THE FASHION INDUSTRY AS A SLIPPERY DISCURSIVE SITE: TRACING THE LINES OF FLIGHT BETWEEN PROBLEM AND INTERVENTION

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Communication in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Chapel Hill
2016

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ABSTRACT

Nadia K. Dawisha: The Fashion Industry as a Slippery Discursive Site: Tracing the Lines of Flight Between Problem and Intervention (Under the direction of Dr. Patricia Parker)

At the intersection of the glamorous façade of designer runway shows, such as those in Paris, Milan and New York, and the cheap prices at the local Walmart and Target, is the complicated, somewhat insidious “business” of the fashion industry. It is complicated because it both exploits and empowers, sometimes through the very same practices; it is insidious because its most exploitative practices are often hidden, reproduced, and sustained through a consumer culture in which we are all in some ways complicit. Since fashion’s inception, people and institutions have employed a myriad of discursive strategies to ignore and even justify their complicity in exploitative labor, environmental degradation, and neo-colonial practices. This dissertation identifies and analyzes five predicaments of fashion while locating the multiple interventions that engage various discursive spaces in the fashion industry. Ultimately, the analysis of discursive strategies by creatives, workers, organizers, and bloggers reveals the existence of agile interventions that are as nuanced as the problem, and that can engage with disciplinary power in all these complicated places. By shining a light on these agile interventions that are employed by various actors in the industry, my hope is that this project will help to clarify these murky spaces and pave a way forward for change within the fashion industry and beyond.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first thank my advisor, Dr. Patricia Parker, whose infinite patience, wisdom, and support kept me grounded, focused and determined during my entire PhD process. Without her, I would never have started this project, nor would I have finished it. She has an intellect that is extraordinarily flexible, and a humanity that is both humble and kind. Her academic work, advocacy service, and leadership roles are awe-inspiring and have modeled for me the kind of scholar I can only hope to emulate.

I would like to thank Dr. Sarah Dempsey for helping direct the research on worker speaker tours in my first semester that laid the groundwork for this project; Dr. Michael Palm for his intuitive understanding of my interests in fashion and immaterial labor and encouraging me to pursue them in his course; Dr. Steve May for his courses on Foucault and CSR that helped to ground the theoretical underpinnings of this project; and Dr. Neringa Klumbyte, my external examiner, who gave generously of her time to read and make valuable comments on this project.

I would also like to thank Vilma Berg and Kimberly Yingling for their tremendous support they have given me during this entire PhD process – which has at times been daunting and exhausting. Knowing that they were there to advocate for me in the department when I had a problem or question helped to keep my confidence intact.

I would like to thank my beloved parents, whose loving support and intellectual guidance I will forever be indebted to; my brother Emile, whose humor helped infuse this process with some much-needed perspective; and my cousin Whitney, whose own
circuitous path to a successful post-law school career inspired me to be creative and flexible in my own journey.

There are so many friends whose infinite support and patience proves the legitimacy of the mantra “it takes a village.” Dr. Anne Whisnant, thank you for your incredible guidance in helping me forge my own, unique path in pursuing (and completing) my degree. Kathleen Morton, thank you for all of the time you spent helping me carve out my own little space in the blogosphere, which ultimately became an important part of this project. To my dear friends in my program whose pep talks, advice and laughter I will forever be grateful for: Janel Beckham, Cameron Ayres, Shannon Lerner, Wayne Rysavy, and Srinath Jayaram, you are amazing people and even better friends. To others who have supported me throughout this process: Deborah Bird, Carmela Mager, Andrew Nowosad, Martha Delafield and Suzanne Wolfe, thank you for keeping me healthy and grounded.

I would like to thank four academics (two of whom were also interviewed for this project) who demonstrated to me that my work could have relevancy beyond the ivory tower: Dr. Jessica Metcalfe, Dr. Adrienne Keene, Dr. Mimi Nguyen, and Dr. Minh-Ha T. Pham. Thank you for your brilliant academic (but accessible!) blogging that helped pave the path for mine.

Finally, to all of the amazing people who generously gave me their time and trust by allowing me to interview them, I owe you my deepest gratitude. Your work to transform the fashion industry is truly inspiring and this project would not have happened without your valuable insights that helped to shape both the intellectual underpinnings of this dissertation and my advocacy work as a community organizer.
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I. Introduction......................................................................................218
Chapter One
Introduction

I. A Problem of Intervention

I haven’t been in a Gap since I was sixteen. As a teenager growing up during the height of the anti-sweatshop movement in the late nineties, I became incensed reading stories about young people my age who were laboring in factories far away to make my clothes. As a sophomore in high school, I founded a chapter of Free the Children, a youth-centered organization started by a thirteen-year old Canadian, who wanted to fight child labor globally while encouraging civic engagement among young people. I became invested in changing my local and global community—organizing both hunger drives for at-risk children in Washington D.C. and petition campaigns demanding that global fashion brands eradicate child labor in their supply chains. After reading a story about how children were found sleeping on the roof of a Gap factory, I resolved to never buy a piece of clothing from Gap again. I have kept that promise.

Still, as a testament perhaps to the power of rationalization, I found myself shopping at cheap fast-fashion retailers – which exploded when I was a college student in the 2000s – without questioning their labor practices. “I am too poor to afford expensive, cute clothing, I have to shop here,” I would reassure myself as I left the store with my ‘haul.’ I shopped at thrift stores too, but again and again I frequented fast fashion retailers for a quick and cheap purchase, somehow convincing myself that by boycotting Gap, I had demonstrated commitment to the cause. It was easy for me to be less vigilant
in my commitment to the cause, as it was difficult to pursue anti-sweatshop advocacy at my conservative university where I would not have a community of other organizers to hold me accountable. While I made a documentary on behalf of the university staff that went on strike my senior year of college, it was challenging to stay engaged with labor issues and I too often found myself falling back into ‘blissful ignorance.’ Furthermore, the media attention on garment worker exploitation and even the more sensationalist topic of child labor began to fade into the background, as other more ‘trendy’ social justice issues (such as environmentalism) took its place. I was able to convince myself that if I didn’t hear about Forever 21 being implicated in neo-colonialist practices, such as forcing children to sleep on the factory roof, than surely it didn’t exist, right?

My personal trajectory tells part of the story of the complicated problem of intervention, both for consumers and activists, into the fashion industry’s most pressing issues, such as labor exploitation, environmental degradation, and neo-colonialism. After years of struggling to come to terms with my own complicity, something clicked and I was able to develop some clarity on my complex relationship with an industry I both loved and loathed. I came to realize that focusing on the Gap as this ‘sole oppressor’ was misguided, and that everyone is implicated in some way in the problems of global fashion. It was that ‘aha moment’ that eventually compelled me to write this dissertation, which argues that organizers need to draw from a multiplicity of interventions to engage the slippery and multifaceted injustices coursing through and

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1 Neo-colonialism is the practice of influencing a poorer country through the use of capitalism, globalization, and cultural imperialism in the lieu of direct military control (imperialism) or indirect political control (hegemony). (Sartre, 2001)
from the fashion industry. I hope that my work provides insights into the ways organizers in the fashion industry can advocate for a more just and equitable future.

II. Theoretical Framework: Theorizing Multiplicity as both Problem and Intervention

At the intersection of the glamorous façade of designer runway shows, such as those in Paris, Milan and New York, and the cheap prices at the local Walmart and Target, is the complicated, somewhat insidious “business” of the fashion industry. It is complicated because it both exploits and empowers, sometimes through the very same practices; it is insidious because its most exploitative practices are often hidden, reproduced, and sustained through a consumer culture in which we are all in some ways complicit. Fashion, in its most simple definition, is a “unique and specialized form of body adornment, dress and style.”\(^2\) It is often referred to as an art form, albeit a unique one, in that its accessibility allows even non-experts to comment.\(^3\) It is cyclical and ever-changing, often reflecting cultural shifts in larger society. Furthermore, fashion’s reach, and the accompanying problems, seems ubiquitous. There is perhaps no industry that represents a global, transnational project more so than the fashion industry. It stretches across multiple nations, means of labor, and forms of presentation. In fact, beginning with the Silk Road,\(^4\) the clothing industry was among the first to become transnational,

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\(^2\) (Polhemus, Fashion & Anti-Fashion, 2011, 18)

\(^3\) (Mendes & de la Haye, 2010, 7)

\(^4\) The development of silk textile arts in China dates to 3000 B.C. By the Han dynasty in the 3rd century AD, silk manufacture and export, including to the West, had already become a major part of the Chinese economy. Among the ancient Greeks, the Chinese were known as Seres, or people of ser, meaning silk. The demand for textiles from China was so great in Renaissance Italy that explorers such
and it is the most globally dispersed when it comes to its structures of production, both material and symbolic. Yet, as will be discussed further in chapter two, fashion, as a massive global industry, is really a product of modernity. Prior to the nineteenth century most clothing was custom-made, but beginning in the twentieth century ready-to-wear and mass-produced fashion proliferated with the rise of global capitalism and industrial developments such as the sewing machine and the factory system of production. The fashion industry in the twenty first century is an international and highly lucrative industry, which consists of four main components: the production of raw materials; the production of fashion goods by designers, contractors and manufacturers; retail sales, and various forms of advertising and promotion.\(^5\)

Fashion is an industry that is implicated in both the private and public spheres, both local and global. While it “gives voice to private sentiments and sensibilities by connecting it to the material, performative, visual, and tactile sphere,” as an economic form, however, it is shaped by and embedded within both local and global institutions and operates through a logic of distance.\(^6\) This logic assumes that the further removed a consumer is from the conditions under which a producer labors, the less likely they will be to have awareness, and ultimately motivation, to protest. While there is a growing movement that encompasses people dedicated to sustainable, transparent fashion practices, aimed at increasing democratization in multiple sectors of the fashion industry and bridging that distance between producer and consumer, questions remain about their

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\(^5\) (Mendes & de la Haye, 2010, 252-295)

\(^6\) (Tu, 2011, 27)
impact. Movements such as those involved in Eco-fashion, the ‘Slow Cloth’ movement, the anti-sweatshop movement, the Fair Trade movement, the crafting/DIY (“do it yourself) community, and ‘authentic indigenous cultures’ movement represent a patchwork of interventions that sometimes reinforce the very problems they are trying to disrupt. For example, fair trade certifications, although intended to provide transparency for consumers concerned about worker exploitation, have sometimes been co-opted by corporations in the name of ‘democratization’ and ‘accessibility.’

My research interrogates how throughout history, fashion’s disciplinary power has been articulated to reproduce the status quo, and will also demonstrate the complicated conditions by which these processes can potentially be re-articulated to pave the way for more egalitarian arrangements in the industry. To that end this dissertation employs post-structural theory as a heuristic to guide this inquiry. As a critical scholar who is also a community organizer, it would seem natural that when using a theoretical paradigm to analyze my research, I would lean towards critical approaches of feminism that have the purpose of “emancipating subordinated groups from oppressive versions of reality,”7 so that they can become empowered subjects who have “sufficient agency to change the world.”8 Critical theorists have often derided deconstructive approaches to feminism, such as post-structuralism, as not acting towards ‘real’ change. However, as Susanne Gannon and Bronwyn Davies argue, post-structuralism does not prevent action, but instead envisions emancipation in a manner that is less straightforward than those of critical theorists, who view power as “oppressive and unilinear, thus mobilizing the

7 (Gannon & Davies, 2012, 66)

8 (Gannon & Davies, 2012, 69)
binaries of dominator and oppressor.”⁹ A deconstructive approach argues for “complex and continuous reflection on the ways in which subjectivities, realities, and desires are established and maintained.”¹⁰ It asks that feminists work within numerous discourses depending on the social, interactive, and historical contexts in which they are researching, and to “shift the ground” in such a way that “what previously seemed normal and natural becomes unthinkable.”¹¹ I argue that a post-structuralist methodology helps to answer important questions about the kinds of claims - Foucault would call them statements¹² - people use to silence, sustain, or re-articulate discourses about complicity in exploitative labor.

Post-structural theory uses discourse as its primary site of analysis, as introduced through Michel Foucault’s work. Foucault argues that discursive power circulates and there are both discourses that constrain, and discourses that enable, the production of knowledge, dissent and difference.¹³ Within this framework then, the questions that are of concern are, what is the work of discourse in this instance? How do some discourses maintain their authority, while other voices get silenced? Who benefits and how? These questions ultimately address issues along the power/disempowerment binary, specifically relating to the material realities of raced, classed, and sexualized bodies, disrupting this promise of democratization. Viewing post-structural agency as historically specific and

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ (Gannon & Davies, 2012, 68)

¹² (Foucault, Foucault Reader, 1984)

¹³ (Foucault, Foucault Reader, 1984)
socially conducted through particular ideologies of truth, Foucault thus felt that these discourses could be “called into question and changed.”\textsuperscript{14}

A post-structuralist analysis has “nomadic tendencies” that go beyond disciplinary boundaries of “literary or linguistic texts to include bodies in space, spaces without bodies, and texts comprised of nonlinguistic semiotic systems.”\textsuperscript{15} Since post-structuralist thinkers view discourse as a way to bring language into the material world in a manner that is historically and culturally constituted, this dissertation will also consider new media interventions as offering an exciting approach to analyzing how different discursive strategies are practiced in the current cultural moment. As a blogger myself, I have been able to experience first-hand a community where I could witness how multiple, competing discourses are situated in the fashion blogosphere, and my hope is that my own blog can also be a means of intervention that can re-articulate these hegemonic discourses into more progressive arrangements.

Another way to “call into question” and change discourses is by employing the theory of articulation, which Jennifer Slack defines as a “mechanism for shaping intervention within a particular social formation, conjuncture or context.”\textsuperscript{16} Discourses can be changed, or rearticulated, by different groups who contest the meaning of the dominant discourse, by disarticulating the misleading or incongruous ‘links’ or ‘information’ that is seemingly connecting these concepts. Articulation theory is an important tool to examine how different actors within the fashion industry contest the

\textsuperscript{14} (Gannon & Davies, 2012, 73)

\textsuperscript{15} (Gannon & Davies, 2012, 72)

\textsuperscript{16} (Slack, The theory and method of articulation in cultural studies, 1996, 112)
concepts of authenticity and democratization at certain cultural moments. Understanding the cultural contexts of these “moments,” or conjunctures, is how this project can suggest different ways of rearticulating these movements in ways that “might change the world for the better.”¹⁷

How do people use discourse in these cultural moments to free themselves of accountability? Under what discursive conditions do people see and evaluate their own complicity or, alternatively, ignore, and justify their complicity? And how do we locate these interventions in the fashion industry where spaces are re-articulated?

The present analysis also relies heavily on Foucault’s notions of technologies of the self, which Foucault defines as those that “permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.”¹⁸

It is these discursive technologies that facilitate fashion as a cultural phenomenon to both democratize and exploit labor, environmental and cultural practices, to both enable and constrain agents of social change. My particular concern is how the entangled discourses of authenticity, transparency, and democratization have been brought into our cultural dialogue around the fashion industry. While these discourses have often been articulated as rhetorical strategies to resist the ills of rampant capitalism, they have also been re-articulated or co-opted into discursive arrangements that allow the neoliberal project to

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¹⁷ (Slack, Communication as Articulation, 2006, 229)

¹⁸ (Foucault M., Technologies of the self, 1988)
continue. In essence, I will be identifying the “moves and countermoves”\textsuperscript{19} that reproduce and also re-articulate social orders within the ever-changing ground of neoliberal disciplinary power and governmentality.

Foucault defines governmentality as the organized practices – such as techniques and rationalities – that governments employ to try to produce a citizen that is best suited to fulfill the policies of the government. Foucault writes: “Government is defined as a right manner of disposing things so as to lead not to the form of the common good, as the jurists' texts would have said, but to an end which is 'convenient' for each of the things that are to governed.”\textsuperscript{20} He expands on this by saying, “that the objective of the exercise of power is to reinforce, strengthen and protect the principality, but with this last understood to mean not the objective ensemble of its subjects and territory, but rather the prince's relation with what he owns, with the territory he has inherited or acquired, and with his subjects.”\textsuperscript{21} In other words, governmentality sheds light on how power operates to exercise control over citizens and populations, while the concept of neoliberal governmentality helps to explicate how citizens in turn exercise that control on themselves.\textsuperscript{22} Neoliberalism views the state through a lens of market rationality, in that a neoliberal state is “under the supervision of the market rather than a market supervised by

\textsuperscript{19} ibid

\textsuperscript{20} (Foucault M., Governmentality, 1991, 95)

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 90

\textsuperscript{22} (Foucault, 1991)
the state.”

Thus the state must construct itself according to market terms, ultimately forcing citizens to view themselves as “rational economic actors” in their daily lives.

To that end, how does one move within this strengthening neoliberal governmentality without risk of co-option by the status quo? What this dissertation will be arguing for are intervention mechanisms or spaces that are as shifty as the problem. Since the main mechanism of modernity is the new, and fashion is an industry that especially emphasizes ‘newness’ and ‘trendiness,’ these interventions must be as connected to the new as the re-articulation of power structures. Thus, there is a need for the landscape of intervention to reflect “discursive agility” to appropriately engage the elusive discursive problems at the intersection of labor, culture and fashion. The following chapters will detail these “moves and counter-moves,” that are employed to engage with technologies of the self, and will offer ways in which re-articulation of the status quo can be sustained, such as through education and collective organizing.

III. Fashion as a Slippery Discursive Site

The title of this dissertation draws inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of lines of flight and their relationship with multiplicity. The lines of flight between problem and intervention in the fashion industry are becoming increasingly blurred, and speaks to a conjunctive moment defined by multiplicity in which there is no clear distinction between oppressor and the oppressed when it comes to labor practices,

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23 (Foucault, The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1978-1979, 2008)

24 (Brown, 2006)
ownership of space, etc.\textsuperscript{25} Deleuze and Guattari define the lines of flight as such: “the reality of a finite number of dimensions that the multiplicity effectively fills; the impossibility of a supplementary dimension, unless the multiplicity is transformed by the line of flight; the possibility and necessity of flattening all of the multiplicities on a single plane of consistency or exteriority, regardless of their number of dimensions.”\textsuperscript{26} Thus, despite systems of control that seem impossible to penetrate, lines of flight are able to break through the cracks and shoot off diagonally into the hemisphere, not exactly opposing power but instead, remaking the world by forming alignments, coordinating creative energies and innovating. These lines of flight let off sparks from the light of their trajectories, which reveal these cracks (or open spaces) that speak to the possibilities beyond the limits of our existence. However, tracing these lines of flight also reveals the sleights of hand that are constantly trying to co-opt these spaces by absorbing these interventions into dominant systems of society, forcing people to define new lines of flight in the hope of one day re-articulating the status quo.

Furthermore, these open spaces are also what Guy Debord would call ‘spectacles,’ that constitute a nexus where these multiplicities converge, creating circuits of power – a conjuncture, that holds both the promise of egalitarian arrangements in the fashion world, but also the prospect of the re-articulation of dominant logics of power.\textsuperscript{27} This conjuncture reflects a “real historical moment” that has tangible effects, such as articulating a “map of what is possible and what is not, who or what is valued and who or

\textsuperscript{25} (Foucault, Power/Knowledge, 1972)

\textsuperscript{26} (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, 9-10)

\textsuperscript{27} (Debord, 1994)
what is not, who or what benefits and who or what does not.”  

These spectacles highlight this multiplicity and indicate that there is no single point of clearly delineating negative material consequences, but also for agency, or what has been labeled as the potential for re-articulating the status quo. For example, the emerging influence of social media has similarly been constructed as an example of powerful intervention into neoliberal governmentality in that it has supposedly ‘bridged the gap’ between ‘normal citizens’ and the powerful elite. However, as this analysis will reveal, these “discursive technologies” are attached to dominant systems of governance such as capitalism that can just as easily co-opt the promise of these new media interventions.

Ultimately, my dissertation will reveal that it is the workings of the cultural economy of fashion that accounts for much of the discursive slipperiness to recreate the power-status quo. Fashion is part of the cultural economy, which is why research on cultural theory is an essential lens for examining the re-articulation of power via culture. This research will be further dissected in the literature review, but it is worth mentioning a few important books that will help advance this argument. In James Clifford’s book *The Predicament of Culture*, culture is examined through a post-colonial lens.  

Questioning the privileging of the West in articulating the stories and cultures of non-Western and indigenous people, Clifford documents the attempts by groups that have previously been viewed as ‘others’ to shape their own culture. Woodmansee’s history and politics of the copyright in her book *The Author, Art, and the Market*, delves into the important question about what it means to be an author and an artist, and thus worthy of

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28 (Slack, Communication as Articulation, 2006, 225)

29 (Clifford, 1988)
legal protection. Given that fashion lacks a copyright and thus can be easily ‘knocked-off,’ Woodmansee’s framework provides insight into understanding the tensions between fashion’s aesthetic and commercial value. Bourdieu’s *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* examines the value judgment of things (such as fashion objects) and how they come to reflect social and cultural conditions that ultimately create class differences and reiterate social inequality. Books such as *Why People Buy Things They Don’t Need* and *By Invitation Only* reveal how advertisers and marketers are able to promote this endless cycle of consumption, making intervention into these capitalist spaces difficult. Naomi Klein’s book *No Logo* also interrogates this intersection of culture and the economy in her expose of sweatshops in the garment industry. Specifically, she examines how the same corporations that exploit their workers are able to co-opt consumer resistance by dominating cultural spaces. Elizabeth Cline’s *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion* writes a book that takes into account the rise of ‘fast fashion’ and the devastating impact it has on people and the environment. By tackling the advertising industry that taps into the aspirational desires of consumers, the book connects labor exploitation with fashion’s slippery and shifty cultural economy.

**IV. Contemporary Predicaments of Fashion**

This section frames the predicaments of fashion’s problem of non-reflexive consumerism at the intersection of fashion, culture and labor. These predicaments will be the through-line of the subsequent chapters, in that they helped me to locate the

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30 (Woodmansee, 1994)

31 (Bourdieu, 1984)
interventions needed to address the problems of labor exploitation, environmental degradation, and neo-colonialism.

