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The Fashion Condition: Rethinking Fashion from Its Everyday Practices

Clemens Thornquist

Abstract

This article challenges traditional ways of understanding fashion as a social phenomenon. By considering the everyday social practice of fashion where looking, wearing, choosing, discarding, consuming, and producing fashion have central roles in understanding fashion’s person-object relationships, this study advances an alternative ontological view of fashion as a volatile emotional condition and inconstant state of mind. This suggested shift in theoretical perspective is significant in understanding and stimulating change or maintaining stability in fashion phenomena and could have principal consequences for thinking and
developing policy in relation to fashion as well as to more general issues in person–object conditioned design cultures.

KEYWORDS: fashion; definition; condition; practices; activities

1. Introduction: Definitions and Change

Leaders in business and education are calling for a radically changed fashion industry. Their dissatisfaction with the status quo grows out of the way fashion goods are produced in a global industrial structure and how fashion goods are consumed as social practices. While different research agendas and business models explore different opportunities for changing fashion, an underlying hypothesis for such programs is often a principal understanding of fashion as a system or systems: linguistically, culturally, and economically (Barthes 1983; Bourdieu 1993). From this perspective, the entire fashion ecosystem needs to be changed or altogether exchanged (Grizzle 1994; Haas et al. 2015; Fletcher 2015).

In order to explore new ways of thinking about fashion, this article calls into question the prevailing understanding of fashion as a system and introduces an alternative fundamental principle of fashion, that in turn open up for alternative strategies for changing fashion as a social practice. However, rather than present new material in the development of an alternative approach, the article calls upon common sources that underlie current understandings of fashion but still hold everyday activities as constitutive of fashion phenomena.

2. Systems Thinking and Systems Dynamics in Fashion

While systems thinking has arguably led to important understandings of fashion as a social and economical phenomenon (Ertekin and Atik 2014; Lundblad and Davies 2016), the development of more sustainable inter-enterprise relations has proven problematic (Hockerts and Wüstenhagen 2010; Molderéz and Elst 2015). Moreover, systems approaches have also been criticized in strategic change processes. Forrester (1961), for example, has questioned logical and orderly processes of change that are based only on the understanding of interdependent structures of a system. Similarly, Meadows (1999) has found that based on the dynamics of the system, people instead know intuitively where leverage points are located. In turn, these notions also suggest a more experimental approach to determining the basic principles of why and how things change by focusing on “real life issues” (Sterman 2000).

An important point of systems thinking in regard to fashion phenomena, however, is that more simple centralized views on the fashion system (cf. Simmel 1905; Blumer 1969) have been replaced by beliefs that fashion emanates from many sources and diffuses in various ways (Crane and Bovone 2006; Godart 2009). From this perspective, a new
meaning for fashion is produced by the collective activities of various agents and institutions (Rocamora 2009). In addition, an important aspect of a systems perspective in fashion is not only the significance of the multiple actors involved but also the significance of the activities among these actors. The fashion system is foremost a dynamic whole: activities are carried out, regardless of what actor or institution is carrying out the action, and the changes in these activities in turn give rise to changes in system roles (Wiedmann, Hennings, and Langner 2010; Laurell 2017). Thus, instead of exploring producers, media, schools, celebrities, bloggers, and other actors (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), it is the activities of producing, promoting, schooling, and influencing etc. in fashion that may be more central in fashion phenomena.

Moreover, understanding the “real-life issues” of fashion also means giving attention to “not just how the body is represented within the fashion system and its discourses on dress, but also how the body is experienced and lived,” Entwistle (2000, 344) argues. Taking the perspective of the lived body, or understanding fashion as a situated bodily practice, does not only mean a shift in scale to the micro social order, however, but also a shift from fashion as wear (object) at the boundary between self and other to fashion as the practice of wearing (activity) connecting body and the other through interacting (Hallnäs et al. 2006). In addition, a dynamic perspective also highlights another central function of fashion: to associate material goods with existing cultural categories, fashion also creates new cultural meanings and new cultural categories (Levi-Strauss 1973; Thornquist 2017). As Vinken (2005, 4) also points out, fashion is not only a representative function of social life and structures but also a poetological activity, a cause rather than effect, that constructs and subverts its expression and thematize itself with a performative power that is capable of inducing change in individuals and social life.

