Timefullness

an exploration of timeless fashion in the context of sustainability
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INTRODUCTION

The project will explore the concept of timelessness, aiming for a more ambiguous and nuanced definition of the term whilst keeping the ever-changing nature of fashion and culture in mind. It will happen within a framework which opens up space for exploring sustainable fashion practices in Växjö, Sweden.

RESEARCH QUESTION:
How can timeless or long-lasting fashion design be characterised and how can design support a shift towards sustainable fashion practices encouraging people in Växjö and elsewhere to keep their clothes for longer?

CONTEXT/SUSTAINABILITY

THE CULTURAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FASHION

Fashion is a highly complex socio-cultural phenomenon. For many centuries it has been used as a vehicle for communicating collective and individual identity, as well as a tool for shaping and discovering one’s self-image (Luckins 2009, 10). According to fashion theorist Joanne Finkelstein (1996, 16), garments can be regarded as visible manifestations of entire systems of values. Through dressing a visual culture is created that is very much part of our daily lives. The exact origins of why humans adorn and dress themselves are debated amongst fashion scholars. However, there are four main theories, including the desire for symbolic adornment and decoration, protection from the elements and environment, modesty or the desire to be immodest to attract and procreate (Luckins 2009, 23). In the current postmodern consumer society, it is argued that the pursuit of fashion is motivated by the desire to either show individuality and/or social conformity (Luckins 2009, 24). Novelty in fashion can be utilised as a tool for social distinction (Mackinney-Valentin 2018, 4) to enhance individuality. The desire for novelty and individuality is a main driver for wasteful fast fashion consumption.

WASTEFUL FASHION CONSUMPTION

The rate of fashion consumption has reached excessive levels in contemporary western societies. From the first fashion magazines published in the late seventeen hundreds (Svendsen 2006, 23), the increase of exposure to visual images and the speed at which fashion changes seem to run parallel to each other. A lot of fashion items are only regarded as desirable or in style until the market reaches a point of over-saturation of that certain aesthetic. In the current age of constant media flow, this period is drastically shorter than it used to be. The consumer can only participate in this fast-paced practice by frequently purchasing cheaply priced garments. Manufacturers rely on increased production speed, underpaid workers and low-quality materials to drop prices as low as possible. This has caused a culture of overproduction and overconsumption with complete disregard for environmental or social consequences. This system isn’t working for any of us, except the handful who turn enormous profits from the fashion industry. Although there seems to be an increasing awareness surrounding issues of sustainability among the general public, the trillion-dollar industry of fast fashion continues to grow as fashion consumption is predicted to increase by 63 per cent by 2030 (Fletcher and Tham 2019, 17). The increase in the volume of fashion production, however, does not equate to a more culturally rich and stylistically diverse range of clothing on the market (Luckins 2009, 8). What can be observed is rather the emergence of a new mass-produced and homogenised “McFashion” (Lee 2003, 12).

“A McFashion garment is to a speciality garment what a Big Mac is to a five-course dinner—unsatisfying, commonplace, and utterly forgettable.” (Lee 2003, 13)

Kate Luckins (2009, 8) elaborates on this, writing that in many cases fast fashion consumption does not generate greater happiness on the consumer end. Cravings of distinction though clothing remain unfulfilled by “McFashion”, rapid product obsolescence leaves feelings of disappointment accompanied by guilt of overspending and today maybe unsustainable behaviour.

In connection with this, consumerism is to be differentiated from over-consumption and materialism, which preaches that the greatest happiness comes from possessing material goods. Consumerism is not solely based on acquisition but also on identity and differentiation. However, the psychological and sociocultural connotations we have made with certain commodities have caused marketing policies, branding, targeting and company competition (Hickey 1997, 84).
There is an urgent need to reevaluate current consumption habits and design practices in the fashion industry. In an effort to design clothing that not only lasts longer but is also kept longer, timeless aesthetics are to be considered. But what is timeless and how may it be assessed in the context of the ever-changing cultural Zeitgeist?

In *Sustainable Aesthetics*, fashion researcher Kristine Harper (2017, 17) argues that the most fundamental and significant way to transform unsustainable consumption patterns through design is by creating solid, well-crafted and enduring objects. Harper’s initial definition of aesthetics that endure through time states that it follows a certain notion of neutrality and minimalism. According to Harper, “harmonious objects” that cater to a broad variety of tastes should evoke an emotion of pleasure that is founded on basic principles of symmetry, harmonious colour schemes and materiality and therefore embody a timeless aesthetic (Harper 2017, 19). Harper writes:

“In order to create an aesthetically sustainable design product, designers must attempt to synthesise the common elements of the beauty experience into the product. The common elements of the beautiful experience make a product experience relevant, extraordinary, and durable.” (2017, 205)

This notion of universality and simplicity has proven to be generally considered beautiful by Western societies over the last decades.

