

Closet Frugality: Reflexive Privation as Fashion(able) Identity

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Abstract

This presentation spotlights the closet as ethnographic object, a material culture site where we can explore and rework fashion identities and sustainability. Using methodologies of narrative voice and cultural theory, this work is informed by a sabbatical project of dispossession and voluntary simplicity, negotiating ‘enough’ and actively pursuing a life of less. Recognizing fashion is indeed a “barometer of our lives”, a closet’s contents can be a dynamic instrument measuring fashion and cultural change. Invoking downshifting and a marginally-filled fast-fashion closet, I read (the) wardrobe as abjection: separation from the fashionable but also a critically opportunity to rethink fashion sustainability. Closet frugality, the active process of owning less isn’t simply rejection of fashion consumption practices, but recognition that a closet’s interior micro-space provides critical reflections on macro-cultural fashion territories. This presentation seeks to contribute to sustainable fashion discourses by recognizing the agency of the closet; a dangerous space capable of undermining fashions consumptive practices. Rather than advocating detachment and strictly anti-consumption discourses, this work champions targeted purchasing to reorient fashion consumption priorities. Envisioning a diminished closet as normative practice, there are real lifestyle payoffs and opportunities to downshifting and trading fashion consumption for simpler expenditures. Shrinking the closet and developing a more tempered fashion ‘uniform’, provides an example of re-reading and rendering a different response to sustainability and fashion(able) paradigms. Attending to a cultural awareness of fashion identities and their rituals, this presentation is storied with a narrative of gearing down. Making the conscious choice for selective fashion privation, the closet housing our attire provides a creative space for critical reflection on fashion and sustainability.

Keywords: Closet; Downshifting; Identity; Reflexivity; Sustainability

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