A. Consumer complicity. The lack of self-reflection on our own implication within the exploitative labor supply chain in the fashion industry can be illustrated with two personal experiences. The first was at a screening of the documentary film *Girl Model*, which examines the trafficking of young girls who are aspiring to be fashion models from Siberian Russia into Japan. While much has been written in the American press about the professional modeling industry’s attempts to issue age guidelines in the United States and Europe, we so rarely get such an insightful look into the transnational side of the industry. It is an alarming documentary that lends fresh insight into the current debate surrounding the exploitative nature of modeling work. Shot in a naturalistic, almost gritty manner that works against any glamorous illusions viewers may have had of the business, directors Ashley Sabin and David Redmon leave little space for discussion on whether the fashion industry is exploitative. Their central questions are ultimately more concerned with how this exploitation occurs, and why there is such a blatant lack of transparency surrounding such horrifying practices as trafficking and labor injustice.

I was lucky enough to watch this film at a local film festival, and the conversation with the directors that followed after the screening was almost as illuminating as the film itself. Audience members were rightly furious, pinning blame on the agents; on Japan, both for its idealization of youth and whiteness and for its use of under-age models; and on the modeling agencies in eastern Russia for not being transparent with the girls and

32 (Sabin D. R., 2012)

their families. The directors seemed a little unsettled by the questions, and were reluctant
to place blame on any one person, agency, or government. As they tried to steer the
audience to broader issues, I found myself looking around the room, and I couldn’t help
but think how ironic it was that we were all so concerned with the exploitation of these
young girls, when most of us were wearing clothes made in sweatshops, probably by
young women of the same age as that of Nadya, the lead character. Watching the movie
in an audience all too willing to point fingers at certain agents within the film without
questioning their own complicity, made me consider how it is that we negotiate our own
contradictions. This is something that I asked the film’s director Ashley Sabin in an
interview. Specifically, I wanted to understand how the people in her movie who seemed
to be complicit in the trafficking of these young models could repeatedly tell ‘lies’
regarding both the false promises given to these girls as well as how they were also
implicated in how these models were treated. Sabin responded,

The story that we told and the dilemma and issues we presented really can’t be
pinned onto one person, country, or institution. It’s all part of a larger structure
that crosses so many boundaries and so many laws. And the thing is, I don’t think
the people in this film saw themselves as liars. They had all created realities for
themselves, and were speaking from that reality. From Ashley, the agent’s end,
she had convinced herself that she was truly helping these girls get out of
poverty.  

And that, I think, was both the central theme of the film and a prime focus of this
research: we are all complicit in a global labor exploitation that is the fashion industry.
The dichotomous nature of the industry often relies on exploited labor hidden beneath its
glamorous facade, as well as its transnational nature that makes it all too easy for key
players to escape culpability when they fail to enforce regulations to protect the most

34 (Sabin A., 2013)
vulnerable. But these key players are not just the designers, the agents, and the factory monitors. They are also *us*, the consumers who fuel the desire for the designer jeans despite the fact that they are made in a Pakistani textile factory, the ‘Made in Italy’ handbags pieced together luxury items made by undocumented Chinese immigrants in Italy, and the beauty magazines that feature the mainly underpaid, exploited models, both here and abroad.

It is significant perhaps, that David Redmon’s other film *Mardi Gras: Made in China* exposes the sweatshop labor conditions of Chinese factory workers who make Mardi Gras beads, an American cultural product that has come to symbolize frivolity and excess.\(^{35}\) While *Girl Model* opens with images of scantily clad girls visually dissected by modeling agents at a casting call, *Mardi Gras: Made in China* focuses on the largely female factory workers whose bodies are pushed to exhaustion by their male supervisors. The two films are similar not just in their critiques of globalization, but also in how they reveal the commodification of female bodies by industries that view women as largely disposable.

The problem of consumer complicity, and the discourses that people employ to justify their consumption of products implicated in practices that harm people, the environment, and cultural identity, will be interrogated more fully in chapters documenting labor exploitation, environmental degradation, and cultural appropriation.

**B. Fake Transparency.** The second revelation I had occurred when I was moving a few years ago. As I threw out everything with fervor into the recycling bin, it suddenly hit me that *everything I was tossing out was mass-produced*. When I came across a necklace

\(^{35}\) (Redmon, 2006)
given to me by my mother, or the Zuni ring that was made by a Zuni woman (instead of a ‘Native-inspired’ design made by factory workers abroad), or the Tagua nut necklace that I bought from an artisan in Puerto Rico whose face I still remember, I just couldn’t let it go. Not only did I consider these items art in the way that they had been lovingly handcrafted, but I had a personal connection with the people who had made them or given them to me. It was easier for me to toss out the shirt I got from Urban Outfitters or the earrings I bought years ago at Forever 21, because I had no knowledge of who made them. They meant little to me. I didn’t value the work put into these items as much because I knew nothing about it, or the people behind it. And that was the point. The fashion industry conceals the labor of the workers who produce these items, the conditions they work in and the life prospects they have. And they do this in part by advertising an aspirational lifestyle that I can only hope to achieve. Lying on my floor in a pile, the mystique created by advertising was clearly shattered. It is in this way that fashion is an appealing ‘technology of the self’ because it promises self-transformation through sartorial choices, but only through commodity accumulation, or constant consumption. When faced by the disappointment of any particular purchase, consumers will often ‘solve’ the problem by purchasing something else, in a continuous cycle of consumption and disillusionment, and more consumption again.

My own feelings towards the fashion industry have always been complex. Despite my appreciation for fashion as a mode of expression, I have been disillusioned with the labor exploitation behind the glamorous façade of the industry. Glamour after all, is a “spell, a magic charm, that is cast to blur the eyes and make objects appear
different from, and usually better than, their true nature.” Even those, like myself, who have been involved in anti-sweatshop campaigns before, or who have enjoyed vintage and artisan made products, still find themselves buying into the status quo of retail that encourages mainstream consumption of ‘fast fashion’ (or buying more clothes at a discount) on the one end, and the idealization of unattainable high couture on the other. Why is social media so full of people bragging about the great bargain they scored at the designer discount site, knowing that by doing so, they were also discounting the labor and people behind it? Or drooling over the latest purse Blair Waldorf carried on Gossip Girl, as will be discussed in chapter three, despite being aware that high couture is often a means by which that show and its many successors reinforces class divisions? The realization I had standing in my room staring at all of these clothes that had been reduced from promises to just stuff was what I would mark as a significant moment in how this movement of sustainability started to truly penetrate my consciousness and shape my dissertation. Sustainable fashion implies that the product has been made with thought and consideration of its environmental and social impact, and in the following months, as I read about the textile fire in Pakistan that killed more than three hundred people, or the ‘apparel industry trends’ report that revealed how companies like Wal-Mart and Forever 21 are ignoring claims of child and forced labor from their workers, or how exporting this cheap labor means a loss of industries and jobs in the U.S, I felt a need to

36 (Mears, Pricing Beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model, 2011, 5)
37 (Fletcher, 2012)
38 (Zia ur-Rehman, 2012)
39 (Wrinkle, 2012)
share this information with others. When I read Elizabeth Cline’s book *Overdressed*,\(^\text{40}\) I was shocked to learn that garment workers overseas are earning just one percent of the retail price of the clothing they produce (as compared for example to 8.4% of the typical price of a new vehicle in the US in 2006,\(^\text{41}\) and that the wages of garment workers could be *easily doubled or tripled with little or no increase for American consumers*. I wanted to understand how Nike and similar companies could engage in such exploitative behavior and still claim commitment to ethical business practices.

Furthermore, although I had always been aware of the exploitative labor behind the clothes we wear, I had never really considered the harmful environmental impact of the conventional textile industry's manufacturing process. And then, once I learned about the cancer-causing chemicals that are found in the very fabrics we wear,\(^\text{42}\) I knew I needed to connect the dots not just between culture and labor, but also between environmental sustainability and cultural economies. The French novelist, poet and film-maker Jean Cocteau famously is quoted as saying "style is a simple way of saying complicated things," and indeed in today's world, the clothes we wear should not be dismissed as merely frivolous things, but as signifiers of the truly deep social, environmental, and economic structures that are at the root of exploitation in the global fashion industry. To that end, this problem of fake transparency will be especially interrogated in chapters four and five, which focus on labor exploitation and fashion sustainability, respectively.

\(^\text{40}\) (Cline, 2012, 159)

\(^\text{41}\) (Wages and Labor Costs, 2013)

\(^\text{42}\) (Fletcher, 2012)
C. Fake Authenticity and Bounded Accountability. There have certainly been many others who have attempted to unpeel the textile industry to expose the intersections of culture and labor. When Naomi Klein wrote her seminal book, *No Logo*, on the textile industry in 2000, it called for resistance against ‘super-brands’ like Disney and Nike which, she argued, were progressively taking over virtually all ‘public spaces,’ including school curricula, neighborhoods, and all-encompassing infotainment malls like Virgin Megastores. Moreover, she documented how, in an attempt to increase corporate profits, these same brands began to subcontract overseas, leaving first-world workers behind while exploiting those in the developing world. Klein’s book was hugely influential in articulating the extent of corporate influence and capturing the potential for global resistance, which she was hopeful would have a lasting impact. The last chapter of the book revealed the activist strategies of so-called ‘culture jammers’ who used the Internet to form networked strategies with other activists. Since then, social media has exploded, and my dissertation will explore the extent to which the growing phenomena of ethical shareholders, culture-jammers, street reclaimers, garment workers, student activists, and others have the potential to develop a global worker solidarity movement that uses these new means (via internet exposes, protest campaigns, etc.) to push the superbrands to adopt more just policies and practices. More than ten years after *No Logo* was released, several startling stories and revelatory reports on the fashion industry reveal an industry that still has exploitative practices at its core. During New York Fashion week in September, a textile factory fire in Pakistan uncovered the oppression hidden behind the façade of glamour when three hundred factory workers were killed, twice as many as the
famous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911.\textsuperscript{43} The report entitled \textit{Apparel Industry Trends}\textsuperscript{44} revealed that popular fast-fashion brands like Forever 21, H&M and Zara also had deplorable labor conditions and suspect monitoring practices. And then, after a factory fire in Bangladesh that sourced for Walmart killed 112 people, it was exposed that the corporation had refused to pay for Bangladesh factory safety improvements. Furthermore, as exploitation occurred tragically abroad, it was revealed that outsourced Olympic uniforms could have brought in $1 billion to the U.S. economy,\textsuperscript{45} which has already lost an estimated 650,000 apparel jobs in the ten-year period ending in 2007 alone.\textsuperscript{46} As if these revelations were not enough, a report by Greenpeace in 2012 exposed the environmental havoc of the textile industry as toxic chemicals were found in many of the fashion industry’s most popular brands.\textsuperscript{47}

How is this lack of transparency and accountability still so prevalent? I interviewed the prominent Eco-fashion expert Marci Zaroff about this issue, and her response was noteworthy and will be discussed in more detail in my dissertation. She said:

One of the biggest challenges I’ve come across with the large retailers I have worked with is how disconnected their different departments are. The marketing team isn’t speaking with the product development or sourcing teams, who aren’t connected with the Sustainability Directors or the buyers. These compartmentalized disconnects result in a lack of transparency, opportunity or effective communication strategies, and sometimes

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[(43)] (Zia ur-Rehman, 2012)
\item[(44)] (Wrinkle, 2012)
\item[(45)] (Chua, 2012)
\item[(46)] (Cline, 2012, 37)
\item[(47)] (Greenpeace, 2012)
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
even result in tragedy, like at the recent factory fires in Pakistan and Bangladesh. For efforts to be truly sustainable for people, planet, profit, passion and purpose (“The five P’s”), companies must figure out how to plan, design, develop, source, manufacture and market with sustainable strategy and design models. **The whole supply chain, from the farm and factory to the PR, has to be connected.**

What is so interesting is that later in that interview, Zaroff noted that Nike, which has generally improved its labor conditions for its workers but still is prone to occasional mishaps, has become a true leader in the organic cotton industry. For example, it was a founding member of the Textile Exchange, a non-profit organization that is committed to expanding textile sustainability across the global textile value chain. This example perhaps challenges Klein’s framing of the labor debate as a rigidly polar issue between ‘evil’ large corporations and citizen activists. On the other hand, as we will explore in chapters four and five, Nike’s adoption of certain ‘ethical’ practices that claim to be transparent and authentic could merely be a form of co-option - a way to expand their consumer base even while they fail to make true sustainable commitments. Chapter six will reveal the contested claims to ‘authenticity’ around the issue of cultural identity, especially as it relates to Native Americans’ art being appropriated by large fashion retailers. This dissertation explores the cultural re-articulations (‘going green,’ ‘fair trade,’ ‘cultural appreciation’ to name a few) that obscure the economic motives at the heart of neoliberal capitalism.

**D. Perilous Democratization.** The increased accessibility of fashion has created a greater need for a larger workforce, and in recent years, both the monopolization of corporate logos and high street ‘fast fashion’ have resulted in worldwide exploitation. This was captured most famously in Naomi Klein’s *No Logo*, which documented the corporate

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48 (Dawisha, Ethical Fashion: How to Navigate the Industry, 2012)
‘super brands’ that were dominating public space and exploiting their workers, as well as the responsive global movement of counter-resistance.\textsuperscript{49} Andrew Ross’s \textit{No Sweat: Fashion, Free Trade, and the Rights of Garment Workers} helped to articulate the nascent anti-sweatshop movement with a collection of articles and interviews that featured garment workers, activists, industry executives, academics, cultural theorists, and labor experts.\textsuperscript{50} The book was unique in its efforts to provide a single book that showed the whole fashion supply chain, connecting labor with matters of style, as it featured perspectives on couture shows along with its articles on child labor in China. Finally, for an excellent account of a corporation that has co-opted the notion of ‘democratic’ access to low prices while crippling American industries and exploiting the workers that it contracts overseas to save money, \textit{The Wal-Mart Effect} is an essential piece of literature for this project.\textsuperscript{51} In a recent work on the subject, Kelsey Timmerman’s \textit{Where Am I Wearing} attempts to bridge the gap between producers and consumers through a journalistic perspective that focuses on the personal stories of factory workers.\textsuperscript{52} His accounts of the difficult, but often necessary, jobs that these workers have to take in the globalized economy is a balanced look at the reality of a deeply complex industry that really offers few ‘quick-fix’ solutions. Ultimately, the difficulty in ending worldwide labor exploitation lies not just in the transnational nature of the textile industrial, but also in the increased compartmentalization of businesses that make it difficult for different

\textsuperscript{49} (Klein, 2002)  
\textsuperscript{50} (Ross, 1997)  
\textsuperscript{51} (Fishman, 2006)  
\textsuperscript{52} (Timmerman, 2012)
departments to communicate with each other to ensure that exploitation does not occur. Harry Braverman, in his book *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, documents this degradation of labor that is now so prevalent in the twenty-first century, arguing that the division of labor only serves to demean the laborer, who is no longer able to gain ownership over a product by making it from start to finish.\(^{53}\) Furthermore, Charles Perrow’s work *Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies* is a fascinating examination into why ‘accidents’ (such as factory fires) occur in these complex industrial systems.\(^{54}\) Perrow theorizes that ultimately, while simple systems have single points of failure that can be easily identified and fixed, complex systems have multiple points of failure that are very difficult to diagnose and repair. While Perrow acknowledges that accidents often occur because conditions are hidden from the public, he also posits that even if they are seen, they are not believed. How to envision the fashion industry as a simple system in which all these different ‘points’ are connected, and one in which citizens are given the tools to understand the exploitation behind the clothes they wear so that they can really see it, is what is at the heart of this project.

What is so interesting about this current cultural moment is that while stories of factory fires were headlining the news, the fashion industry continued to make claims for increased democratization within the industry, as social media and an emerging blogosphere gained influence. This story will be explicated in greater detail in chapter three, which focuses on how the rise of the blogosphere and new media technology was touted as increasing democratization even while being interlinked with dominant systems

\(^{53}\) (Braverman H., 1974)

\(^{54}\) (Perrow, 1984)
of power. The complicated problem of democratization will also be interrogated in chapter four, which focuses on the dilemma of labor exploitation. For example, the availability of ‘fast fashion’ that offers trendy clothes at a cheap price while knocking off couture designers is one such example. The argument of course, is that when designers have to respond to the demands of the mass consumer, a more ‘democratic’ system of consumption is created. Teri Agins, in her book *The End of Fashion: How Marketing Changed the Clothing Business Forever*, disputes this notion, arguing that designers are shifting their creativity from clothing to marketing so as to appeal to, and indeed to shape, an increasingly homogenized consumer market, and to also create markets that are willing to purchase these cheaper clothes.55 Dana Thomas expands on this topic with her book *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Luster*, where she exposes the couture industry as having been bought out by multinational corporations that cater to customers more interested in the label than in the quality of the design.56 For Thomas, the claims to democratization that are made in response to the accessibility of fashionable clothing and designer couture knock-offs are fraudulent, since, she argues, consumers are getting items of lesser quality that are made in deplorable conditions. To that end Elizabeth Cline’s book *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion*, explores how the aspirational promises of cheap fashion have been complicated by its devastating human and environmental impact. Cline traces the rise of ‘budget chains,’ the loss of U.S. jobs to foreign (and often exploited) labor, and the demise of independent, local retailers, all of which has resulted in cheaper, lower-quality clothing. Chapter five, which centers on

55 (Agins, 1999)

56 (Thomas, 2007)
the issues of environmental degradation and sustainability, will further reveal how the
discourses of democratization and accessibility are re-articulated to conceal economic
aims in the form of greenwashing.

V. Literature Review

In order to analyze the discourses of consumer complicity, transparency, authenticity, and
democratization, this dissertation intersects with several key areas of cultural theory as it
relates to fashion: Fashion History and Theory; Technology; and Labor and Post-
Structural Resistance. In each of these areas, discussed below, I will identify and seek to
engage with, critique, and extend the literature in these core areas as they relate to the
fashion industry. By examining the predicaments of fashion through the lenses of these
different fields, I hope to clarify the underlying complexities of the fashion industry,
build on the already extensive literature, and add to the conversation about the role of the
media, and particularly social media, in addressing structural inequities in this industry.

A. Fashion history and theory. In order to provide an analysis and deconstruction of the
fashion industry, it is important to become familiar with fashion history so as to better
examine the numerous cultural moments in which power is re-articulated. As discussed
in chapter two, fashion history is a major topic in and of itself, with thousands of books
and articles. I will single out several that indicate the direction of my work. Jennifer
Craik’s book *Key Moments in Fashion: The Evolution of Style* offers a snapshot of the
major figures and important moments in fashion, from Coco Chanel’s desire to free
women of the corset with swimwear and pants, to Vivienne Westwood’s incorporation of
subcultural movements like punk in her couture collections.57 The book is a valuable

57 (Craik, Key Moments in Fashion, 1998)
resource for identifying the industry’s key moments that truly shaped culture, and helps to demonstrate how fashion often transcends its aesthetic value.

For a truly comprehensive genealogy of the fashion industry, *Fashion since 1900* provides a detailed overview of fashion history that organizes its chapters around the crucial shifts in style during significant world events in past decades. From the importance of Dior’s 1947 ‘New Look’ to the impact of the Internet and blogosphere in the new millennium, the book is a truly invaluable resource that consistently places the industry’s most important developments within their key cultural, political, and socio-economic contexts.

Elizabeth Wilson’s influential book *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* frames fashion within the field of Cultural Studies and traces the industry’s social and cultural history with its somewhat troubled relationship to modernity. While expressing admiration for fashion’s potential as a tool for transformative resistance and as a mode of expression, she also documents the tensions and contradictions of an industry that since the industrial era has become increasingly democratic with the accessibility of mass-produced fashion, while at the same time exploiting a largely female workforce. Still, Wilson is careful to offer a more complex analysis of fashion than the one often posited by feminists, that clothing merely serves as a tool of oppression. Instead, she provides examples of how fashion can shape and subvert identity, from the grunge look inspired by bands like Nirvana, and the multi-faceted meanings behind the Islamic veil, to David

58 (Haye, 2010)
59 (Wilson E., 1985)
Beckham’s ‘metro’ style and painted toenails. Alison Bancroft’s book *Fashion and Psychoanalysis* also offers a unique perspective on fashion’s role as a distinctly feminine space that allows the problems of subjectivity and tensions surrounding gender identity to be articulated in the public sphere.\(^{60}\)

There are three other books that I consider essential reading for fashion theory. Jennifer Craik’s *Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* centers the influence of subcultures and mass consumer behavior, ultimately questioning the long-held assumption that cultural ‘elites’ such as couture designers and tastemakers dictate the industry.\(^{61}\) Along similar lines, Mark Lipovetsky’s seminal book *The Empire of Fashion* was controversial in its embrace of pop culture’s accessibility which he argues was a democratizing means of expression that gave people more choices and thus enabled them to develop complex identities.\(^{62}\) *Fashion Theory: A Reader* is a comprehensive collection of essays that dissects the meanings of fashion from a number of different disciplines, including sociology, gender studies, cultural studies, and anthropology.\(^{63}\) Within this collection I have been particularly influenced by the chapters “Fashion: Unpacking a Cultural Production,” by Peter Braham, and “Consuming or Living with Things” by Tim Dant, both of whom provide compelling arguments for clothing to be valued beyond its material form, and considered as vehicles in which class, gender, and racial codes can be transmitted.

\(^{60}\) (Bancroft, 2012)


\(^{62}\) (Lipovetsky, 1994)

\(^{63}\) (Barnard, 2007)
My readings and research on fashion theory and history will focus on those books that provide an insight into how the producers of fashion have been able in the past to take advantage of certain disjunctive moments to call attention to working conditions, for example, or to change the meaning of fashion in politically interesting ways, or to change consumption patterns, as when World War II made it ‘politically incorrect’ for women to wear silk stockings. I will then turn to whether contemporary social media has been a force for democratization in fashion, and I will look historically at this issue. Is this true? In what ways has social media contributed to improved knowledge about conditions and helped to mobilize both consumers and producers? Is social media a new force, an effective force and a force for good? How have corporations responded to disjunctures in the past and how are they responding now?

