# Inclusive Fashion—an Oxymoron—or a Possibility for Sustainable Fashion?

Otto von Busch

Published online: 29 Oct 2018.

Submit your article to this journal ⬀

View Crossmark data ⬀

# Inclusive Fashion—an Oxymoron—or a Possibility for Sustainable Fashion?

**Otto  von Busch**

Dr. Otto von Busch is associate professor in integrated design at Parsons School of Design, The New School (New York). In his research and practice, he explores how design and craft can be reverse engineered, hacked, and shared among many participants as a form of civic engagement. Many of his projects prototype how design can mobilize community capabilities through collaborative craft and social activism for social sustainability, peace, and ultimately justice.
vonbusco@newschool.edu

## Abstract

Cheap and accessible fashion from large retailers has, over the last decades, been thought of as a "democratic" form of consumerism. While embraced by masses of people with substantial environmental costs, many designers and researchers have questioned this mode of fast production and consumption. Designers try to create more sustainable models of consumption, often combined with ideas of other forms of consumer "inclusion" than cheap accessibility, yet they seldom define exactly what kind of inclusion is meant and what kind of desires they tap into. Using the example of nightclubs, this article asks some

fundamental questions about the relationship between inclusion and exclusion in fashion, exclusivity and ability, and how to help cultivate a deeper interrogation of the dynamics these poles.

KEYWORDS: democratic fashion, inclusion, sustainability, ethics, social design

## Introduction

> I think that what I often see is that people are frightened of fashion and that because they're scared of it, or it makes them feel insecure they put it down. On the whole, people that say demeaning things about our world. I think that's usually because they feel in some ways excluded or not part of the cool group. So as a result they just mock it. […] There is something about fashion that can make people really nervous. (Anna Wintour, from opening credits to *The September Issue*, 2009)

On trend, cheap, and accessible clothes, otherwise known as "fast" or "democratized" fashion, have over the last decades opened a new chapter of consumer habits. However, it is often the poor who get the blame for the unsustainable patterns of consumption that have long existed among the wealthy. Echoing fashion scholar Hazel Clark's (2008, 428) concern: is the "coupling of fashion, with its implications of the passage of time and change, with slowness, too much of an oxymoron?", this text aims to unpack the coupling between fashion, exclusivity and mechanisms of exclusion to determine if "inclusive" fashion is an oxymoron. The task is to interrogate the dynamics between imitative desires, social status, and the social dynamics of "in" and "out" as a demarcation not only of fashion but also of social positions.

Over the years, many models of fashion have been built on the concept of imitation as a mode of social mobility and inclusion, such as the classic works of Thorstein Veblen, Gabriel Tarde and Georg Simmel, and as Kawamura (2005, 20) posits, imitation remains a central trope in the analysis of fashion. However, the micro-regulation of status that operates on an inter-individual level has not been the prime topic of study. Or to put it more poignantly, little attention has been given to how mechanisms of exclusion, which guarantee the exclusivity and status of fashion, puts a human price on the process of social belonging, beyond more abstract categories such as class or culture. If we see how rivalry, exclusion, and rejection play a part in the demarcation between what is considered fashionable versus unfashionable, making clothes cheap and accessible does not necessarily mean wider inclusion, but rather a displacement of the process of rejection. Exclusivity is not something that can be shared. Rather, its very value stems from denying others the same experience, as already expounded on by Thomas (2007).

Thus the distinction between "in" and the "out" is no trivial demarcation between this versus last season, because it is as much a conceptual as social and spatial demarcation. Being "out" does not only connote that the garments are "out" of the trend or store, but bodies wearing these garments are also left out, that is, being rejected and excluded from the in-group. The demarcation between "in" and "out" comes at a social cost, the cost of exclusion; people and bodies are rejected along with the rejected style.

Fashion plays a dynamic role in this everyday process. The arbitrariness of the symbolic distinctions helps socially dominant persons use fashion to always offer a target or excuse for possible rejection. Indeed, the ambiguous meanings and significations of dress act as a perfect alibi for such rejections and violence as the "shallowness" of fashion makes it much harder for the victim to point towards the transgression, mitigate the damage or retaliate. A vague distinction such as "proper dress" is always in favor of the nightclub "bouncer," and it is the mean girls who decide what look is "right" in the schoolyard, not unlike the movie Mean Girls (2004). Esthetic distinctions like these feed the continuous hunt for inclusion through consumption that remains a challenge for sustainable and ethical fashion practices.

If inclusion and exclusion remain central tropes in the notion of fashion, fashion designers must approach this social dynamic in ways that support both sustainable consumption and inclusive self-worth. This affects especially designerly endeavors of social sustainability, as these often argue for wider inclusion and participation. Typical examples of projects range from craft-engagements, more generous silhouettes and sizing, and emotional investment in garments, as well a community-based participation in design processes. As more and more designers seek to address sustainability through social means, the social tensions at the heart of fashion need to be better understood. To make something "inclusive" may also displace and exclude others. There are still losers in win–win scenarios. Someone's utopia is another's dystopia.

