The Fashion Futuring: a Sustainable Paradigm for The Time to Come

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the stories that fashion tells about its imagined future. It intends to identify and analyse the "futuring" discourses that are emerging as a possible way forward for fashion by taking into account the contact zones between critical thinking, environmental activism and history. The purpose is to show the significant role that "futuring" and speculative fictions could play in redirecting fashion, and, broadly speaking, in reimagining fashion itself. The research would like to overcome the dominant identification of fashion with its own industry and to open up a different interpretation of inventions, fantasies and alternate history beyond the promotional and heritage-related purposes of fashion design and communication. By doing so, it aims to challenge the dominant dualistic understanding of fashion as an unrealistic fantasy for a real industry, and to point out some possible aims for designers and fashion thinkers.

This work is part of an ongoing research project on the "futuring" practices that are emerging in fashion in order of achieving desirable futures. It draws on the concept of "futuring" as a paradigm shift in the 21st-Century fashion. "Futuring" stems from the work of the design theorist Tony Fry (2007, 2009), who has argued for the need of re-directing the current design's aims and scopes to better respond to a world that has become unsustainable. Futuring, which has been recently adapted to fashion by sustainability scholar Alice Payne (2019), is among the most innovative concepts featuring in the 21st-century debate on the need to give new directions to the key themes of ecology, sustainability, and ethics. The research methodology combines observations and interviews with fashion designers and professionals who work in the spirit of redirecting fashion with the experience of teaching fashion through speculative fiction and alternate futures. It also draws on design speculative methods (Dunne and Raby, 2013); historical and theoretical approaches devoted to sustainability and uchronic temporalities and alternate futures (Evans and Vaccari, 2020, Vanni, 2016, 2020). Finally, the paper owes to Alain Badiou's re-articulation of the dialectic real/unreal in favour of a better-nuanced understanding of a possible "réel latent" (Badiou, 2015: 33).

In order to achieve the above-mentioned purposes, the research relied on "what if?" as a key methodological tool. This allowed the achievement of two major outcomes. The first is that speaking about fictional histories proved to be an effective tool to identify and understand current and actual issues, such the precarity of the

fashion designer vis-à-vis Artificial Intelligence, and the precarity of the real garments vis-à-vis the digital. The second is the role that speculative fashion plays in rethinking the idea of history, for example finding a counter-history of the European fashion to overcome the narrative of the big brands and the *cliché* of glamour and beauty. The research originality lies in its effort to experiment futuring and speculative methods to fashion, whose theory is still lacking in this regard.

Keywords

Futuring, Fashion design, Speculative Fiction, Sustainability, Uchronia, What If?

Article Classification

Conceptual paper

Summary: 1. Fashion Futures: an Introduction; 2. Futuring and its Methodology; 3. Fashion Futuring and Uchronia; 4. The "What If?" Approach; 5. The Interlocutors; 6. Discussion; Acknowledgements; References.

1. Fashion Futures: an Introduction

This paper investigates the stories that fashion tells about its imagined future. Fashion is undergoing a process of great transformation and many questions recur obsessively in the understanding of what will be the future of fashion, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. The word "future" is accruing a relevance in fashion that it perhaps has not had since the 1960s. Then, it was associated with the new technology and optimism of space travel, whereas today it comes back via anxiety about the future and the "No Future" discourse of environmentalists and climate change activists. At the same time, the fashion industry's discourses about sustainability are reviving the word "future" as a possible way forward for fashion, which can and should play a major role in the creation of a better world. This claim is challenged from two sides: on the one hand, by those who charged it with greenwashing, i.e. the use of sustainability language without corresponding actions, and, on the other hand, by those who believe that fashion has no moral obligation towards the future. Under scrutiny in this paper is the fashion industry's capability to overcome the dystopian realities of unsustainable growth. It follows that the fashion future is more about a paradigm shift than a category of time.