As an example, Cline cites the growing DIY/crafting movement as proof that people are trying to become closer to the site of production and not rely on exploited labor. However, crafting sites like Etsy.com have been critiqued by Native American artists for featuring jewelry that is appropriated from their culture, thus negatively impacting the Native American cultural economy.64

There are two marketing books that I also consider to be valuable in understanding how marketers are able to fuel this constant need for consumption. The first is Why People Buy Things They Don’t Need by Pamela N. Danziger, who details marketing strategies to encourage consumers to spend their discretionary income on non-necessities.65 Another book, By Invitation Only details how the online designer sample

64 (Metcalfe, 2012)
65 (Danziger, 2002)
sale website gilt.com was formed by two young women who wanted to capitalize on consumers’ desire for name brands at recession-friendly prices. Of course, big retailers and even designers are trying to capitalize on fashion’s new democratic moment as well, and it can be difficult to gauge which ones are truly committed to transparency. Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte’s book Brand Aid offers a strong critique of this notion of ‘compassionate consumerism,’ highlighting the contradictions of campaigns such as Gap’s Product Red and Susan Komen’s pink-ribbon campaign for breast cancer, which they argue fuels consumption more than helping the people they are supposed to serve. Similarly, Lilie Chouliaraki’s book The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-Humanitarianism examines how humanitarianism is being performed in our globally mediated environment, in which solidarity is encouraged through the use of glitzy celebrities making the right lifestyle choices.

On the other hand, W. Lance Bennett’s article “Branded Political Communication: Lifestyle Politics, Logo Campaigns, and the Rise of Global Citizenship” paints a more positive vision of the ‘conscious consumer,’ arguing that “the consumer coding of political action becomes an effective means of telling distance and often complex political stories about labor exploitation, human rights, environmental issues,

66 (Wilson A. M., 2012)
67 (Ponte, 2011)
68 (Chouliaraki, 2013)
and bad business practices.” Finally, by examining books such as Dara O’Rourke’s *Shopping for Good*, I will be able to deconstruct the sources of consumer activism, the likely effects of entrusting regulation to consumer efforts, and making global supply chains fair and sustainable. Harry Braverman’s *Labor and Monopoly Capital* will be used to explore the idea of deskilling, and how the fashion industry has controlled alienated labor by introducing technology and preventing workers from having a holistic relationship to that which they produce. To that end Andrew Ross’s *No Sweat: Fashion, Free Trade and the Rights of Garment Workers* will help to illuminate how those in the fashion industry employ tools (such as culture jamming and unionization) that draw from some of the same cultural resources which enable industry exploitation to resist automation and deskilling. Gay Siedman’s book *Beyond the Boycott* will be used for his examination of the role of NGO’s in reversing the global market’s ‘race to the bottom’ in the search for cheap labor.

B. Labor, technology, and democratization. With the rise of the blogosphere, the Internet has too often been easily associated with democracy and freedom. Young bloggers like Tavi Gevinson of *Style Rookie* have been invited to runway shows and heralded as examples of fashion’s current moment of democratization. Techno-enthusiasts such as

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69 (Bennett, 2003, 27)

70 (O’Rourke, 2012)

71 (Braverman H., 1998, Rev. Ed.)

72 (Ross, 1997)

73 (Siedman, 2009)

74 (Gevinson)
Henry Jenkins\textsuperscript{75} have taken the position that this widespread access to blogs is fundamentally democratic because it has allowed “multiple neoliberal freedoms including the freedom to accumulate consumerist choices, and, connected to that, the freedoms of self-expression and self-determination.”\textsuperscript{76} This democratization, proponents argue, “negates and thus frees us from the embodied particulars of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality,” and promises that anyone, especially women, can become someone.\textsuperscript{77}

Techno skeptics however, argue that the Internet’s claims for democracy through its interactive economy are really just a guise for increased surveillance where elites attempt to rearticulate a neoliberal capitalist project of invisibility.\textsuperscript{78} The book \textit{Better Living Through Reality TV} provides a compelling look at the new neoliberal economy presented in reality television, where shows are instructing viewers about how to gain the needed ‘tools’ for living and conducting themselves as citizens. Fashion and beauty blogs have in a sense imitated this format, in that they emphasize rational consumption, privatized modes of self-care and self-management, and the promise of happiness through attaining these cultural objects.\textsuperscript{79} And of course, these critics of lifestyle politics argue

\textsuperscript{75} (Jenkins, 2006)
\textsuperscript{76} (T. Pham, 2011, 14)
\textsuperscript{77} (T. Pham, 2011, 2)
\textsuperscript{78} (Andrejevic, 2004)
\textsuperscript{79} (Hay & Ouellette, 2008)
that consumerism (epitomized by fashion) has become a shallow substitute for political engagement.\textsuperscript{80}

Furthermore, techno-skeptics argue that the blogosphere is often unpaid work in which bloggers create value for their producers but are barely compensated, as Ursula Huws’ \textit{The Making of a Cybertariat}, demonstrates.\textsuperscript{81} Take \textit{Vogue} magazine’s hiring of ‘cultural influencers,’ in which bloggers are given the supposedly ‘elite’ title of being tastemakers without receiving any form of economic compensation. Interestingly enough, as Ashley Mears writes in her sparkling examination of the modeling industry, \textit{Pricing Beauty – The Making of a Fashion Model}, “In fashion, status is not reducible to money; it derives from having authority as a tastemaker, to have one’s taste recognized as good taste.”\textsuperscript{82}

Scholar Minh T. Pham takes a different approach in her journal article, “Blog Ambitions: Fashion, Feelings, and the Political Economy of the Digital Body.”\textsuperscript{83} While acknowledging the limitations of the blogosphere that lends itself to hierarchies, she rejects the claims that these limitations are repressive. Drawing on several Asian American and British Asian blogs, Pham analyzes the ways in which some fashion-themed blogs by Asian bloggers challenge this neoliberal will to disembody color blindness and the belief that ‘anyone can become someone.’ They openly talk about how

\textsuperscript{80} (T. Pham, 2011, 16)

\textsuperscript{81} (Huws, 2003)

\textsuperscript{82} (Mears, Pricing Beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model, 2011, 147)

\textsuperscript{83} (T. Pham, 2011)
their racial/class background has proved to be an obstacle in various ways, and how this has given them a unique relationship to clothes and their sartorial choices.

To that end this dissertation will interweave into analysis Foucault’s “technologies of the self” as a particularly relevant theoretical framework for this project. Fashion and fashion blogging, with their promises of democratization through aspirational dressing, are appealing technologies of the self because they offer the potential of transformation through the management and care of one’s appearance. However, fashion’s disciplinary power is reinforced by the fact that these technologies of the self are interlinked with dominant systems such as capitalism, thus complicating the democratizing promise.

C. Labor and post-structural resistance. Typically, when one envisions ‘resistance’ within the labor movement, binary images of exploited workers and labor advocates may come to mind. This project will examine what shape resistance can take in the contemporary fashion landscape, where, at least from a post-structuralist perspective, power is not held within one ‘site’ of domination but lies along multiple intersections that have the potential to be re-articulated.

For example, while it is true that fashion is an industry rife with labor exploitation, there is a growing labor movement in China in which young migrant workers are demanding better pay and working conditions, as Cline reveals in her chapter from Overdressed titled “Chinese labor, cheap no more.”

According to ethnographer Pun Ngai, this social revolution has been silently manifesting itself in acts of resistance for years, as she documented in her book Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a

84 (Cline, 2012, 161-186)
Working alongside factory workers, Ngai captured the conflicts many of these women faced working in the ‘world’s largest sweatshop,’ which, while exploitative, was still considered an escape from the patriarchal family.

Fair trade is an economic system that attempts to respond to this exploitation by guaranteeing farmers and artisans fair wages and protection from unjust working conditions, while additionally granting them premiums (funds) for community and social investment. Important books on the promises of fair trade include *Fair Trade for All: How Trade Can Promote Development*, *Fair Trade from the Ground Up*, *The Fair Trade Revolution, Artisans and Fair Trade: Crafting Development*, and *Fair Trade: A Beginner’s Guide*. Challenges are noted in the books *Business Unusual: Successes and Challenges of Fair Trade* and *Fair Trade Without the Froth: A Dispassionate Economic Analysis of Fair Trade*. In *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability, and Survival*, Daniel Jaffee offers suggestions for how to strengthen the fair trade system, which he views as too tied to the market and potentially open to co-option by larger corporations. I believe his critique also applies to the fashion industry. Similarly, the article “From Creative Economy to Creative Society,” is a policy initiative that envisions

85 (Ngai, 2005)
86 (Charlton, 2005)
87 (Linton, 2012)
88 (Dickson, 2010)
89 (DeCarlo, 2007)
90 (Osterhaus, 2006)
91 (Mohan, 2010)
the potentials of how neighborhood-based creative economies can move cities toward “shared prosperity and social integration.” The authors warn that shaping a vision that simply focuses on economies while ignoring the political and social potential of the creative center is myopic and will only exacerbate inequality. Interestingly enough, poorer countries like Haiti are looking towards the fashion industry to revitalize the textile industry and provide ‘creative inspiration’ for a country that is so often mired in poverty. While looking towards an industry to revitalize an entire country might seem too simplistic, if Haitians view fashion not just in economic terms, then it indeed might be a way to revitalize culture which can be “reflected in fashion” as Dominican designer Socrates McKinney noted.

While Fair Trade offers a means by which exploitation of workers abroad can be addressed, there is also a growing movement towards sustainable or ‘ethical’ fashion that emphasizes environmental concern (‘eco’ fashion), a slower, more sustainable way of consuming (slow fashion), and a return to ‘DIY’ or ‘do it yourself’ crafts. These movements borrow from previous decades when people sewed their own clothes or at the very least, had a closer relationship to the textiles they wore as well as the people who made them. Angela McRobbie, in her article “Second-Hand Dresses and the Role of the Ragmarket,” was one of the first to write about the pleasure young women derived from shopping, and how the re-appropriation of garments bought at flea markets was indeed, a form of resistance. On a similar note, Carla Freeman, author of High Tech and High

92 (Seifert, 2008, 13)
93 (AP, 2012)
94 (McRobbie, 1988)
Heels in the Global Economy: Women, Work, and Pink-Collar Identities in the Caribbean, reveals in her ethnographic study of Barbados’ informatics workers how consumption is a site of pleasure and even resistance to these employees who are attempting to distinguish themselves from ‘ordinary’ factory workers. These informatics workers would, in a sense, use fashion to re-define the companies’ idea of the ‘professional, ideal worker,’ ultimately creating their own ‘pink-collar’ identities. Nan Estad, in her wonderful study of the culture and politics of early 20th century working women’s labor titled Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure, also examines the intersections of consumerism and political activism. Estad argues that although many of these young women were chastised for their interest in fashion by leading activists and organizers (who viewed their consumption as ‘frivolous’), this consumption actually helped to shape their identities as workers and political actors.

The ways in which fashion can help shape identities and even youth movements is perfectly captured in the book Street Style – From Sidewalk to Catwalk, which documents alternative fashion movements and how they arose out of their sociocultural and political contexts. And Exchanging Clothes reveals not just the social, cultural, and political meaning of clothing, but how this meaning changes when material commodities, as well

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95 (Freeman, 2000)
96 (Enstad, 1999)
97 (Polhemus, 1994)
as ideas, images, textures and colors are ‘exchanged and circulated’ across the transnational sphere.\textsuperscript{98}

As for valuable resources on fashion sustainability and the emerging movement towards ‘Slow Fashion,’ three books come to mind. The first is Kate Fletcher’s \textit{Fashion and Sustainability: Design for Change}, which dissects the different ways in which the fashion industry can better move towards sustainability, both in its environmental and human impact.\textsuperscript{99} The second is the book \textit{The Thoughtful Dresser: The Art of Adornment}, which celebrates clothing as the most public expression of our private identities. Author Linda Grant argues that regardless of whether one is interested in fashion or not, clothing has deep cultural implications and should be considered seriously.\textsuperscript{100} To me, this is an important argument for sustainability, because the argument against ‘fast fashion’ is that it is regarded as cheap and lacking a personal connection to the people who made it, thus making it easier to throw away and fill up landfills. This is why finding the stories and meaning behind clothing could help create a slower, more sustainable way of interacting with the textiles we wear. Take, for example, the debate within the fashion industry surrounding communal authorship and cultural appropriation, that once again centers this question of ‘authenticity.’ Native tribes in the United States for example, have created an uproar over the use of sacred symbols by fast fashion retailers such as Urban Outfitters, claiming that mainstream culture does not have the right to absorb, or appropriate, their cultural objects. Similarly, sustainability advocates have promoted seeking authentic

\textsuperscript{98} (Rabinowitz, 2012)

\textsuperscript{99} (Fletcher, 2012)

\textsuperscript{100} (Grant, 2009)
cultural products at their source as a way to encourage a slower mode of consumption that emphasizes investment in high quality products.

As exciting as these movements are for their potential in bringing transformative change, they have not been immune to co-option. The debate over what constitutes transparency has been contested within different movements, as sustainability advocates have accused corporate and political elites of ‘greenwashing’ and ‘fairwashing’ to appease consumers who are looking for ethically sourced products. Certifications, from ‘Fair Trade’ to ‘Organic’ to ‘Made in the USA’ while providing some benefits in terms of adding much needed regulation to the industry, are still suspect of obscuring corporate interests that may in fact be contradictory to the stated, moralistic claims of these certifications and ‘movements’. Eco-fashion pioneer Marci Zaroff put it this way,

I think that this lack of transparency can really discourage people from being conscious consumers, because they don’t know what to believe. And in the Eco-fashion world, we’ve seen a lot of greenwashing, a practice by which a corporation will display insincere concern for the environment in an attempt to further their own agenda and reputation. Historically, it’s been a challenge to differentiate between which certifications are actually being monitored and accredited by third party certifiers, and there is still a huge disconnect in the consumers’ mind about which certifications matter. There’s a great website called the Seven Sins of Greenwashing that reveals the falsity of a lot of these labeling claims, including ‘all-natural’ (which means nothing – unlike organic, which is a legal word with very specific meaning) or calling something ‘green’ just because it contains one environmental attribute.\(^{101}\)

In summary, the literature that I intend to rely on will be situated at the disciplinary intersections between critical media, labor studies, organizational communications, gender studies and cultural studies. While the literature covers each of these areas, none or few look at intersections between them and none look at ways in which discursive

\(^{101}\) (Dawisha, Ethical Fashion: How to Navigate the Industry, 2012)
structures that have developed to stymie the achievement of greater transparency, democratization and authenticity in the fashion industry. These structures have sought to use emerging social media to further embed capitalism and co-opt opposition to these structures. As a fresh force for change, some, but not most, fashion blogging has sought to create points of resistance within these individual discourses. There are opportunities to add to the conversation about the role of this new media, and I hope that I will be able to show how power is attaching itself to these technologies and creating the potential for intervention in a way that could contribute to transformative change.

VI. Research Questions

These central questions guided the analysis in this dissertation:

*RQ1*: What are the claims - Foucault (Foucault M., 1969) would call them statements - people use to silence, sustain, or re-articulate discourses about complicity in exploitative labor, environmental degradation, and other neo-colonial practices?

*RQ 2*: Under what discursive conditions do people see and evaluate their own complicity or, alternatively, ignore, and justify their complicity? What can be learned from the ways people use discourse to free themselves of accountability? And how might we locate potential interventions in the various discursive spaces of the fashion industry?

Instead of trying to locate a ‘victory narrative’ that provides all the answers, this analysis will utilize a post-structuralist frame of analysis “to trace how a certain mode of thought became possible at a particular juncture, and how it became a dominant discourse or regime of truth that can itself be subjected to retracings and retellings.”102 The hope is

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102 (Gannon & Davies, 2012, 74)
that doing so will provide some legibility for the multiple lines of flight toward social justice in the problematic spaces of global fashion.

**VII. Methodology**

The issue of fashion transparency is one that is complex and multi-faceted. There is no ‘correct’ or single way of writing about it, and thus my methodology will rely on an approach that takes into account this multiplicity. To this end, Laura Ellingson’s analysis of crystallization can facilitate approaching this issue from as many angles (or moments) as possible. Ellingson describes crystallization as using “scraps of data” and often “reflects collaborative processes, and embraces improvisation with form and content that depends on what becomes available.”  

She suggests that likening this process to a construction of a quilt can facilitate the creation of a “crystallized, multigenre text” that “may aid in simultaneously envisioning the big picture of your social, political, and scholarly goals for your project while also enabling you to focus on one particular patch of work at a time.”  

In that sense, my interpretations of different interventions will reveal a unique perspective on the central claim of this research, while at the same time reflecting different writing strategies to best reveal a particular angle.

The thread that ties these scraps together is that of discourse, specifically how people are accessing discourses and interpreting discourses in their practices. To that end post-structuralist theory, which “links language, subjectivity, social organization, and

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103 (Ellingson, 2009, 99)

104 Ibid
power,” is a particularly useful tool to lend insight into how language creates social reality and subjectivity by producing meaning. As the authors explain,

Different languages and different discourses within a given language divide up the world and give it meaning in ways that are not reducible to one another. Language is how social organization and power are defined and contested and the place where one’s sense of self – one’s subjectivity – is constructed. Understanding language as competing discourses – competing ways of giving meaning and of organizing the world – makes language a site of exploration and struggle.

This dissertation is an exploration of (a) examples, or spectacles, revealed in the literature and the discourses that are embedded in their production; and (b) discursive strategies employed by different actors in the fashion industry – from designers to workers to organizers to bloggers – to engage these discourses. I am not arguing a one-to-one correlation between the examples and the interventions. Rather, my approach was to first contextualize through the use of concrete examples and my own blog writing, the workings of power in the fashion industry. This analysis provides insights into discursive terrain for certain interventions by designers, workers, organizers, and bloggers.

The data that I will use to interrogate these discourses will be secondary sources (such as articles and books) and interviews with these various actors. The manner by which I will select my interviews will come through using a snowballing technique, “in which participants invite others in their social network to join the sample.” I have met so many of my participants based on recommendations from others, and have also gathered resources based on these recommendations. The drawback to this technique is

105 (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2005, 961)
106 (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2005, 961)
107 (Gannon & Davies, 2012, 249)
that it can create “systematic sources of sampling error because participants are likely to
recruit others who share similar characteristics in addition to the characteristic of
interest.” I overcame this possibility by asking all the interviewees to recommend
others who do not necessarily share their perspective. Most importantly, given that this
analysis calls for a multiplicity of interventions, I wanted to get a multiplicity of
examples that were representative of the work done in the field. I gravitated towards the
most powerful voices – those bloggers that were most prolific in their writing, for
example, or the student organizers who had been recently cited in a successful campaign.

The blogs I will be analyzing will be selected for their focus on questions of
transparency and contradictions within the fashion industry, and the extent to which they
represent a range of discursive strategies and conjunctures. I will specifically be focusing
on self-described ‘ethical fashion’ blogs, and their attempts to intervene and advocate for
more egalitarian arrangements within the mainstream blogosphere.

The interview questions were derived from the predicaments that were identified
earlier in the chapter and shaped by my research questions. These questions asked people
to respond to both the problems at hand (the issues of complicity, fake authenticity, fake
transparency, bounded accountability, and perilous democratization) and how to locate
potential interventions in the various discursive spaces of the fashion industry. Some of
the questions included:

1) In your opinion, what are the biggest problems facing the fashion industry today?

2) Do you see changing one’s consumption habits (conscious consumption) as the
most effective way to make change?

108 Ibid
3) Some people argue against minimalism/slow fashion because they claim that consumption builds growth and that consuming less means less jobs for workers domestically and abroad. How would you respond to that?

4) Do you feel the rise of ‘new media’ – such as blogs, twitter, etc., has made it easier to challenge those in power, such as big brands and corporations? How so?

5) Given that the mainstream fashion community is so large and powerful, with bloggers often supported by big corporations, do you think it’s possible for the ethical fashion blogger community to effectively intervene in this space?

6) What do you see as potentially troubling/problematic about the mainstream fashion blogosphere, and how do you think the ethical fashion community (and your blog) challenges/questions/critiques these problems?

7) What are the biggest challenges to transforming the industry into a more sustainable and ‘ethical’ one?

8) What do you think about monetization/disclosure policies? Do you think the ethical fashion blogger community approaches monetization and sponsorships differently than the mainstream fashion community?

9) What are your thoughts on companies like H&M that appear to make some sustainable commitments, such as signing the Accord and their Conscious collection? What would H&M have to do to convince you they were fully committed to ethical commitments?

10) Do you think the hashtag #whomademyclothes is an effective way to create awareness and push for change in the fashion industry? Do you think Fashion Revolution helps to create grassroots change that happens offline as well?
Of course, these are just some of the questions that were asked, and certainly they differed depending on whom I was interviewing. When interviewing Eric Henry of North Carolina textile company TS Designs for example, I would ask more specific questions that focused on the lines of flight attached to the problem of outsourcing and the ‘race to the bottom’ in global pricing. When speaking to Katie Roberts of the blog *Sustainability in Style*, however, I asked her specific questions about a campaign she launched to push a company to make sustainable commitments, and whether she felt that these “small steps” would turn into “industry leaps.” Still, these questions were all nonetheless rooted in my primary predicaments. Ultimately what I was interested in was learning from the interviewees what interventions they employed to navigate within these predicaments, so as to pave the way for more egalitarian arrangements in the industry.

This dissertation interrogates the intervention spaces that are able to engage disciplinary power in all these complicated places. To borrow from the theory of requisite variety, one must employ a myriad of tools and responses that are as nuanced as the multiplicity of problems that one encounters while navigating neoliberal governmentality. The case studies that I chose for analysis –such as bloggers - all occupy this space that is complex enough to somehow intervene these problems.

I consider myself to be an organizer, not an activist. Organizing, which has its roots in union and labor politics, forces me to be more accountable to my local and global communities and movements. A strong organizing movement is one that ensures participation and collective impact. There have been criticisms that with the rise of the Internet and new media, movements have become fragmented.109 The question then will

109 (Taylor, 2016)
be to what extent are these fragments informing this bounded notion of movement building? In order for movements to not be co-opted by disciplinary power, there is a need for the landscape of intervention to reflect “discursive agility” to appropriately engage the elusive discursive problems at the intersection of economy, culture, and fashion. To that end, sustained education and awareness is paramount.