Designers must start asking questions concerning how their design process addresses basic social functions in fashion; who are included and does this engagement also exclude others? Does working with one community displace the agency of another? Thus the concept of "inclusion" in fashion must be put into scrutiny to ask deeper questions on sustainability, that is, "what boundaries are perpetuated when we strive to sustain fashion?"

## Inclusion/Exclusion: The Paradox of Democratic Consumerism

Fashion is per definition social and it plays an important role in social stratification. While there are many definitions of fashion, in this text, I go by the esthetic demarcation that fashion journalist Pagold (2000, 8) describes as, "to dress like everyone else, but before everyone else." This

idea overlaps with Bourdieu's claim that, "Fashion is the latest fashion, the latest difference" Bourdieu (1993, 135) a position also supported by Barthes (1983). Merged with the ideology of meritocracy, so important in liberal capitalism, fashion ties into the idea of the individual who can forge his or her own luck; "because I'm worth it!" as the famous L'Oreal advertising slogan goes. Inclusion into the group of winners is the social in-formation, the "difference that makes a difference," to paraphrase Bateson (1972). As in all competition, it is the little difference between winning and losing.

Thus, as highlighted above by both Pagold and Bourdieu, the very concept of fashion signifies a tension between contradictory forces: conformity as well as difference, inclusion as well as exclusion. Yet, fashion as a concept somehow bridges and integrates them with a sense of promise and a possibility of metamorphosis. As Wilson (2004) argues, fashion is in this sense a form of magic; abstract and romantic, yet still very real and dangerous. And as magic, it can also have socially adverse consequences.

In one of his texts on fashion, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2010) notes that fashion is in itself a "perpetuum mobile" driven by our desires for differentiation and uniformity but also by the socio-economic competition producing losers and winners. In this culture, you are only worth as much as the value you manifest, and to the subject, doing well in the social game is not defined by progress but by avoidance of failure, in "the avoidance of being excluded." (Bauman 2010, 59) As Bauman has it, having a passion for fashion is a drive propelled by continuous anxiety, a fear of being excluded, ignored, forgotten, or being a "loser." Even under an esthetic meritocracy, social position is more a zero-sum game than we like to think, as most positions at the top are already occupied. Also, and as economist Hirsch (1976) points out, even in progressive social dynamics where performance is rewarded, positions at the top keep escaping us because of their social scarcity and the continuous raising of the standards for inclusion, that is, for every "in" there is an "out."

The last decades' rise of cheap and accessible "democratic" fashion does little to change this dynamic. Though mass-market "fast" fashion, as well as the proliferation of copies, has made more goods available to a wider basis of consumers, especially in the consumer economies in the West, the very workings of accessibility intensify positional competition. The "democratization" of fashion through cheap retailers such as H&M, Zara, and Forever 21, may have made symbolic goods more widely available to certain groups of consumers, but the proliferation of such goods has not opened new interfaces for social mobility or avenues towards self-realization or autonomy beyond the consumer choices themselves. More and more identity production is squeezed through the funnel of positional goods, where "voting with one's dollars" is framed as the main form of being, freedom and expression, and where

consumers "are, simultaneously, promoters of commodities and the commodities they promote" (Bauman 2007, 6). It is an amalgamation in resonance with Stiegler's (2013) notion of how consumerism makes desire indistinguishable from labor as a "pharmacology of the spirit," that is, simultaneously both cure and poison; what was going to liberate us has made us addicted.

Jean-Paul Sartre also highlights the competitive and fragmenting aspect of democracy, or how the isolated act of voting, rather than wide public participation in collective governing, comes to define how citizens vote. In his essay "Elections: A trap for fools", Sartre notices, in the historical development of democracy, that "the vote had been given not to men but to their real estate, to bourgeois property, which could only vote for itself." (Sartre 1977, 198) Under the slogan of bringing citizens together, instead the ballot further isolated voters from each other, as "all the voters were property owners and thus already isolated by their land, which closed around them and with its physical impenetrability kept out everything, including people" (198). As Sartre states, this dynamic shape a democracy based on the values of enclosed property, of individual cantonment, fortification and delineation, rather than a politics of common values and support of the weak, or those without property. This development can be seen as analogous to that of a "democratic fashion," which is all about individualization (cloned, or "serialized" as Sartre would call it), under the banner of property-centered equality where everyone is free to shape and express their identity through mix-and-match of positional goods, while simultaneously excluded from the decision-making process of who sets the values of these expressions. Indeed, having an attractive identity under the reign of fashion is expensive, especially as goods are seemingly cheap and accessible, and "everyone" has access to these goods, yet individual authorship is beyond the reach of the subject's own agency. As cultural critic Patel (2009, 146) observes, "Economy is about choices. But it is never said who gets to make them."