With its propensity to act as a dream machine that creates idealized worlds and illusory times, fashion has been considered one of the most contradictory aspects of Western culture. Its gleaming and dreamy façade often hides the realities of suffocating factories, precariousness and labour exploitation, as evidenced by the criticism that Karl Marx (1976) expressed against fashion in the 19th-century and that goes all the way to the recent debate on fast fashion, offshore manufacturing, and environmental issues. The delocalisation to non-European countries meaningfully symbolises the separation of fashion imaginaries from production, sweat, and workers. In her book *Adorned in Dreams*, Elizabeth Wilson (2003, 63-64) emphasised the continuous "confusions between real and not-real", and the "aesthetic obsessions" that characterised postmodern fashion. Compared to the 1980s in which Wilson wrote, fashion as a great collectively shared dream has been fragmented in the 21st century into a multitude of imaginaries, conveyed on different scales by fashion communities through platforms, networks and especially social media. However, the idea of fashion as the combination of dream and aesthetics is still present nowadays and continues to affect the discourses on environmental and social sustainability of fashion. This is what José Teunissen (2008) defined "autism in fashion", and echoes Théophile Gautier's concept of "l'art pour art" (art for art's sake) – i.e. the 19th-century idea of a non-realistic art and the total independence of the artist, whose creative faculties should be free

from any moral constraint and political goals. Actually, there are no reasons why sustainable fashion could not be as esthetically appealing and interesting as the conventional one (Aakki 2013; Teunissen 2008).

This paper challenges the dominant dualistic understanding of fashion as fantasy and creativity, at the exclusive service of industry. Given that the dream is an essential component of the industry, it questions how it can be more directly and transparently incorporated in the practices and visions of designers and brands that carry forward an idea of fashion encompassing environmentalism and ethics. The goal is to contribute to the discourse on the ongoing change of fashion paradigm vis-à-vis sustainability, verifying whether and how methodologies developed in the field of design – particularly "futuring" approaches and speculative thinking – can be adopted in the field of fashion.

2. Futuring and its Methodology

The concept of "futuring" stems from the work of the design theorist Tony Fry (2007, 2009), who has attributed to design the primary task of promoting what he called "sustain-ability", that is, the skills necessary to support people, social life, cultures, imaginaries, and the environment (see also Berardi 2017). Through the concept of futuring, Fry has argued the need for "re-directing" the current design's aims and scopes to better respond to a world that has become unsustainable. In Fry's (2007: 5) words: "Human beings have turned the very ground of being into design, the designed, decision and direction... What this means is that everything actually, or metaphorically, touched by human hands has, by degree, a determinant consequence on the form of the future". As Fry pointed out in his book *Design Futuring* (2009: 2), the future is not "an objective reality independent of our existence".

Redirective practices promote the transformation of knowledge into action; shape communities of change working towards a common goal; facilitate knowledge exchange; and politically contest the unsustainable status quo. Importantly, as Fry emphasised, redirective practices break away from established ways of thinking, working and making, and produce not only new designed objects, but also new design cultures, practices, and designers (Vaccari and Vanni 2020).

Futuring has been firstly adapted to fashion by scholar Alice Payne (2019), who considered it as a dynamic process able to negotiate between opposite interpretations of sustainability as an optimistic and gradual technological evolution towards a cleaner industry, or a more prudent approach to freeing fashion from the imperative of unsustainable growth of capitalism. The concept of fashion futuring allows overcoming the exclusivity of some of the proposed sustainable solutions to fashion – such as "eco fashion" (Scaturro, 2008; Brown, 2010) and "slow fashion" (Clark, 2008; Fletcher, 2007, 2010) – which reaffirms fashion as an elitist concept which exclusively entails the linkage between slow and expensive, innovation and luxury. Conversely, fashion futuring as a new approach to the global discourse of sustainable fashion emphasises initiatives that

have in common the quest for a more holistic approach to fashion design, manufacture and consumption in which slow entails, for instance, do it yourself practices and innovation supported by the free circulation of ideas and skills.