**TIMELESS AESTHETICS**

For instance, actress Audrey Hepburn is oftentimes referred to as the personification of timeless style. Her fashion is characterised by simple shapes, neutral colours and sophisticated feminine elegance. There is a lot of aesthetic value in the familiar and expected, however, it is the “sublime” characterised by unfamiliarity and unexpectedness which goes beyond beauty and is highly relevant for timeless design (Harper 2017, 30).

**TIMELESSNESS AND MINIMALISM IN CONNECTION TO CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Audrey Hepburn is however only one example encapsulating perceived timelessness in a 20th-century context coined by Western cultural beauty standards and expectations. This timeless aesthetic characterised by minimalism and simplicity is also to be questioned. Intricate embroidery, bold colours and complicated ornamental patterns, as well as extravagant silhouettes, have been a deep and significant part of human cultures for thousands of years. In 1931, Austrian Architect Adolf Loos originally published *Ornament and Crime*, in which he argues that humans have outgrown ornamentation and sets the foundation for minimalist design. Loos writes:

“This essay is one of the first texts that disagree with cultural maximalism and argues for the aesthetic superiority of minimalism. It is also argued that minimalism and utilitarianism have their roots in fascist ideologies that remain present in our perceptions of what is desirable until the current day (Babajide, 2021). Cultural erasure is closely tied to colonialism and Westernisation. Additionally, I think it is questionable if minimalist or simplistic design is aesthetically sustainable and timeless or if it is not visually stimulating enough to be kept around for long. Therefore, it is crucial to view common definitions of timelessness or long-lasting beauty critically considering the cultural context the definition was derived from.

*NOTES ON ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND TIMELESSNESS*

One aspect that I won’t be elaborating on further in this report, but that should be considered in connection to timeless design is the environmental impact of long-lasting fashion items. How long does it even make sense to keep items for, considering the environmental impacts of maintaining (washing, ironing, etc..) a garment? What is the opposite of timeless design? What might be the benefits of ultra-short-lasting materials?
EXPLORING TIMELESSNESS IN A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

To find out what it is that makes people cherish certain items over a long period of time I got in touch with people over the age of 60. Their experience of time and perspectives on timeless or long-lasting fashion is the core of this research. The conversations aimed to get different people to share what garments they had proven to be timeless for them and then compare the answers I had gotten in order to define some general guidelines for designing timeless clothing.

CONVERSATIONS

The meetings evolved during the process from something more like a workshop with pre-planned tasks and activities to loosely structured conversations.

I went into the meetings with a list of specific questions. Since I assumed that just talking to people might not leave me with rich enough material I prepared a small task as well. A sheet of paper had six images of garments that had been donated to a local charity shop printed on it. The participants were asked to draw onto these images to change them to their better liking and perceptions of timeless beauty. This was a method that worked very nicely at a previous workshop that I ran and sparked very interesting conversations. However, in this context, this exercise was more confusing to the participants and took away more from the conversation than it added to it. This might be due to the fact that I was meeting them one on one mostly, but also because most of them needed to concentrate on drawing. The material I got from this was far less rich in information than conversations. Thus, after the fourth meeting, this task was no longer part of the meetings. Hence, they consisted mostly of dialogue and of the participants presenting garments they cared about. I asked every participant to present at least one garment and express their thoughts about it and why they think they have liked it so much. Many of them invited me into their wardrobes and showed me several pieces that they treasured. In Opening the wardrobe, Kate Fletcher and Ingun Grimstad Klepp stress the importance of turning our wardrobes to engage with and create radical sustainability change in the fashion system (2017, 5). They elaborate on their reasoning by saying:

“There are many reasons why it makes sense to investigate the happenings and makeup of wardrobes, including developing better garments; knowing ourselves better; helping others; increasing understanding of issues around appearance, democracy and satisfaction; enhancing detailed knowledge about the scale, type and rate of consumption of clothes, rendering in a more diverse and holistic understanding of the fashion system, among others.”

(Fletcher and Klepp 2017, 5)

Ten people aged 60 to 79 participated in this part of the project. The meetings either took place at their homes or in a café, depending on what each participant suggested.

OUTCOME

As I was listening back on the recorded conversations and compared the garments I had been presented to find commonalities, I realised that generalising these perspectives into guidelines for aesthetically timeless fashion design does not work. What is considered long-lasting or timeless varies heavily from person to person and seems rather unpredictable. A lot of garments that stayed in people’s wardrobes have a certain degree of emotion attached to them. This is not something a designer can necessarily influence or predict. My change agency as a designer seems to be quite limited in that case. However emotional attachment to a piece of clothing does not necessarily cause lifespan optimising actions or behaviours. Simply because owners connect certain emotions or memories to a garment does not mean that it will be used, but rather that it will merely be stored and seldom-used garments accumulate (Fletcher 2014, 198). Subsequently, this does not prevent replacement purchases, nor does it weaken the desire to consume. On that note, it is important to differentiate between ownership and use-ship (Fletcher 2014, 201) of clothes.

