite the fact that “many vintage items were originally mass-produced” the altered context of their acquisition reincarnates Benjamin’s notion of the ‘here-and-now’ and Soëtsu’s concept of the ‘lifeblood.’ In other words, the affective potential of the piece re-awakens due to the changed context of their acquisition:

“re-discovered as vintage, the argument is reversed because these same [mass-manufactured] items are cherished for being one-of-a-kind and therefore unique”(Valentin 2017).

Kremer refers to the transformation of a meaningless to a meaningful object as a principle of *singularization* (1992). In order to attribute uniqueness with a mass-manufactured product, Kremer argues that it becomes singular through “age and history” or “association of the object,” which can occur “through a personal relationship with an object, so that the longevity of the

owner-object relationship assimilates or bonds the objects to their owner” (1992). Secondhand fashion integrates the narrative of singularization as prompted by the changing of hands and passage of possession: a revaluation that restores the object of its ability to foster an “organic quality of renewal” (Kremer 1992). Literally recycled, regenerated, and recirculated in the retail market, the previously-owned clothing piece conjures in the shopper a sense of liveliness and endurance. Just as this re-signification encourages a ‘bond’ of staying power or durability in the closet of the owner, it further kindles an affectionate attachment in the body of the wearer.

The activation of consumer’s autonomy in circular acquisition additionally contributes to the positive affect of secondhand fashion. Returning again to Ahmed’s theory of affect through “closeness of association,” the selection or purchase of a secondhand garment requires that the consumer fill an active, rather than passive role (2010). In stark opposition to the advertising that urges the consumer of an item bought-new to adhere to a novelty trend, the acquisition of a secondhand piece forces the shopper to choose for themselves what is desirable. Consumer theorist and fashion historian Serena Dyer advocates for shopping as a form of active and critical sensory discernment. She defends the existence of a sensory edification process, or the development of an “inter-sensory skillset acquired through handling, smelling and viewing goods... to train the hand, as well as the eye, to understand quality and workmanship” (Dyer 697). Applied to the secondhand shopper, this discernment constitutes the detection and dismissal of defect and the selection of items that are desirable. To Dyer, the shopper’s ability to evaluate the appeal of a garment constitutes a learned skill, suggesting that secondhand shopping assesses value not only in the product itself, but in the capability of the consumer to distinguish ‘correctly’ between desirable and undesirable. Successful discernment and selection enable affects of pride, satisfaction, and agency in the consumer— feelings that bolster the positive association that the owner has with the found product. Kremer’s analysis of the consumer’s relationship to the material object further defends the link between shopper agency and strong affect: “having a story which points to fate, prowess or shrewdness is significant in the pleasure derived from acquisition and to the quality or affect of the narrative” (Kremer 1992).

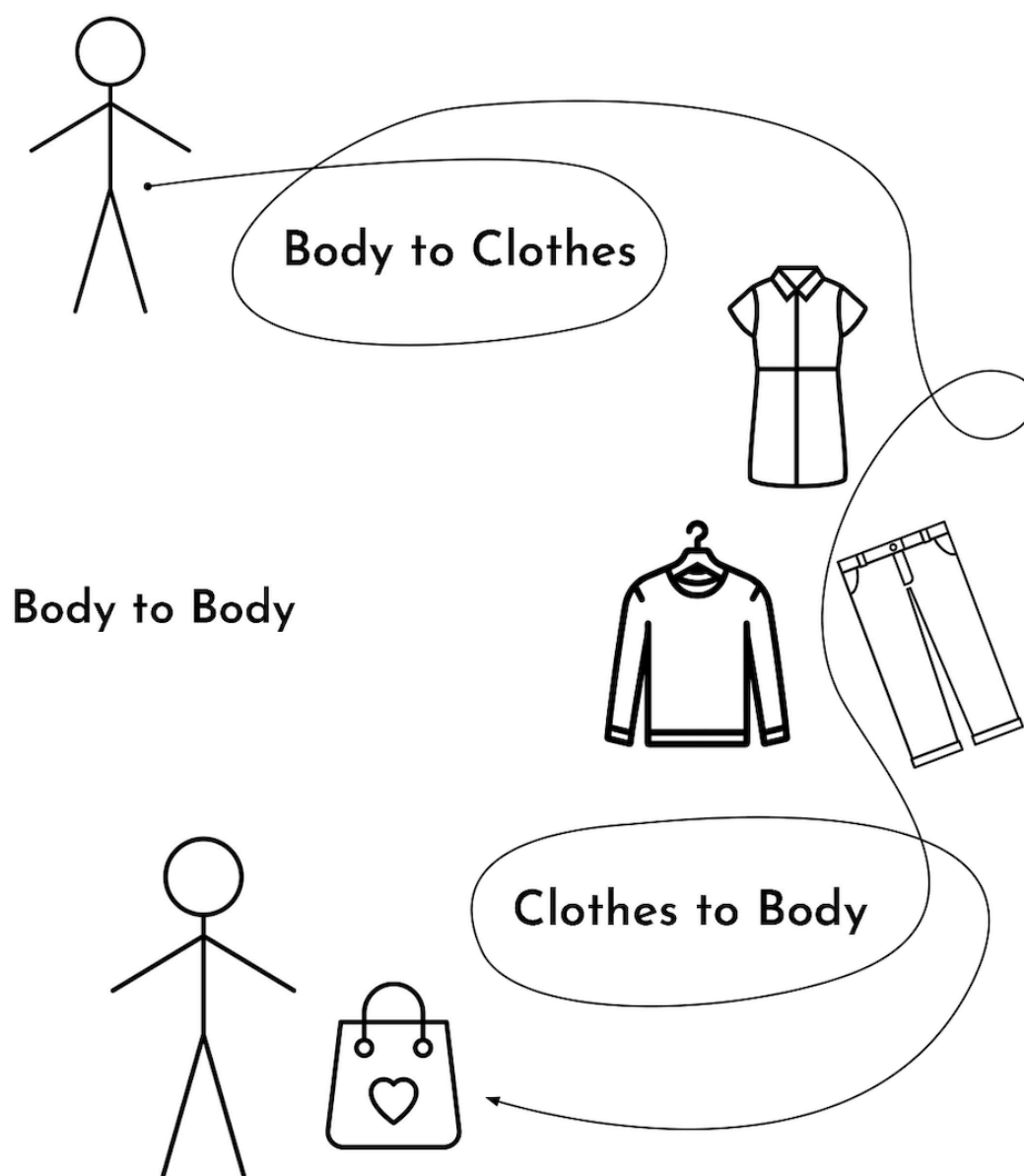
The affective agency involved in secondhand shopping additionally encompasses the feeling of authority that the consumer wields over the presentation of their own bodies. In contrast to the sameness of Zara’s 375,000 clones of identical styles, the discovery of a secondhand piece brings its owner a feeling of rarity, individualization, or speciality. If affect occurs as a transference of essence from human to non-human (Deleuze 1992), then the discovery of a secondhand garment operates on the projection of self into object; the secondhand consumer must not only sift through a labyrinth of time periods and styles to determine what feels fitting to their taste, but additionally dictate for themselves what is worth purchasing. The personalization of the quest and specialization of the hunt for a secondhand item thus garners a higher intensity of gratification than the linear acquisition model’s tyrannical relationship of desire and fulfillment. Shopping secondhand fashion therefore requires a sense of self-understanding, personalization

and individualization that renders the circular purchase a reflection of the consumer's own skill to scavenge, identify and select.

Environmental ethos additionally contributes to the improved emotion of the secondhand piece. The item's relatively low price in comparison to its retail value alleviates the remorse of unnecessary spending while the ecological advantages of recycled clothing assuages the guilt of wasteful habits. "Hunting for and collecting vintage clothing thus transgresses guilt and works on affective dissonance" in the way that it personifies the shopper as an ecological savior (Mcintyre 2019). The shopper's association with the garment is strengthened in its construction as evidence of their moral goodness, a material representation of the treasure that they have salvaged from ruins. Regardless of how realistic this moral goodness may be, the ecological savior complex informs the consumer's affective association of self-satisfaction in the act of purchasing.

Apart from singularity, autonomy, and integrity, the factors that I suggest to primarily contribute to the stimulation of high positive affect in the purchase, ownership, and wearing of secondhand clothing are that of provenance/memory, inheritance/lineage, and material blemish/mortality. If affect functions in clothing to "harness the body's capacities for transformation and provoke the body to become otherwise" (Ruggerone 2018), then affect appears most present in the fashion object that transforms roles and spaces: from one life and one closet to that of another.

LAYERS OF AFFECTIVE TRANSLATION



FORMER TO NEW OWNER

LAYERS OF AFFECTIVE TRANSLATION



IX. PRIORITIZING PROVENANCE

Central to the construction of affect in the ownership and embodiment of a secondhand fashion item is the history and sentiment embedded in its lifecycle. Similar to the value system that measures the esteem of fine artworks, the worth of a fashion object is increasingly determined by the history of its possession, also referred to as its *provenance*. Defined by Oxford Dictionary as “a record of ownership of a work of art or an antique, used as a guide to authenticity or quality” (1stDibs), provenance casts a shimmer of allure and desirability upon the fashion object specifically on behalf of its lineage. I suggest that the additional layer of social association that exists in the fashion object acquired through circular means – including thrifting, resale, vintage, gifting, swap-meets, hand-me-downs, or inheritance – strengthens the item’s affinity to generate positive affects in its wearer.

Parallel to the link between commercial value and ownership in the art world, pedigree plays a significant role in the monetary worth of a garment. Esteem of previous ownership is quantitatively proven to increase the numerical value of a clothing item, be it the association with celebrity or notable fashion history. For instance, while a haute couture Givenchy gown from 1967 retails at \$3,000 from the online resale site 1st Dibs, a haute couture gown from the same decade and atelier sold for over fifty times more when worn by a recognizable figure of fame. The iconic Givenchy ensemble worn by Audrey Hepburn in the 1961 film *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* sold to the winning bid of \$156,250 on auction in 2022 (Julien’s Auctions). However, while the impact of provenance is proven to escalate the quantitative value (price) of a garment, I propose that this factor also strengthens the qualitative value (sentiment) of the piece.

Alongside the heightened commercial merit of a piece with impressive provenance, the built-in history of a secondhand item amplifies its symbolic value and its capacity to stimulate affective intensity. Fashion theorists identify the urge for the contemporary clothing consumer to find something narrative to relate to in their purchases; Valentín claims that

“authenticity and related terms such as origin and heritage have been foregrounded as dominating ideals in recent times and as sources of status and meaning for consumers, who are interested in the provenance of the garment they buy” (2017).

When a fashion item is particularly purchased because of its pedigree – whether it be the allure of a high-fashion runway piece or the desire to own an object touched by one’s favorite artist or celebrity – its wearer extracts a sense of merit or competence from their finding. On par with the satisfaction of a triumphant archeological dig, the pride of the pedigree purchase of this kind summons a strong positive feeling that is absorbed into the object itself as an instance of Ahmed’s ‘sticky affect’ (2010). I refer to this motivational factor of acquisition – clothing as artifact – here as *prominent provenance*. Fashion writer Alexandra Hildreth deems this phenomena a symptom of ego and a form of *virtue signaling* in which “many consumer’s apparent obsession with a piece’s history lies in their bragging rights for obtaining the piece in

the first place” (2023). Kremer similarly suggests that the “narrative” lodged in the acquisition of such a curated historical purchase “presents the collector as worthy or deserving” due to the “knowledge or respect for the object” that is necessary in order to source an item of this nature (Kremer 1992). In this way, the glory of a secondhand purchase with an impressive history tends to appeal to the ego of the shopper and consequently affix the object with affective associations of awe, admiration, and reverence.

However, the previously owned garment does not require so elite an association, or so celebrated a provenance, to appeal to the affections of its owner. To receive a fashion item from a family member, friend, peer, or loved one – a *personal provenance* – can arguably instill the object with an even stronger affinity for affective attachment. Kremer asserts that “the method of acquisition.. appears to alter the meaning conferred by ownership and possession. Any gift carries an association of affection and caring as well as various other implications regarding interpersonal relationships” (1992). Whether gifted as a hand-me-down, inherited, or even purchased off of an acquainted individual, the secondhand garment of personal provenance is a gesture of deep rooted intimacy that relies on the owner’s emotional vulnerability to memory. In comparison to the clothing object of prominent provenance, which contracts value from social or cultural history, the object of personal provenance is valued on behalf of its individual history.

According to Femke De Vries’ notion of clothing as *souvenir*,

“the object of clothing is now mainly purchased to grasp the experience and carry it around in the expectation of the wearer to transform by reviving memories each time they dress (de Vries 2015).

In wearing a garment previously owned by a person of their affections (an object of personal provenance) the wearer is able to ‘transform’ into a likeness of the former owner’s image. Attachment to the item is constructed due to the association of mimicry, as clothing oneself in the shed skin of the loved one functions as if a seance in which the original possessor is temporarily reincarnated, appropriated and embodied. The inherited object subsumes the affective capacities of talisman and memorabilia: nostalgia, pleasure, longing, fondness. Emblems of personal provenance in this way harness the tenderness embedded in their transition and herald affectionate reminiscence as a result. In the act of wearing such a piece, the wearer recalls the nature of its acquisition and projects the attachment they feel for the donor onto the object itself: “the souvenir magically transports us to the scene of origin” (Kremer 1992). Clothing with personal provenance therefore arouses the emotions tied to the bestower upon the bestowed– an inherently intimate response that is consequently conflated to an affectionate attachment with the fashion item.

The social associations of personal provenance are particularly demonstrated through the acquisition mode of clothing swap-meets. A form of non-monetary exchange, the clothing swap imbues its objects with a two-way narrative of giving and receiving. Matthews and Hodges’

study on consumer clothing exchange behaviors identifies *socialization* as a primary motivational factor for the participation in this method of obtaining fashion objects (2016). Garments procured through this method of acquisition hold powerful pertinence to the association of community. Rather than visually mimicking the trends of their chosen peer group or social circle, the clothing swap participant materially assembles themselves within its cultural body. Physically incorporated into the history of the community through its genealogical exchange of objects, the swapper robes their own identity in the material essence of their social network. In this way both the wearer and the garment are bound in a fabric of community and attachment,

“The social bond is binding insofar as feelings are deposited in the same object, which may then accumulate value as happy or unhappy objects: a group may come together by articulating love for the same things, and hate for the same things, even if that love and hate is not simply felt by all those who identify with the group” (Ahmed 2010).

The clothing piece of personal provenance thus transforms from a potentially meaningless product to a touchstone for friendship, connection, and shared taste. It becomes a talisman of interaction. Sewn into its acquisition is story and solidarity.

X. AFFECTIVE ANONYMITY & IMAGINED PASTS

While some acts of circular acquisition entail interaction and engagement with the original owner (*personal provenance*) or at least acknowledgement of its previous possessor (*prominent provenance*), many instances of obtaining a used fashion product do not involve any level of familiarity with the article’s history. However, the acquisition of a previously-owned garment of unknown provenance retains its high affective intensity in the enticing ambiguity and imagined speculation of its narrative: a phenomenon I refer to here as *projected provenance*.

A frequent occurrence in thrift shopping and browsing online resale sites is a disconnect between the donor of the unwanted garment and the new heir – an obstacle erected by the intermediary of the retail business. Although this indirectness could potentially elicit an estrangement between the consumer and the secondhand fashion object, the ambiguity of the object’s previous history instead casts a film of mystery over the item and forces the shopper to activate their sense of imagination. I suggest that the sense of mystic, mythology, and narrative embodied in the fashion item of anonymous provenance strengthens the affective experience of the owner when engaging with the article.

When, for instance, a shopper finds a faded denim jacket at the thrift, the discovery forces a startling confrontation with temporality and positionality. The shopper must wonder where the item has been before, who has worn it, how much it has seen and done. How many arms it has covered from the wind, how many bodies it has clothed, how many decades it has watched come

and go in its cotton embrace. In this way, the previously owned garment of projected provenance is a vessel for speculative storytelling and a harness for poignant pathos, tugging on the emotions of the wearer in its murmur of past lives and unspoken lore. Fashion discourse insists that “provenance matters when an object’s journey is as exciting as the piece itself” (1st Dibs); the uninformed contemplation of this ‘journey’ generates a feeling of intrigue, enchantment, and curiosity in the secondhand consumer who has in effect factored themselves into the tale as the latest installment.