At a first glance, the consideration of these two perspectives together may be seen to lead to a concept of fashion close to Aspers and Godart’s (2013, 24–25) cautious suggestion in the form of “unplanned process of recurrent change against a backdrop of order in the public realm.” However, when activities of practice are taken as central variables in defining fashion phenomenon, it may not be so much the “unplanned process of recurrent change” (e.g. the experience of the lifeworld) and/or the “order in the public realm” (e.g. overarching social regularities) that is understood as causes of fashion. Rather it may be the “against” in the form of activities of practice that becomes a priori the aspects of change and order in the constitution of fashion’s implicit and explicit expressions. In relation to this notion, and to continue the exploration, I will therefore explore fashion from several of its everyday activities, however, still in relation to many of the standard theories underlying the contemporary understandings of fashion.
3. Fashion as Interactive Wearing

Perhaps the most central activity in fashion is *wearing*, considered in a literal sense as well as in the broadest sense of interacting with garments and other fashion-conditioned objects. Wearing thus typically relates to the field of person–object relationships and as such extends further into body-mind discourses. From an interactive perspective, wearing may here be explained as a continuous negotiation between a being which is and a being which is not played out through the interaction with objects in an active and emotionally volatile process of establishing and maintaining a sense of self (Flynn 2013). As such, emotions that arise in the process of wearing are for Flynn not inner states but ways of relating to the world. In relation to the process of establishing and maintaining a sense of self through dress, wearing is not primarily a process of presentation or representation; it is a continuous practice of negation with yourself and inward experience constituted in the process of trying, changing, and experiencing (emotionally evaluating) the body/self through different ways of wearing (Kozel 2008; Ziesche 2014; Martin-Larsen 2016). Wearing as an activity is therefore a mediation between mind and body in the sense of Merleau-Ponty (2002); it is a transitional and interacting state of corporeal consciousness that opposes more static linguistic analyses of fashion. In the process of being worn, as when shoes transform body posture, the elasticity of the object initiates an endless bodily struggle against the material, the weight of the fabric directs a pattern (Martin-Larsen 2016), and the oversized hoodie expands the self in space. Fashion is not any more defined through types and a representative relationship, but through the expression created by body and wear in a wearing that conceptualizes an interactive embodiment as the process of moving—thinking—feeling (Shusterman, 1999; Kozel 2008). Accordingly, the material presence of things and acts, such as the activity of engaging and interacting with clothing, is at once an object of consciousness and consciousness itself—ways of wearing as the perceived identity of a person.

Wearing does not only constitute an internal performative power that induces change in individuals however; it also functions as a performative power in social life (Vinken 2005). Not only is the material agency of dress seen as object (Gell 1998), but also the agency of wearing as an embodiment of culture becomes normative in inducing change through what Noland (2009) defines as the expressions of the corporeal performance of gestures that involves both body and dress. In relation to this, Noland also returns to a key point equally crucial to understanding the agency of wearing as gestures. Gestures, she argues:

[t]hey are not inherently fixed in either an instrumental or signifying register. Because gestures depend on the involvement of a sensorimotor apparatus in order to be performed, they are peculiarly susceptible to dehiscence; they can separate from their
assigned meanings or tasks to become conduits of somatic absorption or, alternatively, spectacles, examples of themselves in scenes of instruction or self-conscious stagings that change their semantic inflection. (2009, 208-9)