Philosopher Roberto Esposito (2010) argues consumerism is an extension of the modern obsession with individual immunity at the price of loyalty and community. As part of the modern project, we consume to become independent, autonomous, and immune to others so we owe nothing to anyone; we have no commitments other than to our own personal project. Such cantonment becomes a betrayal of shared community as everyone becomes a rival to the other. In a similar vein, cultural theorist Byung-Chul Han (2015) touches upon this fragmentary and rivalistic aspect of a consumer democracy. Han argues that the subject has today become an identity entrepreneur in continuous push to perform and achieve increasingly more, where the very being of subjecthood has been modified to become a project. To emphasize: the experience of being as an individual in society is no longer that of a controlled or contained *subject* but of a deal-making and continuously promotional

achiever, a *project* (Han 2015, 46). In this current form of social exist-
ence, I am a productive consumer continuously performing, competing,
accomplishing, and broadcasting my achievements. This cannot least
seen in fashion blogs and social media (Rocamora 2011). The very
notion of being a "prosumer" means I need to be ever more productive,
and I cannot be true to myself if I do not achieve to continuously re-cre-
ate myself as an achiever. My sense of self-worth is dependent on my
auto-exploitative entrepreneurship of the self, and as Italian cultural the-
orist Franco Berardi (2009) would have it, the subject has put the "soul
at work." We are in constant rivalry with our peers under the reign of
the attention economy, and with its new norms of competitive attention
resulting in an always-on character of our contemporary world (Crary
2013). I need to remake myself in order to not fall out of favor with my
peers and even myself. Under such regime, the question, "do I look
attractive enough?" easily becomes replaced with new rivalist achieve-
ments on the frontiers of the latest distinction; "do I look sustainable
enough?" or "am I ethical enough?" as subjects/projects compete to stay
on top of social market positions. As Bauman sums it up in the realm of
dress, I need to keep consuming to keep up my position; "If you do not
wish to sink, keep surfing" (Bauman 2010, 59)

The competition also takes place at certain events and milieus that
highlight and intensify this dynamic. The nightclub as an example of a
"democratic" space, itself a social market place where each subject sells
itself as "project," and also a place where fashion is enacted in an every-
day sense. The club appears as a meritocratic venue, with no apparent
despot controlling or setting a direct esthetic standard, yet still protocols
guide and delineate boundaries of control. The space signals the ideas
that visitors can achieve inclusion (even if we all know a nightclub is no
charity, it's revenue keeps it going), yet its status is dependent on the
upholding of its curated clientele. This dynamic is something we will
examine closer as it also reflects some of the hopes and dreams of inclu-
sion and exclusion enacted through fashion.

## The Nightclub as a Case of Dressing "In" and "Out"

A typical example of the usage of the "shallow" qualities of dress is the
everyday example of dressing up for a night out, going to a nightclub.
Such instances do not necessarily involve a whole ritual of dressing into
a whole new role (such as weddings or other ceremonies where many
participants enact specific social roles). Instead, the night out specifies a
typical social interface, with its ambivalence and masquerade-like play
(Tseëlon 2001). In cases like these, fashion is both a surface for enacting
attraction, but becomes also a perfect alibi for the relational regulation
that executes the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion at the nightclub
door ("no sneakers" or "formal dress" or where a visitor is judged not
having "put the right effort" in dressing the part). The door may have

no formal lock or standard, yet it is still ruled by a nameless protocol, and even this is selectively applied.

A typical example of this mechanic is the "bouncer" at a nightclub door who upholds the dress code of "no sneakers tonight" but enforces the rule explicitly against certain guests, such as people of color or people looking poor. This occasion may be one of the most defining sorting experiences of people according to appearance and dress in everyday experience. The possible rejection of entry is the demarcation of a boundary against that person: a symbolic wall has been erected between "in" and "out"—and even if the victim would change outfit and try to blend in, the signal of submission may only work temporarily (if at all).

The controversial issue of nightclub entry is a commonly discussed topic in the popular press, not least as it seems so arbitrary to the people seeking entry to a venue. As noted by London's *Evening Standard,* pickers are the "hawk-eyed auditors, checking guests at the door to ensure each one fits the image and the attitude of the establishment they defend" (Gardner et al. 2011). Toni Tambourine, a picker at many London venues, tells how the sorting of guests is a key component in getting the right crowd and setting the overall mood of a nightclub.