Despite the lack of association with the item’s former owner, its new one is graced with the duty to elongate its life and determine its fate. The secondhand shopper often takes pleasure in the theatricality of this role, which is consistently referred to as an inexplicable casting of destiny – as if the garment was destined to find the consumer, meant for them, or a result of their own manifestation. Just as Benjamin (1969) frames the passage of ownership as if a prophetic catalog of possession, in which “all of an object’s background participates in a magical encyclopedia whose quintessence is the destiny of the object itself,” Kremer similarly observes that

“often the narrative of acquisition is one which encompasses the acquisition of the object as part of its destiny, and places the collector as a key player in the social and economic drama of that particular object” (1992).

While the ‘drama’ of the secondhand garment’s serendipitous fortune in finding its home inspires in its new owner the positive feelings of individual merit and recognition – as if they were entitled or chosen to come across the special garment – the comparative anonymity of the original owner summons the fascination of filling in the gaps. Fashion archivist Ellen Sampson (2020) stresses the seductive allure of this “unknowing” of who or what previously engaged with a pre-owned garment. Opening an imaginative space of “fantasy and speculation,” the used clothing piece that lacks any certain or identifiable history to its origins offers a fruitful ambiguity to its new inhabitant to fictionalize a narrative for its undisclosed past. Generating a mysterious mythology of wonder, the used garment invites its heir to construct a character of their own making to precede their possession; in this way secondhand fashion encourages introspection in its consumer and urges a consideration of identity. Sampson writes that the *unknowing* carves out “spaces into which we can project aspects of the self. So that in these spaces of unknowing it is not the previous owner who intermingles with the garments but instead we ourselves” (2020).

Purchasing a vintage sundress from the 70’s, for instance, the shopper may perhaps find themselves generating an image of idyllic tranquility in which the garment served witness to a bohemian lifestyle of Grateful Dead concerts and pacifist protests. The acquisition of a 1950’s pantsuit might invite dystopian visions of nuclear conformity and sparkling countertops, an 80s bomber might whisper of teased hair and bobby socks and drive-in movies. What these imagined

personas enable in the current owner is a sense of whimsy, nostalgia and playfulness that illuminates more about their own preconceived worldviews than it does the actual historicity of the clothing item. In this way, the freedom to imagine constructs the object in the owner's own image and elicits a closeness of association in which they transfer onto the garment the fruit of their own desires.

Therefore cherished not only for what it is but for where it has been, the secondhand fashion item constructs sentimental value upon the insinuations of its past. Radiating with the marvel of its provenance – whether affirmed or envisioned – the previously owned clothing piece necessitates the emotional processing of history, temporality, and memory. Pieces of *prominent provenance*, often acquired through avenues for resale, archival, historical or vintage fashion, often predicate affects of respect, pride, reverence, esteem, and awe. Articles of *personal provenance*, such as the contents of hand-me-downs, inheritance, and swap-meets, are prone to nostalgia, connection, affection, endearment, love, and joy. Lastly, items obtained with anonymous origins – often through thrift shops or online resale sites – attribute curiosity, imagination, wonder, and intrigue to the narrative of *projected provenance*. Ordained to association, the secondhand piece in my analysis is consequently constructed as an inevitable channel for affective attachment.

XI. AFFECTIVE ASSOCIATIONS & EMBEDDED MEMORY

Elaborating on Dr Vries' notion of clothing as souvenir, I posit that circular consumption methods more powerfully tug on the owner's activation of associative memory. Though memory is in effect a form of *non-sensuous perception*, theorists frame objects of memory to "fold pastness into presentness" in a material conduit for the memory's "reinvention" and "recomposition" (Manning 2016). In pulling on the affection of memory, the secondhand fashion object creates an intimate relationship to its owner and inspires a strong body-mind response. This claim is supported by Kremer's analysis of the relationship between owner and object, which theorizes a connection between memory and attachment. Curated or collected objects – including the curatorial selection of a secondhand garment or the accumulation of clothing that has been passed through generations or communities – inherently "serve memory, thereby creating a strong relationship between the collector and the collected object (Kremer 1992).

Ahmed (2010) further contextualizes the power of memory to generate affective pleasure through the material product. She frames the transference of memory onto an item as the construction of a 'happy object.' Interaction with a happy object, according to Ahmed's theory, summons an echo of the pleasure experienced during its possession or its previous use. She helpfully allegorizes this phenomenon through the invocation of a sensory recollection:

"we can recall the pleasure of grapes as a memory; we can simply think about the grapes, as a thought that is also a feeling, even when we do not have the possibility of eating the grapes. We can just recall pleasure to experience pleasure, even if these pleasures do not

involve exactly the same sensation, even if the impressions of memory are not quite as lively.” (Ahmed 2010)

If the pleasurable moments experienced while wearing a garment are considered here to be the ‘grapes,’ then wearing the fashion item represents the pleasurable reflection upon the memory of grape-induced delight– the memory of the pleasure worn into the garment. Imprinted with the pleasurable memory of all that has been worn into it, the previously-owned garment operates as a ‘happy object’ and a vessel for nostalgia and reminiscence. This nostalgia can be directed towards many memories associated with the secondhand clothing item: the affection for the previous owner who gave it to them, or the delight of searching for the piece. The joy of finding it at a thrift store, or the imagined excitement of the past era it was lived in. The pride in sourcing it from an online reseller, or the longing for the times in which the garment was previously worn.

In order to activate memory through an interaction with an object, there must be a narrative to recall, a story to remember, or a significant aspect of the item that summons recollection. The development of narrative in an object occurs in the continuous history of ownership or the curation and selection of an item. Aspects of selection, curation, or donorship in circular acquisition thus “release a narrative, thereby acting as a souvenir” (Kremer, 1992). Due to the entanglement between memory, narrative, and sentiment, the association of an object with a memory effectively strengthens the owner’s attachment level to the object. Kremer argues that object attachment is a “dynamic process” which includes “fantasy, creativity, play, and imagination” as well as an aspect of sentiment that is “based on feelings or affection, or a complex emotional or cognitive response to the object” (Kremer 1992). In this way memory, affective response, and attachment are intertwined in the symbol of previously-owned clothing.

While a bought-new fashion object can just as easily acquire the role of a ‘happy object’ or ‘souvenir’ through its use and association with positive memories, the secondhand piece comes into ownership already embedded with a social accumulation of energy and experience. Rather than an empty vessel of nylon or a flimsy cotton container, the previously owned garment exists as a depository and artery for memory. The secondhand fashion piece collects sentimental value in the connotations of its passage: between bodies, between owners, between eras and between lives. Provenance and passage of ownership therefore allow the secondhand fashion object to be inherited already positioned as a ‘happy object’ and ‘souvenir’ of history, resulting in the increased propensity for an item of circular acquisition to stimulate positive affect and strong attachment.

XII. KINSHIP OBJECTS & MATERIAL HERITAGE

In this section of my analysis on acquisition and affect, I focus on the attachment that lines the inherited fashion object. Under the framework of Davis’ theory (1992), in which the social function of clothing is expression of identity, dress often operates as an affirmation of familial and cultural heritage. The clothing piece that is passed down between generations as a

hand-me-down or a gesture of affection in this way can be seen as the actualization of material lineage. Surveying the role of the inherited fashion item, I suggest that this mode of circular apparel acquisition constructs the object as a token of ritual, kinship, and self-articulation. These associations consequently evoke high affective responses when owning and wearing the garment, and ultimately solidify the longevity of the object as a sentimental keepsake.

Necessary to the sentimental affect of a heritage object is the nature of its acquisition. As previously demonstrated, any object that is gifted to a new owner may acquire a social or personal association. Ahmed states that the well intentions and affections of the giver bleed into the gift itself; “things might have an affective life as a result of being given or bestowed with affect”(Ahmed 2010). However, the object passed within family structures represents a particularly poignant attachment in its reflection of identity, positionality, and belonging. Inheriting a pearl necklace from one’s great-grandmother, the recipient holds the evidence of their ancestry. The inheritance of a heritage object is the material transformation of the past into the present and a confirmation of how the recipient has come to be. Baudrillard claims that “we require a visible past, a visible continuum, a visible myth of origin, which reassures us about our end” (1994). The heritage object tangibly cements one’s ‘origins’ into a material proof – an assurance that is intensified and escalated in the heritage garment, which can be physically integrated upon the recipient’s own body. While it can be argued that “the biography of a person is intimately bound up with objects” (Ahmed 2010), the ancestral object of clothing in particular fabricates a distinctly corporeal ‘bind.’ Swathed in the garments of their heritage, the wearer’s body is both materially and symbolically constructed by their genealogy. The body is literally fashioned by the substance of its own birth: a parallel of association that doubly affirms the identity of the wearer and kindles an affectionate attachment.

As a subgenre of Ahmed’s notion of the ‘happy object,’ the item whose ownership shifts within the family is classified as a *kinship object* (2010). Possession becomes an act of ritual, in which the family itself is ritualized through the passage of the material object. The structure of the family – its socio-cultural or even economic roots – is literally cemented by the kinship object as proof of its endurance over time. Ahmed similarly argues that the “promise” of the family is preserved through the inheritance of objects, which allows the family to be assembled (2010). This promise extends to the promise of enduring ownership; McIntyre’s affective analysis of wardrobe case studies demonstrate that the kinship object is less prone to disposability than a fashion object unmarked by social association. Confessions of research subjects showed that

"affective qualities were often given as reasons for keeping garments, even if they had no practical use value. “I don’t want to throw clothes away”, several authors wrote. Grandma’s wedding dress, family baby clothes..”(McIntyre 2019).

Longevity in kinship objects and heritage fashion is attributed both to the sentimental value of the item and the structural durability implied in its ability to withstand the conditions of time and changing ownership. Primarily motivating the owner of familial memorabilia to maintain possession of the object is affective attachment; a claim illuminated again by McIntyre's findings that getting rid of a piece of inherited acquisition marks a traitorous act. To dispose of a kinship object is effectively "betraying the memory of past sensations and experiences" and "getting rid of them felt like getting rid of the memory that was stuck to it, or getting rid of a person" (McIntyre 2019). Additionally establishing the endurance of a kinship object in possession is the logistical connotations of inheritance. The acquisition of a fashion item that has endured several lifecycles of ownership inevitably indicates a level of durability, as the physical construction of the garment – from the way it has been sewn to the material fabrication of its textiles – requires greater strength in order to withstand the passage of time and ownership. In this way, clothing procured through this especially personal provenance is expected to last, not only in its structural soundness but also in its sentimental connection to its wearer.

True to their name, generational garments effectively generate identity through the process of imitation, construction, and negation. Manning theorizes that heritage fashion activates the phenomenon of "siting oneself" within a "cradle of inheritance," in which the clothing piece is the very site of self-construction (2016). Fashion writers Giuliana Mazzetta and Hamutal Hayun specifically emphasize the comforting intimacy and affective power of heritage clothing received from the mother, posing this act of inheritance to function as a ritualized femininity. Maternal wardrobes are suggested to be "archives of time and personal histories." Centering their essay around a handful of particularly poignant garments given to them by their mothers, or acquired in relation to their admiration for figures of motherhood, Mazzetta and Hyun characterize fashion as "feminine inheritance" and a "shared ritual between mother and daughter" in which both lineage and practices of bodily assemblage / adornment are carried through clothing. Mazzetta and Hayun's anecdotes testify to the physical and emotional longevity of heritage fashion through their chronicles of lace nightgowns never worn but kept tucked away as memorabilia, of old dresses revisited as a way to remember their mother's "mythologies."

Along with affirming the high sentiment and endurance of an inherited garment, Mazzetta and Hayun defend the role of lineage wear in identity-construction. They remark upon the common childhood experience of watching one's mother get dressed, summoning the archetypal image of a young girl teetering as she tries on her mother's high heels and beaming with fascination as she rummages through her mother's wardrobe. Observing in awe as the mother adorns herself, the daughter models her own style after her mother's choreography of beauty, body, and femininity. In this way fashion is ritualized as a rite of passage into womanhood, and the inherited clothing of the mother transforms the material commodity into the symbolic endowment of body-legacy or aesthetic-legacy. That Mazzetta and Hayun claim this mother-daughter connection through clothing to be *cross-cultural* suggests heritage and lineage wear to offer a widely accessible route

to a durable wardrobe and an authentically enclothed identity: “Despite growing up in different cultures, our mothers’ relationship to getting dressed and the way they onboarded us to it shaped our identity, acting as anchors for us to go back to as women” (Mazzeta and Hayun 2023).

Writer Tomoe Hill similarly speaks to the binding power of heritage dress, particularly demonstrating the high affective capacity of genealogical garments through her rhetorical blurring of body, object, and environment. Hill conflates the act of wearing a kimono to the inhabitation of a “garment-house” and compares the embrace of the garment itself to that of a mother and child:

“Here in this Western bedroom, the tanzen is horizontal but not broken, instead adjusting its meaning to a different world, the way the mother must and the daughter will. This is another of the daughter’s earliest memories: the contrast of these ruins of paper-thin silk and dense black velvet against her baby skin, its wide weighted sleeves playfully folded over her body. Though no body ever fills it, the child regards its touch as if it were its mother, and so this mass of materials endures...Both she and her mother are silent, aware that this ritual is love; binding as both intimacy and creation” (Hill).

Hill affirms the role of cultural fashion in both affirming and negating identity through her confrontation of the dissonance between Western and Eastern dress. While her Japanese roots cast the kimono as an emblem of familiarity and formulation, her description of the mind-body affects in wearing the kimono conversely gesture at rejection, rebellion and assimilation:

“To wear a kimono, or even a less formal yukata, means there is time spent in and with the garment. There is a particular way to sit and a way to stand, every gesture considered but innate. No one has told her how to behave when she wears one, but her body understands. The combative feeling in her—small and angry and confused—is because she does not understand why her body understands. She knows this sense is relegated to the boundaries of the home, and that to view it outside of that space becomes not a bringing together of girl and culture, but a distancing. She does not know how to contextualize this garment with her world outside of Japan, outside of the house” (Hill).

Manning similarly interprets the kimono as an object of affect, yet not through its cultural connotations but through its revelation of the wearer’s own body: a revelation conversely summoned by the body’s own concealment. In contrast to the clothing that molds or aligns with the shapes of its wearer, the structure of the kimono is fixed. The rigidity of line in its silhouette – its genderless cut – is not made to reveal the body itself, or contour to the wearer’s figure, but instead evoke a pre-existing shape that invites a “processual unfolding that changes in each singular instance of dressing” (Manning 2016). The form of the garment itself is unaltered by the shape of the body that wears it, leaving the ‘becoming’ of the kimono to act only through the

alteration of the figure within. Considering the kimono to function as an emblem of “spatial patterning,” Manning theorizes the stable silhouette of the garment to center the affective experience not around the transformation of the garment itself but instead that of the wearer (2016). The kimono’s potential to confront a wide variety of new innards – or new bodies — allows the garment to construct a “worlding” oriented upon its un-insides rather than its predisposed silhouette. If the kimono operates as an independent variable, the body inside is dependent and changing, allowing the kimono to function as if a figure of measurement and a foundational landing site for the body to return to, a reliable garment house for the body’s awareness of its own metamorphosis in contrast to the kimono’s very stability. In this way, the affective power of the kimono stems both from the heritage of the family and the continual heritage of the individual rebirthing themselves.

Through Hill and Manning’s theorizing of the kimono, the kinship object is seen to force a reckoning of culture, heritage, and identity. Whether this reckoning elicits positive or negative feelings, it is clear that articles of heritage fashion hold intense affective capacities to conjure mind-body responses. Mazzetta and Hayun’s archive of the maternal wardrobe additionally supports the sentimental attachment that often follows the piece of inherited dress. Through these anecdotes – alongside Ahmed’s theory of kinship objects as ritualized possession and McIntyre’s case studies of affective object attachment – the method of circular acquisition that entails familial inheritance is seen as a cause of particularly strong affect and sentiment.