For the analysis of emotionally interactive processes such as the one between body and dress, Husserl (1978) suggests a return to things in the “lifeworld” (Lebenswelt), where people live and naturally and naïvely take things for granted and forget taught theoretical conceptions of what things should be or if the understanding is objectively true or not. Husserl (1976) suggests that one should return to concrete objects, but not through empirical investigations of objects (or consciousness) but to material objects when put to practice such as when wearing objects. This then presents an opportunity for a deeper understanding of the processes between object and mind before the consideration of other theoretical conceptions. Similarly, Heidegger (1962) suggests that the self does not exist in a continuous and unbroken unity with its world nor separate from it as an isolated subject. According to Heidegger, most of the time one experiences oneself as immediate and unreflected, “hands on” (zuhanden), in the world of one’s concern. This could happen when one unconsciously wears a garment in an everyday situation but from time to time transforms to a state where the experience is as an isolated subject standing reflectively before (vorhanden) a world of external objects; times when a garment does not fit or a shoe breaks down are examples. Heidegger also suggests this primordial level of practically engaged, hands-on existence such as in the process of wearing garments as the starting point of any conception of ordinary human experience.

4. Fashion as Active Negotiations between Wear

On a psychological level, clothing has typically been related to functions like cover for protection and adornment for expressiveness and attraction (Carlyle 1831; Flugel 1930). While modesty and exhibitions (apart from protection) have been illustrated to be key to understanding what leads to different kinds of clothing, what may be more important than the motives of dress is the ambivalent condition of conflicting tendencies between pride to exhibit the body and modesty to hide it, as Flügel also notes. Fashion as a socio-psychological activity surfaces within the conflict between modesty and exhibitionism, not in both or neither/nor modesty and exhibitionism. Instead, fashion as the activity of wearing is rather the constant torment between the will or pressure to modesty or exhibitionism played out in the choice of wear and how to wear.

Studies have also argued that “wardrobe” may be analyzed more accurately as a complex set of practices involving consumption, organization, care, and imagination rather than as a system (Cwerner 2001). Early and still influential theories on the psychological aspects of
person–object relationships open up opportunities for an alternative understanding of fashion fundamentals. James (1892) and Allport (1955), for example, note that it is difficult to draw a line between me and mine when relating to objects such as clothing. At times, they point out, objects are treated as part of “me,” at other times as simply “mine,” and in still other instances, as if one had nothing to do with them at all as an unrecognizable part of one’s self. The object of “myself” and an external object taken together are therefore more like oscillating materials in a sense similar to that of consumers who have been found to have a fluctuating relationship with garments in their wardrobe (Bye and McKinney 2007). From this perspective, a wardrobe presents a tool for identity as a process of volatile emotional becoming rather than of being (Giddens 1991). If we accept “myself” then as a non-consistent entity and as a process of multiple selves in evolution simultaneously (Binkley 2008; Steinbach 2015), a never-ending passion for new beginnings (Bauman 2007), or an improvised performance of ambiguous categories (Butler 1993), understanding fashion as a rather intense emotional condition when negotiating different selves through ways of wearing also becomes a more appropriate principle than more static and symbolic understandings of fashion inappropriate for analyzing fashion in relation to processes.

With possession a major contributor to our identities, Stein (1985) and Belk (1988) argue that relationships between self-conception and products are highly dynamic and often driven by a strong desire to realize, or restore, a particular sense of self-related culturally conditioned objects. Freud (1961) and Lacan (1977) also note that this inconstant condition means that the self is not able to construct a coherent identity, as the mirror image of the self is what it wants for itself. Instead, the self is caught up in a volatile emotional state, wherein identity is broken down by imagistic introjection of the other and the external world extruding into itself in the form of its phantasmatic interior life (Alcoff 2006).