The bloggers, designers and organizers I will be choosing for analysis will be collectively representing the landscape of agile interventions that connect to modernity in a way that is critical, and deconstructing this disciplinary power so different publics can be educated about the issue of global fashion industry exploitation. This dissertation interrogates the re-articulation of the problems of interventions into crucial issues such as labor exploitation, environmental degradation, and neo-colonialism that arise at the intersection of fashion, economy, and culture.

VIII. Overview of the Chapters

Chapter two provides a historical context for fashion as a discursive tool, and how fashion has been articulated throughout history to reflect and maintain the status quo. Chapter three will examine the contested ‘democratized’ discursive space of new media interventions and to what extent they can serve as a site for different types of cultural, political, and economic struggle within the shifting grounds of neoliberal governmentality. Chapter four interrogates the cultural debate around labor issues, revealing how the discourses of authenticity, transparency, accountability, and democratization have been at once articulated to resist the ills of capitalism and also re-articulated or co-opted to support neo-liberal governmentality. It turns to the various
interventions that are employed, and reveals the tensions between and within different movements in how these interventions are enacted. Chapter five focuses on how certain discursive technologies both enable and constrain environmental sustainability practices, including organizers’ efforts to create a more sustainable industry, in ways that meaningfully necessitates change without succumbing to corporate greenwashing. Chapter six takes up neo-colonialism and the issue of cultural appropriation in fashion, and whether blogger interventions are providing marginalized populations with a voice, or merely serving as a band-aid for wider institutional oppression. Chapter seven is the concluding chapter.

It is important to emphasize that this dissertation’s main focus is not to provide concrete solutions, but rather, to document the ever-shifting spaces that situate the problems of global fashion and to locate the multiplicative routes for social justice intervention. Power can be obscured, and my intent is to shine a light on these agile interventions that are able to engage disciplinary power in all the complicated spaces of global fashion. I am hopeful that by illuminating the different discursive frameworks that provide sites of intervention, it is possible to re-articulate hegemonic discourses of authenticity, democratization, and transparency from extreme capitalist relations to social justice frames. I am also hopeful that this project will help to navigate a response to these contradictions, complexities, and confusion, and will pave the way for contextual clarity and change within the fashion industry and beyond.
Chapter Two
The History of Fashion: Birth, Marketing and Globalization

I. Introduction

Once we resituate fashion within the vast life span of societies, we cannot see it as the simple manifestation of a passionate desire to be admired and to set oneself apart; it becomes an exceptional, highly problematic institution, a sociohistorical reality characteristic of the West and of modernity itself. From this standpoint, fashion is less a sign of class ambition than a way out of the world of tradition. It is one of the mirrors that allow us to see what constitutes our most remarkable historical destiny: the negation of the age-old power of the traditional past, the frenzied modern passion for novelty, the celebration of the social present.¹

Fashion has often been dismissed, both as a frivolous industry that lacks aesthetic value and even condemned as an insidious industry that hides exploitation behind its glamorous façade. It is seen by many as a tool of exploitation by the capitalist system, manipulating young and impressionable women into becoming mindless consumers.

But fashion is an industry that provides an unusual multiplicity of lenses into society, providing analysts with the ability to discern not only the structure of an industry proper and its development over time, but also, and this is what is of concern in this dissertation, the ability to provide a mirror of broader discourses taking place in society. Understanding how fashion changes is to understand how democracy changes. Its value of newness, often dismissed as transient and disposable, nevertheless provides a clue about the pulse of society’s mood. No industry is better situated to reflect society’s socio-economic, cultural and political shifts. Everyone consumes fashion, and therefore

¹ (Lipovetsky, 1994, 4)
it is as critical to understand the forces that shape it, as it is to understand any other sector of the economy. And while everyone also consumes electricity, the study of that sector would reveal a purely instrumental relationship between consumer and producer that barely changes with shifting socio-economic tides. Fashion, on the other hand, reflects the ebb and flow of society, and it is possible to observe changes in gender roles and identities, power struggles, labor rights, and the changing nature of the global by studying fashion.

Fashion is ultimately a site for re-articulating neoliberal power. Of particular concern in this dissertation is the problem of intervention in light of the re-articulation of issues such as labor exploitation, environmental degradation, and neo-colonialism. In order to understand the work that fashion does as a site of tension, struggle, and contested meaning, it is important to demonstrate the historical context for fashion as a discursive tool.

In this chapter, I will examine three main facets of the fashion industry that embed the problematics that are of particular concern to this dissertation. Each of them is a discursive problem, and to that end a discursive analysis will be employed to analyze them.

First is the creation of fashion. Fashion’s origin in haute couture as a preserve of the privileged few is in dialectical opposition to the development of fashion as a mass phenomenon, allowing for the critical analysis of the problematics of nostalgia vs. newness, fine design vs. cheaply produced mass fashion, elite protection of privilege vs. democratic empowerment.
Second, to understand fashion as a discursive space that allows it to embed the multiple sites of contestation, it is essential to examine the marketing of fashion in the pre-internet age, and how it becomes intertwined with the impulses of couture houses, captains of industry, and modernity (novelty). Fashion’s movement out of the atelier, out of its privileged cocoon, was facilitated by the emergence of newspapers, fashion magazines, television, and with them all, advertising. Clothing itself was replaced by branding and image making, which was targeted along gender, class and racial lines.

Third, the production of fashion and the evolution of its ever-lengthening supply chain are critical. In this section, I will examine the fashion industry’s role in establishing the globalization of labor, and its interest in expanding the logic of distance. The fashion industry is a particularly good case study for exploring this latter concept since advertising creates a veil between the circumstances in which fashion is produced and consumed.

The literature on fashion is vast and marked by competing and profound contributions from authors with neo-liberal, Marxist and feminist perspectives. This literature will be examined in this chapter as well. Most importantly, this chapter and the next will be drawing from Foucault’s notions of technologies of the self, in which people create new subjectivities that are influenced by changing forms of governance.\(^2\) Fashion’s disciplinary power has been articulated throughout history to reflect social realities but also to maintain the status quo, and it is these “moments,” or discursive technologies, that I will be identifying within the shifting ground of neoliberal disciplinary power and governmentality.

\(^2\) (Brodwin, 2015)
II. The Creation of Fashion: How it rose to shape and reinforce class, gender, and social distinctions

Haute Couture traditionally refers to fashion that is custom-fitted, constructed by hand from start to finish, and made with meticulous detail by experienced seamstresses. The word ‘haute’ means ‘high’ in French, and captures both the exorbitantly high prices that are justified on the basis of its fine craftsmanship, as well as the high status of those who consume it. At turns, renowned for its artisanship, dismissed for its perpetuation of exaggerated female beauty, and maligned for its elitism, haute couture is one of society’s most contested cultural institutions. How it emerged and developed in the West, and ultimately declined over time, tells us much about societal tensions over issues of democracy, access, gender roles, and the global neoliberal market. It is fashion’s cyclical nature, greatly impacted by the cultural trends of the moment, which lends itself so well to historical analysis and critique.

Fashion’s ascent can be traced to eleventh century in the late medieval period in Europe, when the agricultural and technological revolution, the growth of commerce, and the expansion of cities fueled vast economic growth. It is in this period that we can begin to see disciplining forms of power at work through fashion. The development of cities fostered commercial exchanges and trade fairs, while the declining power of the monarchy and rising influence of the feudal system increased the wealth of the nobility. By the twelfth century, the rich and ostentatious princely courts of France were the perfect platforms for the nobility to show off their wealth through fashion.\(^3\) And even though Italy had become the center of the world economy in the thirteenth century, a

\(^3\) (Heller, 2010, 31)
diverse array of materials fostered by an increasingly international trade market were used to make clothing, bringing in furs from Russia and Scandinavia, cotton from Turkey, feathers from Africa, leather from Morocco, and dyes from Asia. The growth of cities also brought a wider consumer base, making clothing labor increasingly divided and specialized. By the late thirteenth century there were around ten professions, from dressmakers to shoemakers to tailors and so on, that were devoted strictly to fashion. This corporate specialization of trade had a two-pronged effect: stifling individual creativity while at the same time cultivating innovative weaving, dyeing, and finishing techniques that produced high quality garments. Even though tailors at this point lacked social status as creative artists, they still had an incredible amount of influence in an industry that was proving to be pivotal in shaping aristocratic “refinement and grace.”4

Assigning a single ‘birth date’ to fashion is a difficult task, given the lack of visual records before the fourteenth century.5 What fashion scholars generally agree upon is that fashion’s emergence was shaped not just by trade and markets, but also by contested meanings of gender norms and identities. Fashion was and still is the space and the place where the struggle between women’s desire of autonomy and democracy and men’s desire for control and power is articulated and re-articulated.

Before the eleventh century, Christian austerity influenced the way that men and women dressed, and loose, long robes were worn by both sexes. This was also due to class factors as well, as most societies lived at subsistence levels and thus there was little incentive to dress in ways that distinguished rich from poor.

4 (Lipovetsky, 1994, 40)
5 (Heller, 2010, 28)
Interestingly enough, gender distinctions in dress began to develop during the period of urban growth and agricultural expansion in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which sustained growing populations in the cities. The eleventh century gave rise to a radical change in men’s dress. Men in the court abandoned the short robes of the previous six centuries worn by men in the court for the long bliaut (a fitted outer tunic) and a chainse (a chemise worn under the bliaut). Anglo-Norman cleric Orderic Vitalis observed in his Ecclesiastical History that the young men surrounding William II of England (1087-1100) also wore long pointed shoes and grew their hair long like women, using curling irons and caps to groom and tame their luxurious manes. These styles eventually spread beyond the court to become popular for men in the merchant and labor classes, democratizing dress in a way that Vitalis condemned as a societal “great evil.”6 A shift in women’s style was seen in the twelfth century, when dress began to be shaped to the body by being laced at the sides.

But it was the fourteenth century at the beginning of the Renaissance in which fashion in the strict sense truly emerged, and where a pronounced difference between male and female clothing became apparent. While the new costume for men replaced the “long, flowing, smock like surcoat with a short garment cinched in at the waist and fastened with buttons,” as well as breeches that “followed the contour of the legs,” the costume for women was a more closely fitted, low-necked version of the traditional long dress.7 This “aristocratic interest” in fashionable clothing is observed to have become

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6 (Heller, 2010, 31-32)
7 (Lipovetsky, 1994, 20)
noticeable at the Burgundian court in the fourteenth century, when Burgundy was thriving as the center of the international trade market.\(^8\)

What is so significant about this period is that up until the nineteenth century, male fashion eclipsed women’s fashion in terms of “novelty, ornamentation, and extravagance.”\(^9\) Take for example, high heels, which were exclusively worn by men until the eighteenth century. A sign of status, they were initially used for horse riding by the nobility, and eventually adopted by the working class. In response, the aristocracy elevated the height of the heel to distinguish themselves from the lower ranks of society—and the high heel was born. This heel was hugely impractical, but as Kremer noted, “one of the best ways that status can be conveyed is through impracticality,” as it reinforces that the wealthy “aren’t in the fields working and don’t have to walk far.”\(^10\) The ostentatious height of these heels could only be rivaled by their color, which were dyed a bright red by Louis XIV (1638-1715) and adopted widely. Imitation heels were available for those who were not part of the king’s court, similar to how knock-offs for the couture red-heeled Louboutins abound today. Women started to wear heels in an “effort to masculinize their outfits,” and the style became relatively unisex. In fact, during the sixteenth century, women appropriated the masculinity of daggers worn from their belts, bisexual curls, and high-crowned hats, to name a few examples, sparking the outrage of Elizabethan moralists.\(^11\) It was then that the “Great Male Renunciation,” in which men

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\(^8\) (Wilson, 2003)

\(^9\) (Lipovetsky, 1994, 27)

\(^10\) (Kremer, 2013)

\(^11\) (Wilson, 2003, 118)
relinquished their privilege to beauty and adornment, began. Thus designers were not just aesthetically motivated. They were in fact responding to, and even actively shaping, societal gender norms of the time. This ‘renunciation’ reveals how fashion’s disciplinary power can re-articulate and reinforce the gender status quo so that regardless of cultural shifts in fashion, men are always the dominant sex.

The Enlightenment (1650-1800), with its emphasis on rational thought and education, produced differences in the sexes that were further reflected in dress. Men were seen as rational and intelligent, while women were viewed as emotional, flighty, and “uneducable.” Fashion then, was dismissed as the antidote to Enlightenment ideals – “foolish and effeminate” and its “glitter of artifice” was thus best suited for women. At the same time, the fluctuations of fashion proceeded at a rapid pace during this period of great societal shifts and tension, which were reflected in the changing ‘vogues’ of the time for women. By 1760, men had given up wearing heels entirely, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the rise of the industrial revolution along with revolutionary political ideals gave way to the “great masculine renunciation” in which men abandoned pretensions of beauty. The greater influence of the bourgeoisie encouraged men to adopt a more austere, professional look of a black suit and tie, a marked departure from “the bedizened courtier or even the gaily dressed merchant of Renaissance Florence.” Women on the other hand, were increasingly using fashion to emphasize their ‘delicate’ femininity:

12 (Lipovetsky, 1994, 74)
13 (Lipovetsky, 1994, 21)
14 (Wilson, 2003, 30)
By the early Victorian period a ballet-dancer fragility of looks was fashionable for women; they wore their hair parted in the centre and demurely sleeked down and looped to frame a madonna oval face; their gowns had sloping shoulders and pinched in waists; their whole style trembled with meek submissiveness. This divergence between the sexes was about gender as much as eroticism.\(^\text{15}\)

Furthermore, with the designation in the eighteenth century of homosexuality as a permanent psychological condition (instead of just a sinful act), men were pressured to abandon effeminate dressing in favor of a more staunchly masculine style. Thus, this “increasing sexual stereotyping in dress” was in essence, “a defense against new fears” that has been sustained to the current day.\(^\text{16}\) In other words, men’s dress was being re-articulated as a disciplinary agent to reinforce the status quo – homophobia. Certainly, to suggest that men’s fashion has remained stagnant throughout the last few centuries would be utterly simplistic. Edwardian dandyism had its heyday, as did many other styles influenced by celebrities such as Clark Gable or subcultures such as the hippies and grunge. But the costly aristocratic dress of the nobility had been replaced by clothing that expressed the new social values that were attributed solely to men, cultivated during the Enlightenment “of equality, economy, and effort.”\(^\text{17}\) However, it is important to consider:

Fashion’s new gender disjunction and the preeminence of the feminine that it instituted extended the social definition of the “second sex,” its timeless taste for artifice as an aid to seducing and appearing beautiful. By putting women’s fashion on a pedestal, by reaffirming the primordial requirement of feminine beauty, the hundred years’ fashion represented a continuation of the representations, values, and predilections of the feminine that had ruled for centuries.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{15}\) (Wilson, 2003, 29-30)

\(^{16}\) (Wilson, 2003, 30)

\(^{17}\) (Lipovetsky, 1994, 74)

\(^{18}\) Ibid
There are two points that deserve to be made here. First, fashion only came to be seen as frivolous when women began to monopolize it – an example of the patriarchal misogynistic underpinnings of fashion. Hence it might not have been dismissed as a cultural institution worthy of study if it were still occupied by men. Second, fashion is the ideal object for feminist analysis, as it has both privileged and exploited feminine values throughout the last few centuries.

As this discussion has revealed thus far, fashion’s evolution was as much due to class and social distinctions as it was to gender ones. In documenting the small yet influential changes in personal adornments that began in the medieval period, Lipovetsky opines:

> These were cascades of ‘little nothings,’ small differences that combined to make up fashion as a whole. Such differences immediately raised the standing of anyone who adopted them and lowered that of anyone who failed to adopt them, and they immediately rendered obsolete whatever had gone before. Fashion instituted the social power of infinitesimal signs, the astonishing mechanism of social distinction conferred on those whose dress is subtly novel.¹⁹

It is true that from the Middle Ages on, dress was influenced by the preferences of the powerful and the changing tastes of monarchs and the nobility. It is also true that a culture of consumption was beginning to emerge, in which aristocratic individuals would discard their clothing before they were outworn, representing a “new level of consumption”²⁰ that reflected their high class status. Fashion also helped to shape national consciousness and foster awareness of belonging to a larger, unified political and cultural community, as individual states distinguished themselves from their neighbors.

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¹⁹ (Lipovetsky, 1994, 23)
²⁰ (Wilson, 2003, 20)
through different forms of dress.\textsuperscript{21} As such, fashion also provided an outward marker of civilizational distinctiveness, helping to create and mark the West and Westerners as distinct from other people, or as Edward Said put it, the “orient.”\textsuperscript{22} Thus, Foucault’s ‘neoliberal subject’ of the self-managing individual, had not been fully articulated yet. Citizen subjectivity was still tied to the state, and fashion was employed as an intervention by which those the nobility reinforced their power.

Yet to attribute fashion as simply a marker of class and nation is to overlook the fact that conflicts and tensions among groups have existed long before the rise of modern fashion. Certainly, these measures of social distinction enhanced fashion’s diffusion and expansion, but they fail to elucidate why, even when imitating higher elites in society, individuals do not adopt fashion in entirely homogenous ways. For example, while poorer peasants were denied access to luxurious materials in the pre-industrial era, they still “dressed distinctively.”\textsuperscript{23}

What a class analysis misses is how fashion contributed to the rise of the individual and the democratization of society by offering more choices and avenues to express one’s individuality, or the ‘neoliberal subject.’ By the end of the Middle Ages, this desire to be unique in appearance was legitimized, as was the competition between individuals to establish their ‘difference’ that naturally emerged from this encouragement of the expression of individual tastes.\textsuperscript{24} It was this rise of secular individualism and the

\textsuperscript{21} (Lipovetsky, 1994, 32-33)
\textsuperscript{22} (Said, 1978)
\textsuperscript{23} (Wilson, 2003, 23)
\textsuperscript{24} (Lipovetsky, 1994, 47)
rejection of traditional appearances that angered religious leaders and the “moralists.”

And it was the insistence on equal access to fashionable dress by the rising urban bourgeoisie that angered the nobility. Lipovetsky notes,

This is the crux of fashion’s originality and also its ambiguity: an instrument of social discrimination and a manifest mark of social superiority, fashion was nevertheless also a special agent of the democratic revolution. On the one hand, it blurred the established distinctions and made it possible to confront and confuse social strata. On the other hand, it reintroduced – although in a new way – the timeless logic of signs of power, brilliant symbols of domination and social difference. Here is the paradox of fashion: its flashy displays of the emblems of hierarchy played a role in the movement toward the equalization of appearances.

The next section will reveal how this was the case even with the emergence of haute couture, an institution both renowned and maligned for its exclusivity and high price tags.

III. The Rise of Haute Couture as Unwilling Democratizing Force

Haute couture is without question the most significant institution in modern fashion. No other fashion institution has had to keep on mobilizing a legal arsenal to protect itself against plagiarists and imitators; no other has given rise to passionate debates or enjoyed worldwide fame; no other has benefited from the steady, intense publicity of a specialized press. Extending a phenomenon that was already visible in the eighteenth century, modern fashion is feminine in essence.

The birth of the couture industry is often traced to the formation of the couturiers’ trade guild in 1675, during the reign of Louis XIV (1638-1715). It is arguably also when one can pinpoint the first fashion advertising, as couturiers dressed ballerinas of the newly formed French ballet to gain greater exposure. During the 1700s Rose Bertin, the French fashion designer to Queen Marie Antoinette, helped to bring fashion to the French

25 (Wilson, 2003, 42)
26 (Lipovetsky, 1994, 31)
27 (Lipovetsky, 1994, 56)
28 (Butchart, 2010)
courts and larger society.\(^{29}\) This period has also been credited with giving birth to the concept of *democratization* and “cheap chic” in the fashion industry, as the invention of the manteau – a loose-fitting house dress worn by seventeenth century French women from all socioeconomic backgrounds – popularized the concept of dressing down and blurred class markers between women.\(^{30}\) In this way fashion as a manifestation of Foucault’s ‘technologies of the self’ - the everyday processes and practices citizens operate on their own bodies to constitute a self-governing subject - is applicable here. Even during this early period fashion was articulated as a democratizing force that promised the transformation of class status through the care and management of one’s body and image. The democratizing allure of fashion has been re-articulated often throughout history, and has always been intertwined with the control and governmentalization of bodies within the disciplinary power of dominant system like capitalism. These re-articulations will be discussed in later chapters that detail the rise of other sartorial phenomenons that promise self-transformation such as fast fashion and the blogosphere.

Yet the rise of haute couture truly accelerated with the emergence of industrial manufacturing in the early to mid nineteenth century. By 1840, the ready-to-wear clothing industry established in France was flourishing, even before the wide adoption of the sewing machine a few decades later. Still it was Englishman Charles Frederick Worth, working under the court of Napoleon III of France in the 1850s and gaining recognition for his gowns that he designed for Princess Pauline Metternich and the

\(^{29}\) (Nudelman, 2009, 2)

\(^{30}\) (T. Pham, 2011)
Empress Eugenie, who is recognized for being the “father” of haute couture as it is known today. Under Worth, fashionable women’s wear for the first time was brought under the direction of a single person, and with the simultaneous rise of mass production, the “exclusive dress had to be definitely distinguished from the vulgar copy; the dress designer had to become the artist.”

In 1858 he set up his own dressmaking company, Worth et Bobergh, and in 1870 the Maison Worth fashion house in Paris was established. Worth contributed many of the conventions of modern-day couture, the most important being designer auteurship. His insistence that he be the one to select the fabrics, design the garments, conduct the fittings, and supervise the manufacturing of the finished item that was of exceptionally high quality was truly innovative for the time and laid the groundwork for all subsequent couturiers.

It should be noted that Worth’s position as a male dressmaker was a “scandalous departure” from societal norms but one that undoubtedly helped to heighten the status of his profession as well as to facilitate his ability to take control of his creations, transforming the couturier from artisan into sovereign artist. Thus, as was seen with the shifting meanings around high heels, fashion was re-articulated to reinforce male dominance; in this case, male entrance into the industry served to increase the profession’s capital and prestige. This concern for designer originality was reflected in his insistence that pieces were made to measure for each individual client, and he was also the first dress designer to have his name inside a label, a prototype for what we now identify as a ‘brand.’ When presenting his clothes to his clients, he would use fashion

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31 (Wilson, 2003, 32)
32 (Bancroft, 2012, 72)
models, referred to then as sosies (doubles), who tended to be pretty young women without any kind of class or social status.\textsuperscript{33} Their success depended on personality and looks and wearing Worth’s clothes was not just a form of advertising for his clients, but for themselves as well. Beauty, in a society where high status meant access to clothing with high price tags, thus became “the passport to social mobility.”\textsuperscript{34} It is in this way that fashion’s disciplinary power operated to constrain women’s opportunities for upwards mobility based on beauty standards that they couldn’t control and that were often dictated by men (in this case, Worth).