Most of the items, cherished for their long-lasting beauty, had been worn over several decades and were somewhat representative of their owners as people. There were no specific memories or relations attached to them.

Kajsa said about her cardigan:

“This thing looks so much like me, it feels very authentic, like my very own personal Folkdräkt. So it’s not just as close to facism as minimalism. Decolonial designers refer to this notion of generalisation and unification coming from Western design philosophies as “epistemic violence” (Paim and Mareis 2021, 77). Surely, some common characteristics are worth taking into consideration when designing fashion items. For instance, all garments were of good quality, mostly made of natural fibre like wool or cotton. However, after the conversations had taken place, I had to re-evaluate the direction of the project and decided to tackle it differently. The information I gathered called for a more complex, holistic and action-based response.

What people consider nice or authentic seems in the context of this project perhaps equally as unpredictable as emotional durability. “[Synthesising] the common elements of the beauty experience” (Harper 2017, 205) turned out not to be an appropriate starting point for a solution to the issue of rapid fashion consumption in this project. Especially considering that for this project I talked to a small select group of people, all aged 60+, all Swedish citizens living in Växjö. And still it was impossible to find universal characteristics. Universalism turned out to be a myth and feels just as close to facism as minimalism. Decolonial designers refer to this notion of generalisation and unification coming from Western design philosophies as “epistemic violence” (Paim and Mareis 2021, 77).

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VISUALISATION AND EXHIBITION

As the conversations did not lead me to any general guidelines of what is to be taken into consideration when designing timeless clothing I decided to change course towards a different design direction. I was given a broad variety of reasons why things are long-lasting and the positive connotations with old garments that people can have. I still regarded it as important to share the stories I collected with the public. I chose 5 people of the 10 I talked to and screen-printed photographs of them alongside a part of the conversations that I had previously transcribed. The stories vary very much in themes and depth; this is intentionally done so that the viewer is presented with how much joy long-lasting pieces of clothing can bring on different levels and for different reasons.

I chose Erikshjälpen as an exhibition space because it is a public space where many people pass by. I have been told that the theme of the work aligns very much with the values of the charity shop. Erikshjälpen is a place that is overwhelmed with used textiles. Because of wasteful consumption, the amount of donations has increased over the years. Although Erikshjälpen relies on donations, the amount has led them to be very selective with what actually gets put out in the store and gets a chance for a second life.

*SORTING TEXTILES*

During this project, I volunteered at the shop once a week to help with sorting textiles. Here I experienced really how much of the used textiles get thrown away. Anything with stains, anything sun-faded or with discolorations, anything that is of poor quality, that is broken, torn or ripped, anything that is pilling or has animal hair on it or smells unwashed, anything that is washed out, anything that does not clearly fit into a category and anything that has been out in the store for over one month has to be tossed to make room for all of the new donations coming in. In my experience, approximately 50 to 70 per cent of the textiles coming in go directly into the bin. The issue of the constant flow of used goods that are donated is something that many people are aware of. Going to Erikshjälpen every Thursday made me experience this issue in a more direct and embodied way. As I was physically lifting kilos of textile into the bin, throwing another big black plastic onto the giant pile of big black plastic bags, my frustration grew.

While sorting textiles I was allowed to pick out any waste textiles to use for my project. I chose to screen print the images onto waste textiles because this gave a faulty imperfect look that aligned with the topic. The monochrome prints in blue have a dreamy look to them correlating to the memories that were told. The partly unclear, slightly blurry visuals, therefore, give a certain reminiscing emotion to the images and stories.
In order to propose solutions that align with the diversity of viewpoints that came up during the conversations, a series of events were planned that corresponded to the different approaches to sustainable practices of the participants. Fellow students Ashleigh Spooner, Leonie Engisch and I were in contact with the activist organisation Fashion Revolution to use their platform and the framework of the initiative Fashion Revolution Week (FRW) to bring a variety of sustainable fashion experiences to Växjö. Currently, the fashion culture in Växjö is dominated by fast-fashion retailers. Yet there are a few actors that encourage sustainable fashion practices. Our role during Fashion Revolution Week was to connect these establishments through an action week and bring awareness about the topic to the general public to encourage reconsideration of one’s own clothing consumption patterns.