Findings like these imply a more explicit emotional dimension to typical symbolic interactionist perspectives than the traditional position where fashion has been explored in the sense of meanings and narratives. Thus, instead of typically considering material possessions to “act as signs of the self that are essential in their own right for its continued cultivation, and hence the world of meaning that we create for ourselves, and that creates ourselves” (Rochberg-Halton 1984, 355), wearing different garments and wearing a garment differently in different surroundings is emotionally conditioned instead of merely making sense. This means that the self arises in an environment where the wearing of certain clothing is not telling it who it is or telling it how to become he or she (Rochberg-Halton 1984), but rather an environment that is emotionally pressuring it who it is or how to become itself. Or simply put, the self creates the wear as much as wearing creates the self.
5. Fashion as Looking, Browsing, Thinking, Buying, Testing, Learning

Product centrality or involvement has been identified as being at the heart of the person-object relationship, and the importance of involvement in the domain of fashion clothing can be seen via the defining role of fashion clothing in society (Schatzki 1996; O’Cass 2000). The practice of building this kind of involvement has typically been described as (1) fashion innovation, experimenting with clothing; (2) fashion interpersonal communication, conveying fashion information; (3) fashion interest, driving participatory activities; (4) fashion knowledge about trends, styles, and other insights into the fashion arena; and (5) fashion awareness in the sense of monitoring activities in the fashion field (Tigert, Ring, and King 1976). Today, online behavior also adds to the building of involvement as users and buyers connect with products through education, leisure browsing, information seeking, following influencers, participation in online communities and forums, interpersonal communication, and more (Kim and Eastin 2011; Rose and Dhandayudham 2014).

Self-portrayal practices for online experimentation with self-expression through clothing and accessories have also become central activities in fashion involvement for fashion consumers in general. This activity of blogging to present yourself in a particular way has also been found to increase anxiety about identity and body perception, as the difference between our actual perceived identity and practical concerns and the identity presented and interests claimed grows even further (Stephens-Davidowitz 2017). While the imagery in the fashion culture allows consumers to dream through practical and active involvement at the cost of anxiety (Arnold 2001), and self-portrayal activities may be understood as ways to aspire for and affirm traditional stereotypes, it has also been found to be a platform and technique for self-assertion and empowerment (Rocamora 2011; Titton 2015). Chittenden (2010), for example, argues that teen girls model their identity through the mediated spaces of fashion blogs which then provide personal help to promote positive self-image and gain self-esteem that translate into forms of cultural and social capital.

Participating in fashion as a social practice by doing, thinking, and talking fashion also means that fashion-conditioned objects do not need to be owned to contribute to a sense of self. By skillfully mastering a product and its quality, for example, an individual may validate or enrich a sense of self. Just by knowing objects and people in a fashion field on an intimate or other level has the potential to contribute to a sense of self (Sartre 1960). Studies have also shown that sometimes identity may lie more in the extended self than in the unextended self (McCarthy 1984). In these cases, objects can be more instrumental than one’s own body or body parts, which are otherwise considered the most central elements of the extended self (Allport 1937) in providing...
emotional stability of the self in transitions between life events (McCracken 1986). Moreover, research has found that browsing has path-dependence consequences for the consumer’s overall purchasing activities (Earl and Potts 2000). Investigation has also found problematic relationships between time spent online, pre-purchase, and browsing and problematic behaviors for the development of addictive consumer shopping behavior (Rose and Dhandayudham 2014). In addition, findings indicate that hedonic shopping motivation is a robust predictor of exploratory information seeking, which also can be related to Sartre’s notion of “intimate knowing” and impulse buying (Kim and Eastin 2011).

6. Fashion Activities as Intense Emotional Experiences
While self-fashioning practice remains a tool of distinction, identification, and segregation within social communities, levels of emotional engagement are arguably higher in today’s consumer culture than in traditional class-based fashion practices. One study has found that intense emotions play a central role in prompting both fashion consumption desires and distastes, affecting choices and behaviors in self-fashioning practice (Rafferty 2011). Illouz (2009) argues therefore that attention should be paid to emotions in self-fashioning practices, and an explicit emotional dimension is added to Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of distinction in social relations. This works by expanding the realm of the sensory through broadening the vocabulary of objects, which results in a cultural structure wherein a variety of sensory levels are mixed, which leads to excited imagination and emotions. Additionally Belk, Ger, and Askegaard (2003) conclude that consumer research has devoted little attention to passionate and fanciful consumer desire, which they find to be the central motivating force behind much of contemporary consumption. Similar to Illouz, Belk, Ger, and Askegaard (2003) see desire as a complex, embodied passion that involves a quest for otherness, sociality, danger, and inaccessibility, where self-seduction, longing, desire for desire, fear of being without desire, hopefulness, and tensions between seduction and morality are the underlying causes of the pursuit of desire.