By the early 1900s dozens of other fashion houses had followed in Worth’s footsteps, and the luxury industry began to play a significant role in France’s economy, making up almost a third of the country’s export sales in clothing. The Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne registered fifty houses in 1959, establishing haute couture as an influential cultural institution. The prominence of couture, with its semi-annual collections, helped to regulate and institutionalize an industry that had been driven somewhat chaotically by “one variable arbiter of elegance or another” over the previous few centuries.\textsuperscript{35} That’s not to imply that the fashion houses did not reflect and respond to the changing cultural landscape. Haute couture was undeniably feminine in appeal, and the fashion houses catered their changing vogues and seasonal renewals to women far more than men. Interestingly enough, masculine fashion was characterized by its slow, steady, more “egalitarian” nature, perhaps reflecting culturally ingrained notions of men’s

\textsuperscript{33} (Lipovetsky, 1994, 57)

\textsuperscript{34} (Wilson, 2003, 33)

\textsuperscript{35} (Lipovetsky, 1954, 58)
more ‘rational’ disposition that had been established during the Enlightenment period. Even so, from the 1830s to around 1900 women’s dress in fact lagged behind men’s, largely owing to the confinement of women to the private domestic sphere that made it difficult for them to adapt to metropolitan bourgeois life.

The fashion houses responded enthusiastically in the early twentieth century to the rise to the “New Woman,” a feminist ideal that naturally emerged from the suffragette movement and an increase in educational and economic opportunities for women. Furthermore, even though sports were widely practiced, its emergence of sports for women demanded greater physical comfort and freedom in their clothes. While designer Paul Poiret, the first major dress designer of the 20th century, had discarded the tight-laced corset in his collections, freeing women from the physical constriction that resulted in limited mobility, designer Coco Chanel was adamant that her sportswear pieces could encourage women to be “physical, active and strong.” Her line thus emphasized clothing that would inspire women to embrace the outdoors, such as comfortable jersey fabrics, sleek and simple lines, and bathing suits. Decades later, Courreges’ futurist lines of the 1960s were inspired by the “freedom of movement” that he believed came with being a “liberated” woman. Thus designers were not just aesthetically motivated. They were in fact responding to, and even actively shaping, societal gender norms of the time.

Women’s new freedoms brought new dresses; and fashion increasingly began to reflect the bourgeoisie’s compartmentalized lifestyle that required different dresses for

36 (Kitch, 2001)
37 (Key Moments in Style)
38 (Lipovetsky, 1994, 62)
tea, walking, travelling, dinner, etc. Dress was no longer simply ornate and frivolous, but was “both used as an indicator of social conformity, and, paradoxically, also individualized to the wearer’s taste and personality.”

It is here that we return again to this question of whether fashion contributed to democratization by shaping and strengthening the individual. It is important to note that while fashion in the beginning of the twentieth century did help to shape individualization by offering greater choices in dress, the rise of the uniform as the first mass produced clothing arguably symbolized the “advance of the modern state into the life of the individual.” Uniforms were implemented to enforce homogeneity, suppress sexuality, and even to restrict the fashionable aspirations of women servants. As one domestic servant stated in an interview, “It isn’t right to keep another woman deliberately in the background by making her dress in dark colors.” Even uniforms, however, were often made to be more fashionable as a way to attract new recruits, and many women, as acts of small resistance, would alter their uniforms slightly to individualize them.

Furthermore, as Nan Enstad argues in her study on working women at the turn of the twentieth century, the “democratization of fashion” was really extended more to middle-class women, who embraced this transition as egalitarian. Even though industrialization may have effectively blurred class differences in types of fabrics and

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39 (Wilson, 2003, 35)
40 (Wilson, 2003, 35)
41 (Wilson, 2003, 36)
42 (Wilson, 2003, 36-40)
styles that people wore, nevertheless, “the notion of taste served to maintain
distinction.”

Haute Couture was centralized in Paris, and until the 1960s all fashion industries
were subject to its dictates. This process of creating pieces centrally and then selling the
diluted product to countries outside of Europe’s epicenter has been compared to
globalization, because it conveys a “tacit assumption of a fashion-consuming public,
international in scope, whose tastes and standards were located essentially within the vast
shadow and penumbra of a Eurocentric culture.” Yet surprisingly, it can also be said
that the luxury industry contributed to fashion’s democratization in a number of ways.
First, as previously mentioned, was the increasing heterogeneity of fashion that gave
women greater choices and avenues to express their individuality. Second, the
simplification of women’s fashion that was popularized in the 1920s (often credited to
Chanel) made fashion far less inaccessible to the masses. The flamboyant display of
wealth was re-articulated to symbolize poor taste, even if there were still some
distinctions in how people of different class backgrounds dress. The important point is
that it was no longer “obligatory” for the upper classes to dress in ostentatious luxury,
and that dressing in the current vogue was now possible for a large number of people.
Women at the turn of the century were often adept at sewing, and many of them were
able to make “knock-offs” of expensive clothing they saw in magazines. Thus emerged

43 (Enstad, 1999)
44 (Davis, 1992, 200)
45 (Lipovetsky, 1994, 60)
46 (Cline, 2012, 80)
the neo-liberal subject citizen employing fashion as a mode for aspirational transformation into a more privileged class – even though ultimately, that class was still restricted to them. Third, fashion was undeniably influenced by the trends of modern art following the first World War, which was becoming increasingly avant-garde. Artists such as Picasso, Matisse, and Manet’s experimentations with cubism, for example, helped to democratize clothing styles by rejecting the decorative and “voluminousness” of the feminine form. Of course, the flapper look of the 1920s that reflected the “cubist pictoral space” consisting of “geometrical contours and flattenings” simultaneously freed women of restrictive norms while emphasizing a new ideal – skinny, flat-chested, and boyish. Thus Fashion’s role in democratization at this point was already imbued with complexity and ambiguity. As Lipovetsky notes,

Democratization signified a lessening of the marks of social distance, a muting of the aristocratic principle of conspicuous consumption, along with the new criteria of slenderness, youth, sex appeal, convenience, and discretion. The fashion system that lasted for a century did not eliminate signs of social rank, but it attenuated them by promoting values that stressed more personal attributes.47

Lipovetsky also argues that it was a desire for fashion, previously confined to the aristocratic classes, which fueled the democratization of appearance. After the two world wars a woman’s ‘right’ to fashion, regardless of her background, gained mass-market legitimacy. And fashion’s revolving trends, which women were now expected to follow, imposed values of newness and change that helped give root to modernity. But who exactly was imposing those trends? Certainly the rise of haute couture imbued designer-couturiers with the autonomy and authority to create original designs from which the client had to choose. And yet, couturiers still were constrained by the

47 (Lipovetsky, 1994, 61)
possibility of commercial failure, and thus were careful to listen to shifting public tastes that were reinforced by celebrities and the press. The tug of war between the dominant trends of haute couture and those of mass tastes were never more evident than in the 1920s, when fashion houses ‘declared war’ on short hair and black dresses – and failed miserably.\(^{48}\) In 1946 Christian Dior had better success with his influential, avant-garde ‘New Look,’ which featured full, feminine busts and huge spreading skirts. He openly stated that the collection’s purpose was two-fold, which was to reinvigorate haute couture as well as traditional notions of femininity during the post-war period. Even so, there is still debate about the meaning of the collection despite Dior’s assertions that it was to transform women who were beginning to look and dress like “Amazons.”\(^{49}\) While some theorists have associated the New Look with an antiquated “model of female subjectivity” that exaggerated domesticity and femininity, others have posited that the fantastical nature of the collection (with some dresses featuring twenty yards of cloth) personified the aspirations of 1950s women who wanted to escape the confines of marriage and motherhood and overcome wartime shortages.\(^{50}\) Thus, whether fashion’s disciplinary power reinforced the gender status quo or re-articulated it is up for debate. Certainly, Dior employed fashion as a tool to control women’s bodies, but whether these designs were actually re-articulated by women as fantasy that allowed them to cope with patriarchal control is unclear.

\(^{48}\) (Lipovetsky, 1994, 80)

\(^{49}\) (Bancroft, 2012, 74)

\(^{50}\) (Bancroft, 2012, 74-75)
Couture has certainly been organized around the dichotomy between masculine and feminine appearance, despite educational and economic gains that has actually brought the two sexes closer together. Interestingly enough, this gender dissymmetry is often heightened after periods of advancement for women. For example lipstick was introduced after the First World War, nail polish after 1930, and eye makeup during the 1950s. While it can be argued that these beauty trends restricted women’s choices by confining them to a certain feminine subjectivity (even though they were often repackaged as empowering and liberating), it is also important to note that men are in fact subject to an even more restrictive code in which they are under no circumstances allowed to wear dresses and use makeup. These constraints placed on men’s dress are a reinforcement of a sexist, homophobic status quo that demeans both women and feminine men. Thus, one can argue that women have more choices and flexibility in the construction of their appearance that men do not have. In fact, one could even posit that as women gained greater access to equality later in the century, they were allowed a flexibility in the workplace and their home lives that was not as easily afforded to men.

Does the greater number of choices in fashion for women enable them to become more complex individuals in Western society? Of course, as was discussed in how high heels were worn by men and then re-articulated into a symbol of frivolity only appropriate for women, the myriad of fashion ‘choices’ for women does not translate into greater social, political, and economic power. The important point here is that during haute couture’s golden age:

51 (Lipovetsky, 1994, 110)

52 (Hoskins, 2014, 200)
Despite its character as a luxury industry aimed at making the social hierarchy visible, then, haute couture was a democratic individualistic organization that adapted the production of fashion to the ideals of the sovereign individual – even though, as was the case for women, that individual remained in a “minor” position within the political order.\(^5^3\)

Thus, one must be careful when employing discursive technologies such as ‘democratization’ and ‘freedom,’ as doing so may obscure the ways in which fashion is integrated into dominant systems for the profit of capitalist structures and privileged groups, and as such, can reinforce and strengthen hierarchies of aesthetics, knowledge, and tastes along racial, gender, and classed lines.

**IV. Labor Issues: How the artisan trade guilds and textile factories articulated class-consciousness in the nineteenth century**

Labor organizing and exploitation in the twentieth century will be discussed in more depth in chapter four, but this section will interrogate how the artisan trade guilds and urban factories helped to shape class consciousness and new subjectivities in the United States and Western Europe. In late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century France, for example, the Revolution created new categories of citizen-subjects and their rights. In doing so, France’s social order was transformed from a society of corporate bodies connected by their subjugation to the state, to one that consisted of individual citizens linked together by a contract that guaranteed their natural rights.\(^5^4\) It is in this way that *class is discursive*; these discursive technologies, influenced by regime changes that included the Restoration and the emerging socialist discourse of the 1830s and 1840s, helped to fundamentally shape working class identity and invigorate

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\(^{53}\) (Lipovetsky, 1994, 86)

\(^{54}\) (Sewell Jr, 1986, 56)
collective action both in the workplace and in the political sphere.\textsuperscript{55} This of course included the artisan trade guilds, as revolutionaries ended the regime of corporate regulation and left artisans with the legal freedom to carry on his trade with “his own inclinations, capacities, and interests.”\textsuperscript{56} This ideal of ‘brotherhood’ and worker solidarity, absent in artisan trade guilds during the Old Regime, emerged during the Revolution and strengthened into a new class consciousness.

The context in which nineteenth century working-class formation developed differed in France, Germany, and the United States. In France, class formation was greatly shaped by artisan culture, organization, and values. Artisans were successful in forging alliances with workers across trade lines to challenge exploitation, and it was this tradition of organizing that helped to shape “the development of fiercely independent forms of resistance”\textsuperscript{57} when factory industrialization presented new challenges in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Despite popular discourse that connects the class conscious worker movement to the factory, in nineteenth century France small-scale industry was twice as large as large-scale industry, even as late as 1876.\textsuperscript{58} In Germany artisan traditions and organizations didn’t so much shape class formation as they were assimilated into the dominant, modern class rhetoric. Domestic workers and journeymen – skilled workers who labored for small employers and then became modern-day workers

\textsuperscript{55} (Katznelson, Working-Class Formation: Constructing Cases and Comparisons, 1986, 34)

\textsuperscript{56} (Sewell Jr, 1986, 57)

\textsuperscript{57} (Katznelson, Working-Class Formation: Constructing Cases and Comparisons, 1986, 29)

\textsuperscript{58} (Sewell Jr, 1986, 48)
mid century – were the foundation for the expansion of the new trade unions and independent labor party.\textsuperscript{59} In the United States, however, the political and anti-capitalist orientations of the urban craft unions did not effectively influence the “dominant machine politics” of the new proletariat.\textsuperscript{60} These differences could in part be due to geography and space; in France, it was the neighborhoods surrounding the work areas that cultivated a social and political space that facilitated organizing against economic change and exploitation. While in Germany and the United States the separation of factory areas from (class specific) residential neighborhoods was a development beginning in the mid nineteenth century, in France, similar spatial arrangements only emerged in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{61} This helped to foster a sense of continuity and collective solidarity in urban worker experiences, and as such, also slowed down the tempo of capitalist development in France.\textsuperscript{62} It is important to note that while the Revolution imbued citizens with individual rights that helped to usurp corporate control of artisan guilds, it also fostered a liberal economy based on free market principles that challenged artisan traditions. These deeply embedded artisan traditions, however, provided a “basis for resistance to capitalist control and changes in the organization of labor.”\textsuperscript{63} In other words, the ideals created by

\textsuperscript{59} (Katznelson, Working-Class Formation: Constructing Cases and Comparisons, 1986, 28)

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid

\textsuperscript{61} (Katznelson, Working-Class Formation: Constructing Cases and Comparisons, 1986, 33)

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid
the French Revolution strengthened capitalism while simultaneously equipping workers with tools to challenge it.

To that end, even though the French artisan industry thrived well into the twentieth century does not mean it was left uninfluenced by the rising development of industrial capitalism. In fact, capitalism began to shape crafts even before the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the rise of English technological innovations fueled mass production of textiles in the artisan industry. As early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for example, the “merchant capitalists who dominated the textile industry” began to outsource spinning and weaving operations to rural families as a way to bypass urban guilds’ insistence on high labor wages, fair worker practices, and high product quality. In the nineteenth century exploitative practices transformed even the more “traditional” handicraft trades that did not rely on machinery – such as jewelry, furniture, garment making, building and shoemaking. Entrepreneurs in these industries responded to increasing demand by turning away from the antiquated practice of making items ‘ready-to-order’ and instead began to mass produce standardized, ready-to-use items that could be sold at a lower price. Doing so effectively reorganized standards of production, including increasing the division of workers and subcontracting schemes while lowering wages. It is no wonder then, that artisans were so heavily involved in early working-class protests. It is important to emphasize that factory workers and artisans developed different subjectivities in the way they understood their labor within these exploitative practices. Artisans working under

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64 (Sewell Jr, 1986, 50)

65 (Sewell Jr, 1986, 51)
the corporate trade guild system of the medieval and early modern cities developed a more social understanding of their labor. Corporations demanded of both masters and workers the “collective discipline of the corporation,” and they were “units of regulation” as well as of “pervasive solidarity.”  

Factory workers, by contrast, developed a relation with labor production that was less social and more individualized. They experienced their work as “independent family units enmeshed in a network of commercial relations.” This fact repudiates the Marxist account that forcing workers together in a crowded factory will automatically lead to collective solidarity. It all depends on how workers understand their work and their relations to each other of course, but as will be discussed in more detail in chapter four, laboring in close proximity to one another does not automatically guarantee recognition of common interests. The important point is that distinct histories of capitalism shaped worker subjectivities and their different understandings of labor in the textile industry and artisan craft guilds.

As discussed earlier, the French Revolution dramatically transformed the established structure of society and also created a new political discourse in which “public claims of all sorts could be couched – a language of individual citizens, natural rights, popular sovereignty, and the social contract.” The Restoration in 1814 re-articulated these discourses to reinforce the power of Louis XVIII, who attempted to replace the language of the Revolution with ideals of religious piety, authority and

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66 (Sewell Jr, 1986, 54)

67 (Sewell Jr, 1986, 70)

68 (Sewell Jr, 1986, 52-53)

69 (Sewell Jr, 1986, 59)
tradition, and disdain for revolution. This revolutionary language was restored when Louis XVIII’s successor, Charles X, was overthrown and a more liberal Orleanist monarchy was established.\textsuperscript{70} However, the discourse of this revolution – which emphasized individual rights for citizens (and artisans) – presented problems for workers. Their concern was that efforts to regulate a trade could potentially infringe on the liberty of the individual, since the Revolution articulated society (and by extension, trade guilds and factories) as composed of free-thinking individual citizens rather than of corporate bodies. Thus, artisans’ solution for this problem was to develop, during the course of 1831-1833, the idea of “association” that had been proclaimed as a right in 1789 and re-articulate it in a way that spoke to the workers’ rights movement. The Revolution had conceptualized society as an “association formed by free and equal citizens of the nation and united by bonds of fraternity”\textsuperscript{71} and thus workers were able to advocate for smaller associations that reflected these same ideals. These corporate organizations, renamed with titles such as “Philanthropic Society” and “Society of Fraternal Amity” were effectively transformed into “democratic voluntary organizations” that ultimately made compatible their demands for collective regulation with revolutionary discourse.\textsuperscript{72} This idea was more fully developed in the 1830s when workers and socialists established the notion of producers’ associations or producers’ cooperatives, which gave workers the right to be “joint owners of the means of production.”\textsuperscript{73} This notion of producers’

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid
\textsuperscript{71} (Sewell Jr, 1986, 61)
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid
cooperatives was articulated in a way to re-articulate the complicated space of a strengthening liberal discourse that emphasized the “egotistic individualism” over community. It is a concept that has been fully developed in the form of fair trade and artisan cooperatives, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter four. Ultimately, the dramatic transformations of the 1830s in France created a discursive and organizational space that laid the foundation for a class-conscious discourse and the modern-day workers’ movement.

As noted previously, class formation developed differently in the United States. Prior to the Civil War the artisan workshop was the dominant mode of production, with half of the working class laboring in craft industries organized under traditional lines. However, by 1860 only one fifth of workers were doing so. This was in large part due to the swift pace of industrialization, which developed as more urban and factory-based than the French. Cities grew at dizzying speed during a period of mass immigration mid-century, while apprenticeships disintegrated and the division of labor became more intense. Increasingly work became subcontracted, creating instability for journeymen (skilled workers with apprenticeships) and more work for “outwork” laborers. Cultural shifts in divisions of labor articulated new subjectivities. For example, in Baltimore, the increased work of women and children and the growing division of labor replaced the artisan, even in the handcraft industry. In Philadelphia a large swath of the Irish immigrant population was employed as day laborers in the new forms of production – out-work, factories, large-scale manufacturers and sweatshops. Two thirds of Germans

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74 (Sewell Jr, 1986, 62)
worked in skilled trades. Thus at the time working class identity became deeply entwined with immigrant labor in urban enclaves. And to that end, new subjectivities emerged in response to these changing labor patterns, whereas native-born whites left unskilled labor and the industrialized crafts to work in commerce, the professions, and prestigious building trades and printing. Furthermore, as will be discussed more in chapter four, immigrant women laboring in factories saw their identities transformed in ways that spoke to women’s heightened independence, but also experienced these exciting new possibilities co-opted by capitalist interests that exploited their bodies for profit.  

Certainly labor organizing emerged before the Civil War, including efforts to establish free public school, a shorter workday, and democratic political reforms. However, working class values and organizational mobilization lacked a “single clear direction.” By 1860 however, American workers had developed dominant forms of collective working-class action so that labor unions were apart from politics, and as such, they did not create a class-specific labor, socialist, or social democratic political party. This was in stark contrast to Germany, where workers integrated trade unions deeply into the political sphere and were then able to create Europe’s largest mass Marxist political party. Furthermore, while the German working class fashioned their class-conscious subjectivities against an authoritarian state, American workers understood their interests to be in opposition to their employers. Repression by the state was “soft,” and workers

75 (Bridges, 1986, 170-174)

76 (Katzenelson, Working-Class Formation: Constructing Cases and Comparisons, 1986, 26)
viewed political parties as a tool in which they could leverage their demands. Foucault’s “technologies of the self” is applicable here, as the ways in which workers conceptualized their identities was determined in part by distinct forms of governmentality and disciplinary power.

To that end, Amy Bridges argues that American artisans developed in distinctive ways from their European counterparts, largely due to the cultural impact of widespread suffrage and industrialization’s urban locale in a rapidly expanding agricultural country. She contends that workers’ status as an urban minority and fight for suffrage led them to channel their cultural resources into electoral politics and party politics – both Republican and Democrat. It was these practices that “inevitably shaped their consciousness and their culture.”

Union organizing experienced an upsurge during the 1850s as the economy rebounded from the depression of 1837. This new prosperity provided workers with leverage to increase their demands for higher wages and better working conditions. However, labor unions in the United States really gained equal footing with businesses and industries at the turn of the century and especially during the Great Recession of the 1930s. Industrialization promised progress but often brought exploitation in the form of factory fires, safety hazards, and poor wages for their mostly women workers. Child labor was rampant and many were injured trying to manage factory equipment. The

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77 (Katznelson, Working-Class Formation: Constructing Cases and Comparisons, 1986, 38)
78 (Bridges, 1986, 192)
79 (Bridges, 1986, 175)
industrialization of cotton fueled the slave trade, the destruction of American Indian cultures and famines in British India.\textsuperscript{80} Technological innovations like the cotton gin and the steam engine helped the cotton industry increase rapidly, exploiting slaves before the Civil War and then, more increasingly as the turn of the century, children. American Indians were forcibly removed from indigenous territories in the South because these fertile lands were needed to grow cotton for an emerging textile industry in England. Subsequent chapters, especially chapter four, will reveal that this exploitation of marginalized bodies is not a thing of the past. Chapter four in particular will focus on the labor rights movement that developed in the twentieth century along with a strengthening neoliberal governmentality that served to co-opt worker efforts.