XIII. BLEMISH & ABSENT BODIES

Finally constructing the previously owned, or circularly acquired, fashion garment as a stimulant for intense affect, association, and attachment is its emphasized materiality. In comparison to the bought-new garment, which is pure and unblemished, secondhand clothing bears the potential for blemish, damage, and physical markings of use. At times, the signs of disrepair in the acquisition of a secondhand garment can summon negative affects of disgust, repulsion, or fear of contamination. Other times, material blemish gestures at nostalgia, mortality, transience, and the body’s own capacity to experience pleasure. Through its embodiment of both temporality and spatiality, the secondhand fashion object exists as a tangible reminder of the owner or wearer’s own humanness. In this way, I suggest that the materiality of the previously-owned item generates particularly strong associations and affective body-mind responses.

Through marks of use, the previously owned garment exquisitely embodies the element of affect emphasized by Spinoza and Deleuze: the nature of affect to transpire between entities (1992). The affective transference of emotion or experience not only from body to object, but from body-to-body is consummated in the secondhand garment’s passage of ownership. Physical traces of our lived experiences are impressed into the weave of our garments. Clothing contains the physiological evidence that we have run and danced, sneezed and strained, stretched and

tripped and ate and drank and loved. A cotton T-shirt becomes the felt immediacy of our years, yellowed with our sweat or wrinkled with age. Worn into the pieces of our wardrobes are the actions that define our day-to-day lives. Threaded into blue jeans is the salt of our labor and the stains of our lawns. Imprinted upon our leather jackets are the curves of our shoulders and the slosh of our morning coffee. On behalf of this function of clothing to absorb the evidence of our existence, the passage of a clothing item from one owner to another constitutes a simultaneous affective transference of sensory experience.

The secondhand garment is often riddled with sensual triggers. Stains, yellowing, discoloration, and distress carry visual cues of wear and previous ownership. Odors of musk or smoke mark the used garment as a victim of use and tarnishment. Unraveling, wrinkling, the crusty skin of food spills and the brittle texture of sweat can additionally contribute to used clothing's lived-in texture. At times, the sensory stimulation of the secondhand fashion object can elicit negative affects of repulsion, abjection, and disgust. Kim's theory of consumer contamination effect frames the used object as a carrier for disease or a transmitter for contagion, noting that "the most frequently chosen deterrent for both secondhand purchasing (55.5%) and renting (53.3%) [is] concern for hygiene or freshness" (Kim 2021). Similarly, sensory historian William Miller explains how the material imprint of past human activity deters us from engaging with an affected object: "we will sit on a public toilet seat with less upset when it is cold than when we discern that it is warm from the warmth of a prior user" (Miller 1998). Detecting use in the sensory engagement with secondhand clothing here presents materiality as a trigger for visceral bodily reactions. However strong these affects of rejection may be, positive bodily-emotional responses to lived-in fashion objects can skew just as strong.

In fact, statistics prove that the blemished garment is commercially desirable. Resale site The Real Real's has reported that the consumer demand for items in "fair condition," which encompass those that show "significant signs of wear," doubled in 2023 (Chan 2024). Charlotte Rogers, founder of resale shop Old Thing London, similarly testifies to the "driving demand for items that are more visibly used" (Chan 2024). The appeal of the materially distressed fashion object holds roots in affect theory. Ahmed argues that "objects acquire value through contact with bodies" (2010). Drawing from Spinoza's conflation of goodness as immortality and consistency, Ahmed claims that the encounter of an object with a bodily history serves as a reminder of our own capacity for survival. Spinoza writes: "we call a thing good which contributes to the preservation of our being, and we call a thing evil if it is an obstacle to the preservation of our being" (1992). In the context of the previously owned garment, this 'goodness' is constructed upon the material markers on the item, which denote both the mortality/transience of the absent body that once wore it and the endurance of the clothing piece itself to 'preserve' their memory. The recognition of its previous ownership imprints a mourning upon the new owner in the face of the former owner's absence, a nostalgia that begs the garment to stay in their possession as a gestural performance of keeping them alive or present. Manning

argues that “what will remain immortal is not the human body, but the procedural force that bodies, that architects, that fashions, the procedural force that sites awareness in the field of relation” (Manning 2016). In other words, the secondhand object is the ‘procedural force’ that ‘sites awareness’ of those who have come before us. This recognition of past and preservation of memory is what constructs the used garment as a conduit for the history of life itself: a concrete conservation of goodness.

Archivist and material object researcher Ellen Sampson similarly posits that the “contact points” imprinted upon a used clothing item elicit an affect of longing for the absent body that once filled its form (Sampson 2020). Noting the physiological and psychological impacts of “wear, gesture, and trace” that characterize the “afterlife of clothing,” Sampson emphasizes that “imperfect garments make the absent bodies of those who used, made, and repaired them present for us” (2020). Nostalgia for these phantom bodies imbues in its new wearer a sense of remembrance: the garment becomes a talisman of their relationship to the absent body. Whether the heir of the garment has personally interacted with the garment’s original owner, is historically familiar with the garment’s original owner, or has only the ability to imagine what sort of life used to inhabit the garment’s gap, the nostalgic affect of the reincarnated clothing item establishes its value as one of profound sentiment. Though her work analyzes archival fashion and its accession, storage, conservation, and display, the affect of use described by Sampson similarly informs the affect of used garments acquired through circular consumption modes.

Echoing the mystery of Sampson’s previously mentioned *unknowing*, which occurs in the confrontation with an object of anonymous or projected provenance, Claire Wilcox proposes the pleasure of solving the ‘forensic stain.’ As senior fashion curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Wilcox narrates the process of archiving a blemished Balenciaga dress worn by Madame Weisweiller in Jean Cocteau’s 1960s film *The Testament of Orpheus*. Obsessed with piecing together the “mystery of the stain,” Wilcox writes: “If I were a forensic scientist I could mark exactly where the coffee cup (I jump to conclusions) was poised, exactly the tilt at which, once jogged, Mme’s hand lost control” (Wilcox). The fascination conjured by the presence of material imprints of use and wear in this way frame the secondhand fashion object as a site for reconstructing history and contemplating past lives. In this way the materiality of the used fashion object provokes reflective emotional responses in those who engage with it.

In a final ode to the sentiment of stain, Anne Sexton’s confessional poem titled “Clothes” contemplates what of her wardrobe she would like to be buried once she dies (1974). Considering the options of her wedding hat, her maternity skirt, or the underwear of her childhood, Sexton memorializes her lifetime through the clothing pieces emblematic of the social roles that she has filled of wife, mother, and child. Sexton’s piece not only acknowledges the definitive weight that the garment holds in articulating one’s place in the world, but additionally asserts the particular nostalgia embedded in used clothing. Mapping her existence through the

items that have accompanied her through birth and marriage, innocence and loss, Sexton appeals to the affective potency of the lived-in garment. Several lines of her piece characterize the blemish in the clothing pieces that she considers for her burial, particularly establishing the increased sentiment of worn-in fashion. The items described are significant to her not because of their commercial value, but because of the stories that forged their stains and spotting. That this nostalgic affect is powerful enough for Sexton to deem these garments worthy of immortality, *literally* taking them to the grave, is a testament to used clothing's sense of endurance, its evidentiary claim to identity, and its affective intensity.

Sexton's piece particularly demonstrates the physicality of affect as a fuse between body, object, and space. She portrays her painting shirt to be "spotted with every yellow kitchen I've painted" in the same way that she frames her kitchen to "hold the family laughter and the soup" (1974). The garment and the room are both sources of inhabitation. Each a setting, housing bodies and sensory experiences. The kitchen soaks up the suds of its own immersion, taking on the very qualities of its encased objects. Its solid countertops become indistinguishable from the savory linger of the soup and the ricocheting echoes of the laughter. In the same vein, Manning contests the notion that "architecture exists only for the one who beholds or inhabits it," and instead indicates a blur of environment and inhabitant in which "the body-in-action and the architectural surround should not be defined apart from each other" (2016). There is a tangible and symbolic transference between the bodies inside of the room and the structure of the room itself. Collapsing into the very atmosphere that it houses, Sexton's kitchen functions as a vessel of affect.

Sexton's depiction of her t-shirt merely narrows the affective capacity and breadth of the kitchen. Reducing furnishings to limbs, tapering walls into a solitary figure, softening metal and stone to cotton and linen, the kitchen and the garment are seen to hold the same affective potential. Just as the kitchen contains its meals and noises, the shirt houses the phantom gestures of Sexton's postures while painting. It bears the blotches of her brushwork and imprints her kinesthetic rhythms into its form. There are layers of affective translation here: the meld of shirt into body, body into chair, chair into floor into the kitchen itself. What is held in them are one with them. In contrast to the normative habit to "abstract the sitting body from the desk, the walking body from the street, the sleeping body from the bed," Manning suggests that reorienting perception to more cohesively meld body and surroundings will construct a fluid and meaningful relation between subjects and objects (2016). Sexton's poem asks us to do what Manning explicitly demands:

"Now look again and see not the clothing that *masks* a moving body, but a shape in the making that includes movement, that includes textile, that includes body, the three together an ecology that is an emergent bodying" (Manning 2016).

Through Sexton's poignant depiction of her clothing and the spaces that she has lived in them, the affective potential of sensory markings are made visceral and immediate.

Therefore the material blemish of the previously owned garment constructs the item as a sensory retelling of its past life. Marks of use can indicate preservation of human life or the previous owner's pursuit of pleasure. They can summon nostalgia for absent bodies, beg historical contemplation, or provoke repulsion as a symbol of contamination. Yet the marked secondhand garment exists ultimately as the velcro of vitality. Clung to the secondhand garment, in the material souvenirs of its use, are its owner's very affections: in this way the consumer of circular fashion holds a higher likelihood for object attachment.

CLOTHES Anne Sexton, 1974

Put on a clean shirt
 before you die, some Russian said.
 Nothing with drool, please,
 no egg spots, no blood,
 no sweat, no sperm.
 You want me clean, God,
 so I'll try to comply.

The hat I was married in,
 will it do?
 White, broad, fake flowers in a tiny array.
 It's old-fashioned, as stylish as a bedbug,
 but it suits to die in something nostalgic.

And I'll take
 my painting shirt
 washed over and over of course
 spotted with every yellow kitchen I've
 painted.
 God, you don't mind if I bring all my
 kitchens?
 They hold the family laughter and the soup.

For a bra
 (need we mention it?),
 the padded black one that my lover
 demeaned
 when I took it off.
 He said, 'Where'd it all go? '

And I'll take
 the maternity skirt of my ninth month,
 a window for the love-belly
 that let each baby pop out like an apple,
 the water breaking in the restaurant,
 making a noisy house I'd like to die in.

For underpants I'll pick white cotton,
 the briefs of my childhood,
 for it was my mother's dictum
 that nice girls wore only white cotton.
 If my mother had lived to see it
 she would have put a WANTED sign up in
 the post office
 for the black, the red, the blue I've worn.
 Still, it would be perfectly fine with me
 to die like a nice girl
 smelling of Clorox and Duz.
 Being sixteen-in-the-pants
 I would die full of questions.

XIV. METHOD

Moving from theory to practice, I attempt to qualify and measure the relations between acquisition and affect through an auto-ethnographic study of my own wardrobe. Because the relationship between a garment and its wearer is heavily dependent upon individualized context and lived experience – “the feeling of being dressed is quintessentially situational (unpredictable, surprising, queer)” (Ruggerone 2017) – affect theory as applied to fashion is incongruous with definitive generalizations or absolute conclusions. While the acquisition of a clothing item might render one consumer euphoric and secure, the same act might conjure an opposite affective reaction of dejection and insecurity in another. In this way it is difficult, if not impossible, to stake an absolute claim on the connection between affect and acquisition in regards to apparel. However, my conducted analysis of affect and acquisition is centered upon my personal interaction, engagement, and embodiment of apparel. Through a narrowed case study, I intend to generate observations and stimulate further investigation regarding the link between a fashion object’s origin and the owner’s resulting level of attachment/detachment.

Adopting Mark’s affective analysis model (2018) as applied by Tienhoven and Smelik (2021) to the examination of the fashion object, I catalog the affective experience garnered by fifteen items from my own wardrobe. Mark’s affective methodology, constructed upon Deleuze and Guattari’s aesthetic analysis (1994) and originally developed to assess works of cinema, constitutes a three-step process of Affect, Precept, and Concept. Tienhoven and Smelik’s adoption of this affective analysis methodology focused on two garments – one, a haute couture dress by designer Jan Taminiau and the other a t-shirt from fast fashion retailer Primark– with the goal “to register, trace and describe processes and relations invoked by affect” (Tienhoven 2021).

In the first stage of analysis, the researcher documents the involuntary bodily responses aroused by their interaction with the artwork: “autonomic nervous system responses like sweating, goosebumps” or “smiling, frowning, cringing, embarrassment” (Tienhoven 2021). The intention of this step is to reduce the conscious or representational engagement with the object and instead engage with its non-linguistic affect. Second in Mark’s process is the Precept stage, which Tienhoven and Smelik describe as the observation of the sensory stimuli perceived by the researcher. To “postpone” assumptions, the researcher adheres to a purely material comprehension of the targeted affective object through visual, tactile, olfactory or even auditory recognition (Tienhoven 2021). In the final Concept stage, the researcher synthesizes their analysis of the object into an “elaboration on the ideas generated by the affect and precept phase” (Tienhoven 2021). Tienhoven and Smelik’s application of this method derived the “concept” of their study from a deconstruction of the garment’s formal elements and a relation of these aesthetic factors to their respective affective responses of pleasure, discomfort, awe, and fear.

My catalog replicates the affective analysis method of Mark, Tienhoven and Smelik, with the inclusion of one additional factor to arrive at the ultimate concept stage: that of acquisition. In order to evaluate the degree in which method of acquisition alters the consumer's affective relationship with the fashion item, I note the means by which I obtained the object before conducting the process of Affect, Precept, and Concept. Drawing upon Macintyre's (2019) affective survey of wardrobe studies – in which 34 participants kept a three-month diary inventorying their closets, transcribing new purchases, noting the motivations preceding the purchase and the resulting feelings stirred in them – I relate the sourcing of the fashion item to my emotional experience owning, storing, and wearing it.

I further extend Tienhoven and Smelik's affective analysis of fashion from a distal to a proximal engagement with the studied object. While the two researchers conduct their study through the act of touching and looking at the analyzed garment, effectively bringing “the bodily and emotional reactions of the researcher into the research,” (Tienhoven 2021) I intensify the sensory engagement with the fashion item through the act of actually wearing it. In this way the physical element of affect is exaggerated through material embodiment. Bringing the object of research at one with the materiality of the researcher, my adapted method enables an increased probability for bodily affect to occur in my apparel analysis.

Fashion writers Mazzetta and Huyun's narrative catalog of clothing items and accessories that they inherited from their mothers also informs the critical emphasis that I place upon provenance and pedigree in analyzing my affective response to the wearable object. Ahmed's previously mentioned theory of “sticky affect,” in which an object acts as a vessel that retains the experiences of its owner, suggests the inherited or secondhand garment in particular to operate as a “happy object” reminiscent of the person who wore it previously (2010). In this way I foreground previous ownership of the fashion item as a primary factor in the inducing affect.

As a worker in the fashion industry, I recognize the bias that I bring to both my analysis of affect and the methods through which I have acquired the apparel in my wardrobe. Due to several years of experience working in the resale industry, significant interest in fashion history, and advocacy for conscious consumerism, my wardrobe is primarily composed of items that have been purchased secondhand; vintage garments; clothing pieces gifted to me; and fashion objects acquired through transactionless swap-meets. As a result of these biases, it is possible that the affective analysis of my clothing may garner higher levels of emotional response, or more intense affects, than a similar practice would merit in a fashion indifferent consumer, or a consumer who exclusively purchases their clothing ‘bought-new.’