By contrast, Ferguson (1996), criticizes the primacy of desire, arguing instead for a multifaceted understanding of the emotions involved in a consumer society and positing “wish” as a fundamental principle. Ferguson argues that desire is essentially a concept of ego-psychology and belongs to the classical period of bourgeois modernity due to desire’s essential distance between the ego and a valued object, the lack of which is felt as the tension of a want or need. However, while desire is founded upon comparison, vanity, envy, and the need for self-approbation, nothing underlies the immediacy of the wish. It is instead casual, unexpected, and dream-like in its expressing and fulfilling of wishes “and like all wishes, is insincere and childish.” Baudrillard (1998, 114)
also puts strong emphasis on emotions when noting that a gadget attempts to move beyond the generalized usefulness into the “ludic mode.” To Baudrillard (1998) the gadget—the consumer product—is “impoverished, a fashion effect, a kind of artificial accelerator of other objects […] caught in a circuit where the useful and the symbolic resolve into a kind of combinatorial uselessness”; the product reflects both a moral judgment and the anxiety generated by the generalized disappearance of use-value and the symbolic function. On the other hand, Baudrillard continues, the reverse may be true for the exaltedness of the new object. In this moment fashion and references to others have no place; there is only an intense relation that is a sublime period of the object that in certain cases attains the intensity and quality of love, at least until the new “new” is introduced.

7. Fashion as Manufacturing Choice

Following Zuckerman (2012), Aspers and Godart (2013) have found that fashion comes into being only when consumers (wearers) make choices framed by what is offered. This means that even though a market per se is not a necessary condition for fashion, production and mass markets play significant roles in the possible rapid changes in fashion as more and more people allow themselves the “fickle habit” of changing clothes impulsively and more often (Marshall 1923). In relation to the typical consumption activities of material goods, this does not necessary mean that production is more significant for the understanding of fashion, but as Barthes (1983) has already concluded, economic factors are the primary reason for the fast changes in style and expression in fashion. In line with this conclusion, research has continued to confirm that in order to understand the sociological dynamics and mechanisms of fashion, one needs to study the fashion industry as well (Davis 1991; van Raaij 1993; McRobbie 1997; Lieberson 2000).

In broad terms, Chomsky (1989) has argued that society as a whole has submitted to commercial and ideological pressure as a result of manipulative and deceitful propaganda found in marketing activities. Put differently, his words suggest that people are weighed down with the relatively trivial worries evoked by media and advertising; each manipulates our perceptions and profits from our anxieties by encouraging the consumption of programs and products (Glassner 1999). This is not brand new thinking, however. Simmel (1905, 1911) earlier had determined that by attempting to turn people into something which they are not, the fashion industry forces consumers themselves to buy into the commercial ideology that is the substance of the fashion industry.

In postmodern culture, as Firat (1993, 74) suggests, products are becoming the essence of society, and consumers increasingly live as the means of reproducing the simulated images of the products, and fashion functions as the mechanism in the numbing of not only the market place but also social life (Postrel 2004). Against this backdrop then, Lehmann’s (2000, 11) definition of fashion as the supreme expression of
the contemporary spirit becomes clear: “It changes constantly and remains necessarily incomplete; it is transitory, mobile, and fragmentary. This quality ties it in with the pace and rhythm of modern life” (Lehmann 2000). Similarly, anxiety in relation to an unattainable image (ideal) and the accompanying loss of social control becomes better understood in relation to society at large where the person–object relationship or the consumption of fashion goods is always subject to changing relational conditions (Entwistle 2000; Wilson 2003).

