

Emotionally durable fashion: Framing the creation of emotional value in fashion practices and discourses

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Abstract

In the 2017 report “Sustainable Clothing Guide” by not-for-profit organisation Wrap UK, emotional durability is listed both as a key factor in extending the lifespan of clothing and as a viable strategy in design for longevity. This understanding of emotional durability builds on design theorist Jonathan Chapman’s work, which proposes that we look at emotional durability as a set of product design strategies that aim to encourage and nourish long-term relationships between products and users (Chapman 2005, 2015). Research on use practices of clothing by Kate Fletcher (2011, 2017) and Sophie Woodward (2007, 2014), however, has shown that durability in fashion, rather than the intentional outcome of specific design strategies, is more often than not an accidental outcome that results from the everyday clothing practices of users. This paper therefore asks: How can we develop a productive framework for emotional durability in fashion that encompasses and accounts for both design strategies and everyday use practices? In order to do so, this paper analyses three case studies—each representing a different approach to fashion practice: design, DIY practices, and storytelling—through an understanding of fashion as ‘process of materialization’ (Woodward and Fisher 2014). By focusing on the creative strategies and processes adopted in the case studies, the paper will argue that, from a sustainability perspective, it is both desirable and productive to locate emotional durability across different forms of fashion practice and discourses. It will also highlight that, what these practices have in common is the materialisation of the emotional value of clothing, which may potentially challenge the market-driven understandings of value promoted by the fashion industry at large. The paper will then propose an understanding of emotionally durable fashion as an umbrella term that includes a range of practices and discourses that materialise the emotional value of clothing through time, thus opening up new perspectives on how we can productively understand emotional durability in contemporary fashion practices and discourses.

Keywords: Emotional durability, fashion practice, fashion discourse, emotional value

ISBN: 978-989-54263-0-0