My background in fashion writing also conditions me to consider clothing a subject of representational and linguistic analysis, or a mirror of social politics and culture. The conversely non-representational quality of affective study reflects my intent to separate myself from the

rationalization and intellectualization of clothing, and instead engage more deeply with a non-rational, sensory approach to fashion through this exercise. To attempt to mediate the bias I hold towards methods of circular acquisition and to more extensively measure the affects ushered by *differing* modes of obtaining product, I have selected a sampling of fashion garments and accessories that represent a range of bought-new, inherited, and secondhand models of consumption.

This affective analysis of my own wardrobe ultimately measures the mind-body feelings elicited by the encounter with my clothing pieces in connection to their origins and histories. After selecting a range of garments and accessories to catalog, noting the means by which I obtained them, and conducting Mark's Affect-Precept-Concept process, I identify the trends of affective experience in relation to their mode of acquisition.

XV. AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC AFFECTIVE ANALYSIS

1. TOP

Acquisition

CIRCULAR. SECONDHAND. IN-PERSON.

I purchased this garment secondhand from What Goes Around Comes Around in New York City. It is from Issey Miyake's F/W 2010 Ready-to-Wear collection and the most expensive item in my wardrobe. Issey Miyake died within the year. Because of this clothing piece I have renter's insurance.

Affect

Taking this garment off the hanger, I feel an immediate tug of fascination. Awe. Wonder. The urge to play, to run the long silken extensions through my fingers and twirl them around my wrists. I feel a closeness with the garment. Putting it on I notice a hitch in my breathing and a fluttering sensation in my chest at the excitement I feel to be able to wear it. Freedom. Impulse. Lack of regulated movement. Wearing the piece I am overcome by the urge to sway, to lean, to move and dance. Windmilling my arms, I wrap the ties around my neck, fling them into the air. In it, I become limitless.

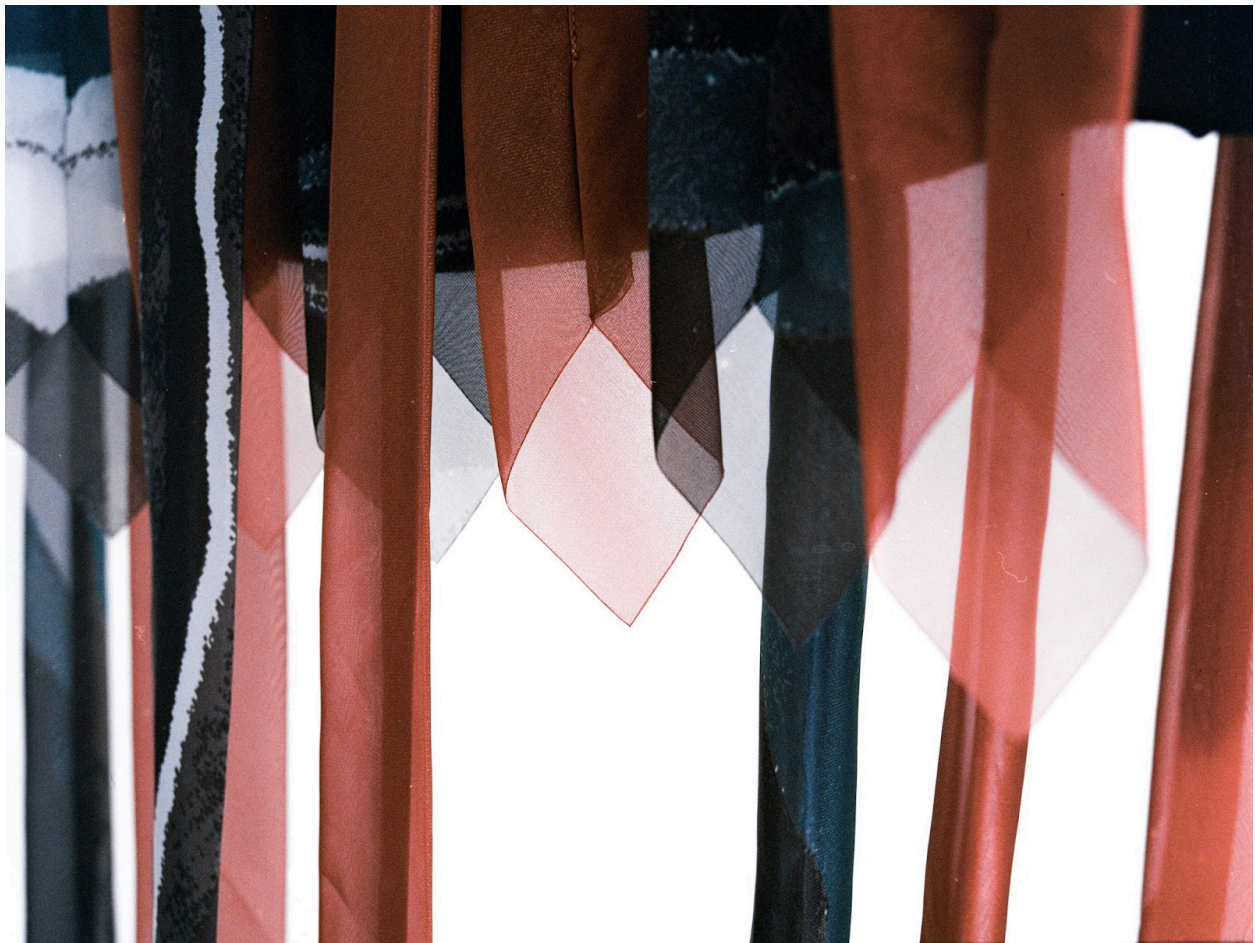
Precept

First recognized in the tactile sensation of the garment on my body is comfort. The cotton of the t-shirt base is black and soft and stretchy. It rests against my skin with a sense of nonchalance, neither clinging nor draped. It is close to me like a light breath or a cool coating. I feel the extensions of my arms in the drapery of the ties pooling forth at my clavicle, around my forearms. Although they are long and cumbersome, they glide smoothly and airily as if floating. They do not feel 'in the way.' I register the contrast of the ties, red and cool gray, with the blankness of the garment's body. The ties are just barely opaque, and they feel like water swirling with my limbs. I am swimming in the garment. In it I cannot stand still.

Concept

IMPULSE. I conflate the irrational impulse of purchasing this garment (a factor of its acquisition) with the unmediated impulse of movement that I feel in wearing it (a factor of its affect). Although I do not feel any regret in buying this piece, I know that it reflected an impulsivity of consumption that was at its core non-rational. I did not have the money to be spending as much as I did on its purchase. I merely felt so attracted to it that I gave in to the affect of pleasure it triggered in me upon seeing it in the store. My disappointment, anger, even, that I spent so much of my hard-earned wage on this garment only furthers the feeling that by wearing it, I am immune to authority. When wearing it, I feel a similar lack of bodily regulation and a sense of limitlessness, as if there is no end to my movements and no constrictions to the contortions I may make within its arms. The element of convertibility in the garment – the way that the ties can be arranged frontwards or swooped towards the back, tied up as if actual neckties or knotted around themselves – also contributes to the concept of impulse that I have derived from this analysis. Each time I put this garment on, I tap into a primal or extra-cognitive

sort of urge that instructs me in how I want to wear it and move inside of it. The eerie similarity of the silken extensions to arms additionally represents an impulse to merge body with garment, or the desire to mimic and replicate the beauty of the human form in the material fashion object. There is freedom to having so many arms, to duplicating the extremities in this way. The deep pleasure that I feel wearing this garment stems from both my sourcing of the piece and the material sensation of wearing it. While the physical elements of the garment are inherently pleasing to me, I am equally admiring of its rarity and uniqueness. That I sourced this garment one-of-a-kind, that it had a life before me walking on the Issey Miyake runway, instills it with a sense of wonder and sacredness that increases its affect of movement, impulse, and transformation.







2. JEANS

Acquisition

CIRCULAR. VINTAGE. IN-PERSON.

I acquired these Levi's from Chelsea Market in New York City when I was 14 years old. At the time, this was the most money I had ever spent on denim. I have now had them for over six years. They were sold to me as 'vintage' as they are a style of 501's from the 1990s.

Affect

Familiarity. Comfort. Discomfort. Grounding. Small tug in my gut of apprehension. Tense fear that they will not fit properly. Urge to put my hands in the pockets, front and back. Relief. Limbs settling.

Precept

Light wash faded blue. Soft cotton. Forgiving. Sturdy. Pliable. I notice two small blood spots at the inside seam of the crotch. The way I must give them an extra tug to pull them up over my hips. They comply. I enjoy the noise of the zip- it goes with ease. Big splotchy tan stain on the inner thigh, coffee probably. Discoloration on the shins and the seat, probably from kneeling and puttering about in grass. They cling to my inner thighs and cut straight against my ankles. Pucker at the knees. I take a twisted small pleasure in the half inch of room at the waist. Wearing them and considering my reflection, I am drawn to the hard lines of the seams, the extra fading lining them white at the edges. I feel the depth of the pockets and watch how far my hand is able to disappear until only my wrist is visible.

Concept

MEASUREMENT. My first instinct to put my hands into the pockets of the garment reflects the time that I have owned them, the nagging thought that I have left something forgotten: a note, a coin, a ticket stub, a spare dollar. The staining on the denim does not bring me any kind of displeasure- it only marks their debris, the feeling that they are loved. I have never attempted to wash away the blemishes. The underlying tugs of fear that I felt upon putting them on I attribute to my awareness of time and transformation, the apprehension that a day will come when they do not fit me. I think of the times that I wore them and they felt a little too tight, the year or two when they were too roomy and sat lower on my hips. The high waist fit of the pant I associate with safety. That I am tucked in. There is nothing of me spilling out or over, which brings pleasure. Wearing them does not summon memories of the time I have spent in them as much as it summons the feeling of putting them on. As if putting them onto my body is a form of measurement, a check to see how I have changed or bulged or narrowed. This is unhealthy, I suppose, but rather than rationalizing this anxiety I see something nostalgic in it; the version of myself at sixteen, eighteen, twenty, still putting on these jeans and hoping that they will still do to serve me. I do not know who owned the jeans before me. I do not wonder about them so much as I wonder about the girl who I was the last time that I wore them. I bring them out only every once in a while when I need something absolutely reliable, classic, simple. They appear to me as if the marks penned onto the wall of a childhood home to measure growth. I'm not a kid but I am still seeking a way to measure myself. My mind goes to the classroom, to highschool, to the

feeling of sitting at a desk and being told what is expected of me. In the jeans I know what to expect: the feeling of the fabric pressing into my stomach when I sit down, keeping me in. I arrive at the concept of measurement. Mode of acquisition influences this concept not because of where I bought them, but the conditions in which they entered my life. At an age where every growth required measurement. The attachment that I feel to them is an attachment to the validation that I can find in them when I put them on and they still fit. A gruesome, guilty attachment that is more ambivalent than the cut-and-dry pleasure of a garment that I love the feel of wearing. Jeans I regard with obligatory respect, a bit of repulsion. They are gratification, assessment, measurement.







3. SUN DRESS

Acquisition

CIRCULAR. VINTAGE. IN-PERSON.

I purchased this garment when I worked at Buffalo Exchange in Phoenix, AZ. The act itself, of buying it or finding it, did not leave much impact on me. I do not remember much other than that I saw it in the section of the store marked 'vintage' and it has been mine for about two years.

Affect

Nostalgia. Longing. Tug in gut, lump in throat. Youthfulness. Playfulness. Joy, joy, joy.

Precept

The cotton has a soft, loved, worn in feel to it. It is not coarse but sturdy. The flowers on the bodice are hand-stitched in sapphire and aqua and sunny yellow. Some of the strings have unspooled from their moorings and curl out as if 3D petals growing out of the dress. From the bust to the jut of my hip bones, it is smocked in this wonderful closeness that makes me feel hugged in. There is a bit of discoloration at the armpits and some odd stains at the back. My own back is bare and I can feel the air on my skin and the halter ties tickling my spine. The hem cuts off mid-shin in a line of quaint crochet. I am made alive in the color of the red. I feel long and lanky and like I should always be barefooted. My breasts are supported and I could be a mother or a child. I feel pleasantly within my body, aware of all of the shapes I can make with it.

Concept

NOSTALGIA. The dress summons images of sunshine spilling on skin. I am reminded of late afternoons in the springtime and grass stains and freckled cheeks. There is joy effusing from the fabric, mimicked in the bouquets of flowers sewn into its bust. It is soulful and childlike. I am prone to calling it my 'happy dress.' In it I smell lemons and sea salt and citrus perfume. The memories worn into the garment coat over the memory of its acquisition. It is a happy object by association. I wear it on days that I miss simplicity and gingham and Italian coasts. Wearing it brings me a pleasurable longing for lovers that I no longer love and days that are no longer so free. I see muddied feet in the small wrinkles of its silhouette. It reminds me of sturdy denim and the sound of cicadas. It is an object of serenity and sweet mourning. It conjures two specific memories: the first, a day in the park, full of pleasure and strawberries. My hair is up and I am not wearing makeup and my curls fall out of their clip without care. I feel unencumbered. The second is a day in Liguria in a small field of lemon trees. My feet are flat on the ground and I walk to a stone pebbled beach. It is cold. I walk and the wind blows me and the dress into the water. I have never washed the dress, and I like to think that some of the smoke and the sea remain in it. It is a souvenir of nostalgia.







4. BLAZER

Acquisition

CIRCULAR. GIFTED.

This garment was gifted to me by my former boss, Doris Raymond, as compensation for my time as her apprentice in Los Angeles. It is an archival piece from her collection of historical clothing, designed by Thierry Mugler circa 1980.

Affect

Unease. Hesitation. Distance. Caution. Rigidity. Stillness. Posture. Relief. Pride. Power. Upon removing this garment from its hanger, I notice a sense of stillness and hesitation. A slowness to my movements, shortened inhalations of breath. I handle the garment gingerly and with a tenderness of touch. There is hesitation to put it around me, as if it is meant to live safely on its hanger. A complete halt of breathing: sliding my arms into the sleeves, snapping the buttons closed. Something stirring in my stomach as my body and the garment settle into place. A narrowing of my chin as I consider my reflection in the mirror. The straightening of my shoulders. The strict posturing of my spine. Pride tightening my abdomen and pulling in my navel. Exhale.

Precept

I note the ease with which my arms glide into the sleeves, the delicacy of the silk maroon lining. A cautious texture. I admire the broad padding at my shoulders, the nip it takes at my waist, the uncompromising cut of the hip that extends outward. I see the severity with which it segments my body into parts, accentuating the femaleness of my form. I feel the stiffness of my body and the tightness around the slope of my torso. It is a comforting sort of tightness, the kind that is suctioning me in and expanding me out. It draws my gaze to the lines of the pattern: they accentuate the curve of my bust and the inflection beginning at my belly button. I caress the crushed black velvet lapels and stroke the delicate silk chiffon of the tartan on its body, on my body. I touch the garment the most at its peplums. They are just as silken as the rest but they are not so pliable, more rigid in their cut and unrelenting in their structure. The only bit without a satin interior. Unlined.

Concept

DEFINITION. I deduce concept – definition – in this garment both from its aesthetic elements and its ontological associations. I see its physical and representational qualities as mirrors of my own self image that function to articulate my sense of identity. I relate the caution of my movements and my hesitation to put on the garment to my reverence for its history. My fear of wearing it stems both from the unforgiving fabric from which it is constructed and the underlying doubt that I deserve to own something so valuable. It is probably worth more than the life I have so far given it; it is of museum quality. The stillness with which I put it on and the slow, deliberate movements I must make while wearing it reflect the respect I hold for the garment's value. This admiration feels an inextricable part of who I am. I worked for two months with Doris Raymond to document the contents of her archive and document the value of each garment for sale at auction. In return, I earned this piece, one that I wrote about then and write

about again now. I am defined by my ownership of this garment, as it is a testament to my ability in the industry and a symbol of my passion actualizing itself. The affects of pride and power that fill me when wearing the garment reflect the gut-feeling that I am fitted, well-equipped, capable of creating the life I envision. Embodying my idealized self, I actualize my perception of both body and personhood. The pleasure I feel in experiencing the garment stems from its feeling of familiarity. Perfectly tailored to my figure, the piece is a twinned composition of my own body. A mimicry of my own form. In it I am defined. Its visual contrasts of gender further strengthen the degree of association and closeness I feel to the garment. The rigid structure juxtaposes with the fragility of the fabric, gesturing at the contrast of masculine and feminine aesthetics. Bold and unforgiving yet delicate and graceful. I resonate with the balance that these two embodiments strike in the garment, as I see them mirrored in myself. I am the romance of the maroon and the anger in it too. I am made more digestible by the yellow veins of brightness that outline my biceps, my sternum, my breast. The pleasure that I find in the sensuality of the garment's silhouette feels to represent the agency and value I associate with my own sexuality. The piece is an affirmation and manifestation of my identity. In it I see not only the definition of my physical body but an echo of the way that I define myself: a wrestling of masculine and feminine elements, a confrontation of rigidity and tenderness, a conflicting brush between head and heart.