The paper presents the first partial results of an ongoing research project on *Fashion Futuring*, aimed at rethinking the fashion designers' role and mapping emerging sustainable fashion design models in Italy. The research started in December 2019 at the Università Iuav di Venezia, as part of the strategic projects promoted by the Department of Architecture and Arts. The first phase entailed qualitative interviews, workshops and meetings with fashion designers, professionals and fashion students. The research is based on a methodological framework (Vaccari Vanni 2020) which articulates in four intersecting trajectories: 1) *Do It Yourself*, referring to the 21st-century revival of self-production practices in the field of clothing from knitwear circles to cutting and sewing courses (von Busch 2014). These practices re-evaluate individual creative abilities, in line with the principles of new frugalism (von Busch 2020). Historically, forms of domestic crafts such as knitting, crochet and embroidery have been recovered in a feminist perspective as examples of creativity and unpaid female work, and have recently been revamped by the web 2.0. 2) *Future Craftsmanship* (*Futuro Artigiano*) is the title of the book (2011) by Stefano Micelli dedicated to "hand made" artisan cultures and practices, which the author places at the centre of the concept of Made in Italy. Craftsmanship is seen as a "bespoke" form of industrialisation that can be applied to enterprises regardless of their dimension and that becomes a meeting point between local and global. 3) *Digital manufacturing*: the advent of maker culture coincides with the desire to re-imagine production and consumption in the direction of sustainable futures, and the capacity to blur distinctions between producer and consumer. The adoption of digital technologies such as laser cutters, associated with open source software, has generated different supply chains and created new fashion designers capable of integrating artisan know-how with digital knowledge. 4) *Industrial experimentation* based on sustainability-oriented technology constitutes a rich pool of examples based on the logic of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, as in the case of the invention of new fabrics that recover waste, such as orange peels, grapes, mushrooms, and agricultural residues.

3. Fashion Futuring and Uchronia

Though ethically rooted in the present, the concept of futuring is unidirectionally projected towards the future, towards a time that is not yet existing, but that can be imagined as socially and environmentally desirable. The paper argues that futuring is uchronic, and aims to investigate its peculiar fictional character in fashion.

Uchronia is modelled on the word u-topia (no-place) invented by Thomas More to describe a fictional island as an ideal society. Uchronia (no-time) was a neologism of the 19th century coined by the French author

Charles Renouvier in his book *Uchronia. The Utopia in History* in which he rewrote European history starting from the impossible hypothesis that the fall of the Roman Empire had never happened. The concept of fashion as uchronia comes from Roland Barthes' *The Fashion System*, first published in 1967. As u-topia means "no place", according to Barthes u-chronia refers to a time that does not exist (Evans and Vaccari 2020). The reason why such a promising concept has been neglected by anglophone fashion studies most probably lies in the fact that, in the English translation, the French words "*Ucronie*" was rendered as "Achrony". This word, however, has lost its original utopian flavour, which the book *Time in Fashion* (Evans and Vaccari 2020) has rediscovered.

Uchronia also means imagined times and fictional time. As such, it opens up to many possibilities for innovative thinking and enables progressive narratives. For instance, the Afrofuturism phenomenon, which offers an inventive reclamation of black identity through performance, self-fashioning and styling. According to Sonja Eismann's definition: "Members of the African diaspora imagine themselves as utopian space travellers with roots in Egyptian mythology" (Eismann 2019: 67-8, quoted in Evans and Vaccari 2020). Uchronia encompasses the uchronic manipulation of temporal processes, which can have "transformative effects" and "real implications" when they allow people "to bring the intended future into existence," as the anthropologist Felix Ringel (2016) stated. Contrary to the unidirectionality of the futuring, uchronia involves both past and future allowing the invention of possible futures as well as the rewriting of the past – as in the case of the above-mentioned references to Renouvier's reinvention of the history of the Roman Empire, and Afrofuturism respectively. In the field of fashion, it spans from the most conservative and retrogressive fashion narratives to the most radical, creative and life-changing ones. Retrogressive fashion narratives are frequently adopted by the fashion industry, which frequently recurs to the invention of its own time through the promotion of the new. Uchronia encompasses a variety of phenomena, spanning from utopian heritages, when a fashion brands reinvent their history; trend-forecasting, when the predictions of the future are commercially motivated, though Mathilda Tham (2015: 258) argued that these practices do not necessarily answer only the question "what is likely to happen?" by extrapolating data (for example, meteorology and population growth studies), but also, similarly to futuring, the question "what would we like to happen?"; the otherworldly (Lexileictous, Klanten and Sven 2016), like posthuman fantasies, made possible by digital fashion image-making; and also activism motivated by a real sense of urgency and political engagement, for example when one thinks of ecological disaster and possible solutions (Evans and Vaccari 2020). Finally, uchronia includes speculative fiction, which has received little attention in the field of fashion history and theory. The concept of speculative fashion at the core of this paper covers a vast range of practices that find themselves at the crossroads of fashion design, activism, visual, and performative arts.