V. The Marketing of Fashion: How the impulses of couture houses, captains of industry, modernity (novelty), and fashion creativity became intertwined with the neo-liberal market.

Today’s fashion no longer centralizes Parisian haute couture, and that can be attributed to many different cultural and economic factors. The era of made-to-order that had so dictated taste was actually beginning to be substituted by a more heterogeneous system of ready-to-wear beginning in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Mass production was transformed after the First World War by the influence of a changing manufacturing process, in which labor was increasingly divided, machinery was made to be more efficient, and breakthroughs in the chemical industry allowed for synthetic fibers and richer colors. Even so, “ready to wear” (or prêt-à-porter) as it was called was not a significant threat to the upper classes, since “the quality of the fabrics, the luxuriousness of the trimmings,

\textsuperscript{80} (Bajaj, 2014)
and the fame of the dressmakers continued to permit the display of prestigious
differences.” After the Great Depression in the United States however, the demand for
couture declined as women, many of whom were now working, had less time for fittings
and could no longer afford the high price tag. Designer and department stores responded
by manufacturing clothing in bulk quantities that were accessible to women from all
socioeconomic backgrounds. These clothes could be bought at department stores or
through mail order catalogues, allowing women in even the most rural of locations to
keep up with trends and purchase clothing more quickly and at a cheaper price. In the
early years of the twentieth century the mail order market served a whopping ten million
Americans. After World War II, the market boom began to usher in a consumer society
for a rising middle-class, and Americans were starting to purchase more clothing from
their local department store or Sears catalogue. Still, for the next few decades, it was
accepted that even with the rising influence of mass manufacturers, it was ultimately
Parisian haute couture that “set the pace in the information landscape of fashion.” Even
Coco Chanel, who re-opened in 1953 with the intention of challenging the ostentatious
style of Dior’s New Look with her own simplistic look that allowed women to move
freely, noted: “I am no longer interested in dressing a few hundred women, private
clients; I shall dress thousands of women. But … a widely repeated fashion, seen

81 (Lipovetsky, 1994, 83)
82 (Bancroft, 2012, 76)
83 (Braham, 2007, 359)
84 (Cline, 2012, 21)
85 (Braham, 2007, 359)
everywhere, cheaply produced, must start from luxury.”

Thus, even though mass industrialization promised the allure of self-transformation for the working classes, the democratizing potential of “ready to wear” was re-articulated to preserve the status quo of the elites.

It was during the 1960s that societal, economic and political transformations disrupted the system upon which couture was modeled, creating greater pluralism in fashion that credits its sources from a diverse range of groups, designers and influences. The first “hairline cracks” began to emerge in 1961, when the French government demanded that couturiers use at least 90 percent French textiles in their collections or risk being stripped of their government subsidies. By the mid-1960s Paris fashion was being eclipsed by designers in London, who were looking to the streets – notably the booming youth culture – for creative inspiration. The impact of the miniskirt in particular (popularized by designer Mary Quant), which was born in London, helped to launch this shift, and rich women’s increasingly “jet-setting” culture facilitated travel to other cities such as New York. At the same time the fashion “youthquake” of the 1960s gave rise to a teenage market on both sides of the Atlantic. Young people now had money to spend, but couldn’t afford the luxury prices of couture. A consumer, throwaway culture in which young people kept up with “short-lived fads” and disposed of clothing once they were no longer fashionable emerged during this period. And of course, the counter-culture groups of hippies, mods, and rockers (to name just a few)

86 (Wilson, 2003, 89)
87 (Braham, 2007, 359)
88 (Mendes & de la Haye, 2010, 158)
spurred an anti-establishment revolution that further challenged the status quo of couture. In other words, captains of industry were no longer dictating to the masses a single ‘New Look.’ Rather, a newfound emphasis on individualistic style (or ‘anti-fashion’) emerged, as creative consumers experimented with mixing and sampling their clothes from endless inspirations.89

Couture’s dominance was not ‘replaced’ so to speak, but was rearticulated into new and more complex forms. In other words, its power was not diminished, but was obscured behind shifting cultural forms attached to dominant forms of governance. Many of these houses abandoned their small, “family style” feel for global conglomerates funded by shareholder dollars in which fashion house designs were produced globally. In Italy for example, the High Fashion-Industry Accord signed in 1971 allowed Italian couturiers to receive a subsidy if their line had successfully met prior guidelines agreed upon with their far-flung manufacturers.90 Even though the fashion industry was beginning to lose money on their couture collection, the prestige that emanated from their luxury lines helped to mass market their very profitable licensed goods.

Fashion licensing gives the designer a certain percentage of the profit made from an outside manufacturer who produces and markets handbags, shoes, jewelry, bedsheets, and of course, perfumes. These designers were able to put their trademarks on these items so that consumers who could never afford a couture gown could still have access to products with a designer label, thus increasing their profits by growing their audience beyond the wealthy woman. Manufacturers, on the other hand, benefited from the

89 (Polhemus, Fashion & Anti-Fashion, 2011, 8)
90 (Braham, 2007, 363)
prestige of a luxury house and could therefore increase the price of their products. Certainly, if a French house is perceived to be “cheapening” the image of the couture industry, the designer could not only risk their reputation but could also be expelled from the French Chambre Syndicale, the organization that regulates and monitors the luxury industry.\(^9^1\) Of course, when licensees are giving a couture designer millions in business, it can be difficult to demand a certain quality that may not sell to the masses. Teri Agins in her book *The End of Fashion*, details how the house of Dior, deemed the “father” of fashion licensing when it signed up with New York hosiery company Prestige, had developed more than two hundred licensees by the late 1980s. The label, she argues, suffered as Dior luggage and other merchandise were found at discount stores.\(^9^2\) Perhaps no designer took licensing further than Pierre Cardin though, who began the practice in the 1960s and by the late 1980s, had signed up eight hundred licensees in “apparel, cosmetics, chocolate, home furnishings, and appliances.”\(^9^3\) While Cardin-label products had reaped a whopping one billion dollars by 1991, his name had lost its luxury appeal. This didn’t seem to bother Cardin however, since he had a certain disdain for couture’s “aristocratic pretensions” and wanted to be more of a label than a designer.\(^9^4\) The rise of licensing – which brought increased accessibility to luxury for the masses - was thus an affront to couture’s tradition of preserving the elite’s status quo in defining taste and style. One could argue that the increased accessibility that licensing promised was an

\(^{91}\) (Mendes & de la Haye, 2010, 232)

\(^{92}\) (Agins, 1999, 28)

\(^{93}\) (Agins, 1999, 30)

\(^{94}\) (Agins, 1999, 31)
intervention that promised greater democratization in the fashion industry. However, fashion licensing is still deeply rooted in capitalism, producing an abundance of goods for consumption at the expense of workers and the environment.

**VI. Ready to Wear: Designers become labels; Captains of Industry cede their power; Houses adjust to market demands**

It was also in the 1960s that ready-to-wear developed into an ‘autonomous’ fashion institution that was not simply a branch of haute couture. Ready-to-wear, which refers to factory-made, good quality clothing sold in standardized sizes and made in huge quantities at low cost, grew significantly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century along with unregulated sweatshops and the rise in mail order catalogues. It was inextricably intertwined within capitalism’s disciplinary power that promised democratization and attainment of self-transformation through commodity accumulation, but only at the expense of exploited workers. But it wasn’t until the 1960s that ready-to-wear designers began to establish their lines in “a spirit oriented more toward daring, youthfulness, and novelty than toward ‘class’ perfection.” These designs were not just “watered-down” versions of haute couture. Exciting new designers such as Mary Quant, Daniel Hechter, Christine Bailly and Kenzo experimented with innovative designs such as miniskirts, wide capelike coats, and Eastern influences that challenged the traditional structure of couture while making their creative designs accessible to the masses. Lipovetsky writes,

> Haute couture had in fact stopped setting the tone in fashion matters; ready-to-wear, off-the-rack clothing had constituted as an “autonomous” fashion center.

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95 (Mendes & de la Haye, 2010, 19)

96 (Lipovetsky, 1994, 91)
By the time haute couture introduced women’s pants into its collections, women had already adopted them on a massive scale: in 1965, more women’s pants were produced industrially than skirts. And in 1966, when Saint-Laurent included jeans in his collections, they had long since been adopted by the young as the apparel of choice. ‘You have to go into the streets.’ After playing a pioneering role, haute couture in the narrow sense had become primarily a prestige-generating institution that did more to consecrate innovations produced elsewhere than to drive the cutting edge of fashion.  

Furthermore, unlike haute couture, which had catered to the feminine for over a century, ready-to-wear opened the market to men. By 1985, men’s ready-to-wear represented almost twenty percent of haute couture’s profits. Fashion’s disciplinary power had once again re-articulated the gender status quo, and this was no better demonstrated than when two sexy, aspirational leads of the hit 80s detective show Miami Vice wore clothes made by designers such as Versace, Armani, and Mugler.

Couture houses soon realized that the industry needed to shift to keep up with a quickly changing cultural landscape. Many of them merged with ready-to-wear designer labels and formed multi-million dollar conglomerates. For example Moët Hennessy-Louis Vuitton (LVMH) was born when French mogul Bernard Arnault acquired Christian Dior in 1987. LVMH currently owns around “sixty fashion, spirits, and accessories brands, including fashion labels Fendi, Givenchy, and Marc Jacobs.” It became apparent that the “bottom line” was increasingly important, and just between 1995 and 1997 forty fashion companies went public, including Jones Apparel Group, Guess?, Donna Karan, and Tommy Hilfiger. American high fashion companies started to make

97 (Lipovetsky, 1994, 92)
98 (Lipovetsky, 1994, 93)
99 (Marr, 2014)
100 (Cline, 2012, 66)
gains in the 1980s when they introduced “bridge” collections, which carried the designer label but were priced thirty percent less and made in countries like China. American department stores could thus make a significant profit off of bridge brands like Donna Karan’s DKNY and Anne Klein II. French designers at that point however, had not picked up on the bridge concept and were continuing to manufacture their clothing using high-cost French and Italian factories. Their higher price tags thus locked them out of what had become the world’s primary market - U.S. department stores. French resistance to the erosion of their most prized cultural institutions reflects the country’s history of deeply embedded artisan traditions discussed earlier in the chapter. These artisan traditions helped to slow down the speed of capitalist development in France, but as global markets began to more strongly respond to neoliberal pressures in the latter half of the twentieth century, France’s position as the locus of fashion influence diminished. This speaks to the discursive slipperiness of the fashion industry and the difficulty in re-articulating the fashion quo. While challenging France’s dominance of the industry may seemingly promise greater democratization, it is also a reflection of rising neoliberal influences that do more to reinforce hegemonic systems like capitalism that do more to oppress than liberate.

VII. Fashion Knock-Offs: Aspirational dressing at the intersection of democratization and exploitation

France’s hold on the couture industry was beginning to wane, and perhaps that is why many of the couture houses became paranoid about stopping knock-offs – an affront to couture’s hegemony and the very essence of fashion itself, which traditionally

101 (Agins, 1999, 38)
reinforced elitism. In the mid 1990s a true “knockoff war” between Yves Saint Laurent and Ralph Lauren gained media attention, with Laurent charging that the American Lauren had ripped off one of his tuxedo gowns. In 1995, the Chambre Syndicale attempted, unsuccessfully, to prevent photographers who attended fashion shows from leaking their photos online to their foreign competitors.\(^\text{102}\) As luxury-brand logos grew more prominent and more distinct, consumers lusted after the perfect purse or pair of sunglasses that would designate their “membership” into a certain “tribe” that “subscribes to that particular brand’s message and its ethics.”\(^\text{103}\) Counterfeiting has long been an issue in the luxury industry, but it really took off in the 1990s. Agins, in her book The End of Fashion, argues that this can be attributed to luxury’s democratization and the rise of China. She notes,

> When luxury brands went democratic, they thought they could satisfy the middle market with lower-priced handbags and perfume. What executives didn’t count on was middle-market consumers satisfying their craving for higher-end items by buying fake versions that they could pass off as real. At the same time China evolved into a capitalist market economy and the world’s manufacturing center, with a new class of entrepreneurs who saw counterfeiting as a viable business. The convergence of the two – big demand and big supply – was cataclysmic. And it took luxury executives – and executives in most other industries – by surprise.\(^\text{104}\)

By 2004 the U.S. Department of Commerce estimated that American companies alone had lost between twenty billion and twenty four billion annually, and that just in New York City counterfeits resulted in an annual loss of up to one billion in taxes.\(^\text{105}\) Knock-

\(^\text{102}\) (Agins, 1999, 43)

\(^\text{103}\) (Agins, 1999, 272)

\(^\text{104}\) (Agins, 1999, 274)

\(^\text{105}\) (Agins, 1999, 274-275)
offs that one can buy on the street, in New York City or Los Angeles’s Santee Alley, flourish because counterfeiters can make millions of dollars and are rarely caught and prosecuted, even though counterfeiting is a notoriously seedy business that too often relies on child labor and reportedly supports international terrorism with its profits.\textsuperscript{106}

Another form of “copying” has become popularized by what has come to be called “fast fashion” retailers such as Forever 21 and H&M, which sell radically cheap clothing at a high turnover. These stores will rip off couture and ready-to-wear collections, but are hardly ever sued for copyright infringement because they rarely copy the original design exactly. Copying fashion has always been widespread in the U.S. especially since 1941 when the Supreme Court ruled that intellectual property protection for designs violated antitrust laws.\textsuperscript{107} On the one hand, this seems deeply unfair to the aspiring designer whose $150 shirts are no longer appealing to the young fashionista looking for a cheaper knock-off version at a nearby fast fashion store. On the other hand, even some designers have argued that the mass copying of styles is what fuels newness and trends, leading to a more dynamic, creative industry. It is an “overt form” of “prestigious imitation” upon which the fashion industry is founded.\textsuperscript{108} Designers like Marc Jacobs have expressed the view that knock-offs are a form of flattery so to speak, a sign that his original designs are “desirable.”\textsuperscript{109} Tom Ford is of a similar mind, since he believes that the consumer who buys couture and the one who buys knock-offs are not

\textsuperscript{106} (Agins, 1999, 276)
\textsuperscript{107} (Raustiala & Sprigman, 2006)
\textsuperscript{108} (Braham, 2007, 362)
\textsuperscript{109} (Thomas, 2007, 276)
Interestingly enough, Tom Ford is often credited with “the new-era luxury profit formula” that sells marked-up accessories and handbags to the masses. Companies take especially large margins on designer handbags, which are often marked up to twelve times over the cost of production. One would think that with fast fashion flourishing, consumers would demand lower prices from high fashion, and yet this has not been the case. Why does couture sanction such overpriced goods? Author Elizabeth Cline of *Overdressed* describes it as an extension of the economic principle of Veblen goods in which products like fashion become more desirable as their price increases: “Clothing is very sensitive to this effect since it deals directly with personal expression and ego. We see it as an extension of ourselves, and it is the most visible way we can strut our stuff.” Furthermore, it is worth reiterating that luxury clothing is actually a loss for most luxury brands. Cline continues,

> But holding runway shows and putting actresses in designer dresses on red carpets is about branding, sometimes even more than it is about selling the actual clothes. The fashion serves to raise the profile of the designer in question, creating lust for their name and then driving sales to marked-up handbags, shoes, and profitable knickknacks.

At the same time, Cline argues that consumers who shy away from the ridiculously high price tags of couture see cheap fashion as “a badge of honor, as proof that we are not one of those people who would ever pay too much for a designer name.”

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110 (Cline, 2012)
111 (Thomas, 2007, 168)
112 (Cline, 2012, 77)
113 (Cline, 2012, 68-69)
114 (Cline, 2012, 69)
why the collaborations between designers and mass retailers like Target and H&M have proven to be so popular. When the ‘Missoni for Target’ collection shut down their website because of excessive demand, it reflected the desire for affordable clothing that also displayed a designer logo. These collaborations are profitable for designers, and help to contribute to their ‘brand’ by making them seem almost ‘populist’ in the eyes of their consumers. While not significantly profitable for the mass retailers, these collaborations succeed in raising the amount of “media impressions,” which refer to a metric that gauges how often consumers see a reference of the collaboration in the media. The Missoni for Target collection was considered a huge success in that was featured in over forty magazines.\(^{115}\) And it contributed to the media discourse of fashion’s ‘democratization’ by giving consumers a chance to buy luxury items that were not usually afforded to them. And while couture designers traditionally attained status with their elite consumer base, selling clothes at retail markets like Target has become a “status symbol” in itself for “up and coming designers” who are trying to appeal to a larger, more diverse consumer base.\(^{116}\) It is worth asking whether these collaborations also help designers to take control of the knock-off market by producing lines that are similar in style but made of lesser quality. And yet, if this is the case, designers have been faced with consumer resistance. Many consumers have been able to “game” the system – buying collaboration pieces at retail, and then selling them for much higher prices on sites like eBay. In fact, consumers have sold some of these “knock off pieces” at prices higher than the “authentic” luxury pieces – thus cutting into the couture market.

\(^{115}\) (Wilson E., 2011)

\(^{116}\) Ibid.
The author of an article on the Balmain/H&M collaboration points out, “With mark-ups like these, why spend your time (and money) hunting down the collaboration when you can score real, off-the-runway Balmain for less?” But what exactly is “real”? These questions are worth pondering:

This leaves open the possibility that even if we think we ‘own’ a designer label – after all, there it hangs in the wardrobe – our belief may be misplaced or at least open to question: leaving aside counterfeits, is our prized garment really the creation of the designer whose name is on the label, did the designer merely approve a licensee’s design, or did the designer even see it at all? And does this matter to us and if so, why? Is this comparable in some way to the differing reactions that we might have to possessing a work of art depending on whether it is an original (equivalent, perhaps, to haute couture), a limited edition, or simply an un-numbered print, and so on?

These questions are especially relevant when considering the rise of off-priced apparel stores like T.J. Maxx and Ross, which sell brand name clothing at a fraction of the price. Much has changed since the golden age of department stores, when cities took pride in their ‘own’ Macy’s or Bloomingdale’s that catered to its local clientele. By the 1960s however, department stores took a hit as Americans began to embrace suburban life and flocked instead to their local malls, where they could count on discounters and sales. As discount stores like Mandy’s and T.J. Maxx exploded in the 1980s, department stores competed in “vicious markdown wars and continuous sales” and ultimately kicked out many of their bridge lines like Anne Klein and DKNY that were deemed too expensive. With massive department store consolidations that saw Federated Department Stores (which owned Bloomingdale’s, Macy’s and several other chains)

117 (Coscarelli, 2015)
118 (Braham, 2007, 362)
119 (Cline, 2012, 27)
merge with rival May Department Stores, smaller regional department-store chains could no longer compete and often shut down. Clothing in department stores are now generic and lack much of the charm and distinctiveness of department stores of the past.

This homogenization is why designer outlets and off-price stores like T.J. Maxx have become so popular, because they give consumers the chance to find designer labels at affordable prices. However, as the article “The Myth of the ‘Maxxinista’” revealed, consumers are not actually getting the coveted pair of Calvin Klein jeans at a lower price. Instead, they are getting a pair of jeans that have been produced by T.J. Maxx, one of the brand’s licensees. Calvin Klein allows T.J. Maxx to put their prestigious label on their jeans in return for a percentage, usually between 5-20% of the wholesale price of the garment. In 2012 alone, the article cites that licensed goods accounted for 50% of Calvin Klein’s global retail sales, amounting to more than $3.8 billion in sales. The author argues that the practice is deceptive because consumers are not getting the supposed quality of ‘real’ designer jeans. One has to wonder though, whether consumers truly care about the quality as much as the prestige that comes with a brand.120

That is not to say that consumers may not miss the traditional shopping experience. In an article about the online personal shopping site Stitch Fix, Anne Helen Peterson writes about how for many women, the act of consumption is a way to assuage lack in their lives. Thus, buying a cheap product may not provide a shopper with any real thrill or satisfaction. Forming a relationship with a personal shopper and then waiting in anticipation for their monthly box to arrive, however, brings back “the experience of

120 (Hallstein & Doyle, 2014)
consumption as one of surprise and delight.”

Peterson also argues that it gives women a community of support, as women post selfies of their new outfits on a Facebook page and receive validation from other members. Shopping has always served as a quick-fix solution for women to deal with their fears, insecurities, and failings living in a patriarchal world. Yet, the site determines a woman’s style based on an algorithm—which does not include any clothing for plus-size women. It also relies on a woman having a sizeable wallet. Fashion can indeed be fun and inspire creativity and confidence, but it is unclear as to whether tech companies are supporting these attitudes or “simply bolstering a giant feedback loop” in which taste is determined by a woman’s physical and financial ability to dress herself based on sexist and classist societal expectations.

The proliferation of knock-offs, fast-fashion, designer-mass market collaborations, and other forms of fashion production that increase accessibility to the consumers are appealing “technologies of the self” because embedded in them is the allure of democratization and aspirational promise (especially to women) that anyone can access privilege and prestige and be “someone.” And, it is also testament to the fact that young women are hardly oppressed subjects. The account of consumers buying and then selling Missoni’s collection, which may have put a dent in the actual couture line, is a testament to the potential for intervention and re-articulation of the fashion status quo. However, this revolutionary potential is embedded within conditions of capitalism that operates on people’s bodies in complex ways. First, cultural re-articulations that enable designer collaborations to be framed in democratizing terms are in fact obscuring

121 (Peterson, 2015)
economic aims. After all, designers do capitalize hugely off of licensee and mass-market collaborations. Second, access to more choices in fashion does not necessarily signal more freedom. Consumption, as will be detailed in the next section on advertising, is often fueled by societal constructions of beauty, aesthetics, and tasted based on gendered, racial, and classed lines. Third, these forms of fashion production offer aspirational dressing at cheap prices for many women in the Global North, but do so by abusing the labor of poorer women both in the Global North and South. This issue of global labor fashion exploitation will be touched on in the last section of this chapter and developed more fully in chapter four.