> The very presence of a door picker shows that whoever is running the club is attempting to create a little universe for themselves, and excluding people actually brings everyone else closer. The clue is in the name: a "club" is essentially a collection of like-minded people to which you want to belong. (Tambourine 2015)

The distinction of "in" and "out" of the club is, as Tambourine highlights, a spatial as well as social marker, with the picker having total power of who has access and who does not to the social universe of the club. The value of belonging increases with the process of exclusion. However, as Onibada and Pears (2015) notices, refusing entry to people with hoodies and trainers strikes disproportionally against certain groups of people, especially when systematically enforced (through police support) against venues playing hip-hop and grime or music that attract black crowds. It is the very fluidity of door policies that give venues the right to refuse entry to whomever they please. Similarly, Muir (2015) points out how the racism at nightclub doors is common but also complex in terms of social dynamics as the bouncer often comes from underprivileged groups.

As a person tries to enter, the bouncer or picker will highlight a dress code violation that becomes an excuse for exclusion. Usually, the garment in question is ambiguous and some "right" clients may enter with similar category of items, for example, their sneaker-branded shoes do not count as sneakers. The item turns into a signifier of stigma and discretization, depending on the social setting and categories of distinction (Goffman 1963). The symbolic power of the nightclub selection may

also become a taken-for-granted culture and thereby appear "natural" to the habitually included group (Bourdieu 1987, 1990). This undetected type of social sorting becomes part of the "stigma power" of the institution, which in turn may correspond widely with other types of systemic social prejudice such as racism or classism (Link and Phelan 2014). Such processes of stigmatization may serve many social purposes, such as defining in-versus out-groups (Tajfel and Turner 2001), as well as facilitating social exchange of partners and cooperative groups (Kurzban and Leary 2001).

In the example of the nightclub, "in" and "out" work as both a spatial demarcation and social category, that is, to be "in" means to have access to the right people. Here, Tambourine would agree with Wintour's opening quote, which also points towards the Latin root of *factiō,* "a making," apparent in fashion, as it is also related to the word "faction," the differentiation between groups and separation of individuals. The boundary the victim tries to cross is a social as much as spatial line; "no sneakers tonight" is equivalent to "you can't sit with us" which also means "you will never be one of us." Similarly, items that may help gain entry in an adjacent setting may become stigma or target for other types of abuse. A gang symbol which gains respect in one area may be a target in the next block, or revealing clothing which may be just right for a certain setting may make the wearer a target for catcalling on the way home, or in some cases, even be seen as a provocation and excuse for violence (Robson 2013, 73f). Clothing thus works simultaneously as mark and justification for both excluding and scapegoating the victim, making sure he or she takes the blame for the distinctive boundary.

## The Dynamics of Status and Exclusion

When it comes to group dynamics, the example of the club is not far-fetched, but manifests common social phenomena that also overlap well with how fashion is enacted between peers as desire and social rivalry. It is common to think a person with many friendship connections and at the center of a large network has high status. But as sociologist Robert Faris (2012) argues, this is not true. While a popular and well-connected person may have a "connective status," this does not translate into high status or being part of an elite. High status is not about connecting to many people, but to the *right people.* That is, a person with high status has connections across social barriers and keeps these bridges open only to a few carefully curated relationships. Status is thus no abstract social category but a continuous *practice,* as status needs to be recreated and upheld. As Faris emphasizes, "elite status is maintained through selectivity, not connectivity, and by denying rather than accumulating friendships [ … ] rejecting supplicants may increase the attractiveness of the exclusionary group." (Faris 2012, 1211) Thus rejection of others must, per definition, be central practice in maintaining exclusive

status, and as noted in the case of the bouncers, the status for a popular club must be recreated over and over, night after night. As esthetic hierarchies are fluid, especially in a time with an abundance of copies and options for entertainment, there is a continuous need to uphold attraction, barriers and order. Status is upheld through denial and exclusion rather than accommodation.

From Girard's (1965) perspective, desires are not emanating from an autonomous ego, neither do we simply desire others to desire us. Rather, we borrow our desires from others, always imitating peers we admire. Desire is not an individual lack, but provoked and amplified by the desires from those surrounding us, that is, desire is always part of a triangular relationship or rivalry, between two subjects and an object. This relation is structuring, but also structured by, violence, as desire in this social dynamic becomes a zero-sum game of prestige won by acquiring the collectively desired object. Girard (1991) highlights this as a common theme in Shakespeare's dramas where the protagonist only fully realizes his love for the object as a rival starts competing about her love, resulting in envy, antagonism, duels and eventual death. Desire does not "trickle down" in a linear way, but is produced selectively and always through rivalry and competition. Desire and aggression acts in this triangular shape, much like the classic love triangle in many forms of historical and popular narratives: it is always competitive between rivaling lovers and thrives on vanity and envy.