4. The "What If?" Approach

From this theoretical framework, the research aimed to identify and analyse the uchronic-speculative discourses in fashion futuring practices. The purpose was twofold. The first was to investigate the transformative power that futuring can have in fashion, relying on the peculiar way that the latter has to construct its own scenarios from what is not yet existing. The second stems from looking at speculative practices through the lens of "futuring" to investigate their "real latent" potential in the current and vast debate on the redefinition of fashion itself. The concept of *réel latent* is drawn on Alain Badiou's (2015: 33) nuanced understanding of the dialectic real/unreal.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned purposes, the research has relied on "what if?" as the key methodological tool. What if? Is the question that typically introduces an alternate history and, for this reason, is at the basis of this approach to uchronic time. For example, what if Africa were the richest continent in the world? This idea was behind the provocative advertising campaign launched by Diesel Fashion Company in 2001 featuring the fictional newspaper *The Daily Life*, in which black models lounged in limousines or luxury offices under headlines such as "African Expedition to Explore Unknown Europe by Foot", imagining Africa's supremacy as a world power (Forbes 2020).

As theorized in the book *Time in Fashion* (Evans and Vaccari 2020), the uchronic time of fashion allows one to build fantastic scenarios starting from real facts and characters. It is like an invented time, but with real repercussions. From the point of view of speculative narratives, criticism and social change are the motivations underlying the uchronic process, as in the case of the action strategies of activist groups and radical environmental movements. Through the uchronic manipulation of time and reality one can radically rethink the past and contribute to design the future, because building hypothetical scenarios in the sphere of fashion bears concrete transformative implications.

What if? was a series of collaborative conversations and a workshop with Fashion and Visual Arts Master's students carried out at the Università Iuav di Venezia in summer 2020, in the frame of the above-mentioned *Fashion Futuring* research project. The author of this paper has co-facilitated *What if?* together with fashion designer and professor Fabio Quaranta, and researcher in fashion design Paolo Franzo. In each conversation, two fashion professionals were invited to propose and discuss a topic by asking the facilitators and the students one or more questions starting with "what if?". All the conversations were motivated by a certain sense of urgency and worries about the future. Actually, this series was conceived during the most critical months of the Covid-19 pandemic, which raised new/old questions about possible futures of fashion and revealed the great weaknesses of fashion in terms of places of production, timing schedule and the role of the fashion designers. The interruption of most creative and productive activities have pushed fashion brands and fashion designers towards a shared understanding of changing the system. This has also entailed the rethinking of time, in favour of more relaxed rhythms of production and consumption. Starting from the

question "what if?" was a way to ask not only what the fashion of the future will be like, but also what future fashion can contribute to build. What happens when fashion begins to invent stories for good to support desirable, rather than unsustainable, futures? And what are the designers doing to change it? The cycle of collaborative conversations involved emerging fashion designers and bearers of a radical vision of fashion, curators, professionals and experts in environmental sustainability, digital fashions and artificial intelligence. The formula of collaborative conversations is in line with the experimental nature of the entire project, which required the invited interlocutors not only to tackle new content, but to do so in order to build new ideas by means of their interactions. In the field of education and communication, the collaborative approach requires, in fact, that the interlocutors discuss with a creative goal, rather than a controversial one, in order to generate new ideas or deepen their knowledge of a given topic. With this proactive and change-oriented attitude, the interlocutors who took part in the project were invited to build their ideas in front of the student audience. Giuditta Tanzi, fashion designer and founder of the niche fashion brand Garbage Core, talked with Guya Manzoni, promoter of inclusive fashion projects in Italy, founder of the Isola della Moda in Milan and Sfashion-net. Giorgia Roversi, an expert in artificial intelligence and director of sustainability and inclusion of YOOX NET-A-PORTER GROUP, was in dialogue with Gloria Maria Cappelletti, creative director of Vice, editor at large of i-D and founder of the digital art gallery Gloria Maria in Milan.