**FASHION REVOLUTION WEEK**

Fashion Revolution is a globally operating organisation that was founded in the wake of the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013. 5000 people were working in the Rana Plaza building in Dhaka, Bangladesh manufacturing clothing for several of the biggest global fashion retailers. The building collapsed and killed 1134 people and injured more than 2500 others. (Fashion Revolution, 2022) Coinciding with the anniversary of this catastrophe on the 24th of April, Fashion Revolution has initiated Fashion Revolution Week (FRW). From the 18th to the 24th of April people are invited to take action against the current way the garment industry operates.

It is a core aim of our action to push for positive connotations to practising sustainability in fashion. By including community, interpersonal exchanges, notions of agency and empowerment, as characteristics of the events, such alternative fashion experiences might be valued more and therefore be favoured by the consumer. Reducing the scale on which fashion consumption happens and diversifying how we engage with fashion might lead to an increased quality of fashion experiences. (Fletcher & Tham 2019, 45)

The project in its variety of events and actions touches on all four sustainability spheres by intending to counteract fashion mass-production and overconsumption, which affects cultural, social, economic and environmental sustainability.

**RE-MAKER SPACE**

Encouraging people to explore handicrafts and garment making is a very valuable tool to convey the value of garments and the time it takes to create something. Von Busch writes in his book about radically participatory fashion design that participation in the making of a garment can trigger feelings of self-enhancement (2008, 37) as well as agency and empowerment.

**COLLABORATION AND EVENT**

Kupan is a local second-hand store that is part of the Red Cross Sweden. We proposed hosting mending workshops at Kupan to store manager Monica Ravelli and other staff members. We ended up deciding together that we will host the first workshop on the 18th of March already and repeat it during FRW. The concept for the workshop is fairly straightforward. Prior to the workshops Ashleigh, Leonie and I looked through the garments that would have been thrown out at Kupan and sorted out anything that we thought would be worth giving another chance. Like Erkshjälpen, Kupan also has a rather selective sorting policy as they are equally as overwhelmed with clothing donations. At the workshops, people were able to purchase the items we sorted for 5 Swedish crowns and alter them to their liking. Of course, people could also bring things they already had and work on those.

Ashleigh, Leonie and I as well as some members of the staff at Kupan were there to guide and assist with sewing. Along with the garments that could be repaired, Kupan provided furniture for the workshop space and some sewing supplies. We brought sewing machines and supplies and set up an inviting space. It was important to us to make the experience of working with textiles as pleasant as possible to encourage agency and take away the intimidation of craft that some people have.

“I remember my aunt who worked a lot with clothes, she taught me a lot. For example on a shirt, you take off the collar and flip it around, so the part that is worn out, you have it on the inside. Or she showed me on a knitted sweater you carefully take out some yarn and you can re-knit it from here. So I think it was much more like that before so that you changed clothes or you kept your clothes.”

/ Excerpt of the conversation with participant Kajsa
TRIAL WORKSHOP

The first workshop took place on the 18th of March. We reflected on it together a few days later. There were a lot of positive reflections. For instance, most people started talking to one another as they were mending, which sparked a multitude of conversations about fashion and craft and connected people from the local community of Växjö. Consciously talking about unsustainable fashion is a very important step towards consumer responsibility.

One observation was also that the participation was heavily gendered. Many older women came and stayed for a long time chatting and mending, sharing techniques and knowledge. Very few older men stopped by and had rather low confidence in their own capabilities to work with textiles. So multiple times we as Re-Maker Space facilitators were asked to provide the service of hemming and mending things for them. For the second workshop, we planned on making it more clear that this space is to be used by people to explore textile craft themselves and that it is not a free tailoring service.

SECOND WORKSHOP

This second workshop was joined by more younger people that brought their own things to mend as opposed to the previous one where mostly older women that were visiting the store sat down to craft. This might have been due to the fact that our advertising on social media was a bit more elaborate this time than previously.

REFLECTIONS

After the workshop, we sat down with the store manager, Monica and the person responsible for the textile department, Nadia to reflect together. Monica and Nadia told us that they were very pleased with the space we had created and overall expressed positive reflections on the initiative. We were asked if we would be open to setting up the Re-Maker Space more regularly to establish this as part of the store. Since we do not have the capacity or time to do this, we suggested that they might be able to do it themselves, using the set-up we created. Monica and Nadia said that they were very interested and open to it, however, it is not a priority for them at the moment.

The fact that a lot of items we sorted out from the textile waste were sold as they were, showed that the criteria for what is waste and what can be sold might be worth reconsidering. Especially, since there are a lot of poor quality fast fashion items out in the store. We were discussing whether it might make sense to ask the people that are sorting the textiles to look at the tags and check which materials the garment is made from. Maybe there could be a rack like the one we set up with slightly faulty garments in the store permanently. However, Kupan is still flooded with old garments every day, so it is also understandable that they have concerns about complicating the sorting process. Additionally, we were told that they do not have the capacity to wash nor fix any clothes.