5. JACKET

Acquisition

CIRCULAR. GIFTED.

This garment was given to me by my current partner. He bought it originally at a resale shop in Phoenix and has had it for about several years. It has been in my ownership for about three months.

Affect

Surprise. Comfort. Protection. Security. Small tug at the gut. Something of love, or belonging, or pleasure. Remembrance. The urge to finger the tassels. To sway with my arms in the air, to splay the tassels out like wings. To put my hands in the pockets. To tuck myself inside of it.

Precept

Removing it from the clothing rack, I am struck by the weight of the thing. It is so eager to fall off the hanger, to come loose. As it does, it retains its shape, mimicking a body though it is not filled by one. I smell the scent of the leather, all skin and a hint of tobacco. It makes a sound of heaviness as its sleeves and body relax into one another. The tassels make a pleasing fluttering noise and they fall against the surface, leather on leather. The clink of the zipper, the snap of the collar as I click it into place. I visually take in details that I have not noticed before: the small lacing on the sides. The fading of the suede florals is not gray but blue, and yellowing at the edges. The leather is supple, wrinkling, malleable. Buttery and still with a bit of shine. The material is rigid and thick enough that the shoulder stays square even when I shrug mine down. The tassels are worn at their edges, the seams threaten to fray. I note the sturdiness of the thing, the way there is no revelation of my own figure when I am inside it. The braiding cuts diagonally from the armpit to the navel and the tassels sprout from the shoulder seams, the undersides of the arms. There is staining at the back that rubs right off when I scrub it with the pad of my pointer finger. The inner lining is silky on my skin.

Concept

PROTECTION. I associate the heaviness of the garment with safety. I think of the reason why the garment was given to me, as an act of love and desire as bodily mimicry. I had given my partner my father's letterman jacket and he gave me his leather jacket in return. I think about all of the growing up he must have done in this jacket. I think about the other women who may have loved him in it. I associate the leather jacket's large roomy sleeves with his arms, which are equally sturdy and warm. Wearing it is his embrace. I associate my feeling of pleasure to the joyful mimicry of taking on his likeness and absorbing elements of his being in the act of loving him. I wonder how he stained it, what he was doing that frayed the tassels or left splotches of lightness on the dark shell of the black. I assimilate the calfskin with human skin, with the embrace of my lover. Wearing it, I feel pride that I am able to love someone and be loveable. There is pleasure in the way that wearing it summons the desire I feel for him, to envelope him, to consume him, to be consumed by him. There is an underlying current of wonder, or fear, or doubt, that lines my wearing it, its temporariness. A gnawing feeling that when we are no longer together that he will ask for it back. This feeling circles back on itself and leaves me with all the

more pleasure in being able to wear it now – even though it is temporary, there is a feeling of savoring it while I am able to. I treasure its temporality, its transience. There is wonder at the layer of skin, so many layers. I think of the skin of the cow, how it died, if it was worth killing the animal for me and my partner and whoever sold it to Buffalo Exchange to be able to appropriate its skin as our own. I respect the garment for this. That there has been some sacrifice in order to make it. The sacrifice of flesh, this, offering of symbolic skin to one's lover. A donation of body in order to clothe mine. Guilt oozes from this realization. But it is washed out by the lingering of the garment's weight on my body and the joy of this. My attachment to the garment I attribute almost fully to its acquisition, as I see it as a bodily extension of my partner, a synthetic or prosthetic likeness of his body. I see it as who he is. I protect the garment and feel protected by it.







6. SKIRT

CIRCULAR. INHERITED.

Acquisition

My mother gave me this skirt. She bought it in Italy when she studied there as a university student in the 1980s. I have had it for several years.

Affect

My first, quite unexplainable instinct is to smell it. It smells only of my perfume. I scrunch the fabric and feel its softness.

Precept

First compelling me to the garment in removing it from its hanger are all of the marks of wear. A black tulle tutu used to accompany the skirt. The elastic waistband has completely deteriorated and stretched. I run my finger between the wide pleats. I see that it is less of a plaid and more of a houndstooth, really. The tag says “Confezione di Lusso, Made in Italy.” I have the waistband cinched with a safety pin and it has begun to wear a small hole into the fabric, which is so soft that it feels like a child’s blanket. The garment is structurally so sound but for that waistband. Its hem is peeling completely off and small black threads tangle and jump out from the frayed ends. The houndstooth print is small and organized into even squares. Stepping into the garment, I feel excitement. It hangs so low on my hips that it would fall all of the way off if not for the pin keeping it in place. My tattoo peeks out from the top of the waistband. It is permanent and so is the life of the skirt. Neither are going anywhere. I notice the fall of the pleats, which bring me pleasure and nostalgia and pride. The way that they lay begs for movement.

Concept

KNOWLEDGE. Wearing the garment summons memories of reflection, of the joy in sharing the experience of living abroad with my mother. We both studied in Florence. I think of her coming to visit me and showing me the places that she would go, the piazzas and trattorias she would inhabit when she was my age. Passing onto me her knowledge. I think of coming-of-age and discovering myself. I associate the pleasure and the nostalgia of the pleats with my own experience in Italy, where I learned to hand pleat a garment. The pattern of the skirt resembles that of a schoolgirl, disciplined lines yet the restlessness of movement. I associate the looseness of the garment with some kind of opening of the mind, the broadening of the waistband with the expansion of the brain coming into consciousness. The unraveling threads as the garment unfurling to make room for new languages and countries and cobblestones. The affect of attachment to this garment stems not only from my acquisition of the piece, but also from the acquisition of my mother’s— how she acquired it in a place that one day her daughter would also come to know. How, at that time, my mother had not conceived the idea of having a daughter or one day passing onto her this skirt. Wearing the garment, I discover the knowledge of my own.







7. CAMISOLE

Acquisition

CIRCULAR. INHERITED.

My mother gave me this lace camisole when I was a teenager. I remember she told me it no longer fit her around the shoulders. That my father had bought it for her when they were traveling. Italy, maybe. I have kept it ever since.

Affect

Familiarity. Ease. Beauty. Delicacy. Sophistication. Taking the camisole off of its hanger, I do not feel much in my body but I feel a lot swelling in my mind. My first impulse is to put my hands inside of it, to see where in the lace I can see through to my skin.

Precept

Peeling the straps off the hanger, I scrunch the lace between my fingers. I notice, as I always have, how the material is not itchy. This surprises me. It is lace all over. Creamy. It has never shown discoloration through the years that I have had it. I wonder if it was always this steady yellowish. If it began as white. It is probably thirty years old. I notice the flat scallops of the hems and the horizontal panels that give it shape in the bodice. Unlined. Stretchy. There are one or two small snags near the armpits, at the shoulder. One tear at the side seam, by the waist. I wonder if I put them there or if my mother did. The actual pattern in the lace is floral, all teardrop petals and leaves like lily pads. On my figure, it is snug and well-fitted. I am pleased by the way that it suits my body, the way it supports and tapers off just below my belly button. I am mildly in awe of the way that it has always fit me since my mother gave it to me. It has always had a way of doing my body justice. I notice the way that the material is sheer everywhere except for the bust, which has an opaque panel to maintain the wearer's privacy. I am cold, and my nipples peek through the splits in the lacework. The tag says FORME.

Concept

BEAUTY. My mother gave me this garment before I knew how to become beautiful for myself. Wearing this garment made me feel like a woman who had real pajamas that weren't big old t-shirts but the pretty delicate things that real women wore when they were grown and desirable and knew who they were and what they wanted. The simplicity of the garment and the intricacy of the lace remind me of timeless things that will never show age. Wearing it now that I am grown and know who I am and what I want, now that I have lacy and silky things of my own to wear to bed and feel beautiful, I feel a great surge of gratitude for my mother. She is good at being a mom. She has raised three girls. I am the youngest and I feel honored that it is me that she has chosen to give her pretty things. Of all her daughters, I am the most in love with beauty. I think that she knows this and I feel understood by her knowing, that she recognizes me in the things that were once so beautiful to her, too. I attribute the sensuality of the garment to sophistication. I attribute the lack of itch in the lace to an indication of comfortability in oneself. There is both innocence and desire in this garment, something beautifully cheeky about the not-quite-white and something suggestive of girlhood and femininity all at once in the combination of covered and uncovered skin, the sheer and opaque panels. Wearing it reminds me

of sitting on the tile of her bathroom and watching her take off her makeup in the nighttime. Seeing her body and hearing her complain about the effect that three pregnancies has had on her skin, her suppleness, the size of her nipples. She was never afraid for me to see them though— the near invisible cellulite marks near her legs that she would use all sorts of lotions to eradicate, or the grays growing in at her roots that she would ask me to cover up with powders or sprays. I always thought she was so beautiful. I still do. I am twenty one and I still like to raid her closet. There are many lace camisoles in the world; the affect of this one comes purely from its original belonging to my mother. In giving it to me, she taught me beauty.







8. NECKLACE

Acquisition

CIRCULAR. INHERITED.

The necklace was given to me by my grandmother Mary. My mother's mother. It was originally my great-grandmother Bessie's: my mother's mother's mother. She passed when I was still an infant. I have had her necklace for several years.

Affect

Holding the jewelry piece in my hands, I do not move. I allow it to just rest there. I consider it. My heart beats steady and slow. I am calm. I have no strong urges for movement. I merely look. Undoing the clasp, struggling to fit it behind my own neck into its enclosure, I am floored suddenly with the image of my great-grandfather fitting this very hardware piece into its fixing many years ago. I wonder who helped my great grandmother put it on- if she did it herself. If she ever wore it. There is a turn in my stomach at the thought of this. It feels wrong that she is not here to ask her about it, but that I have this thing around my neck that was once around hers.

Precept

First I am struck by the weight of the thing. It is heavier than it appears and makes the wonderful soft clink-rattle noise that jewelry does when it folds in on itself. It is not cold or warm but something in between. The weight is centered on the three bulbous pendant pieces, which glint in burning pink and cool toned lilac clusters. I notice the way that the chains feel strangely soft, like a buttery sort of bronze. The pressure of it in my palm is comforting. Around my neck, the three bulbed jewels settle into the divet of my throat. They nuzzle sensually into the hollow underside of my collarbones and do not slide around when I move. They rise and fall with my breathing and the chains hug my flesh. Again, there is soothing pressure of the piece worn on my body.

Concept

COMFORT. The piece is wholly a thing of pride and pleasure. I am proud to know a woman like my grandmother, to learn from her and have her share with me the things that she has known and seen and collected. Even though it belonged to my great-grandmother, and though it was presumably worn by her, it reminds me of my relationship with my grandmother and for this reason the object brings me joy. It summons memories of being at my grandmother's kitchen table, all wooden curved corners and dark slatted shiny wood floors. White walls, open windows. Cold coffee in mugs. I think of my grandmother's library and all of the books that she has in those shelves, the ones that seemed so tall to me when I was small and would sit in there for hours imagining how long it would take me to read every book in there. How much I would know once I had done it. I think of my mother when she was small and wonder if she ever sat in her grandmother's library and looked in awe at the figure of her. If she ever saw my great-grandmother Bessie wearing this necklace and felt so much admiration and comfort and love that it spilled out of her chest. I never knew my great-grandmother Bessie. I was too young to remember her. There is a picture of me as an infant, resting on her lap and laser-focused on the necklace she wears. When I wear her jewelry I think about that picture. I wonder what she was

like and what sorts of things we would have talked about. Instead I tell her about my life through some trace of her that lives in this amethyst object that senses when my vocal cords buzz and my breath quickens. She hears all of my words. I am comforted. I deduce the concept of comfort in this piece due to where it has come from: the comfort in knowing who has come before me.







9. PLAID DRESS

Acquisition

LINEAR. BOUGHT-NEW, FAST FASHION. IN PERSON.

I purchased this dress brand new from Urban Outfitters five years ago. It was on the clearance rack and the only one left in the store. It is one of the most consistently worn pieces in my wardrobe.

Affect

Familiarity. Steady breathing. A bit of nerves, queasiness. A tug in the gut, a tightening of the stomach.

Precept

Taking the dress off of its hanger, it folds in on itself. The fabric feels synthetic beneath my fingers, like it has that cast of polyester and the smooth plastic sort of hand to it. I twiddle with the puckers of black lace on the chest. I am momentarily hypnotized by the interlocking lines of black and green. I digest that I am drawn to plaids. That plaids seem to line my wardrobe. The tag says "Urban Outfitters. Made in Vietnam." There is a bit of displeasure in the feeling of the material. It is neither silky or soft, just still and smooth. I notice the darts in the bust that I have never noticed before. It is unlined. I take pleasure in the slits up the sides, the panel of black lace hanging off of the hem. This section is what drew me to it in the first place. There is a scratchiness to the lace, an itching. Putting it on my body, I feel put at ease. Comfortable. I feel elongated. I love a long dress, the way it stretches me out. The way it does not nip in at my waist has always bothered me, it bothers me now. The cut of lace over my décolletage feels exposing in a way that airs me out. My eyes go to the triangle cut out over my sternum, the slitted opening of the sides, the image of my knees and the parting of my shins. Cast over in the shadows of the lace. I feel I can lean back. I enjoy the way that the garment frames my collarbone and there is pleasure in all of it except for the wish that it did not hang so gaping at my waist.

Concept

AGENCY. The concept I assign to this dress stems from its role in my life as a talisman of transition. I associate the garment with new moments. I wear it as a 'good luck' dress.

Embodying the piece summons the times that I have worn it, all moments that felt grand and important. My first date with the boy I really liked in high school, how we went skateboarding and I skated in the dress and a pair of real chunky Doc Martens loafers. The way that I fell off of the skateboard and scraped my knees and my underwear showed in the dress as I hit the pavement. That he was impressed that I skated in the dress. It was my first time skating. There was a flutter in my chest and I felt rebellious and sexy. I think of wearing it when landing in Florence, with pants underneath. Wearing it on my first day at my new job. The plaid will not expire in time. The back lace feels sophisticated and the slits of the garment are provocative but not too much. There is a level of authority and steadiness in the plaid. Interestingly, there are no signs of wear in the garment. It is immune to this sort of thing. It does not appear to be loved, though it has been worn through so many versions of myself, so many instances of love. Its

brand new acquisition allows all of the associations that have accumulated within the garment to arise as fully and entirely my own. There is agency here. Taking control of my own life. Decisive plaid. Pretty lace. New things and old.







10. PANT

Acquisition

LINEAR. BOUGHT-NEW, FAST FASHION. ONLINE.

I ordered these pants online from Urban Outfitters. At the time I purchased them, I had not bought anything fast-fashion in over a year. I have worn them only once.

Affect

Taking the pants off of the hanger, I recoil a bit from the feeling of the fabric in my hand. My lips turn down. I do not find the feeling of the garment appealing or attractive. There is a queasiness in my gut that is unpleasant. A tug of guilt for buying something so wasteful that I have gotten no use of. Discomfort. I want to take them off as soon as I put them on.