As Girard (1987) emphasizes, this dynamic, by necessity, turns into an escalation of rivalry that results in aggression not only between subjects, but also upon innocent bystanders who become scapegoats for the social drama between rivals. As Girard posits, mimetics are part of any social relationship, but our modern times are wrapped in the delusion of "negative imitation" where subjects try to define a form of unique individuality by repeatedly denying their mimetic desires, and the imitative component becomes to "be different," yet in ways which still mimic one's models (Girard 1965, 100). Similarly, competition may not only seek the accumulation of goods but mimicry can also be the imitative abstinence, as in the case of anorexia as a "disease of desire" (Girard 2013). In such cases, fads and fashions act upon our bodies as esthetic rivalries where, just like we compete in consumption, we compete in hunger and pleasure. Girard's position resonates well with research on bullying and social stigmatization, such as Juvonen and Graham (2014) highlighting of the relation between aggression and high social status: the eloquent use of social rejection makes the perpetuator gain social esteem, a view also supported in other studies (Adler and Peter 1998; Jennifer and Hopmeyer 1998), and very much in resonance with Faris (2012) idea of "reputational aggression" that sustains elite status.

But rejection may not simply be enough to produce status. Following Girard's (1965, 1987) model, a mimetic crisis increases social friction and a stigmatization through violence is necessary: to find a scapegoat.

It is by the explicit rejection, aggression and eventual (social) sacrifice of the innocent scapegoat the antagonism between rivaling peers can be defused. The sacrifice of the scapegoat reconfirms the unity between two rivaling parts, while rejecting the scapegoat from the community. The scapegoating is not a byproduct of the rivalry but a necessary component in the dynamic of the mimetic desire. As the bouncer Tony Tambourine argued earlier, "excluding people actually brings everyone else closer," and Girard would posit that scapegoating the victim, to make them blame themselves, is inherent to the pleasures of desire.

The nightclub elucidates the social dynamics of dressing up for inclusion, but also of being seen as "right" for the desired venue and crowd. As pointed out by Arntzen's (2015) fashion is always "right," thus the distinction of "in" makes the wearer also "worth it," while others are not. In his early writings on fashion, Simmel (1957) similarly defines fashion by the sartorial demarcations between "us" and "them." While some esthetic categories, which pick the "in" from the "out", may seem arbitrary, the consequences of these decisions are not. Instead they become the motivational foundations for wider exclusion and rejection where fashion plays into a social culture of "fashion supremacy" where those who are "in" are, per definition, seen as meritocratic elite (von Busch 2014). The people who gain entrance are considered "worth it," even if, as for adolescents, their primary meritocratic achievement is their parents' socio-economic position, or who their friends are. The exclusion, on the other hand, is not simply a temporary glitch. As noted by Eisenberger et al. (2003), rejection not only hurts emotionally, but social pain such as rejection activates the same neural circuitry that causes us to feel physical pain. Indeed, social pain teaches us as deep lessons as physical pain, but also produces lifelong lasting social scars (Walser deLara 2016).

In the case of the nightclub door, the ambivalent use of "in" and "out" in dress becomes regulated through literal entrance or exclusion to the space. In such case where clothes become the skin of the scapegoat the judgment of dress the very interface for inclusion and exclusion. In a space that is considered neutral (class, race, or titles should not matter, yet still do) the judgment is used to create status of the venue and to heighten status differentiation, thus boasting about entry becomes an intensification of difference where there may have been little difference at the beginning of the evening. For example, a group of peers may go out one night, starting as equals, but X got into the prestigious club, while others did not, and making X the more respected of the peers. The social sorting of the nights spatial "ins" and "outs" reflects on the status between the peers in the group.

As noted above, part of the nightclub's prestige comes from its exclusionary status, and how this is fueled by envy from the people excluded; the people who desire to mimic the elite, but who have been rejected entry. As Girard notices, "all envy is mimetic, but not all mimetic desire

is envious. Envy suggests a single static phenomenon, not the prodigious matrix of forms" where the subject forgets the object that once caused the envy (Girard 1991, 18). Thus, rejected people may not explicitly say they desire to be with the people in the club, but argue that it is about the music, drinks, mood, or other qualities of the club, and thus dodge making explicit the target of their envious desires. As Girard notices, accepting one's envy always undermines one's own sense of authenticity and self-esteem as one accepts being subjugated to mimicking one's model. That is, even if gripped by an emotion of resentment, envy is still a way to look upwards at one's model, implicitly downgrading one's own achievements. In this dynamic and socially emergent form, Girard's envy differs from that of Schoeck (1969), who sees envy as much more intrinsic or part of an individual's psychological disposition (cf. Dumouchel 2014). The case of exclusion at the doors of the nightclub opens similar dynamics, as we *desire* to come into the club, we also desire the *boundary to be there,* as it is the boundary of exclusion that demarcates the value of the achievement of winning entry. It thus reso-nates well with Christopher Breward's observation that "Fashion can be about confirmation, of self and others. But it is also about anxiety, ambiguity and worry." (Breward 2016, xix)

### Discussion: Sustainable Inclusion or Exclusion in Fashion?

The club is a magnet of desire, it is aspirational, and in resonance with Han's argument earlier, it is a space of achievement and performance. It is important to be seen entering and, on the other hand, a disgrace being rejected (one's esthetic achievements are deemed unworthy.) Thus, both the bouncer and the audience lining up to the club are participating in the value of the experience. The audience not only tacitly supports the bouncer in the sorting but also makes sure the victim experiences a situation where the victim feels he or she "deserved" refusal as he or she was clearly "not worth it."