Consequently, even though it is plausible that one cannot have democratic liberty and equality without a concomitant sense of anxiety, as Clark and Miller (2002) argue, anxiety may still be the governing condition of the contemporary freedom cultivated by the systemic efforts of the fashion industry or where the “freedom” of choice itself causes stress and anxiety detrimental to our emotional well-being (Schwartz 2004). In Campbell’s (1987, 77) view, this gap between the imaginary world of consumption’s perfect pleasure and the disappointments of reality—an “autonomous imaginative hedonism”—results in limitless wanting and a constant state of anxiety. Today this condition is well acknowledged as studies find compensatory and compulsive buying activities inevitable “by-products” of a worldwide consumer culture (Roberts and Sepulveda 1999). As both Bauman (1988) and Giddens (1991) note, the consumer has no choice but to choose.

8. Fashion as Analyzing, Designing, Launching, Selling, Flashing

On a practical level, Stevens (cited in Adamson 2003) points out that the fashion industry functions “to induce the public to buy or to possess something always new, and to promote the industries to go on with the production” on the basis of a planned obsolescence involving “inciting the consumer’s desire to own something a little newer, a little better, a little sooner than is necessary.” Consequently, as Burns (2010) also notes, planning for durability is no longer a priority, and psychological obsolescence becomes a means to influence consumer spending through the introduction of “this year’s model” typically updated stylistically and offered as new for a particular season.

In the fashion industry, however, planned obsolescence has come to be known as fast fashion where mass-consumption and habitual buying are central activities, and the characteristics of fashion are phenomena. In business terms, fast fashion has also come to denote the most well-established business model in the industry because of its proven strong financial performance in the global market in recent decades (Park, Kim, and Forney 2006). Furthermore in order to stimulate mass-consumption, the industry developed new marketing strategies that build on the idea of psychological obsolescence through branding and creative marketing; according to Burns (2010) these set in motion the strategies for encouraging consumption and appealing to the natural forces of
consumer desire. Klein (2000), for example, demonstrates how fashion culture and our ways of living and relating to products have been affected. And in looking at the fact that consumers have never before been exposed to such powerful and persuasive advertising pressure as they are today and that the expenditure on advertising globally is continuously accelerating (World Advertising Trends 2006), some scholars also conclude that advertising is the essence of today’s everyday social culture (Neuner, Raab, and Reisch 2005). In addition, in adopting simple strategies like updating collections by introducing new items on a weekly basis, fast fashion retailers succeed in making customers routinely return to the store for new purchases (Tokatli and Kizilgün 2009). Even though advertising and weekly product updates are strong tools, many other innovations have also shaped the development of the fashion industry into a complex system of short-lived values (Park, Kim, and Forney 2006).

In practice, such consumer consciousness—perhaps best explained by the tagline of a 2016 Uniqlo in-store billboard: “A New Look. A New Season. A New You”—is influenced by a combination of (1) quick response and (2) enhanced design, which typically gives a greater incremental increase in profit than the sum of the increases resulting from employing either system in isolation (Cachon and Swinney 2011). This is particularly true when consumers exhibit strategic behavior, purchasing over and over again to sustain their identity and sense of self; in practice this translates to consumption patterns manipulated partly by quick-response production techniques to continuously match supply and demand (Eppen and Iyer 1997; Ghemawat and Nueno 2003; Caro and Gallien 2010) and partly by tactical frequency and “flash” sales (Cachon and Swinney 2009). Moreover, buying behavior may be manipulated by marketing practices that maintain social control in the form of the beauty myth (Wolf 1991), media planning with streamed content that taps into a latent and arguably universal human desire for material enrichment (Vohra 2016), carefully monitoring and manufacturing for the trendy, fashion-forward, young tastes of fast-fashion consumers (Morgan and Birtwistle 2009; Rohwedder and Johnson 2008), aggressive in-store promotion and selling techniques that evoke impulsive buying (Donovan et al. 1994; Phau and Woo 2008), and the use of a limited number of trend bureaus to provide a work base common to all supply chain actors for implementing a collective strategy of consumer demand manipulation (Dari and Paché 2013). This is similar to what Barthes (1983, xi) found, though expressed in more general terms: “calculating, industrial society is obliged to form consumers who don't calculate; if clothing's producers and consumers had the same consciousness, clothing would be bought (and produced) only at the very slow rate of its dilapidation.”