Giulia Bortoli and Mauro Simionato, founders of Vitelli – a knitwear brand at the intersection of youth culture, sustainability and Italian style today – talked with Monica Albergoni, a fashion designer at Cividini, a historic knitwear brand in Italy. Finally, Maria Paola Zedda, a curator and expert of performative languages, spoke on the relationship between clothing and body with Denise Bonapace, a designer and founder of the Abitario collective. The collaborative approach reverberated in the contribution of the students who took part in the project. Each conversation stimulated discussions on how fashion should be in front of the great issues of social and environmental sustainability and in response to the radical changes brought about by technological innovation and the pandemic crisis. It was, in fact, an opportunity to launch questions that engendered the production of texts, images and short videos by the students, providing evidence of the potential that speculative fashion has in education by creating a proactive approach to knowledge. The questions thrown during the conversations did not expect a single answer, thus leaving the workshop participants to imagine their own answers.

5. The Interlocutors

Giuditta Tanzi is a designer who graduated in 2018 from the NABA Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti in Milan. After two internships in the style offices of Milanese fashion brands, she decided to undertake an independent project, which she defined as wearable art, in which a work of experimentation and expression takes place

through fabrics. In 2019, therefore, she created Garbage Core, a development of her degree thesis: second-hand clothes take on new life and the stories of those who wore them in the past are handed down. The idea stemmed from a transposition of the *object trouvé* theme from contemporary art to fashion. The design process involves the recovery of used clothes in vintage markets and wardrobes of friends and relatives, selecting only Made in Italy garments to pass on a creative and productive story; these are unstitched, disassembled, cut, placed on the body, reassembled with moulage or paper pattern and finally used to create new garments – unique pieces bearing previous stories.

Guya Manzoni is a curator and consultant of fashion projects concerning production, communication and marketing. In 2007 she founded Isola della Moda, the first Milanese hub dedicated to independent fashion productions: an innovative space able to supply and coordinate services and resources dedicated to fashion micro-enterprises. She was among the first in Italy to talk about critical fashion, sustainability and awareness in consumption, co-conceiving the first Italian critical fashion in 2009. Her most recent project, launched in 2020, is the creation together with Marina Savarese of the Sfashion-net portal – the initial "S" refers to slow, sartorial, soul, sustainable, social – a digital platform that welcomes and promotes selected Italian brands on the basis of sustainability, ethics, innovation and design.

Specialised in digital fashion, Giorgia Roversi is director of sustainability and inclusion of YOOX NET-A-PORTER GROUP (YNAP), a company based in Italy and one of the world leaders in online fashion sales, born in 2015 from the merger between Yoox and Net-A-Porter. With an approach that combines sustainability and new technologies, YNAP pays attention to radical changes in designing, distributing and consuming fashion. On the one hand, YNAP is experimenting with the introduction of Artificial Intelligence in the fashion sector: in November 2018 it presented 8 by Yoox, a private label of the group created also by the means of Artificial Intelligence, used to interpret the consumers' needs by processing the data collected through the e-commerce portal. On the other hand, it promotes projects such as Vogue YOOX Challenge-The Future of Responsible Fashion, presented in February 2020. The competition is dedicated to designers and start-ups invited to present innovative ideas of sustainability in fashion in all its aspects: conception, production, manufacturing, communication and sales.

Gloria Maria Cappelletti is the founder of the Gloria Maria Gallery in Milan, a pioneer in digital art that has made known in Italy and supported influential contemporary digital artists. She is the editor at large of the magazine *i-D* Italy and creative director for the fashion partners of VICE Fashion & Luxury Group Italy, a creative agency that deals with research, strategy, creativity, development, production and content distribution. She is also the curator of the Milan Fashion Film Festival, founded in 2014 by Constanza Cavalli Etro and dedicated to fashion films increasingly used by brands to communicate their imagery in the digital age, through an artistic combination of photography, editing, music, aesthetics and ethical and poetic sense.

Mauro Simionato is co-founder and creative director of Vitelli, a brand born from the meeting with Giulia Bortoli, who in the same year was completing a master degree in knitwear design at the Politecnico di Milano. Simionato previously dealt with art direction, an activity that he continues to carry out as a consultant for other fashion brands. Thanks to Bortoli, he discovered a strong interest in knitwear and its connections with the craftsmanship, the territory and the culture of the Italian provinces. After training in graphics and art direction, Bortoli began to specialize in knitwear, opening Studioe, a consulting firm that designs and develops the production of knitwear for various international brands, including Vitelli.