Precept

I find displeasure in the plastic feeling of the fake leather. I am momentarily pleased by the color of the green. More faded than an army, too deep for olive, but not forest green either. Yet even the appeal feels synthetic to me. I notice the way that the seams are coming undone with loose threads. The tortoiseshell of the button, so incongruous to the silver hardware on the pockets. The tag reads "Urban Outfitters, Made in China." I note the uneasy softness to the inside of the pants, as if a mock suede. The raw hems, so unfinished and careless. On my body the fabric feels clammy, like soggy carpet or scared skin. It sticks to me in a way that makes my flesh crawl. I do not like the shine of the material, dull and sickly. They gap at my waist and pucker poorly at the crotch and come too high up and the bulge of the pockets shows through. I am happy to take them off.

Concept

GUILT. I associate the shade of green with something rotten. I wear them and remember the feeling of wearing them on a ten hour international flight, the way that they stuck to my skin and felt so claustrophobic. Sweaty. Close. Stuck. The way they made me want to claw my way out of my body. I am not so much detached to them as I am put off by them. The displeasure I feel while wearing them is not directly from their method of acquisition, but rather an ill-fitting symptom of their acquisition. I was not in-person when I decided to purchase them, and was therefore disconnected from the material experience of feeling them, of touching them and realizing that they feel wrong in all sorts of ways. The bodily rejection to the object constructs them as an object of guilt.







11. BRA

LINEAR. BOUGHT NEW. FAST-FASHION, IN PERSON.

Acquisition

My grandmother helped me pick out this bra when I was 13. We purchased it in-person from an intimates store called Soma.

Affect

Pleasure. Dread. Tucking, pushing, spilling. Erecting of the spine. Sucking in at the navel. A deep, deep breath.

Precept

I note the dusty lilac of the mesh. I rub the silk mesh of the band between the pads of my fingertips. It is smooth and well made. I loosen and tighten the adjustable straps. I wonder what setting is the one I like best. They always loosen by the end of the day. This pisses me off without fail. I shift my gaze to the cups, noticing the satisfaction I feel in the translucence of the material. The way that the tone of my skin peeks through. I have always hated the fluffy constriction of padded bras. I enjoy the breathability, the airiness of the unlined cups. My eyes follow the swirls of the lace applique, black leaves and scalloped edges. The pattern is beautiful and hypnotic. Putting on the bra is a method of ritual. Circling the band around me like two arms in an embrace around my waist. Fitting the hooks into the tightest clasp – always the tightest – and scooting it around me in a 360 so that the cups are in the front. Wiggling my arms one at a time into the negative space of the straps. Scooping out the breasts, one at a time, to fill the cups properly. And an exhale. I feel the underwire around me, fixing my form into place. I see the teardrop of my breasts, their natural shape accented by petals and buds and lines. I feel the dig at my ribcage and the pressure on my shoulders, the pressure on the skin there of carrying my own weight. I am physically encased and uplifted and it feels both suffocating and soothing at once.

Concept

COMPROMISE. Confronting this bra I am taken back in time to the day that I selected it, like pulling teeth from years. My other grandmother invited me to go bra shopping as an incentive to wear bras more often. My small form of rebellion as a teenager was refusing bras- I preferred to let the boobs be. I have always had a big chest. It is something about me that often feels like it overshadows the rest, a burden I never asked for and do not particularly want most of the time. If my chest was going to call attention to itself I might as well steer into it, own it in some way. The adulting forces in my life never liked this much and wanted it supported, the nipples tucked away and stuffed into a more acceptable shape. I agreed to go bra shopping on the condition that I would pick one I really really liked, one that was pretty and made me feel as such. I picked this bra. I have had it for almost nine years and it is odd that it still fits, has always fit. There is freedom in it, and negotiation. Fine, it says. I will adapt to the social standard but I will do so on my own terms. In the mesh, I will let myself breathe. The lace says I will be beautiful but the dusky lilac says I will not be seductive. I will be something in between. I feel good in the bra. But I will always be happy to take it off, relieved of the imprisonment. I will always scratch at the red marks it has imprinted in my skin, scalding and marking my body in a tolerant mold. Its

materiality brings me only a relational pleasure; I enjoy that it is more flexible than most bras in allowing my flesh to breathe and my natural figure to rest. It is desire by comparison. I am drawn to it in a way that I am repelled by the usual cupping and padding and rounding off and pushing up. Its contrast of pleasure and pain informs its conceptualization as COMPROMISE: between self and other, body and world, construction and constriction.







12. UNDERWEAR

LINEAR. BOUGHT NEW. FAST-FASHION, IN PERSON.

Acquisition

I stole these underwear from Brandy Melville.

Affect

Guilt. Repulsion. Shame. Girlhood. Something of rebellion. Queasy stirring in my gut.

Precept

Holding the underwear in my hands, I register the lacy frill of the waistband. The scalloped edges of white and the continuity of this hem that encircles its form in a delicate circumference. I note the dimpled texture of the cotton, the gestural flowers like pinpricks to breathe. They smell clean like linen and dryer sheets. The underside of the crotch is rubbed over with texture. Splotched with yellowish stains. Hints of old blood. Erratic, globular, brownish blots pooling at the edges and spotting at the front. They are soft and malleable, lax and loose with the shapelessness of a kleenex, a crumpled paper towel. I step my feet into the leg holes one at a time and tug them over my thighs, my hips. They sit low on my body, a straight bikini cut. There is nothing sexual about them. They are sturdy and full and pucker at the cheeks. I feel them cling to my hip bones, gap at the small of my back. They are ill-fitting, unflattering, and safe.

Concept

(IM)PURITY. My impulse to hide the underwear away and the tug in my gut of shame mark this object as an expression of bodily function and abjection, the horror so often ascribed to the female body. These are my designated “period underwear”- I wear them when I am so bloated and bleeding that anything less substantial than this thick cotton undergarment would leave me feeling vulnerable. The affect of embarrassment that taints the item is on behalf of its blemish, its association with what is not tolerated in social visibility. The splotches are grotesque. I know that this piece of clothing is soiled and secret, something I would feel afraid to have anyone see. They are the purity of girlhood – the bikini cut, the floral motif, the chastity of cotton – defiled by the marks of womanhood – the stains of sexuality and fertility. The object represents a kind of innocence lost, yet I am oddly connected to the way that they contain the guts of me. They hold the innermost essence of my body, my core and blood. They are the bandage of my lifeline and the menstrual flag. They are vaginal discharge and peonies. Something in their discoloration is comforting. Wearing them I am free to make a mess. To be dirty and hungry and misshapen, disgusting and desirable. The repulsion that I feel in acknowledging that they exist in actuality brings me closer to them, as I monitor and store and embody them with the closeness of attention that I would equally do with an object that I cherish and treasure. In my closet, I am sure to bury them at the back of my underwear drawer, just as I am methodical in my habit of pushing the pretty lacy things to the front. There is an awareness of the underwear that is both uncomfortable and comforting; they straddle the lines between desire and disgust, the crack of the gut and the lining of the uterus. Putting them on my body arouses the feeling of resignation, that I have given up any and all attempts to avoid underwear lines or present my body as this seamless,

unblemished thing of beauty. They are clunky and obvious and abhorred. They are purity made impure, and for this they are made sacred.







13. SOCKS

LINEAR. BOUGHT NEW. FAST-FASHION, IN PERSON.

Acquisition

I bought these socks as a ten-pack from Target in the children's section. I do not remember the particular instance of buying them. I purchase the same white socks every time I wear my existing pairs into nothingness.

Affect

Pleasure. Satisfaction. Gratification. Pride. A small laugh. Curl of the lip at the absurdity of the thing.

Precept

I poke my finger in the gape of the holes. Pull the absent spaces and widen them. I see the tear at the heel yawning like a mouth. I flesh out the strings unraveling at the seams. I feel the pills of the cotton, the softness worn into the ribs of the ankles. I twiddle the nubs of the fabric like tumors, like maggots. Small protrusions of gray. I pick them off one at a time, denuding each sock from its little barnacles. I see the gray lining the heels, the smudges of indigo shadowing the toes. I note the asymmetry of the pair, once so twinned in whiteness and now so splintered apart that the one has almost parted into a two. Mutilated, torn, the second sock so battered it has departed entirely from function. The ankle panel twists apart from the covering of the foot itself, joined only by the ball of threads like hairs, like yarn, like nesting. Limp, pathetic, shaped only by the force of my own foot. Pulling on the socks, one at a time, I am caught in a comedic struggle. My toes poke through the holes at the heels, snag on the rips at the ball of the foot. The cotton strains over my skin, my heel protruding like a skinned fish. The second sock will not go on all of the way, caught at the juncture of the two disparate panels so eager to release their hold on one another. I feel childlike, juvenile, in the desperation that it takes to tug on these cotton socks. As if I am learning to wear them for the first time, I am as young as they are old.

Concept

FULFILLMENT. I associate the dysfunction of the socks, their complete and total disrepair, with an odd sense of gratification. That I have lived them to the end of their life cycle. That their blue-gray tints encase the shedding of my skin, the pressure of my heels hitting the floor. Friction and force. The echoes of my steps. I see the disintegration of their form as the solidification of their own. The tread that wears them down, that erodes their structure, strengthens mine. We are equal and opposite, these socks and I. The activity, the distance that they encase is both their sacrifice and my vitality. They are calloused as my big toe and charred with the charge of my pace. I cannot think of a singular moment wearing them, indistinguishable as they are from my other pairs. I imagine how many times these two socks have come to know one another- if their lone instances have been balled up with other matches, if they began together, if they have found their way back. I think of the forces that have brought them at one with one another, how strange it would be if their first time encountering one another was in this act of death. Meeting, never having met before, at the cemetery of their use. There is not much in my ownership that I have worn unwearable. The socks are the culmination of my force. They are productivity and efficacy,

the trail of my footsteps and the final destination of my legs. I do not mind parting with them; they have fulfilled their purpose and can rest easy.







14. SHOES

CIRCULAR. RESALE. ONLINE.

Acquisition

I purchased these Maison Margiela Tabi Ballet Flats from Depop about two years ago. I bought them gently used, with some scuffing but otherwise intact.

Affect

Zing of pleasure down my ankles and through my toes. Relief at my arches. I am smiling a pleased little smile and tapping around, clicking my heels.

Precept

Holding the shoes in my hands, I bend the right one between my palms. The soles are worn completely smooth without a bit of traction. The letters and numbers etched into the soles – the size and the label and the ‘Made in Italy’ – appear chalked over, the leather bottoms softened into something like suede. The insoles are firm and sturdy, white leather with foot scum blurring over the branding and darkening the pores of the material like pepper in the grains. The little bows adorning the toes have become brittle and wiry. Hard little knots. The shoe itself is brown and chocolatey, with just enough sheen to look like a true ganache. Buttery, supple leather. Wrinkled at the heels and creased at the toes. The toes. Cloven, hoof-like. I bend them and separate them at the split down the middle. Here they are scuffed, scratched into a lighter brown. Reddish, almost. At the big toe the leather has eroded and the skin peels with the texture of sandpaper. Sliding them on, I cannot help but wiggle my feet back and forth. My four split toes wave at each other, curling in on my heels. The spread of my toes is a familiar, peculiar feeling. Comfortable and pleasurable. Therapeutic. The leather molds closely to my foot, a skin-to-skin hug. The material is malleable enough to show the outline of my toes underneath as they wriggle against the carpet. I feel the utmost awareness that there is a ground that I am standing on. My feet lie flat against it. Each step I take in the shoes reminds me of the floor beneath. They root me to it. They curve with my arches and I am eerily aware that my toes are toes and that feet move upon ground.

Concept

AWARENESS/MINDFULNESS. I associate the scuffed soles and the creased leather with miles. I wear them and can walk endlessly. I think about cities and pavement and sore shins. The chalky bottoms have covered such ground. They have shed away upon rain puddles and packed dirt. Curved over cobblestone and slapped the blacktop. The blemish of the shoe is satisfying; the proof that they have brought me from here to there and back again. The abrasions summon the patter of footsteps on a rainy afternoon in New York City and the muffled stillness of a museum in Los Angeles. I think about where they have lived and what has been stuck between the toes: a lipstick, a dollar bill, five euros, a cigarette. I think about the four weeks they spent stuffed inside a suitcase in the basement of a small trattoria in Italy. I interpret the flatness of their form with a sense of steadiness, stability, calm. Wearing them brings grounding and comfort. I take so much pleasure in the kineticism of their shape, their anatomical resemblance. The cloven toe, so phalangic and animal, startles me into remembering the obvious. I have feet and toes just as

apparently as I have this apparatus to put them in. I recall reading somewhere that this style of shoe – the tabi – was designed to target the center of holistic reflexology. That separating the toes is psychologically proven to clear the mind. There is such clarity here in wearing them. I am tall in flat shoes and I will go anywhere. I have worn them into the exact shape of my foot. They are my wearable feet. This thought is endearing. I enjoy their strangeness and their uncanny likeness to my own extremities. I am fond of their material feel just as I am fond of their symbolism. They are cult and covetable. I wanted a pair for several years before saving up to buy myself these little espresso slivers. I laugh thinking about how many odd looks they have endured and how my most treasured shoes are merely a twinned reflection of my own feet.







15. VIVIENNE WESTWOOD SIGNET RING

Acquisition

CIRCULAR, GIFTED.

My mother gifted me this ring for my high school graduation. It was purchased new from the Vivienne Westwood website. I wear it everyday.

Affect

A chill. Closeness. The urge to clutch it to my chest or close it inside my palm for safety. Impulse to protect it. Keep it from harm. Pleasure. Assurance. Passion.

Precept

Holding the ring in my hand, I notice its misshapen form. The way that the band does not form a circle but a lopsided ovular shape. The flattened bit on the right half of the band and the strange divet it pulls over to the left. The metal is cold against my skin. I notice the scratches and dents and the tarnished bits. The bold engraving of the Westwood insignia – a crowned saturn – unblemished by time. I trace the shape of it with my nail and follow the ring of it, a ring upon a ring. The stamped etch of this logo is the only portion that has retained its darkness. The whole thing used to be a deep charcoal gunmetal. This coating has worn away, now entirely silver but for this crowned planet etched on its face and the small spots on the underbelly of the band that remain shadowed. I notice the way that the metal reflects the light. I put it on and see the way that the band curves around my finger like a hug, the deformation of the band catered to the girth of my ring finger. It is contoured to my body.

Concept

OATH. The ring is the most worn and loved fashion piece in my belonging. I associate the scrapes of the metal, no longer polished but battered with the acts of writing and folding and washing and bathing, with my persistence of self. It is marked with the endurance of my own body, my own hands. Despite the scratches on its surface, the flaws in its silver skin, the ring remains functionally sound and the intention of its message – the display of the Westwood insignia– maintains its definition. Similar to my own body, which has dimpled and scarred and taken the labor of the day upon its surface, the ring has not lost its central energy: the imprinted orb. Strong and clear. The symbol of punk. I look differently than I did when I received the ring. My body has gotten smaller and harder and softer and larger again, it has the sutures and freckles of wound and sun. Yet who I am, my centrifugal essence, remains unignorable. I see my own body in this object. The pleasure, the emotion I feel in this object, is in part due to the sentimental nature of its acquisition – gifted to me by my mother – and in part to the memories that it has taken on in the duration of my ownership. It has endured in my wardrobe because it reminds me of what I want to do, who I want to be, how I envision myself and my values. I see in it the impression that my relationship with fashion has left on others, the impression that my relationship to fashion has left on me. I see in it a conduit for what I have lost and gained. When I was 19, I bought my lover at the time a matching ring for her 20th birthday. Hers was not identical, but instead a convex rendition of the concave impression upon my own. The Vivienne Westwood orb on my ring was an imprint, while hers featured the stamp. I had only had the ring

a year, but what it meant to me had already cemented itself in my brain as intrinsic to the core of my being. It was the passion of my life up until that point – the art of clothing – given to the passion of my life made new – what I felt for my lover. Buying this ring for her was a promise that we fit together. That we were matching pieces to this puzzle. When we broke up, she did not return the ring. I cannot see my own ring without thinking of her. Although I acquired mine before knowing her, the object has taken on the expressions of love and loss endured. I see the impression of the orb as the impression that she left upon me in our time loving one another. It is always there. I wear it still as a promise to myself that I will not lose sight of my self-definition. I see the scratches as the symptoms of life and mourning and loss and grief and agony that endure. The blemishes, the love marks, the traces that have been left upon the thing are a lineage of all my own. The orb remains, untouched by the scratches surrounding it. It has been stamped deep enough into the surface of the silver that nothing can touch it. This is the essence of myself. It will not wear away.