9. Fashion as Orchestrating Sympathy

According to Bernays (1947, 250), a founding figure of modern PR and propaganda who based his ideas on Freud’s (1961) theories of the
unconsciousness man, the main task for the industrial activities above is the “engineering of consent.” According to Bernays (1947), this engineering involves tapping into the basic emotional condition of the consumer and uncovering his or her deepest fears or desires, which then trained practitioners in accordance with scientific principles, use for their own purposes. The goal of this activity is as clear for Bauman as it was for Bernays: “What starts as an effort to satisfy a need must end up as a compulsion or an addiction.” The urge, as Bauman continues, to seek solutions to problems and relief from pains and anxieties in shops, and only in shops “is not just allowed, but eagerly encouraged, to condense into a habit or a strategy with no apparent alternative” (Bauman 2007, 47). Practical examples of this encouragement to condense an addiction into a habit, or to turn the consumer sphere into a hall of mirrors—as Bauman and Obirek (2015) explains current marketing strategies for no apparent alternatives—include evolutionary computation approaches to search for ideal neural network structure for short-term retail forecasting of apparel sales (Au, Choi, and Yu 2008); influence maximization based on discrete particle swarm optimization algorithms on social platforms that gives high profit for less investment in complex networks (Gong et al. 2016) and association rules mining for online cluster analysis to propose products to online group buying (Liao et al. 2012).

From the point of view of practice theory, this suggests that consumption occurs within and for the sake of practices (Martin 1998; Reckwitz 2002). For example, Warde (2005) suggests that items consumed are put to use in the course of engaging in particular practices and where to become a competent practitioner requires appropriate consumption of goods and services in addition to the importance of exhibiting common understanding, know-how, and commitment to the value of the practice. In this way practice is both performance and coordination that gives rise to both individual and social order through activities such as: (1) understanding what to say and do, (2) explicit rules, principles and instructions, and (3) ends, projects, tasks, beliefs, emotions, and moods (Schatzki 1996).

In Baudrillard’s (1998) terms, members of fashion practices are provided with communal moral principles based on a moderated form of self-interest in a way that echoes Smith’s (1761) theory of moral sentiment as that which underpins developing economies but where a person’s sympathetic ability to form moral judgments is limited to their particular self-interest and desires. For Baudrillard and for Bauman and Obirek as for Smith, this sympathy is based on mirroring, where one person imaginatively reconstructs the experience of an observed other. This response is not the opposite of self-interest but is based on an individual’s pursuit of self-interest through virtuous actions, where complete self-interest is moderated through the individual’s desire to be both praised and praiseworthy (Paganelli 2008). For Smith (1776), the self-interested individual acts in a manner that is mutually interdependent
and ultimately unintentional and yet at the same time works to promote its society “more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.” Sympathy in modern consumer culture is to Baudrillard (1998): “a simulated solicitousness which is forced, bureaucratized and counterfeit... where we find ourselves surrounded by emotions and personal relations that are carefully orchestrated. Many of those we interact with are instructed to keep smiling and make sure to tell us to ‘Have a good day.’”

10. Fashion as Promoting Poor Self-esteem
The best raw material for this kind of consumer life, Bauman argues, is the flexibility of the human condition, pregnant with insecurity directed toward the present and uncertainty of the future that creates a permanent state of ambivalence, unsettledness, and anxiety. And this is why a consumption-oriented economy, according to Bauman (2007, 47) “actively promotes disaffection, saps confidence, and deepens the sentiment of insecurity, becoming itself a source of the ambient fear it promises to cure or disperse.”