VIII. Advertising: Manufacturing Desire to fuel consumption and the fashion empire

Along those lines, the desire for luxury goods does not come out of thin air. Advertising has been fueling the demand for fashionable goods for almost a century, and through a number of different mediums. As Stuart Ewen documents in his book Captains of Consciousness, advertising has a long history of capitalizing on people’s fears and insecurities, rooted in the Industrial era when Americans were experiencing rapid change that came with women’s rights, immigration, labor union strikes, and “red scares.” Since the development of the assembly line allowed for cheaper products to be sold, so new markets had to be opened up. In the 1930s, advertising emerged as the perfect tool to move these products off the shelves, by capitalizing on these cultural fears. Products were sold by giving people the sense that they had access to commodities that would improve their lifestyle and social status. As Ewen notes, “The logic of contemporaneous advertising read one can free oneself from the ills of modern life by embroiling oneself in
the maintenance of that life.”122 In the new consumer society, all social problems could be solved by working on the ‘self.’ Of course, we develop our sense of self in large part by comparing ourselves to other people, also referred to in psychology as “social comparison theory.” As James A. Roberts put it in his book, Shiny Objects,

Advertising presents a nearly unlimited stream of opportunities for upward social comparisons. The models in the ads we see are always better looking, better dressed, richer, and more fun-loving than we are. But not to worry: there’s a simple solution to narrow the social comparison gap – buy the product.123

Advertising can even foster insecurities by offering products as a solution to “fix” problems that advertisers themselves create. Ewen offers the example of Listerine as a product that could ‘cure’ halitosis – a condition that the mainstream had no awareness of as even being a problem until the emergence of mouthwash ads.124 In fashion, advertising often works through a process of seduction, in which gorgeous ads appeal “first and foremost to the eye: more than information, it promises beauty, the seductiveness of appearances, an idealized ambiance.”125 These same advertisements can also instill a sense of shame and anxiety for those who are unable to keep up with fashion’s standards of beauty. This is important to keep in mind when considering critiques of consumers who engage in aspirational dressing. While it is all too easy to dismiss them as merely materialistic, one should always consider the societal pressures that are behind their purchasing decisions.

122 (Ewen, 1976, 44)
123 (Roberts, 2011, 175)
124 (Ewen, 1976, 46)
125 (Lipovetsky, 1994, 159)
In the United States alone, over $100 billion is spent on advertising each year, and people see up to 3,000 adverts every day. While one can argue that seeing 3,000 advertisements a day is an indication of “healthy competition and choice,” the staggering size of that number is an indication that most consumers have little ‘choice’ in engaging with advertisements.126  Fashion especially, is a monopolized industry owned by a few multinational corporations, which have a tremendous amount of control over consumers’ choices. In 2000 alone, Gucci spent approximately $250 million in advertisements, while LVHM had spent more than $1 billion – a whopping 11 percent of sales – by 2002.127

Magazines have been instrumental in selling advertisements to their readers. *Vogue* has perhaps most famously been setting couture’s tone and shaping the desires of readers all over the world since it was established in 1892. Today however, the vast majority of fashion magazines are owned by a few giant multi-billion dollar corporations, most notably Condé Nast and Hearst Corporation in the United States, and Bauer Media in Europe. So while there may appear to be a choice between magazines like *Glamour*, *Elle*, *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar*, in actuality consumers are merely being given a choice between “two media brands espousing the same values and owned by the same giant corporations.”128 These magazines often appear to have more advertisements than content, and adverts do indeed provide much of the profits. The editorial content of renowned magazines like *Vogue*, in turn, give advertisers an ‘audience’ that can essentially be sold. Television advertising operates under a similar basis, although the

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126 (Hoskins, 2014, 60)
127 (Thomas, 2007, 101)
128 (Hoskins, 2014, 37)
traditional thirty-second advertisement has been eclipsed by a tremendous amount of product placement within the show itself as a response to declining television audiences.\textsuperscript{129}

Furthermore, instead of just relying on models in ads to sell their clothes, couture houses turned to Hollywood and celebrities as a new form of advertisement, as Dana Thomas documents in her book \textit{Deluxe: How Luxury Lost its Luster}. Luxury brands realized that the awards programs, television appearances, and charity galas celebrities attended could in essence be, as Hollywood stylist Rachel Zoe put it, “a million dollars of free advertising.”\textsuperscript{130}

Fashion advertisements have also been critiqued for their perpetuation of unrealistic body ideals, Western notions of beauty, and heteronormative ideas of gender and sexuality.\textsuperscript{131} Here we have an interesting paradox however. While advertising acts on the masses, and is often successful in reinforcing the cultural status quo to large groups of people, the fashion industry advertises to the consumer in a way that often encourages individualist statements. In her article on working women “power dressing” in the 1980s and 1990s, Joanne Entwistle argues that the discursive narrative around women’s dress was a new “technology of the self,” re-articulated as someone who could become ambitious, independent and successful through the care and management of her

\textsuperscript{129} (Roberts, 2011, 225)

\textsuperscript{130} (Thomas, 2007, 100-101)

appearance. As she noted, the fact that numerous women hire styling consultants is also “testimony of the extent to which this modern woman is an enterprising self.”\(^{132}\)

Making fashion about the individualist statement was important during an era when more women were going to work and trying to prove themselves in traditionally male spheres. Shopping became a way to communicate to the world one’s identity and lifestyle. Certainly, one could make the argument that the shaping of individual identity can contribute to democratization by fostering differences and choices. Yet it is problematic to limit the notion of ‘freedom’ to the “right to choose” between different shoes, even if those shoes do express a certain identity. Furthermore, as Lipovetsky argues,

> We encounter more stimulations of all sorts, but also more anxiety; we have more personal autonomy, but also more personal crises. Such is the greatness of fashion, which always refers us, as individuals, back to ourselves; such is the misery of fashion, which renders us increasingly problematic to ourselves and others.\(^{133}\)

What is very clear is that haute couture has changed drastically, from an industry in which Paris was the sole arbiter and couturiers were renowned as artists to a slick, corporate industry that is more concerned with marketing than creativity. Even in France, a survey of three hundred women revealed that Parisians were similar to Americans in that their “dream world of fashion” consisted of “designer labels at affordable prices” and that their primary interest in fashion was to “maximize me.”\(^{134}\) At

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\(^{132}\) (Entwistle, 2007)

\(^{133}\) (Lipovetsky, 1994, 241)

\(^{134}\) (Agins, 1999, 44)
what cost however, does working on this self-project have for those who are making their clothes?

IX. The production of fashion: A glamorous façade conceals exploitation.

The history of the fashion industry that this chapter has detailed is implicated in the present, in terms of who makes fashion, where, and how. Fashion is a glamorous industry with a “dual nature” that conceals a “life of corrosive toil for the workers hidden from sight. The glamour seems almost separate from exploitation.”135 In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as ready-to-wear began to grow, so did the reliance on exploited sweatshop labor – usually young women - in Western cities. In the United States the 1911 Triangle garment factory in New York killed 146 of its employees when the owners locked the doors to prevent theft, mobilizing anti-sweatshop activists to fight for more progressive labor laws. They were able to attain them, and the garment industry in cities like New York was for many years a decent way to make a living. However, as the industry became increasingly corporatized and American culture shifted to demanding cheaper clothes, companies started to look for cheaper suppliers. To demonstrate the shift in the U.S. clothing industry consider that the United States started to import cotton in the 1950s, and even in 1965 imports were less than five percent of all clothing. Yet by 2010 only about two percent of apparel is made in the U.S. Clothing is produced in poorer countries where companies place immense pressure on factories to produce forever-falling prices by selling cheap and producing quickly on shorter deadlines. In 2005 the Multi Fibre Arrangement (MFA), a worldwide quota system that limited the number of clothing exports from developing countries into industrialized

135 (Wilson E., 2003, 90)
ones, expired. Not coincidentally, it was around this time that fast fashion retailers expanded their retailers all over the world. That same year, “Chinese cotton trousers exported to the United States leapt by an unreal 1,500 percent and shipments of cotton knit shirts were up to 1,350 percent; meanwhile sixteen thousand U.S. textile jobs were lost and at least eighteen factories closed that year.”

Although exploited labor has become synonymous with China, in recent years China’s increasing wages and better working conditions have forced companies to look elsewhere – namely to Bangladesh. In 2011-2012, garments represented nearly 80 percent of the country’s manufacturing export income of $19.1, making it the second largest exporter of apparel in the world. Yet despite the industry’s rapid growth in the last thirty years, Bangladeshi workers are still the lowest paid garment workers in the world, earning on average $37 a month – far below the living wage of $120 that is needed for basic household necessities. Workers’ efforts to organize for better pay and safety regulations are all but outlawed. In April 23, 2013, an eight-story building in the Rana Plaza building in Savar, Bangladesh collapsed, killing over 1,000 people and injuring more than 2,500. Although it is easy to blame the factory owners, who had deemed the factory safe the day before, one must consider that low prices in the garment industry are, after all, the country’s best selling point in the global economy. So suppliers cut their prices at the expense of their workers, who are paid poverty wages and made to work excessive hours. Factory owners, pressured by their buyers, often find their efforts to invest in factory safety undermined by the pressure to reduce costs.

136 (Cline, 2012, 55)
137 (Dawisha, 2013)
This neoliberal capitalist governmentality has also been disastrous for workers in the U.S., where workers, usually immigrants in cities like L.A. and New York, are forced to work for low wages in an effort to compete with offshore prices. Smaller designers and independent companies also struggle to find affordable factory resources, and to charge prices that are fair while also generating profits. This is an especially difficult task in a fashion landscape dominated by ‘fast fashion,’ which, as mentioned previously, is a method of retailing in which trendy clothes are produced at much lower than its competitors at a very high turnover. This method of production has catastrophic consequences for the environment and for our bodies. For example, the average U.S. citizen throws away 68 pounds of clothing per year, with 2.5 billion pounds of post-consumer textile waste ending up in our landfills annually. The process of clothing production is itself toxic, as more than 8,000 toxic chemicals, many of which are carcinogenic, corrosive or include biologically modifying reagents, are used to turn raw materials into textiles. In fact, a recent study of 20 name brands revealed that clothing companies like Calvin Klein, Levi’s and Zara, contain traces of hazardous, potentially cancer-causing chemicals.

Most consumers, however, are shockingly unaware of the human and environmental consequences of their consumption. Images from tragedies such as Rana serve as a harsh reminder of what happens when we treat humans as just numbers, or as simply ‘cheap labor’ within a global supply chain that feeds the consumption patterns of the United States and European Union by delivering low-cost clothing from Bangladeshi

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138 (Cline, 2012, 48)
139 (Dawisha, 2012)
factories to stores in the Global North. It is an industry that operates according to a logic of distance, in which a consumer is so removed from the condition under which a producer labors that they are less likely to have awareness, let alone any motivation to protest.

X. Conclusion

One hundred years after the Triangle Shirtwaist factory, we are once again at a cultural moment in which human rights are being violated and major reform is needed. This chapter has provided historical context on the creation, marketing, and production of fashion, and how fashion’s disciplinary power is constantly re-articulating itself to reinforce power systems, making intervention difficult. In subsequent chapters, I will be exploring how different agents in the fashion industry employ a diverse range of practices and tools to close this distance between producer and consumer, creative and non-creative worker. The following chapter will focus on social media as a particularly timely strategy.
Chapter Three
Fashion as a Site for Constituting and Intervening in the Fashion Media Complex

I. Introduction

In 2011, an article on Reuters titled “Fashion Bloggers to Spur Online Luxury Sales”\(^1\) reflected the changing nature of the fashion industry, in which the influence of fashion critics like Suzy Menkes and magazine editors such as *Vogue’s* Anna Wintour was being questioned by an increasingly influential fashion blogosphere. This “fashion democratization” was at turns hailed by some as proof that fashion had become easily accessible to everyone, and criticized by others for allowing too many ‘amateurish’ voices into the fashion landscape.\(^2\) As fashion bloggers became increasingly visible, with young teens such as Tavi Gevinson awarded front row seats at fashion shows, so did the critiques leveled at these new fashion critics. Some media outlets, from *The New York Times*\(^3\) to *The Business of Fashion*,\(^4\) questioned whether bloggers were really the “authentic, democratic” voices that they claimed to be, as it became ever more evident that lines between editorial content and advertising were becoming increasingly blurred.

To that end, this chapter will examine the fashion media complex, which draws from hidden or unexamined discourses of governmentality grounded in marketing and

\(^1\) (Cianco, 2011)

\(^2\) (Pham, 2010)

\(^3\) (La Ferla, 2012)

\(^4\) (Berlinger, 2014)
advertising. Media and technology can fuel this discourse through product placement and the blogosphere, but can also disrupt it through these mediums. At stake is the economic, cultural, and social significance of the fashion media fashion complex, and I hope to argue for its political and organizing potential.

The chapter will dissect the socio-historical context that presaged this current cultural moment, beginning with the rise of the fashion magazine and the role of other media – such as television – in rearticulating advertising and the interaction between producers and consumers. I will focus also on product placement and the case of Gossip Girl as an example of efforts by advertisers to blur the boundaries between product advertising and program content, thereby increasing the labor extracted from consumers. Then the chapter will discuss the contested ‘democratized’ space of the fashion blogosphere and to what extent it can serve as a site of political, feminist, class, and race struggle when operating within neo-liberal boundaries.

II. Advertising: From Magazines to Television, how marketing helped to shape the neoliberal subject

What is the relationship between media organization’s identity, and what exactly is a magazine? And how does organizational identity intersect with the digital media fashion complex? Furthermore, how did neoliberalism as a form of governmentality rise to shape the media’s organizational identity and the digital media fashion complex? In an age of media convergence, participatory culture, and a recessionary economic context, these questions are particularly compelling. Brooke Erin Duffy’s book, Remake, Remodel: Women’s Magazines in the Digital Age, offers unique insight into how magazines have
been rearticulated from cultural objects to brands.⁵ “Organizational identity” is developed as a key concept that helps define what is distinctive about a company, and that initially it was the individuals working within the organization who were theorized as the most responsible for shaping corporate culture, practice, and ritual. In the case of media industries, however, organizational theorists have begun to also stress the importance of external agents such as “consumers, advertisers, and competitors” in contributing to organizational identity.⁶

Media convergence scholars still overlook the role that social factors such as race, class and gender play as an organizing mechanism in the “processes and products of media industries.”⁷ Certainly, feminist scholars have critically examined the various roles of women in media organizations and have come to the conclusion that women are vastly underrepresented in executive positions. In fact, in 2014, the Women’s Media Center conducted an exhaustive study that confirmed these findings, while also revealing that men outnumbered women in bylines, as talk show guests, and as experts quoted in news stories.⁸ The findings were even more dismal for women of color, suggesting that the media has a long way to go before it can claim a diversified media landscape.

What was generally missing from this otherwise comprehensive report was the analysis of those so-called women’s magazines that center on lifestyle, culture and fashion. Furthermore, while the report mentioned young women’s robust engagement

⁵ (Duffy, 2013)
⁶ (Duffy, 2013, 7)
⁷ (Duffy, 2013, 9)
⁸ (Women’s Media Center, 2014)
with social media, it did not shed light on lifestyle blogging, another female-dominated platform. Duffy argues that this oversight is apparent also in media industry studies, and that there is a much needed analysis for the agency of the “critical-creative citizen-consumer” when dissecting how media enterprises work in this new era of media convergence. Indeed, analysis of women’s magazines and lifestyle/fashion blogging has been largely overlooked and even denigrated because they have been defined as feminized spaces, despite the fact that women have played a pivotal role in both the production and consumption of these spaces. In fact, since the late eighteenth century women have been involved in magazine production as writers, contributors and even editors, and several current analyses of women’s magazines have found that the majority of editorial staffers are women. Of course, such progress in the magazine industry does not override the fact that the majority of these organizations are overseen by male CEOs. Still, significant gender disparity often found in the bylines of more “intellectual” magazines such as the Atlantic and the New Yorker does not exist in women’s magazines, a fact that makes the latter worthy of gendered critique and analysis.

The women’s magazine genre is defined “not only by its central placement within gendered circuits of production and consumption, but also by its role in constructing and articulating identities according to carefully sliced audience segments.” These magazines have particular feminine markers that make them distinct from other magazine genres. For example, women magazines emphasize ‘intimate communities’ in which

9 (Duffy, 2013, 13)
10 (Duffy, 2013, 27)
11 (Duffy, 2013, 28-29)
readers are given advice (often in a conversational tone) by writers and editors who are often presented as matching their readers’ own demographics. Furthermore, the 21st century was marked by magazines making a conscious effort to distinguish themselves within the genre, not just by creating texts with a unique ‘personality’ but also by shaping the identities of the magazine’s readership. Thus readers could be part of a community that catered to their distinct needs, whether it was the high fashion of *Vogue*, the teen angst of *Seventeen*, or the sexually liberated *Cosmopolitan*.

Feminist scholars have critiqued this notion of a community of ‘girlfriends’ that these magazines promote, however, as veiling their true commercial purposes. During the 1970s and 1980s especially, many of these scholars viewed women’s magazines as promoting an unattainable, aspirational, and heteronormative view of femininity that essentially ‘trains’ woman to be the perfect wife, mother, lover, girlfriend, or fashionista – ideals that can only be attained through the consumption of products advertised within the magazine.\(^{12}\)

It is in this way that women magazines emerged as “technologies of the self,” which, as discussed in previous chapters and will be developed in subsequent ones, is a term Foucault uses to describe the everyday cultural practices that people engage in to develop certain subjectivities.\(^{13}\) High-fashion enthusiasts read (and were shaped by) *Vogue*, homemakers turned to *Good Housekeeping*, and so on. However, the cultural re-articulations in which magazines were marketed as creating diverse ‘spaces’ for women were criticized for obscuring their capitalist interests. These technologies, Foucault

\(^{12}\) (Duffy, 2013, 24)

\(^{13}\) (Brodwin, 2015)
argues, operate to reinforce hegemonic systems of power by promising self-
transformation (in the form of new identities shaped by magazines) through the
accumulation of desired commodities.

While the commercial intent of these magazines is undeniable, these critiques
may fail to take into account the agency of the consumer. Subsequent studies of
magazine readers found that contrary to expectation, readers took pleasure in the
‘fantasy’ and ‘escape’ that the feminine spaces of these magazines provided. While this
research was revelatory and provided a counter-narrative to women as cultural dupes,
very few studies since have examined how women consumers, most notably those in the
digital age, contribute to and help shape the actual content of magazines. This oversight
is unfortunate, given that women are a marginalized group struggling for autonomy and
democracy within a patriarchal industry, thus, studying the neoliberal interventions that
attempt to co-opt these feminine spaces is hugely important for advancing democratic
discourses.

Of course, the hegemonic influence of advertising is such that it can be difficult to
imagine pockets of resistance in the form of young media consumers as “influencers.”
Women have been recognized since the industrial revolution as the primary consumers of
the family, and this role was especially reinforced after World War II when women were
encouraged to return to their domestic roles after years of working in the traditionally
male work sphere. They have thus been aggressively targeted by the advertising
industry, and women’s magazines have been a perfect medium for that.\(^{14}\) Since
magazines are sold at a cost less than their production, advertisements are what provide

\(^{14}\) (Duffy, 2013, 34)
the profits. A placement in a magazine with an established reputation, in turn, can give the advertised product the endorsement it needs.\textsuperscript{15} Thus brands are, in essence, a magazine’s second set of ‘readers.’ Political economist Dallas Smyth argued more than three decades ago that the mass media essentially sells audiences to advertisers to create value and profit for the cultural industries, and these audiences, in turn, perform unpaid work by consuming these advertisements in their free time.\textsuperscript{16} Thus one can argue that the goal of a fashion magazine and fashion journalist is to provide advertisers with readers. This can have an impact on editorial content, as editors “must take care to cultivate an environment which advertisers want to be associated with,”\textsuperscript{17} while also fostering a “persuasive environment” that encourages consumerism.\textsuperscript{18} This “direct correlation between the number of adverts placed in a magazine and the number of editorial mentions in the text of a magazine that a brand received”\textsuperscript{19} can strongly contribute to a form of editorial censorship. It is pretty rare to read a fashion magazine that discusses, for example, issues of sustainability, animal rights, or labor rights in the fashion and beauty industries when that might undermine a brand that does not commit to ethical practices.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{15} (Duffy, 2013, 37-38)
\textsuperscript{16} (Smythe, 2001)
\textsuperscript{17} (Hoskins, 2014, 38)
\textsuperscript{18} (Duffy, 2013, 35)
\textsuperscript{19} (Hoskins, 2014, 39)
\textsuperscript{20} Vogue, to its credit, has featured in the last few years an “ethical fashion line” but this tends to focus on a niche product.
It is important to note that it was the media consolidation of the last two decades of the twentieth century that facilitated a landscape in which audience specialization and ‘advertising/editorial interdependence’ became the new norm. These global acquisitions that began in the 1980s gave a few vertically integrated companies such as Hearst, Time Warner, and Conde Nast a huge share of the market. Thus, this discourse that the fashion press is inherently democratizing because it provides readers with an array of choice is complicated by the reality that a few large companies control the majority of media outlets. This has a multi-pronged effect. First, these companies could lure advertisers with volume discounts. For example, if Hearst wanted to attract a large consumer goods company such as Unilever (which owns products such as Axe, Dove, Hellmann’s, and Lipton), they might ask the advertiser to purchase space across several Hearst titles (such as Harper’s Bazaar, O: The Oprah Magazine) in exchange for a discounted rate. It is in this way that the system “clearly incentivizes partnerships between advertisers and the largest of the publishing chains.”

Furthermore, media mergers allow for cross-platform collaboration and promotion. As Tansy E. Hoskins elaborates, a book published by AOL can be produced into a TV, a film, and then turned into “every conceivable type of themed merchandise.” These products in turn, can then be publicized in their media outlets.