XVI. REFLECTIONS

Considering the efficacy of the Affect-Precept-Concept affective analysis adopted from Tienhoven and Smelik (2021), I noticed several discrepancies that might be altered in future practices of this method for critical fashion research.

Most prominently flawed in the methodology was the consistent overlap between the Affect and Precept stages. Both while conducting the study and reading over my observations, I had great difficulty in differentiating between bodily instincts and sensory feelings. While impulses, urges, and instincts are to be assigned to the Affect stage, the sensory stimulation of these feelings were often blurred into the tactile, visual, olfactory, and auditory sensations that are to be solely noted in the Precept stage. Noticing the blur of these two stages of the method, I realized another issue: that my attempt to document the immediacy of my mind-body reactions to the research objects through stream-of-consciousness style writing spewed out scattered fragments, half-baked thoughts, and wildly disorganized observations. Though the haphazardness of these observations accurately conveyed the flurry of affective feelings and sensations spurred by the clothing items, the chaos simultaneously lacked coherence, clear-cut takeaways, or easily digestible sequences of ideas. I hesitate to revise my written observations for clarity, as this would constitute tampering with my data. I also fear that any attempts to reorganize, simplify, or synthesize the observations would retroactively impose the extra-cognitive nature of affective experience with over-intellectualization or reductionist rationalization.

In future attempts at the Affect-Precept-Concept method of affective analysis, I might take bullet point notes of my mind-body reactions and formulate them into sentences later. This alteration of the methodology might allow for more time to consider which feelings fit in which stage, rather than eroding the presence of the feelings in the act of composing full sentences. Were I to conduct this very same study a second time, I would additionally include a systematic, clearly defined distinction between the observations noted while engaging with versus embodying the object. This additional infrastructure in the methodology would more clearly emphasize the difference in distal and proximal relationship between researcher and subject.

However, I do find that this methodology provided the basis for thorough and provocative analysis in the post-practice stage. According to the results of my auto-ethnographic case study, the consumer factors generating the strongest mind-body reactions, the highest degree of attachment, and the greatest indication of sentimental durability were found to be: proximity/distance, inheritance/provenance, aesthetic/quality, and association/memory.

A. PROXIMITY / DISTANCE

In my affective analysis, I found that the factors of closeness and distance heavily influenced the affect stimulated by the encounter with a fashion object. This relationship of *affective proximity* was primarily demonstrated through the affective differences in the act of touching/looking versus wearing/embodying the piece. For instance, in documenting my body-mind responses to the Blazer (Item 4), the experience of negative affect when merely approaching the garment was starkly contrasted by the positive affect experienced once putting it onto the body. While the spatial distance of looking at the Blazer merited apprehension and unease, the closeness of wearing the garment evoked affects of pride and pleasure. This observation supports Ahmed's theory that affective potential strengthens through "closeness of association" (2010). Embodiment itself is thus a factor of high affect, indicating that the more that a consumer wears a clothing item – rather than merely regarding its existence in their closet – the stronger likelihood that they will feel a powerful positive attachment to the object.

I similarly found the factor of physical distance/proximity to alter affective response through the comparison of clothing items acquired *in-person versus online*. While both the Plaid Dress (Item 9) and the Pant (Item 10) were obtained through the linear acquisition model of the fast fashion retailer, their affective responses were starkly differentiated. The Plaid Dress was purchased in-person, and the generally positive affect it summoned can be in part traced to its fulfillment of consumer expectation; my spatial proximity to the garment when buying it allowed for the sensory experience of touching and feeling the item before purchasing. Embodiment through the act of trying on in this way enabled a more pleasurable fulfillment of my expectations of its materiality. In contrast, the Pant was purchased online. The distance between consumer and product in this transaction was great enough that my assumptions of the item's feel and fit could not be confirmed before buying. As a result, my affective experience of wearing the Pant was one of dissatisfaction, confirming Ahmed's claim that the consumer becomes "alienated—out of line with an affective community" when they do not "experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are attributed as being good" (Ahmed 2010). Assumed to be 'good' from a distance, the pants were tragically displeasurable in proximity, eliciting affective estrangement. Distance therefore can be seen as an agent for deviation in the consumer model. Meanwhile, proximity to the clothing object in the event of acquisition increases its affective potential for pleasure and longevity.

I additionally found *symbolic proximity* to amplify affective response. Along with physical closeness, representational closeness to the body merited strong affect in the instances of the Blazer (Item 4), Bra (Item 11), and Shoes (Item 14). The Blazer's tailored fit mimicked the form of the figure, stimulating a pleasurable affect of satisfaction and the concept of self-definition. Similarly, the Bra's physical melding to the curvature of the bust evoked intense recognition of body and high self-awareness. The Shoes' uncanny resemblance to the foot comparably aroused

the potent affects of bodily comfort and ergonomic support, as well as an aesthetic strangeness that elicited an affect of joy and delight. These findings suggest that *bodily mimicry* of the clothing object itself conveys a visual proximity or likeness, and thus “closeness of association,” that Ahmed reckons to spark affective intensity (2010).

My findings therefore support the claim that close *proximity to the body*— both physical and tangible — increases affective intensity.

B. INHERITANCE / PROVENANCE

In tune with Ahmed’s theory of the *kinship object* (2010), acquisition most strongly informed affect when the fashion item was inherited from a loved one or family member. Particularly positive conceptual constructions were assigned to the garments that carried associations with intimate social relationships. The Jacket (item 5), Camisole (Item 7), and Necklace (Item 8) summoned pleasurable experiences of protection, comfort, and beauty as derived from their connections to lover, mother, and great-grandmother. In this way, attachment to a fashion object can be attributed to affectionate attachment to its previous owner. Belonging is made double in the relation of subject and object. Items of *heritage fashion* and *personal provenance* therefore carry the sentiment of their past inhabitant, suggesting that strong object attachment is more likely in this method of distinctly circular acquisition.

Similarly, items of *prominent provenance* and significant history were seen to provoke significantly high affective responses. Just as the Top (Item 1) increased in sentimental value and affective appreciation due to its association with a prominent fashion designer, the Blazer (Item 4) provoked a particularly intense pleasure in its compounded role of both gift and artifact. Not only was the Blazer associated with the fondness of its acquisition — as a talisman given to me by a fashion archivist who I consider in high regard and an emblem of personal provenance — but its existence as a vintage artifact further amplified its affective awe. Both items represented rarity and specialty in their past lives as runway pieces. Their resulting positive mind-body responses can be traced to their representation of *narrative affect*. Here the association of the clothing object with a celebrated past life demonstrates the affective potential of vintage and archival fashion: both circular acquisition methods necessitate the sentiment of storytelling in the layers of their lifecycle.

My findings thus suggest that *passage of ownership* strengthens the emotional association and affective attachment to a fashion object.

C. AESTHETIC / QUALITY

In some cases, aesthetic and material circumstances were seen to overpower method of

acquisition or historical association in motivating bodily-emotional responses to the fashion object. As seen in the analyses of the Sun Dress (Item 3) and the Shoes (Item 14), the affective pleasure of wearing the piece was attributed primarily to its visual and tactile elements. Though underlying associations of memory additionally informed the overall concept assigned to each piece, their construction and fabrication contributed significantly to the positive experience of embodiment – the exuberance of the Sun Dress’ red hue and the delight of the Shoe’s playful shape. Conversely, the poor quality of the Pant (Item 10) led to the affect of dissatisfaction and displeasure experienced when wearing the garment. *Silhouette, fit, material, and style* are therefore not to be discounted in identifying the factors that encourage strong object attachment in clothing consumption.

However, particularly potent affective responses were provoked by the clothing items that featured marks of *physical blemish* or disrepair. Both linear and circular acquisition models were seen to construct the circumstances for tear, stain, and imprints of use. Though the Underwear (Item 12) and Socks (Item 13) were bought new, they accumulated extreme impressions of material deformity. While the blood spots on the Underwear elicited intense feelings of shame, the complete disfigurement of the Socks generated satisfaction. In these examples material imperfections can be seen to garner extremes on both ends of the affective spectrum. Whether positive or negative in quality, the heightened degree of the affective response to marking of use indicates a greater potential for blemished clothing items to stimulate an emotional relationship to the fashion object.

Interestingly, the fashion objects that stimulated the greatest positive affect in relation to their physical markings of use were those acquired through circular consumer methods. In contrast to the potentially negative feelings invoked by items bought new and worn into disrepair, secondhand objects that embodied blemish on behalf of their past ownership often kindled responses of affection. Supporting Sampson’s notion of *wear, tear, and trace* (2020), the Jacket (Item 5) and Skirt (Item 6) were seen to generate affects of nostalgia in their embodiment of the previous owner’s very existence. Both functioning as heritage objects – received from mother and lover, respectively – these imperfections of these garments recalled the vitality of the loved one and elicited fondness as a result. Rather than arousing aversion, the fading and unraveling of these objects reflected the previous wearer’s capacity to experience activity and pleasure, effectively and affectively transferring this pleasure upon the item’s recipient. In these instances the doubled factors of personal provenance and material blemish elicited high positive affect; suggesting that passage of ownership and extended lifecycle both contribute to strong affective attachment. The Jeans (Item 2) function here as an outlier, as they are an emblem of secondhand acquisition yet the sentimental feelings evoked from their blemish was induced not by the markings of their previous owner but through their degradation over time in my own possession.

Regardless, my findings indicate that *physical markings of use* – whether caused by circular

acquisition or ownership over time – construct the fashion object as particularly prone to intense affective response.

D. ASSOCIATION / MEMORY

Most powerful in generating affective response to the fashion object was association of *memory*. Supporting de Vries' notion of clothing as souvenir (2015), the accumulation of personal stories and narratives most frequently foregrounded the affective expressions of joy, pleasure, contemplation, and nostalgia. Though the event of obtaining a garment constitutes a memory on its own, the quality of my affective reactions – and the specific memories recalled in the act of wearing – were attributed less to the instance of acquisition itself and more to the consequences of the acquisition's nature. While both bought new and previously used items were seen to summon affective responses through their connection to memory, the secondhand garment showed a higher affective potential to conjure the compounded memories of both the current and previous owner.

The increased accumulated memory of the second hand garment can be seen in the instance of the Skirt (Item 6). Because the Skirt contains an association with my mother, its previous owner, my affective reaction to wearing it spawned from my recollection of my own memories wearing it in tandem with the memories of my mother's that I have projected onto it. Along with the emotional response to my own experiences wearing the Skirt, I conflated the garment's sentiment with stories that my mother has told me of her own youth, for which the skirt represents a material talisman. Supporting Sampson's notion of *unknowing* (2020) and imagined pasts, my findings suggest that the bodies absent from used fashion items effectively summon visions of fictionalized memories of those who wore before. Though I was not alive yet when my mother wore the Skirt, my own embodiment of the piece conjured curiosity, wonder, and fascination with the times that she too experienced life in its fabric embrace. In this way my findings demonstrate the compounded power of both imagined and real memories to coincide in the secondhand garment and amplify its affinity for affective attachment.

Acquisition further informed accumulation of memory and affective association in the analyses of the Jacket (Item 5), Camisole (Item 7), and Necklace (Item 8). Wholly constructing my affective response to the Jacket were the memories associated with the partner who gave it to me. Conflating the giver and the object not only recalled the memory of the previous owner but felt as if to reconstruct them; embodying my partner's jacket felt as if to mimic his embrace or re-enact the memory of his actual arms around me. The Camisole, meanwhile, stirred memories of my mother performing rituals of beauty, rituals that through the inheritance of her garment felt as if to be passed over to me. The affect of admiration elicited by my engagement with this piece functioned as an emotional transference of the admiration I feel for her. The memory of her beauty infused my embodiment of her garment with a beauty that I identified in myself as well.

Similarly re-staging memory was the Necklace (Item 8). As an object previously belonging to my great-grandmother, the jewelry piece invited speculative visions of her wearing it despite the fact that I never truly knew her while she was alive. While the affects of loss and grief enacted by wearing the necklace were associated with the loss of true memories to recall of my great-grandmother, this encounter simultaneously evoked an affect of comfort in the ability to connect with an emblem from her life. My conflicting affective responses to the Necklace display the capacity for memory to imbue a fashion item with associations of mourning and remembrance. In my analysis of clothing objects acquired secondhand, the affective response to the item therefore appeared to act as a sublimated social response to the initial owner, a powerful exhibit of memory as attachment itself. In this way, my findings defend the notion of clothing items as “carriers of affects, even sad ones. Connections with others, and emotions, [are] ‘stuck’ to these clothes” (Mcintyre 2019).

However, high emotional potency of object attachment also occurred frequently in the fashion items that had accumulated the association of memory through enduring ownership: a factor attributable to both bought new and previously owned objects. Aligning with McIntyre’s reflection that “particular garments were reminders of a certain phase of the owner’s life” (2019), the garments that had been in my possession for a longer duration of time had acquired a heightened sense of reflection and nostalgia. Demonstrated in the affective analyses of the Jeans (Item 2), the Sun Dress (Item 3), the Bra (Item 11), and the Ring (Item 15), the strongest reaction to wearing each garment was recalling past instances of their use. Affective responses derived directly from the recollection of these memories; previous experiences of warmth and joy in the Sun Dress were reconstructed in its embodiment just as the conflicting feelings spawned by the Jeans stemmed from the repeated act of trying them on as a form of body-checking over years of changing appearance.

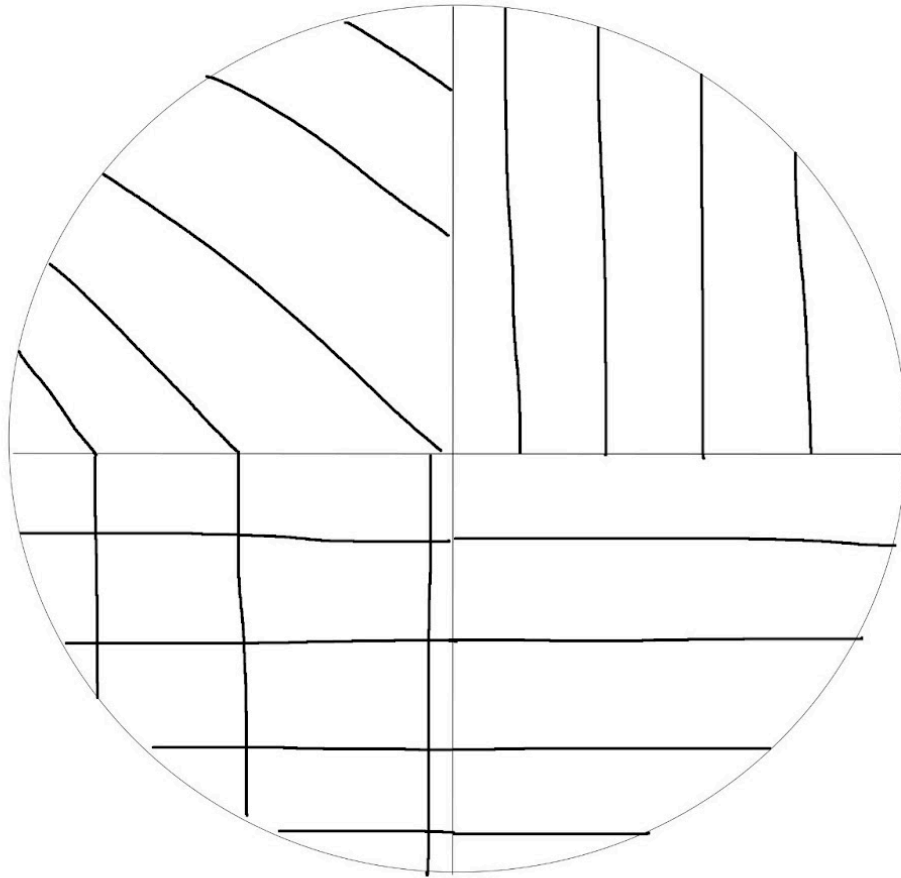
Encountering clothing objects of longevity, in other words, conjured emotional responses directly associated with the memories of previously wearing them. This affective phenomenon consequently informed the strong attachment felt in keeping the fashion items as souvenirs or memorabilia items from stages in my own life. My affective response to the Ring (Item 15) particularly displayed the power of temporality and duration to construct a fashion object as a material conduit for the self and a metaphorical symbol of one’s growth. “Such possessions are not static memorabilia, that they do not merely catch a moment for nostalgic reflection; at the time of their greatest importance, such emotionally significant possessions appear to reflect and influence the individual’s growth, in a dynamic process” (Kremer 1992).