Monica Albergoni graduated from the master degree course in Fashion and Visual Arts, Fashion curriculum, at the Università Iuav di Venezia. Her training made her discover the knitwear design, for which she developed a passion. After her first professional experience at the Stone Island fashion brand in Milan, she decided to return to the province of Bergamo, where she grew up, a territory characterized by a long history and tradition of knitwear and factories. Here she started working as a knitwear designer for Cividini, a brand founded in 1989 that pays particular attention to manual work, developing capsule collections of limited edition knitwear with handlooms or decorated with manual interventions, stencils, airbrush and tie and dye.

Denise Bonapace graduated in Industrial Design at the Politecnico di Milano and worked as a consultant for Italian fashion companies. At the same time, she developed personal experimentation projects on the relationship between the body, clothing and living, projects that were exhibited in international events. Since 2006 she has been a lecturer in knitwear design at the Politecnico, Fashion Institute of Technology, and NABA in Milan. In 2019, she founded Abitario, a collective that designs and manufactures handcrafted knitwear using traditional techniques in an experimental way. The first collection, *RR Ricama e Ripara*, began in the Prato district with the salvage of 100 discarded sweaters with the aim of redesigning, reassembling, mending and making them unique, transforming holes and defects into distinctive elements.

Maria Paola Zedda is curator in the field of performing arts and the languages at the border between dance, performance and visual arts. She was the production manager for over a decade in the Enzo Cosimi Company. Since 2011 she has directed festivals and events related to contemporary languages, collaborating with institutions such as MAXXI, Civic Museums of Cagliari, Hanoi Doclab - Goethe Institut and, in 2015, she was artistic director of Cagliari Italian Capital of Culture. She is artistic co-director of DiDstudio, at the Fabbrica del Vapore, a centre for dance and performance in Milan. Since 2013 she has been the artistic co-director of Across Asia Film Festival, a film festival focused on the innovative languages of the contemporary Asian scene. She writes for *Alfabeta* and *Artribune*.

6. **Discussion**

The thesis of this paper is that the adoption of a speculative approach can not only help to redirect the current dystopian realities of fashion towards a better and more sustainable world, but it also does it according to an inventive and imaginative language that is part of fashion. Speculative fashion means here a fashion that does not yet exist, therefore a hypothetical fashion which, however, could give real indications on how fashion could be or could become. The definition of speculative fashion adopted here covers a wide range of practices that lie at the crossroads of design, activism, visual and performing arts, and that utilize uchronian inventions, fantasies and stories beyond the promotional purposes and objectives of industrial production. Speculative fashion entails a certain sense of urgency as well as social and political commitment.

The key outcome of *What If?* is that – paradoxically – speaking about fictional histories proved to be an effective tool to identify and understand current and actual issues. For instance, Guya Manzoni and Giuditta Tanzi asked the question of what would happen if the great giants of luxury and fast fashion disappeared. A possibility, this, that seems increasingly concrete after the contraction in sales due to the pandemic, but which nevertheless forces us to reflect on possible alternatives. Another theme that emerged during the *What If?* conversations was the precarity of the fashion designer vis-à-vis Artificial Intelligence, and also the precarity of the real garments vis-à-vis the digital. What if the fashion designers and the real garments disappeared? These themes were introduced to the students by Giorgia Roversi, sustainability director at Yoox Net-à-Porter, in conversation with Gloria Maria Cappelletti of *i-D* magazine. Many of the questions asked by the fashion designers and professionals invited took real concerns to extremes, but also the students' answers repeatedly stressed that the speculative approach is anything but an opportunity to daydream, pointing out how it is an open time full of contradictions, but also of possibilities.

Another major outcome of *What if?* is the role of speculative fashion in rethinking the idea of history, freeing it from the big brands' narratives. For example, finding a counter-history of the Made in Italy to overcome the narrative of the gig brands and their *cliché* of glamour and beauty. To do so, the young creative director of the niche brand Vitelli explained that he took inspiration for his design by an alternative history (a subaltern history) based on the rediscovery of Cosmic culture (an Italian club culture from the 1980s); the culture of the small towns (the Italian province); the periphery of fashion; and the rude and punk attitude which is common in the knitwear workshops around the country. Their question was how to make a town shop when by town is meant the world.