Drawing a parallel between the nightclub and the everyday use of fashion raises some important issues around ethics and sustainability in everyday fashion. While haute couture is per definition exclusive, the very concept of fashion raises concerns about what kind of social dynamics are perpetuated under its guise—however "democratic" its consumption may appear. While consumers of haute couture are seldom accused of buying too much or being engaged in unsustainable con-sumption habits, even if their walk-in wardrobes are stuffed to the rim with exclusive garments, the very urgency of sustainable fashion hap-pens when it is poor people who get access to consumerism. It is when fashion becomes "democratic," cheap accessible and potentially inclu-sive that the complaints begin. It thus becomes easy to blame poor con-sumers for being unsustainable and also responsible for the plight of the poor working conditions overseas, while neglecting the larger systemic

issues around the distribution of agency and value throughout the fashion economy. So far, the discourse around sustainable fashion often lacks a socio-political perspective on who and what kinds of consumerism should be sustained and for which social groups.

These dynamics have explicit implications that affect ideas of social sustainability in the realm of dress. First, it is not certain that "classic" garments, with a slower esthetic metabolism, can avoid the dynamics of rejection as other trends keep evolving. Yes, a person can have a nice "little black dress" but last season's cut or wear and tear may still set the victim aside as a target for exclusion. Second, when it comes to repairs and craft-based care, who and where will users wear those home-knitted and artfully repaired garments? Can sustainable garments compete in the reputational struggles of who is in or not, or will explicitly sustainable looks come at a price of exclusion, especially in a culture which increasingly emphasizes competitive achievement and performance? Can visible mending ever be seen as acceptable for "professional dress" at the aspirational workplace or the prestigious nightclub? These are social and esthetic issues, but take on very real boundaries: they are boundaries between status and exclusion that need to be taken seriously by fashion designers as well as users.

The central issue is still: how can designers make sure the issues around sustainable fashion do not become another form of exclusion (in price, time investment, cultural signification, or ethical elitism)? If the fashion metabolism is to be slowed down, and users are to buy fewer, more expensive, sustainable garments, designers must think of new models of payment and service for such garments. Sustainable fashion must be accessible to the poor, the people who most urgently need to dress for social mobility. Not unlike payment plans for cars such models could also be supported by lifelong service plans as product service systems.

As suggested by Harman (1985) fashion can offer room for acceptable deviance, to belong "just enough" not to be excluded. However, several studies have shown how fashion is not only an arena for seduction and celebration, but as much a representation of conflict and status anxiety (cf. Barnard 1996; Arnold 1999, 2001).

Thus, the dilemma of inclusion and exclusion still takes front row; if it is inclusive, is it still desirable as distinction? Does it help you gain entry to the spatially desired place among the in-group in the everyday esthetic struggles of what Faris and Felmlee (2014) call "social combat?"

The ethics of inclusion thus faces a challenge in the realm of fashion, not least if the just distribution of goods devalues the properties shared in the first place. That is, are the celebrated values of inclusion in fashion an oxymoron? Designers and scholars must examine the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion if sustainable fashion is to address the everyday dynamics of wearing and using fashion. Who can wear the recycled

clothes and still feel they advance on the status ladder? Who can wear the "hacked" or recycled garments, the visible mending and deconstructed knits and still gain entry to new social spheres? If we acknowledge fashion is a social phenomenon, we must ask if the bouncer will know the memories and sentimental values of my inherited garments, and can these values help me gain entrance to the prestigious arenas of achievement? Can the emotionally durable designs still engage me in the magic of metamorphosis for another night out, and make me feel fresh enough to dare another attempt to seduce my desired one? Do those hacked, open source garments give me access to the peer groups I envy?

It seems sustainable and inclusive approaches to fashion always risk becoming second-rate tools for social combat, insufficient props in our struggle for social achievement, or at least they play with other dynamics than the aspirational modes of "in" versus "out." And the standard must be set higher than merely seeking to have more fashion garments in more sizes and proportions; we may need to make sure this process also opens new doors and venues for the pleasures of inclusion, not merely raise the baseline for what is considered "acceptable" to include more people into the competition to achieve.