These findings therefore suggest *longevity of ownership* to be a significant factor in generating high rates of affective nostalgia, sentimental memory, and continuous object attachment.

The factors of linear versus circular acquisition were seen to influence affective response to the degree that the garment became associated with intimate or affectionate experiences. Items of linear acquisition – the Plaid Dress (Item 9) and Pant (Item 10) – elicited negative affects of discomfort more directly from their synthetic qualities and flaws of quality rather than the lack of moral ethos underlying the fast-fashion purchase. While items of circular acquisition generally resulted in more complex, intense, and positive body-emotional responses, the object acquired brand-new did in fact demonstrate the potential to skew positive or negative depending upon the amount of use that the item had undergone. The nostalgia of the Plaid Dress (Item 9) was due solely to the associations that my own use of the garment had embedded in it; a positive affect, although less of an affectionate attachment than that of the objects inherited by a mother, great-grandmother, or lover. In this way both fashion objects of *linear and circular acquisition* hold the capacity to accumulate positive affective associations, though the latter proves to more inevitably generate attachment in its pre-conceived/embedded connotation of history.

Ultimately, the mode of acquisition in clothing consumption does appear to influence the affective mind-body response facilitated in the act of owning and wearing a fashion item. While both *linear* (fast-fashion/mass-produced/bought-new) and *circular* (secondhand/previously owned/ inherited) avenues of obtaining clothing were demonstrated in my study to hold the power to provoke strong object attachments and affective associations of both pleasure and displeasure, the fashion items acquired through circular means were more likely to contain a complexity of affect. Factors of heritage and history, passage and longevity of ownership, and material blemish construct the secondhand fashion object as a particularly strong vessel for affective response and attachment. Especially in cases of inheritance or gift-giving, the means of obtaining the fashion object is imbued into the wearer's associative preconception of the piece, constructing it in the image of a 'happy object' with a 'sticky affect' that retains or acts as a conduit for the feelings of fondness or affection that the wearer holds for the person who has given it to them (Ahmed 2010). Most influential in the relationship between affect and attachment to clothing, or the factor most influential in constructing the fashion object as durable, sentimental, and emotionally/symbolically valuable enough to keep in the wardrobe, is the power of association or memory. Because the means of acquisition is in fact an instance of lived experience, the memory accompanying the fashion object's origin in the life of its owner does in fact contribute to this association. However, it is clear that the memories that are later worn into the garment through its use (memories post-acquisition) are capable of overriding or over-powering the memories and associations with the way that it was obtained. Ultimately, the additional memory that is required and transferred in the changing ownership of a circular garment renders the secondhand fashion object a more likely stimulant for memory, association, affect, and attachment.

FACTORS OF AFFECT IN A NEW GARMENT



LEGEND



Memory of Use



Proximity / Distance

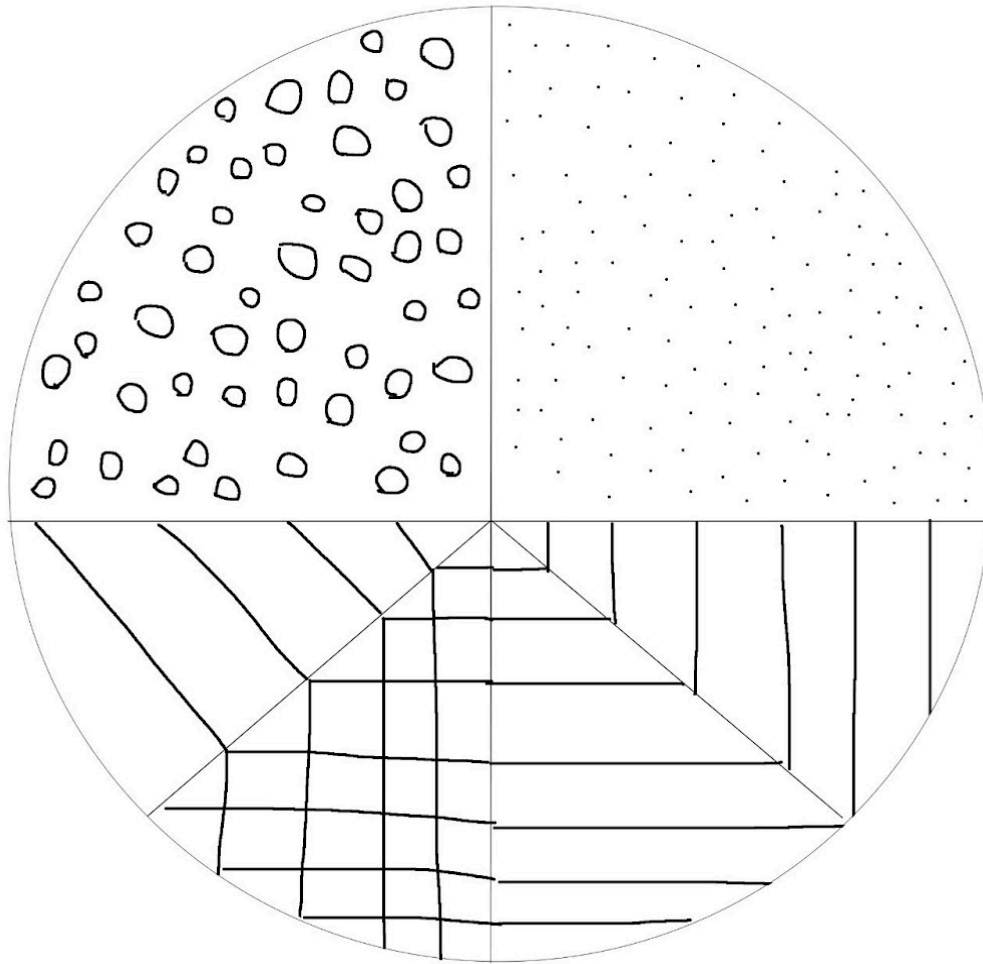


Environmental Ethos



Material / Aesthetic
Quality

FACTORS OF AFFECT IN A USED GARMENT



LEGEND



Memory of Use



Proximity / Distance



Blemish / Wear



Environmental Ethos



Material / Aesthetic
Quality



Memory of Previous
Owner

XVII. CONCLUSION

My practice of Tienhoven and Smelik's (2021) affective analysis methodology indicates that there remains much to be explored in the critical study of fashion, affect, and embodiment – not only in expanding the discursive space around this topic, but in broadening the approach to affective investigation. A development of affective analysis methodologies that go beyond ethnographic research and individual case study would significantly enhance the field of affect studies as well as stimulate further research on the role of affect in clothing and consumption. While much has been written about clothing as a product, and fashion as a sociological subject, the undertaking of this project has revealed a general lack of scholarship that confronts clothing as an act, or that considers fashion as it pertains to a social understanding of spatial-temporal relationships between bodies and objects.

However, the results of my theoretical analysis and auto-ethnographic study do appear to offer both industrial and individual implications. Primarily implied in my findings is an urgency for reformed consumer habits that prioritize circular consumption methods – such as thrifting, resale, vintage, hand-me-downs, and clothing swap-meets – in order to acquire fashion objects. My research suggests that, in place of purchasing new and mass-produced clothing, the uptake of circular acquisition modes will enable consumers to associate themselves more closely with the contents of their own wardrobe and form lasting object attachments to their belongings. The link between secondhand fashion objects and increased likelihood of object attachment, positive affective experiences, and possessive longevity indicates that individual consumers hold the power to utilize circular consumption for both ecological and ontological benefits.

Approaching clothing as embodiment rather than transaction – as an expression of personing rather than purchasing – will significantly slow the rate of consumption in the fashion industry. Rather than impulse buying, an affective lens on object acquisition entails thoughtful intention and consumer awareness in the decision to purchase: a shift that would potentially halt the speed and scope of mass production as well as limit the disposability of fashion items. My research in this way advocates for a changed consumer consciousness that aims to ameliorate the environmental consequences of the fashion industry through lessened textile waste and decreased consumer demand.

Relating the impacts of these findings to the fashion industry itself, the link between acquisition, affect, and attachment indicates that though there is less profit in increasing the endurance of clothing purchases, there is an ethical incentive to increase socialization, proximity, and memory in the approach to marketing and consumption. My research suggests that a corporate-industrial emphasis on storytelling and narrative building in the act of selling clothes will herald product longevity for environmental and social benefit. Retail oriented strategies to encourage the

extension of the item's lifecycle and stimulate affective meaning could include: a restoration of in-person/brick-and-mortar interactions with fashion objects, an integration of garment recycling programs, the incorporation of used items into exclusively bought-new inventory, or the implementation of community mend and repair events. Through this transformation in corporate perspective on profit and sale, the fashion retailer will benefit in its newfound positioning as a proponent for legal, moral, environmental, and social welfare.

My findings further prescribe circular clothing consumption as an act of resistance to the capital economy. The fashion industry relies upon constant renewal in order to exist. An affective lens on circular consumption, however, inverts the power dynamics of this system – using the industry's excessive novelty to instead renew the very expression of the self through a renewed social approach to persons, bodies, worlds. Rather than appropriating the prepackaged identities that revolve around trend, novelty, and commercial desirability, circular consumption utilizes the surplus of the capital economy to frame clothing as an autonomous act. Aesthetic bodily expression is mandated and delineated by what we buy, wear, and consume; there is thus empowerment in reclaiming agency within consumer spaces to prioritize fluidity, playtime, and pleasure. Under this lens, clothing emerges anew as a “procedural architecture” that is “capable of opening up a field of relation or an emergent ecology” to “activate the conditions for the continued interplay that keeps life in the process of self-invention” (Manning 2016). In other words, circular acquisition shifts the act of dressing the body from the dictation of linear market advertising into the self-prescription of the wearer, who is able to adorn and inhabit their body on their own terms.

Not only will an emphasis on circular consumption and acquisition bear environmental advantages to the fashion industry's high rates of textile disposal – as fashion objects will be kept in possession rather than discarded– but the consumer themselves will reap the ontological benefits of clothing as an act of mutual becoming. Regenerated or used garments foster a simultaneous transformation between the wearer's body and the fashion object, in which the owner experiences the stages of the object's lifecycle in tandem with the stages of their body's own. Aging with the object, rather than purging and purchasing in a vicious cycle, the consumer enacts a reciprocal relation to the contents in their wardrobe in which their items' marking of spatial or temporal differences serves as a practice of self-definition. Under circular modes of clothing consumption, the relationship between wearer and garment is humanized and personalized in contrast to the alienation and estrangement of a bought-new fashion purchase. This study therefore characterizes clothing and ownership as acts of ritual and actualization.

In action, this renewed consumer ethos takes the form of intentional engagement with secondhand retailers, informed recirculation of unwanted fashion objects, and community organizing of clothing swaps. However, the ontological advantages to circular consumption will stem from more than just going to the thrift; they will stem from a shift in consumer

consciousness. For the contemporary clothing consumer to initiate an affective relationship to embodiment and begin the mutual dialogue between wearer and garment, the consumer must reorient their understanding of fashion from profit and capital to appreciation and intimacy. The consumer must seek value in longevity over novelty, and lineage over trend. Prioritizing proximity, provenance, and memory in their engagement with fashion items, the consumer will view clothing as a means for social connection rather than social currency. “What is at stake is not a capitalist creation of the newest new, a new body, a new object, but the activation of the force of relation that has as its goal the fashioning of a new mode of existence” (Manning 2016). Foregrounding fashion object ownership in sentimental, rather than commodity value, will therefore open up a channel for transformative, meaningful embodiment through the act of clothing.

Most significant in the implications of this study is the potential for an affective approach to embodiment to alter the social perception of physical and metaphysical boundaries. My proposed method for thinking about, purchasing, owning, and wearing clothing encourages a more fluid understanding of subject/object, body/world, and self/other. In blurring the distinction between wearer and garment, posing the fashion object as a vessel for memory, and characterizing the flesh as a harness for inheritance, this study suggests a broadened comprehension of both definition and delineation. If the average consumer can comprehend their own body beyond its lines, or see the interconnection between living bodies and material objects, this consciousness can normalize fluctuating borders: between humans and earthly resources, subjects and objects, ourselves and one another.

An affective lens on embodiment further endorses flexibility in our knowledge systems, in which the perimeters of difference are de-emphasized. When the wearer begins to see the body and its surroundings – the body and its envelope – not as separate entities but as a conjoined landing site for awareness, they will begin to understand the synergy between bodying, worlding, and personing. Integrating affect into the experience of consumer behavior and clothing ownership will dismantle binary and rigid thinking, stimulating in its place an increased appreciation for divergence, gray areas, and ambiguity. Understanding that the body does not end at the skin, the consumer will undergo an extension of consciousness that incorporates empathy into the act of embodiment. This widened perspective on dressing and clothing will simultaneously widen the inclusivity of the fashion industry, as the bodies often excluded from fashion will find the boundaries that police and categorize embodiment to instead value clothing as a practice of meditation, awareness, and care.

Certainly much remains ambiguous. This project has raised more questions than answers. The argument on behalf of the kinship object’s sentimental value is tinged with a glorification of materialism, asking us to consider the consequences of a positive relationship to material items. What does it mean to have an affectionate relationship to objects? Can this be productive and

beneficial, or is it destructive and degrading? As there is no ethical consumption under a capital system, is hanging onto sentimental fashion items a gross expression of materialism and a symptom of hoarding culture? Does retaining ownership of your grandmother's pajamas actually denote the hyperrealization of capitalism in which we are swamped by useless objects? What does it reveal about the state of parasocial intimacy when our relationships consummate in the symbol of the material object?

While there is clearly much to grapple with in the romanticization of the fashion object, there is further ambiguity in considering the potential consequences of changed consumer behaviors. Advocacy for secondhand shopping brings moral complications to the surface regarding the ethics and effects of thrifting. It is critical to acknowledge the ethical dilemmas involved in shopping secondhand due to the potency of gentrification. It is equally important to take into account the potential for the financial accessibility of used items to conversely increase the consumer's frequency of 'impulse/experimental' buys – a consequence that would degrade the intention for circular consumption to mitigate excess and disposability. Will increased practices of secondhand consumption rewrite the narrative of commodity identity, or merely encourage excess?

Lastly problematizing the argument for incorporating pleasure and intimacy into the acquisition and ownership of clothing is the inability for incremental reformation to dismantle the systems that mark the fashion industry as inherently classist and exclusionary. Stressing a shift towards circular consumption does not unseat the economic hierarchy of luxury fashion, or wholly enable those excluded from the fashion system to take part in the experience of positive affective embodiment. Though circular consumption, consumer consciousness, and an affective lens would restore agency and meaning to the act of clothing the body, this moralization of the fashion industry simultaneously encourages a justification of the capital economy. My research debates whether finding pleasure in the identity expression of clothing can function as a meaningful reclamation of personhood under capitalism, or if doing so merely perpetuates complicity to the hegemony of the capitalistic system.

An interdisciplinary approach to affect, clothing, and consumerism ultimately indicates an urgency to locate a state of embodiment and adornment that is autonomous from commodity and capital. Until the fashion industry is dismantled entirely, the circular acquisition model poses a realistic strategy to achieve an anti-capitalist expression of body and identity through dress. A strategy of self-affirmation and transformation with the body itself as a site of resistance.

A strategy in which clothing is not a noun, but a verb.

Credits

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