To sum up, generally, there was a positive response to the Re-Maker Space in Kupan both from the participants as well as the staff. Setting up such spaces to be maintained permanently is, however, more complicated and would require some effort and money from the charity shops.
**SCREENING**

“We decided to include a screening of the 2015 documentary Udita. Udita is a film by the Rainbow Collective that follows women who work in the garment industry in Bangladesh over the course of five years. We got in contact with the director of the film, Hannan Majid, and got permission to screen it publicly. The LNU Design Department sponsored the screening at the local cinema Palladium. Udita is Bengali for “arise” and the film deals with themes of oppression, death and hardship. When dealing with such emotional and important topics we regarded it as valuable for viewers to voice and contribute opinions, reflections and thoughts after the viewing. Initially, we considered having a guided discussion after the screening, but we agreed that perhaps that would not give the appropriate space to reflect on a sensitive matter. Instead we prepared postcards with questions that could be discussed in groups or to be contemplated by oneself. People could choose whichever question they felt like answering and wrote their thoughts on the back.”

/Excerpt of the conversation with Participant Eva

A big part of changing consumption patterns is awareness and education. Therefore we found it crucial to have an educational event during this week.

**COLLABORATOR AND EVENT**

We decided to include a screening of the 2015 documentary Udita. Udita is a film by the Rainbow Collective that follows women who work in the garment industry in Bangladesh over the course of five years. We got in contact with the director of the film, Hannan Majid, and got permission to screen it publicly. The LNU Design Department sponsored the screening at the local cinema Palladium. Udita is Bengali for “arise” and the film deals with themes of oppression, death and hardship. When dealing with such emotional and important topics we regarded it as valuable for viewers to voice and contribute opinions, reflections and thoughts after the viewing. Initially, we considered having a guided discussion after the screening, but we agreed that perhaps that would not give the appropriate space to reflect on a sensitive matter. Instead we prepared postcards with questions that could be discussed in groups or to be contemplated by oneself. People could choose whichever question they felt like answering and wrote their thoughts on the back.

**REFLECTIONS**

Most of the people that came to the screening took the invitation to stay and talk afterwards. The postcards ended up working well as a tool for reflection or as starting points for conversations. Generally, the audience at this screening was already aware of the issues depicted in the film. Thus, it was stated by multiple people that they were already considerate of ethical issues when buying new clothes. I attempted to make the items as durable as I could using only waste textiles from natural fibres in combination with sewing techniques to make the seams as secure as possible. I chose to work with natural fibres such as wool, cotton or silk since these materials usually age the most gracefully and were preferred by the people I had previously worked with. The pop-up shop was included in FRW since it seemed like a very soft intervention and a form of sustainable fashion that might seem manageable to people that don’t see themselves partaking in the making of their own clothes.

**POP-UP SHOP**

“I don’t like doing handicrafts, never have, I was quite offended when all of us girls were put into the handicraft classes when I was a kid, I don’t know, I just cannot excite myself for it. Also the older I get the harder it is to do intricate things with my fingers.”

/Excerpt from the conversation with Katarina

In addition to materials for the small exhibition at Erikshjälpen, I used some of the waste textiles I picked out when I volunteered at the shop to make a few garments. I attempted to make the items as durable as I could using only waste textiles from natural fibres in combination with sewing techniques to make the seams as secure as possible. I chose to work with natural fibres such as wool, cotton or silk since these materials usually age the most gracefully and were preferred by the people I had previously worked with. The pop-up shop was included in FRW since it seemed like a very soft intervention and a form of sustainable fashion that might seem manageable to people that don’t see themselves partaking in the making of their own clothes.

**COLLABORATION AND EVENT**

Along with the small exhibition the items were displayed at Erikshjälpen. This created a circularity since the waste that was collected and sorted out at the charity was returned as finished products to the store. I attempted to make the items as durable as I could using only waste textiles from natural fibres in combination with sewing techniques to make the seams as secure as possible. I chose to work with natural fibres such as wool, cotton or silk since these materials usually age the most gracefully and were preferred by the people I had previously worked with. The pop-up shop was included in FRW since it seemed like a very soft intervention and a form of sustainable fashion that might seem manageable to people that don’t see themselves partaking in the making of their own clothes.