Indeed, how do we make sure that when designers help make more people "fashion-able" that this ability to engage with fashion is not modeled after the existing power dynamics, introducing new norms of performance that in turn undermine the possibility for freedom? This is a paradox apparent in my own earlier work (von Busch 2008), which I need to address more in the future, that is, a fashion-ability modeled after the current dynamics of rivalist prestige risks reproducing the same normative fashion-ableism that a consumer buys when purchasing fashionable goods. Similarly, cultivating a narrow sense of fashion-ability too closely modeled on an elitist system risks celebrating only those with the right bodies and abilities to pull off that homemade look. How "able" can a user be under a system of supremacy without reproducing the same system and turning peers against each other as rivals for new distinctions? In every case, "inclusion" may still reproduce an ideology of superiority against those excluded from a new ability. Future research will have to explore if this impacts the definitions and enactments of both fashion and social sustainability at large.

The tension between inclusion and exclusion may be inherent in the allure of fashion, and as Arntzen (2015) argues, the feeling of being better than others, of being "right" and "worth it" (while others are not) is perhaps a social prize intrinsic to fashion as a social phenomenon. If we accept this and its potential abuse in the form of rejection, bullying and scapegoating, designers may need to think more about how such pleasures can be made more accessible to those who may need it the most. If designers want to address the issue of inclusion, perhaps making new garments, however, accessible and "democratic" they may be, is not the answer. Rather, designers need to find other ways to use clothing to

address the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, self-worth and social status. Fashion designers could open other forms of interactions with dress, from skill-building workshops and education, to more therapy-like settings, if not outright activism to take on the social issues in more direct ways.

If, as design theorist Vilem Flusser (1999) argues, design is a form of leverage that has the potential to make the user stronger, we must also ask how fashion may work more explicitly as a form of social leverage and for whom this leverage is offered. Designers must grasp how fashion leverage can be made accessible to the weak and poor, rather than to those who are already at the top of the social game, who are already "right" and "worthy" in the eyes of society. Commodity-based inclusion bought through fashion may be an oxymoron, but the ethical distribution of leverage can still be a goal for a sustainable fashion practice. If inclusion is to have any success it may need more explicit strategic aims; inclusion for whom, and for what arena?

As Wintour mentions in the opening quote, fashion makes a lot of people nervous and fearful of exclusion. If fashion is to be socially sustainable, designers must find ways to address this dynamic. Even if this means designers must unpack more realist and Machiavellian dynamics at the basis of fashion, fashion must not stay trapped in a zero-sum game. Currently, it seems that for every "in" there needs to be an "out;" for every winner a loser. But designers can experiment with wider communicative interfaces between peers, more dynamic scales of prestige, more intense sensations and experiences, and perhaps decouple fashion from both consumerism and materialism; to expand the reality of fashion. As author LeGuin (2014) argues in her speech at the 2014 National Book Award, we must strive to be "realists of a larger reality." For fashion this could mean to strive beyond the politics of inter-personal power, to build towards more utopian forms of sustainable fashion, not merely patching up the existing mode. Perhaps we all, together, can find models of fashion that supports a *more meaningful freedom*.

## References

Adler, Patricia and Peter Adler. 1998. *Peer Power: Preadolescent Culture and Identity*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Arnold, Rebecca. 1999. "Heroin Chic." *Fashion Theory* 3 (3): 279–296.

Arnold, R. 2001. *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality In The Twentieth Century*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Arntzen, Mari Grinde. 2015. *Dress Code: The Naked Truth About Fashion*. London: Reaktion.

Barthes, Roland. 1983. *The Fashion System*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bateson, Gregory. 1972. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. New York: Ballantine.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 2007. *Consuming Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press

Bauman, Zygmunt. 2010. "Perpetuum Mobile." *Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty* 1 (1): 55–63.

Berardi, Franco. 2009. *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1987. "What Makes A Social Class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups." *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 32: 1–18.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1993. "Haute Couture and Haute Culture". In *Sociology in Question*, edited by Pierre Bourdieu, 132–138. London: Sage.

Breward, Christopher. 2016. "Foreword." In *Fashion Studies: Research Methods, Sites, And Practices*, edited by Heike Jenss, xvii–xx. London: Bloomsbury.

von Busch, Otto. 2008. *Fashion-able: Hacktivism and Engaged Fashion Design*. Gothenburg: ArtMonitor.

von Busch, Otto. 2014. "'A Suit, of His Own Earning': Fashion Supremacy and Sustainable Fashion Activism." In *The Routledge Handbook of Sustainability and Fashion*, edited by Fletcher Kate and Tham Mathilda, 275–282. London: Routledge.

Clark, Hazel. 2008. "Slow + Fashion—an Oxymoron—or a Promise for the Future … ?". *Fashion Theory* 12 (4): 427–446.

Crary, Jonathan. 2013. *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*. New York: Verso.