The advent of the digital is at the heart of understanding the "what if?" perspective in fashion, not only with regard to online publishing and e-commerce practices, but also with fundamental implications on the revision of design processes, the figure of the fashion designer, the relationship between consumption, and the set of symbolic structures of fashion. Filters offered by applications and social media such as Snapchat are becoming the new frontier of ornamentation, while the growing offer of virtual clothing opens up provocative questions about the possibility of replacing the act of buying "real" clothes, with possible positive consequences in terms

of environment, transport and waste of textile, and improvement of the working conditions related to fast fashion. From 2020, virtual clothing also provided a crucial self-fashioning opportunity at the time of the anti-pandemic imposition of social distancing and limitations on freedom of movement.

One of the *What if?* conversations was completely aniconic by choice of the two interlocutors, who wanted to experience the audience's capacity to imagine, mentally visualize words and concepts, without having to see them. In Bonapace's words: "we liked trying to understand how, by working on one's imagination and therefore listening skills, we can be aware of what kind of images we are going to produce when we listen carefully. In my opinion, it is something that we designers should have". With these premises Bonapace and Zedda contributed to *What If?* by asking what it would be like if the designer planned the space of relationship, dressed the networks that connect the body with other bodies, her/his own subjectivity with other subjectivities and therefore designed the worlds that engender these relationships? What would it be like if the designer designed the dress and the co-presence relationship? What would it be like if she/he designed animated clothes capable of relating to each other? What would it be like if she/he dressed the new perspectives between clothing and living? What would it be like if she/he designed inhabited clothes that inhabit? These are some of the questions that emerged during the What If? fourth conversation, which took place on July 2, 2020 and involved Denise Bonapace and Maria Paola Zedda.

Though speculative fashion is receiving increasing attention in the field of fashion design, the development of speculative approaches to fashion is still lacking, unlike what occurs in the field of design theory. Speculative fashion design examples include *Fashion People*, founded by Ricarda Bigolin (2014: 97) in 2012 as an inclusive model of a fashion house that investigated "how speculative and imaginative fashion products might encourage participation and social engagement"; and the workshop *Speculative Fashion: building new worlds through what we wear*, held on February 9, 2019 at No Nation Art Gallery and Tangential Unspace Lab in Chicago. On that occasion, the organizers Xiili Rose and Payal Kumar defined speculative fashion as "an active practice of reimagining our dress as a tool of radical expression, resistance, and future building". They presented their workshop an opportunity to "Collaboratively construct an imaginative garment that confronts issues facing our communities right now". Despite the small scale that its manifestations often have, speculative fashion could provide a great contribution in redirecting dystopian realities of unsustainable growth towards a better and more sustainable world.

Design theorists have introduced speculative methods that can constitute a useful point of reference also for fashion, whose theory is still lacking in this regard. Starting from a critical theory approach to design, Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby (2013) considered design as a tool to create ideas, stimulate "social dreaming", and speculate about possible futures. In their *A / B, A Manifesto* (2009) they significantly opposed a design "in the service of industry" to a design "in the service to society"; a design that has "fictional functions" to a design that has "functional fictions"; a design that "change the world to suit us" to a design that "change us to suit

the world". They shifted design away from the logic of profit to the space of reflection. Another example is the case of design theorist Daniela Rosner, who argued that what she called "critical fabulations" (the title of her book) are a speculative proposal for a better living. This case is interesting because it was used as a theoretical framework to analyse the case of Serpica Naro, a fictional designer created in 2005 by a group of activists in Milan who staged a number of interventions in the designer's name during Milan Fashion week (Vanni, 2016; 2020).

What If? was also an opportunity to verify the possibility of adapting speculative methodologies to fashion by stimulating debate amongst designers, educators, industry and the public about the social, cultural and ethical role of fashion. The need of collaborative communities was at the heart of the *What If?* conversation introduced to the students by Giuditta Tanzi, founder of the niche brand Garbage Core based on upcycling, and Guya Manzoni, an expert on critical fashion and social innovation. During this conversation, a student, Enrica Marangio, dealt with the theme of the creative community by raising a critical issue: "What are the big brands doing, while the small brands are moving in the right direction?". She also stressed how "starting a fashion brand by selling to the friends – as the social media suggest – is a fairy-tale that one cannot afford anymore". On the contrary, she pointed out, working in fashion necessary entails selection, funding, institutions and education as the bases for every revolutionary action". How can dreamy ideas be sustained?

Acknowledgements

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