**REFLECTIONS**

When I came back on Friday, several items had sold. The initiative was very appreciated by the staff of Erikshjälpen. However, after setting it up, I only observed the display briefly to see how visitors interacted so I cannot determine how much interaction took place. The few people that I talked to were interested in the act of re-making textiles and conversations about fashion and textile consumption started from there.
"My daughter would put on these fashion shows in the living room as a teenager. She would go into my wardrobe and put together the wildest combinations, it was very entertaining, truly. Most of the time, it was a bit questionable what she wore, but sometimes I thought, oh maybe I should wear my things like this sometimes too. Today we still share our things and she gets very excited when I let her look through the clothes I don’t wear anymore.”

/Excerpt from the conversation with Lille

Inactive garments could be shared between clothing consumers and therefore reduce the demand for new resource-intensive production. By exchanging clothing the opposing notions of sustainability and fashion consumption can be combined and are not exclusive to each other (Luckins 2009, 14). We included a clothes swap event to facilitate and initiate this exchange between the residents of Växjö.

EVENT AND COLLABORATION

OAS is a vegan coffee shop in the city centre of Växjö. After hearing about our plans for FRW we were contacted by the store manager and the owner of OAS. Since among all of us, many already had experience in hosting and participating in clothing exchange events, we could plan together and take previous experiences as well as Kate Luckins’ in-depth research in Fashion Re-Consumption (2009) into account to make the event go smoothly. Participants were asked to drop off clothes the day before at OAS Roastery where the garments were checked and sorted. In exchange for the garments, we handed out one to two tickets depending on the quality and material of the item. We decided together with the person that was dropping off the garments how many tickets each item should be exchanged for and marked the tags with either one or two stripes. In addition to the “pricing” people were asked to write their names and a note on the tags for the things they handed in. By doing this we wanted to celebrate the fact that these garments had been with somebody else before and therefore give value.

We divided all the garments into three parts to put out new clothes every hour to avoid people rushing to get the best things by being the fastest. We created an environment in which people could mingle and stay awhile to talk to each other. The clothes we collected were sorted by material to draw some attention to what the clothes were made of and to make people consider the materials of their clothes more closely. What is something made out of? How does it feel? Why does it matter to know?

REFLECTIONS

During the clothing drop-offs we faced the same problem as the charity shops we were working with. A lot of people used this as an opportunity to merely get rid of their “inactive garments” (Luckins 2009, 14). Several well-meaning people asked us if they could only donate garments without taking any from the Swap Party. We did not allow this. Most of those items that people wanted to donate were of poor quality and did not age well. Additionally, we had to reinforce the rule of 10 items max. per person to avoid an overflow of textiles that were not picked up. The current way that fashion is practised in the Global North is so cheap, fast and easy for consumers that consequences are oftentimes overlooked. We tried to avoid becoming this consumerist event, or a service that people could just use. It was a community initiative which is the reason why we requested that participants helped us with labelling and why we “priced” the items together, resulting in the feeling that it was co-created by all of us.

We collected around 150 items of clothing and a good two-thirds of them were taken home by new owners at the Party. In addition, we put out around forty items we had previously found in the textile waste at Kupan that were left over from the Re-Maker Space. All of those items were gone after the Swap Party.

We set up a Pop-Up Free Shop on the Linneaus University Campus to give away the remaining clothes to students for free. Anything left after that was donated to a local charity shop.
CONCLUSION

HOW CAN TIMELESS OR LONG-LASTING FASHION BE CHARACTERISED?

This research did not lead me to a clear definition of what timeless fashion design is. Our understanding of self-image and identity is supported and embodied by what we wear (Svendsen 2006, 75) made up in a dialogue between individuality and conformity. What is conformity might be predictable by considering trends and traditions. But the aspect of personal individuality that paired with cultural/social belonging creates a long-lasting image of authenticity and self seems to be rather unpredictable to me at this point. By speaking to people older than 60 I realised that what is timeless varies a lot depending on who you ask. This participatory research process also made me question the Western design canon as I was attempting to find universal guidelines for aesthetics. To me, this might be one of the most valuable learning outcomes.

I’d also like to note that I focused on the consumer end for this project. For further development towards ethical practices within the fashion system, it is crucial to consider the role and responsibility of fashion brands, producers and legislators.

My role as a change agent in the context of this project varied a lot throughout the process. I researched, was a conversation partner, a workshop facilitator, host, produced graphic material, sorted through textiles and therefore experienced clothing waste first-hand. I believe that my learnings throughout this process can also be relevant for other design students or designers.

Ashleigh, Leonie and I were the initiators and connection point between several collaborators and participants of Fashion Revolution Week Växjö initiating a more sustainable and communal fashion culture locally.

...AND HOW CAN DESIGN SUPPORT A SHIFT TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE FASHION PRACTICES ENCOURAGING PEOPLE IN VÄXJÖ AND ELSEWHERE TO KEEP THEIR CLOTHES FOR LONGER?