Dumouchel, Paul. 2014. "A Mimetic Rereading of Helmut Schoeck's Envy: A Theory of Social Behaviour." In *The Ambivalence of Scarcity and Other Essays*, edited by Paul Dumouchel, 109–126. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

Eisenberger, Naomi I., Matthew D. Lieberman, and Kipling D. Williams. 2003. "Does Rejection Hurt? An fMRI Study of Social Exclusion." *Science* 302 (5643): 290–292.

Esposito, Roberto. 2010. *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Faris, Robert. 2012. "Aggression, Exclusivity, and Status Attainment in Interpersonal Networks." *Social Forces* 90 (4): 1207–1235.

Faris, Robert and Diane Felmlee. 2014. "Casualties of Social Combat: School Networks of Peer Victimization and Their Consequences," *American Sociological Review* 79 (2): 228–257.

Flusser, Vilém. 1999. *The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design*. London: Reaktion.

Gardner, Jasmine, Dolly Alderton and Connie Allfrey. 2011. "Door Wars: How to Get Beyond the Velvet Rope at London's Top Clubs." *Evening Standard*, March 17. https://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/

door-wars-how-to-get-beyond-the-velvet-rope-at-londons-top-clubs-6578523.html.

Girard, René. 1965. *Desire, Deceit, and the Novel*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Girard, René. 1987. *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Girard, René. 1991. *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Girard, René. 2013. *Anorexia and Mimetic Desire*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood: Prentice-Hall.

Han, Byung-Chul. 2015. *The Burnout Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Harman, Lesley. 1985. "Acceptable Deviance as Social Control: The Cases of Fashion and Slang." *Deviant Behaviour* 6: 1–15.

Hirsch, Fred. 1976. *The Social Limits of Growth*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Jennifer, Parkhurst and Andrea Hopmeyer. 1998. "Sociometric Popularity and Peer-Perceived Popularity: Two Distinct Dimensions of Peer Status." *Journal of Early Adolescence* 18: 125–144.

Juvonen, Jaana and Sandra Graham. 2014. "Bullying in Schools: The Power of Bullies and the Plight of Victims." *Annual Review of Psychology* 65: 159–185.

Kawamura, Yuniya. 2005. *Fashionology*. Oxford: Berg.

Kurzban, Robert and Mark Leary. 2001. "Evolutionary Origins of Stigmatization: The Functions of Social Exclusion." *Psychological Bulletin* 127 (2): 187–208.

LeGuin, Ursula. 2014. Speech at the 65th National Book Awards on November 19, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Et9Nf-rsALk

Link, Bruce and Jo Phelan. 2014. "Stigma Power." *Social Science Medicine* 103 (103): 24–32.

Mean Girls. 2004. Comedy, directed by Mark Waters, Produced by M.G. Films/Broadway Video, United States.

Muir, Hugh. 2015. "The Truth about 'Racist' Nightclub Owners is a Complex One." *The Guardian* July 19.

Onibada, Ade and Elizabeth E. Pears. 2015. "No Hoods, No Trainers…No Black People?" *The Voice*, June 13. http://www.voice-online.co.uk/article/no-hoods-no-trainers…no-black-people.

Pagold, Suzanne. 2000. *De Långas Sammansvärjning*. Stockholm: Bonniers

Patel, Raj. 2009. *The Value of Nothing: How To Reshape Market Society And Redefine Democracy*. New York: Picador.

Robson, Ruthann. 2013. *Dressing Constitutionally: Hierarchy, Sexuality, and Democracy from our Hairstyles to our Shoes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rocamora, Agnes. 2011. "Personal Fashion Blogs: Screens and Mirrors in Digital Self-Portraits." *Fashion Theory* 15 (4): 407–424.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1977. "Elections: A Trap for Fools." In *Life/Situations: Essays Written and Spoken*, edited by Jean-Paul Sartre. New York: Pantheon.

Schoeck, Helmut. 1969. *Envy: A Theory of Social Behaviour*. Boston: Liberty Press.

Simmel, Georg. 1957. "Fashion." *American Journal of Sociology* 62 (6): 541–558.

Stiegler, Bernard. 2013. *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology*. Cambridge: Polity.

Tajfel, Henri and John Turner. 2001. "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict." In *Key Readings in Social Psychology. Intergroup Relations: Essential Readings*, edited by M. A. Hogg and D. Abrams, 94–109. New York: Psychology Press.

Tambourine, Tony. 2015. "Bring Back the Door Pickers." *MixMag*, November 30. http://mixmag.net/feature/bring-back-door-pickers/.

Thomas, Dana. 2007. *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Luster*. New York: Penguin Press.

Tseëlon, Efrat. 2001. *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on Gender, Sexuality and Marginality*, London: Routledge.

Walser deLara, Ellen. 2016. *Bullying Scars: The Impact on Adult Life and Relationships*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wilson, Elizabeth. 2004. "Magic Fashion." *Fashion Theory* 8 (4): 375–385.