Elias (1982) has similarly shown how the entire narrative of the modern citizen in relation to consumption is based on how external control is internalized into self-control and how our individual differences in terms of passions and drives—freedom—are channeled into the compulsive consumption of a fear of being socially rejected, of losing social self-esteem, of being socially “wrong.” As Falk (1994) demonstrates, however, Elias’s explanation may only be partial in regard to modern consumption. To understand channeling the direct release of (drive) pressure—pleasures—into socially acceptable and surrogate modes of imaginary consumption in fashion consumer culture, Falk shows how the supply and marketing of fashion goods fuels the realm of substitutes that discharge the affective “pressure” in an imaginary self-consumption.

In line with these ideas, studies have found that the pursuit of self-esteem is recognized as one of the most significant motivational factors in fashion involvement and product centrality (Banister and Hogg 2004; Conseur, Hathcote, and Kim 2008). This connection also correlates with the key principles of low self-esteem and disposition to fantasizing that occur in relation to addictive levels of consumption (O’Guinn and Faber 1989). Other studies suggest a more moderate impact, arguing that low self-esteem and anxiety vary with object attachment levels and possessive behavior, with lower levels indicating a stronger attachment and urge to possess particular objects (d’Astous 2008). From this perspective, consuming products can become a feel-good medication providing temporary relief from an immediate pain or yearning where happiness resides in the coming possession; this does not however essentially change the consumer’s objective condition (Belk 1988). This understanding supports Hartston’s (2012) argument that addiction may be an appropriate term to describe this phenomenon. Hartston
maintains that increased product accessibility, manipulative marketing techniques, the absence of a protective delay between impulse and purchase, overvaluing the shopping process and purchased objects along with the widespread prevalence of the problem and its similarities to other addictions all point to over-consumption as a potentially addictive behavior.

Perhaps this is why Kant (1978) despite his critique still argued that it is better to try to follow fashion as a jester than to try to avoid it, as fashion at least conditionally helps to solve the central problem of the philosophy of life. And although this perspective may seem at odds with more traditional views on fashion as a social function, an inquiry into Simmel’s analyses of fashion through the eyes of Kant and Blumer still suggests that a person can be a homogeneous part of a mass without losing his individuality; “[he can] both stick to his own private taste and expect others - who also have a taste of their own - to share it” (Gronow 1993, 89). As a consequence, a person deeply enmeshed in contemporary fashion culture, with a deeply rooted desire or consumer consciousness, may form moral judgments relating solely to the carefully orchestrated consumer market and in so doing simultaneously and unconsciously promote its development.

11. Discussion and Conclusions

This article explores an alternative way of understanding and defining fashion and suggests that fashion as social phenomenon understood from its central activities has a strong emotional dimension that may be described as an emotional condition and state of mind and more specifically as a volatile emotional condition or inconstant state of mind.

Firstly, while it is accepted that the development of a self and the maintenance of that self rely on both mental and physical external objects, research suggests that the object of “me” exists in relation to objects such as clothing as part of a fluctuating material wherein one’s fundamental relationships with objects become active, emotionally inconstant processes of constituting a sense of self. Second, research also suggests that this emotionally volatile process could constitute an intense emotional experience when it occurs in relation to objects such as clothing and other consumer goods. Findings also suggest that people deeply submerged in a fashion-conditioned consumer society are consciously cradled in a process of constant change because their desires and needs are manipulated by a range of different activities that includes calculated emotional states, introducing new styles, promotions, and flash sales that change emotional relationships to existing objects (products) by directly manipulating demand and purchase intentions for new fashion condition goods. Hence, while much of fashion theory suggest fashion as something constructive, inscriptive, structurally systematic and rhetoric, fashion understood from its activities of practice rather advocates fashion as an explicit emotional condition.
This concept opens up space for an alternative ontological foundation of fashion where logics of fashion systems could be seen as expressive consequences of different aspects and functions of fashion as an inconstant emotional condition and state of mind. Moreover, these ideas also open up new and alternative ways of thinking about fashion that imply alternative opportunities and challenges that relate to understanding and managing change and stability in fashion phenomena such as fashion consumption or developing new perspectives and policies with regard to ethical and ecological issues in different material cultures related to fashion.

**Disclosure statement**

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**References**