In collaboration with Fashion Revolution and fellow design students, we, therefore, created a multitude of diverse fashion experiences. By diversifying fashion experiences to go beyond the mere act of purchasing a garment, we aimed to create a more vivid and valuable fashion culture in Växjö. Community, empowerment, agency and awareness could enrich such experiences and enhance the perceived value of garments connected to them. Our initiatives were welcomed by both participants and collaborators. Establishing and maintaining these new forms of fashion consumption or practice, however, is something that needs a lot more elaborate research, design and financing. And since implementing sustainable fashion practices as a permanent, reliable and realistic alternative is crucial for lasting change, it seems to be a natural next step following this project.

Working on this project, I was faced once more with the complexity of the fashion system. Although I attempted to approach the issue of rapid fashion consumption holistically, keeping in mind as many connections and relations as possible, I have barely scratched the surface of all the interconnected issues of the fashion industry. There are a lot more aspects to consider when researching timeless fashion design.
The teamwork between Ashleigh, Leonie and I was hugely beneficial to this project. Working together did not only allow us to prepare and conduct a multitude of events with a variety of collaborators. Building this collective and working communally has enriched the process by giving us agency and empowerment to act, the same notions we aimed to convey through our work.

“Collective work taught me a lot in terms of how much power you can gain when working with others and how the impact of a collective goal is even stronger. We complemented each other in a super productive way that made it so easy for me to get to know your methods and approaches on how to deal with such a difficult topic. Also the conversations we had were precious because we were pulling on the same string to make fashion slow down again.”

/Ashleigh Spooner on our collective work

“I learnt from both of you, was inspired by you and it motivated me to know that we were doing something none of us had done before as a team. We made sure the process was just as fun and fulfilling as the outcome, no one was overworked or pressured, the team was supportive to each other throughout.”

/Leonie Engisch on our collective work

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special Thanks to:

Ashleigh Spooner and Leonie Engisch for a very fruitful collaboration

Jan, Lena, Lille, Anna-Karin, Kajsa & Kajsa, Katarina, Eva, Tommy and Johanna for participating and opening up their wardrobes

Zeenath Hasan, Head of the Design Departments at LNU, for making the sponsoring the screening of Udita and the poster prints to advertise the events possible

Rasmus Peterhans for taking photos at Fashion Revolution Week Växjö
"I do have a twin jumper. I have had it for a very long time. I keep it in the front of my wardrobe and I always wear it. It’s really joyful in a way. When I go to the city centre, everything looks the same in the shop as in the city. Every single thing is very beige and grey. But we live here in Vaxjo. The weather is already very grey most of the year, so I think it’s crucial to have some color and fun with how you look."

"This jacket I have had for a very long time. Look at it, it isn’t thick. I think it’s cool... y. I am aware that it’s from the nineties, and do you know what this is for? It’s for a cell phone! My phone now doesn’t fit in my jacket anymore. But it’s funny how these little details like this are part of evidence for the time it was made in. This is a very classic and basic piece of clothing, but the little pocket gives it away that it wouldn’t be sold today."
"Now that I look at a lot of things that I have kept tightly in my time. They are all the things that I keep to me. This jumper I got when we arrived through the coming with the car and friends. And I had wanted to get a jumper like that and I had looked in many shops and finally one time on the outside of a train. There was a small shop and we went in and this was hanging there and I knew immediately this is it. It looks like the time I spent in Scotland. But it also has the color that go match with the other things I really like. So although it is not as simple or classic, it still looks fitting."

"I was working as a representative, so I had for a lot of people as well as also very powerful companies. And for important meetings I wore this olive green suit. It is just so elegant and makes me feel confident. It's sort of support jacket. Because you know, demanding things from powerful people and making decisions requires a lot of confidence. And demanding and deciding as a woman at that time required even more confidence. So this suit is actually quite important to my career, but also to my sense of self."

name Lena

name Eva

garment scottish jumper

garment olive green suit

notes fashion style, personal

notes family, feminism, work
meeting date 28.02.2022
age 17

This is the traditional dress from my country, and I brought it so much like
feels very nice, cool and soft. But it's very nice because it looks beautiful to me. The pattern
is a sort of folklore.

You know how every county in
Sweden has a different, very
specific traditional dress... This really feels like my own personal one.

name Joanna
garment jumpers
notes Empathy, knitted

"My mother..."
SCREENPRINTS

Jeanette and her 22-year-old lefty

It was the 1950s and 1960s, a time when women were expected to be submissive and obedient. My mother was a strong woman who rejected these expectations. She refused to be seen as a弱者, and she fought for her rights. She was a feminist before it was even a word. Every day, she fought to make the world a better place for women. She was a true feminist, and her spirit will live on forever.
Kasia and her 19-year-old grandson

This is my favourite piece of clothing. I love this. When I was 95 years old, I had to wear this and I still wear it and I don't care who says anything. It's a beautiful dress and I wear things as I like to wear them. It's a very nice dress and I wear it for special occasions. I think it's very nice and it makes me feel good. I wear it for special occasions and I feel very comfortable in it. It's a very nice dress and I wear it for special occasions. I think it's very nice and it makes me feel good. I wear it for special occasions and I feel very comfortable in it. It's a very nice dress and I wear it for special occasions.
RE-MAKER SPACE

Drop off clothes and collect tickets
at OAS Roastery
on Friday 22nd of April 2022
between 14:00 and 18:00

Come for an evening of clothes swapping, music and drinks
at OAS Café
on Saturday 23rd of April 2022
between 18:00 and 21:00

Fresh clothes drops every hour!

Plats: Kupan, Arabygatan 31.
Tid: 12–17 Fredag 18e Mars.
Konstnadsfritt.

SWAP PARTY
UDITA ARISE
Life, Death, Oppression & Resistance
A Rainbow Collective/Opnzvor Documentary

Screening at
Palladium
Storgatan 12, Växjö

on
Friday 22nd of April
20:00

Free entrance

What could an exploitation-free fashion system look like?

A fashion system not under a capitalist and imperialist system. Exploitation will always exist under capitalism, in more extreme conditions like Bangladesh and less extreme like cheaper production in third world countries. The NGIT union is doing the right thing leading a violent fight with workers against the exploitors. Workers of the World, unite!

Look at the labels in your clothing – where were they manufactured? Write down your thoughts...

Look at the labels in your clothing – where were they manufactured? Write down your thoughts...

It can be quite hard to find out where specifically your stuff was manufactured from. If you find a country you still have no idea about the factory or working conditions. Imagine this is the case, why then when I come to this country?

Do you think about where and how your clothes were made when you chose them?

Has that changed over time?
GARMENTS FROM WASTE TEXTILES 
SOLD AT THE SMALL POP-UP SHOP

Wool jacket with mother-of-pearl buttons

Quilted jacket

Bags of different sizes and materials

bright orange cotton work jacket
Short wool shirt with metal buttons

Cotton shirt from sunfaded table cloth

Cotton jacket with small knot details

MATERIAL FROM TASK DONE WITH CONVERSATION PARTICIPANTS

All garments were sorted out as waste at Erikshjälpen. What would you change about them to make them more timeless?
PROGRAM FASHION REVOLUTION
WEEK 2022 VÄXJÖ

THIS PROJECT IS PART OF FASHION REVOLUTION WEEK. COME AND JOIN OUR OTHER EVENTS THIS WEEK!

TALES OF TIMELESSNESS / TUE 19 APRIL / THROUGHOUT THE WEEK

Mini-Exhibition:
5 women tell stories of what timeless clothing means to them to inspire rethinking wasteful fashion consumption.
Displayed at Eriksjälpen Växjö

RE-MAKERSPACE / WEDS 20 APRIL / 12:00-17:00

A pop-up event at the Red Cross where we will be mending, un-making and re-making fashion 'waste'. Our materials are the clothes that would have been exported for recycling due to little holes and such.

We’ll provide the machines, tools, scrap fabrics and threads. Let's get stitching and talk disposable fashion, gendered labour and fashion's waste crisis.

MENDING ON DISPLAY / WORKSHOP THUR 21 APRIL / 15:00-17:00

Alisa is exhibiting mended clothes at Kalmar Bushö, all week long, to have repairs and mending take up more visual space in our society. She'll run a workshop on Thursday 21 April 15:00-17:00 where you can try mending, ask questions about the project and get inspired to mend in a new way.

UDITA (ARISE) SCREENING / FRI 22 APRIL / 18:30

We are screening a powerful documentary on Friday night, to centre the women leading the garment workers struggle in Bangladesh. It’s a story of resistance amidst union busting and precarity in a deeply unequal system. We will show it "for free" at Palladium to mark nine years since the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory in Dhaka in 2013.

If you fancy, stick around for drinks and snacks after the film.

SWAP PARTY / SAT 23 APRIL / 18:00

We are wrapping up the week with a clothes swap party at Oas. (For those of you that miss the free shop, I hope this will do for now!) Drop off your freshly-laundered, loved-but-no-longer-needed clothes with us in exchange for swap tickets.

Drop off schedule – for Friday 22 April:
10:00-12:00 at M-hus. Probably in Mellannrummet but text us if you can’t find us!
14:00-18:00 at Oas Roastery

THE ORGANISERS
We are Noemi Braun (DC+C3), Leonie Englsch (DC+C1), Alisa Olsson (VC+C3) and Ashleigh Spooner (MFA2). Feel free to get in touch with any of us with questions.