Magazine publishers also have repositioned themselves as brands that have infiltrated numerous media, from books and radio to television and most pressingly, the Internet. Since readership of traditional print magazines has declined in the last ten years

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21 (Duffy, 2013, 38)

22 (Hoskins, 2014, 36)
as people spend more time on their mobile devices, publishers are targeting readers through various social media platforms. Indeed, recent reports have revealed that thirty million digital users visited magazine-branded social networks in 2011, a 5.7 percent increase over the preceding year.\textsuperscript{23} Take Hearst, which signed a three-year contract with iVillage in 2004 to host and produce webs services for titles such as \textit{Good Housekeeping}, \textit{Marie Claire}, \textit{Cosmopolitan}, and more. As it became increasingly clear that online forums were essential for advertising, Hearst purchased the websites back from iVillage in 2007 and placed them under the umbrella of Hearst Magazines Digital Media. Hearst Digital currently manages twenty-four websites and fourteen mobile sites for magazine brands, including social shopping site Kaboodle and digital-only sites such as Real Beauty and Delish. Additionally, they have “more than fifty applications and digital editions for Apple’s iPad, iPhone, and iTouch products, including \textit{Cosmopolitan’s Sex Position of the Day app}, \textit{Real Beauty’s Instant Celebrity Makeover tool}, and the \textit{Seventeen Fashion Finder app.”}\textsuperscript{24}

The consequence of this is that magazine workers are now expected to work as flexible laborers and, as \textit{InStyle’s Lisa Arbetter} noted, to “think like marketers.”\textsuperscript{25} This entails, for example, producing features for corporate partners with the purpose of including ‘hyperlinks’ in these pieces that can redirect readers back to their site, and ultimately, increase page views. Readers are usually unaware that the same people are creating content for various magazines under the umbrella of a corporate entity, as these

\textsuperscript{23} (Duffy, 2013, 43)
\textsuperscript{24} (Duffy, 2013, 47)
\textsuperscript{25} (Duffy, 2013, 124)
institutional affiliations are hardly made transparent. For writers, this can create a “tension between creativity and constraint” in which content might be compromised so as to maintain revenue streams for the publication.\(^{26}\)

On the flip side, it can also create conflict in an organization’s structure and identity when creative freelancers, who in some ways fit well within these new flexible work arrangements even while not fully integrated, violate what is supposed to be a consistent editorial voice by speaking freely and potentially disrupting a publication’s brand.\(^{27}\) Furthermore, the consequences of this new flexible digital workplace are also unquestionably (and problematically) gendered. While women make up the majority of online workers,\(^{28}\) the vast majority of digital executives are male.\(^{29}\) This can be especially troubling in the women’s magazine landscape, where most editorial representatives are women—all the more reason to be concerned that technological progress, despite its democratic promises, has not created more egalitarian arrangements. This mirrors how, in the 1930s, the radio was celebrated as democratizing communication but the message that was often transmitted to the masses was misogynistic and racist.\(^{30}\) Similarly, these new media technologies, while articulated as revolutionary in giving marginalized voices a platform, are still entrenched in hegemonic systems along gendered, racial and classed hierarchies.

\(^{26}\) (Duffy, 2013, 60)

\(^{27}\) (Duffy, 2013, 124)

\(^{28}\) (Stillman, 2012)

\(^{29}\) (Duffy, 2013, 67)

\(^{30}\) (Pham & Nguyen, OF/SB, part II: Blog in the Machine of Democracy, 2009)
To be sure, users of online spaces can also engage with participatory forms of media such as blogs, social media platforms, and user-generated content, arguably testing the boundaries of corporate hegemony. Duffy cites *Self* magazine’s webpage as an example of this phenomenon. She writes:

> A banner on the homepage calls on fans to “Get *Self* Everywhere,” and includes links to the magazine’s Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube sites, each of which has an active following. *Self*’s Twitter feed is populated by posts from Editor-in-Chief Luzy Danziger and currently has more than 180,000 followers. *Self* also offers an iPad app, which the website describes as ‘your favorite magazine brought to you in a fresh, new format.’ Along with the standard magazine fare, the app includes fitness slideshows, how-to videos, a live ticker of useful events, and an interactive ingredient tracker.\(^{31}\)

Yet, the incorporation of new media technologies may just be a way for corporations to capitalize free and democratic spaces, in other words - an advertising strategy. Furthermore, if women’s magazines have promoted the possibility for self-reinvention and improvement (the foundation of the American Dream that ‘anyone can be someone’),\(^{32}\) then the swift digitalization of magazines from print to online publications that include various forms of new media only makes that project more urgent. The increased accessibility of self-styling tips both democratizes fashion and style while making it more difficult for women to escape the neoliberal project, which articulates consumer choices as most important in the constitution of the self.

**III. Product placement and television: Who is doing the work, and at what cost?**

This chapter will return to the intersections of print and digital, but first, it will turn to television as a medium in which the tensions of product placement, viewer exploitation, and audience productivity are performed and thus are ripe for analysis. It is interesting

\(^{31}\) (Duffy, 2013, 43)

\(^{32}\) (Pham, New Technologies of Style and Selfhood, 2010)
that several political economy scholars took up the aforementioned Dallas Smythe’s audience commodity theory, which argued that audiences essentially ‘work’ by consuming advertisements in their free time. Sut Jhally and Bill Livant, for example, argued that watching television is actually a form of labor exploitation. That said, just because there are a certain number of advertisements in a program doesn’t mean that people enjoy watching them, a point that Jhally and Livant acknowledge. Eventually, there is a point beyond which it is no longer efficient to oblige audiences to work more, as there is a limit in the number of commercials viewers are prepared to watch during a one-hour program. Still, they argue that alienation from work, i.e., the viewing of advertisements, can be countered in two ways. The first is to develop techniques to make audiences ‘watch harder,’ such as shortening the length of spots and barraging the viewer with many more images of the product in a 30 second commercial. The second is to merge the content with advertising, also referred to as product placement.

A fine example of product placement was the hit HBO series *Sex and the City*, a show about four independent, sexually liberated women working and living in New York City. The series focused on these four friends “getting what they wanted” both sexually and materially, and the act of consumption, usually of designer brands, was supposed to signify their independence in the capitalist economy. The romanticization of

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33 In (Maxwell, 1991, 38) the authors provide this example: If a half hour show cost the media owners $400,000, but the advertisements divided into twelve 30-second spots cost $100,000 each, then a total of $1.2 million returns to the network, $800,000 of which can be counted as profit. So if audiences “earn” their wage in the program by watching $400,000 of advertisements, which Jhally and Livant contend are 2 minutes of four ads, then the remaining eight ads viewed are “extracted as surplus watching time” in that we produce extra value for media producers by watching them.

34 Ibid.
accumulation, and the pleasures it would bring, was just as much the heart of the show as the pursuit of true love. Ariel Levy, in her chapter “Shopping for Sex” from her book *Female Chauvinist Pigs — Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, writes:

> There was as much focus on Manolo Blahniks and Birkin bags as there was on blow jobs. Buying things became a richly evocative experiences as seen through the lens of *Sex and the City*...a feathery pair of mules became the lynch pin of a glamorous, romantic evening in Central Park. It was as though without the shoes, everything else — the moonlight, the trees, the man – would dissolve into the night, leaving nothing but the bleak mundanity of regular life in its place.\(^{35}\)

Product placement was a particular fixture on the series *Gossip Girl*. As the *New York Magazine* article on the show notes:

> All the characters talk on Verizon cell phones, and Victoria’s Secret sponsored practically an entire episode, introducing 13-year-olds everywhere to slutty sleepwear. It seemed to be working: “This is my outfit,” said a twenty-something fan we bumped into on set, smoothing the front of her plaid belted trench. “It was on the show.” (And can be yours for $159 at Nine West stores nationwide.) But placement is just no revenue match for broadcast ads.\(^{36}\)

Susan Willis layers these political economy arguments in her essay “Unwrapping Use Value” which argues that the desire for happiness and gratification is created through the ways in which advertising mobilizes an almost sexual form of desire and induces us to consume. She contends that since no commodity can ever match the “expectations and desires” of its buyer, the well-trained consumer learns that the fault does not lie inherently in consumption, but with the belief that if one product fails to deliver its promises, then the next product surely will. As Willis puts it, “the consumer learns to

\(^{35}\) (Levy, 2006)

\(^{36}\) (Pressler & Rovzar, 2008, 3)
associate pleasure with the anticipation of use value simply because commodity culture
does not offer use value itself as appreciable or accessible.”

IV. The case of Gossip Girl: Bloggers as (unpaid) influencers in the fashion media complex

Indeed, *Gossip Girl* is an intriguing example of television-internet convergence
that places fashion, gender, product placement, and blogging at its core. *Gossip Girl* was
a true hybrid drama that has drawn from soap operas, teen serial dramas, and reality
television to give its viewers a genre entirely its own. Based on the eponymous book
series by Cecily von Ziegesar, the series focused on beautiful, privileged teenagers in the
Upper East Side in New York City. A modern take on the teen genre and the soap opera
serial, the world of *Gossip Girl* was one where gossip was mainly spread through
surveillance and blogs, in that everyone involved in the Upper East Side scene watches
everyone else and sends pictures from their cell phones to the anonymous blogger
‘Gossip Girl.’

Furthermore, the way in which viewers were interacting with *Gossip Girl* was
markedly different from the traditional television watching of soap viewers. Dafna
Lemish’s study of college students and soap opera viewing revealed that watching soap
operas together allowed for not just a “topic of conversation but an occasion for
becoming a ‘social collective’,” in that as a group they would laugh at humor, sigh in
relief, and cheer on their favorite characters. By contrast, since *Gossip Girl* was a show
that achieved success largely through the Internet, fans bonded using blogs, fan sites and

[37] (Willis, 2001, 337)

YouTube. Thus *Gossip Girl* drew from the structure and themes of traditional serial dramas and soap operas while mimicking the participatory nature of reality television fans. Instead of just watching a television show, talking about it with some friends, and then going to sleep, *Gossip Girl* viewers continued the conversation by posting up ‘mvids’ – music videos using bits and pieces from the show — that they created, writing in blogs about their favorite characters, and even discussing plot lines and themes that they dislike.

It is important to note that even though *Gossip Girl* was scripted, and viewers were not exactly producing content to the same extent as they might in reality shows (by voting off characters, etc.), they were still making their voices heard. For example, given the show’s dismal ratings on television but huge following online in its first season, *CW*’s president of entertainment, Dawn Ostroff, tried to draw its viewers back to the television set by shutting down streams in the last few episodes. The move didn’t work. *Gossip Girl* fans found other ways to catch the show online, the show slipped in ratings in the second season’s season premier, and *CW* announced in July 2008 that they would offer live streaming again in its second season.39

The fans of the series were a formidable presence on the online community, and they blogged about everything related to the show, from the characters to the fashion to even the lives of the actors off-screen. Bloggers ‘gossiped’ on the various sightings of the actors in New York City, discussing who the actors were dating, whether Blake Lively and Leighton Meester were actually feuding in real life, and muse about whether Ed Westwick’s (who depicts bad boy Chuck Bass on the show) sightings at various NYC

39 (McCarthy, 2008)
bars and parties suggested his offstage persona really matches his onscreen one. This investment in the actors’ onscreen and off-screen lives draws from the *Hills* reality model, in which viewers are comfortable staying engaged with actors who are supposedly just playing themselves on television. Furthermore, the on-point nature of the gossip mongering has drawn speculation that all of these rumors were actually orchestrated by a higher-up whose objective was “cultural permeation.” After all, “promoting a show about gossip with gossip is not the worst idea in the world.”

Even though creator Josh Schwartz has denied these claims of being a puppeteer, or the show’s off-screen ‘Gossip Girl’ so to speak, the question remains as to whether *Gossip Girl’s* army of bloggers is performing unpaid work by circulating the show and its actors in the online community and pop culture. It is here that Maurizio Lazzarto’s concept of ‘immaterial labor,’ which “involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as ‘work’—in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion” is applicable. Immaterial labor thus produces a social relationship as a key commodity, which ultimately “is not destroyed in the act of consumption, but rather it enlarges, transforms, and creates the ‘ideological’ and cultural environment of the consumer.” It is therefore difficult to distinguish work time from leisure time because we are always engaging in communication and producing social relations. This steadfast digital productivity is enabled by the logic of capitalism, which

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40 (Pressler and Rovzar, 6).

41 (Lazzarato, 1996, 1)

42 (Lazzarto, 5)
shapes efficient and multi-tasking subjects as cultural goods to be consumed and commoditized by a rapidly paced global economy. Thus, while Gossip Girl fans were not so much being targeted by advertisers in the traditional sense – during its televised broadcast – they were being monitored by advertisers when they blogged and were producing unpaid value for the series.

Furthermore, many of those who watched the show were encouraged to form an almost intimate relationship not just with the characters (who they ‘consume’ on fan sites and magazines) but also with the fashion. Indeed, on the final disc of the first series, an extra feature titled ‘Gossip Girl Couture’ takes the viewers behind the wedding scene in the final episode, and a stylist flashes the Vera Wang wedding dress the bride wears to the camera. Both in the television series and on the show, designer brands were heavily incorporated into the lives of the characters, sometimes to the point in which, as was the case with Sex and the City, buying expensive fashion was misplaced for romance.43 Certainly it was confirmed that there was paid product placement for the television series, which, given its low ratings, is reflective of this new media landscape where advertising is merged with content.

Thus fans also produced value for producers and the larger economy by purchasing products placed in the show. The significance and power of the digital fashion media complex can be observed through the lens of websites such as collegenet.com and gossipgirlfashion.onsugar.com, which provided the details of what the characters are wearing and where to find them. If a $2,000 designer bag is not in one’s price range, then fashion sites like fashionjunkee.com and shopsueyboutique.com

43 (Winerip, 2008)
provided designer-inspired accessories that take the latest fashions directly from fashion magazines and shows like *Sex and the City* and *Gossip Girl*. In fact, *fashionjunkee.com* actually had links where one could ‘shop by celebrity’ or “shop by *Sex and the City* character.”

This growing insistence on fashion’s ‘democratization,’ the idea that every woman has a right to fashion, and ultimately, her own aspirational self-expression and self-determination, was no better expressed than when high-end designer Anna Sui created a line for Target that was based on the styles of *Gossip Girl*’s four main female characters. As Susan Willis wrote in her article about ‘hoped for’ use value, advertising mobilizes desire and feeds into this feeling of anticipation that these purchases will bring certain feelings or a certain lifestyle. So perhaps by dressing like Blair Waldorf, we can attain her “Queen Bee” status and become popular, easily able to win friends and the cute boyfriend. It is significant that the character Jenny, who hailed from Brooklyn and felt the twin pressures of wanting to fit in while not having the financial means to do so, was a fashion designer who makes her own “designer-inspired” outfits. Encapsulating the neo-liberal project, Jenny was a character who represents the bridge between the world young viewers desire to inhabit, and the one in which they actually live. Perhaps this is why so many young fashionistas have turned to the world of fashion blogging, in which these aspirational fantasies can both be realized, and perhaps unknowingly, co-opted. It is here that this chapter will turn next.

**V. The Political and Organizing Potential of the Blogosphere**

The blogosphere emerged in the late 1990s and can be described as “networked
practices of storing and linking.” Blogs developed out of the technological moment coined “Web 2.0,” in which specific technologies and websites (such as mashups, Twitter, and YouTube) paved the way for what would become the ideals that techno-enthusiasts espouse, those of participation, democratization and transparency. The ‘post’ designates blogs as their unique form of contribution, distinct from the ‘page’ of print culture. And also unlike print, readers can leave commentary on a blog, creating an interactive environment that can represent a “considerable break from the traditional, top-down model of communication.” Notably, bloggers have at turns been praised for being “citizen journalists” on the one hand and narcissistic personal writers on the other. Certainly, bloggers often employ an autobiographical tone, but posts, like a letter or a phone call, also attempt connection and engagement. The exaggerated focus on blogs as breeding narcissism overlooks the fact that self-writing (and the practice of sharing writing with audiences) has been a common practice since the Ancient Romans. And while most bloggers do not claim to adhere to conventional journalistic standards, the fact remains that “paid journalists blog, blogs are cited in mainstream journalism as evidence from ordinary people, bloggers appear in print and on television and on radio, and Internet content is delivered to mobile phone.” As Dean continues, “the content focus can’t keep multiply intersecting modes of communication in view. Additionally,
rather than following the conventions of either journaling or journalism, blogging occurs in a space that opens up between them, when the news that matters is news of me and my opinion.”

People most often turn to blogging as a form of creative expression and to share personal experiences. Readers often cite bloggers, from traditional bloggers to YouTube personalities, as more “authentic” and honest precisely because they share personal information, and thus consider them to be a more reliable source of information on issues ranging from politics to pop culture. Blogs can also foster a sense of community, which is not exactly a new phenomenon. Women’s magazines and television soap operas, for example, have long attempted to convey a personal tone with readers, printing their letters and creative contributions. These “occasions for participation,” however were limited in various ways, and producers still retained full editorial power and “legitimized their role as experts within widely recognized domains of gender and femininity.” Producers have in turn embraced this collapse of boundaries between producers and consumers as giving their readers a greater communication platform, while at the same time expressing fears that an excess of interactivity (such as reader feedback and reviews) could undermine their brand.

Techno-skeptics have argued that magazine editors can diminish the power of

50 (Dean, 2010, 49)
51 (Lenhart & Fox, 2006)
52 (Marwick, 2013, 120)
53 (Duffy, 2013, 90)
54 (Duffy, 2013, 98)
these bloggers through a form of enclosure, namely, employing the “participation-as-empowerment” rhetoric to incorporate bloggers into the culture of the magazine. 

_Cosmopolitan_ magazine, for example, launched a “Fun Fearless Female” promotion and encouraged readers to submit their pictures on their various social media platforms and be a “star” of an ad campaign usually reserved for celebrities and models. Duffy argues,

> Although participants likely benefitted from their participation (e.g., enjoyed the photo-shoot simulation), they did not provide much in the way of creative labor as it is traditionally conceptualized. Instead, the emphasis remained on the physical aesthetic despite the appeals to “fun” and “fearlessness.”

Furthermore, magazine executives and producers can use (and some may argue, exploit) the creative contributions and information that audiences share through online contests, fan forums, and cross-media promotions within the social media communities they participate in. This information can fuel the digital-media complex by providing valuable demographic and marketing data to advertisers, who then target audiences with advertisements. The voluntary submission of information online might lead one to assume that audiences want to receive “microtargeted” marketing messages. Yet the _Economist_, in a special edition on advertising and surveillance, cited a BCG report that revealed around 75% of consumers in most countries cited privacy of personal data as a central concern, and that younger people are as uncomfortable with online surveillance as their older counterparts. Thus, while many participants in online communities may take pleasure in the community, participatory engagement, and even forms of self-promotion that these platforms provide, they also might not be fully aware that their participation is

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55 (Duffy, 2013, 94)

56 (Duffy, 2013, 92)

57 (Economist, 2014)
implicated by economic incentives. It should be noted also that advertisers might be making gendered assumptions about consumerism, believing that women are more likely to share and promote their favorite brands with other women instead of just consuming them.  

Furthermore, the rise of the blogosphere reflects an increasingly unstable and precarious workplace, especially within the creative industries, in which work is increasingly being outsourced to mostly unpaid laborers. Interestingly enough, the entire notion of “Free Culture” is rooted in activist movements that have fought for a free and accessible Internet as providing the best alternative to mainstream media’s hegemony. Free culture advocates maintain that “people should be able to critically comment on mainstream culture, employ cultural raw material for their own uses, and create ‘transformative works’ such as fan fiction or mashups without fear of litigation or punitive damages from the entertainment industry.”

These activist movements have taken the form of hackers, feminists, punk rock, independent publishers and ‘zines,’ and DIY (do it yourself) culture. One has to question however, whether the democratic promise of “free culture” has been somewhat co-opted, for two reasons. First, as Joseph Reagle argues, the values of an open and transparent culture can prioritize the concerns of misogynistic men, who can claim censorship when faced with accusations of sexism. This was no better demonstrated than when feminist critic Anita Sarkeesian was harassed with violent online threats after she made videos

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58 (Duffy, 2013, 89)
59 (Marwick, 2013, 34)
60 (Reagle, 2013)
criticizing misogyny in gamer culture.\textsuperscript{61} Secondly, an argument can be made that online
users are essentially performing unpaid work for corporations and advertiser, which, as
referenced previously, is a form of ‘immaterial labor - “labor that produces the
informational and cultural content of the commodity.”\textsuperscript{62} As Campbell notes in his study
of iVillage, this “labor of devotion” is spread through social media platforms, creating
more value (and profit) for advertisers and corporate interests.\textsuperscript{63} Given that these
consumers tend to be female, this rhetoric of labor must be appropriately intersected with
gender. To that end, the Women’s Media Center’s report on the status of women in the
media found that men dominated almost every paid sector. Women, however, are more
actively involved on social media networks and are robustly engaged in the blogosphere,
platforms that are largely unpaid.\textsuperscript{64} Yet despite this, theories of participatory/digital
media and labor power have largely overlooked the important role of gender in these
discourses. This is why the fashion blogosphere is the perfect site for analysis, as it is a
cultural industry that intersects labor issues, participatory media, and gender politics.

\textbf{VI. Fashion Blogging: Producing meaning within the context of neoliberal
capitalism.} 

It is estimated that there are 133 million blogs worldwide, and of these, only a
fraction (about two million) are dedicated to “varieties of fashion and style that might be
grouped as celebrity, street, couture, luxury, indie, mass-produced, masstige, vintage, and

\textsuperscript{61} (Robertson, 2014)

\textsuperscript{62} (Lazzarato, 1996, 133)

\textsuperscript{63} (Campbell, 2011)

\textsuperscript{64} (Women's Media Center, 2014)
That being said, this chapter has thus far touched on the economic, cultural, and social significance of the digital media fashion complex, and will also argue for its political and organizing potential. Very little academic critique has been given to culture bloggers, especially those who write about fashion. Instead, political blogging, which ranks highest in terms of online traffic (but still constitutes just 11 percent of the blogosphere), has received the greatest attention from scholars. As Minh-Ha T. Pham argues in her article, “Blog Ambition: Fashion, Feelings, and the Political Economy of the Digital Raced Body,” this disproportionate focus on political blogging lends the impression that blogging is dominated by men, when in fact, slightly more women and girls blog and females under the age of twenty-nine are the most prolific bloggers. Furthermore, as Pham points out:

By limiting critical examination of blogs’ political function to political blogs, they miss the heterogeneous and informal modes of cultural politics in which many people who feel disenfranchised from formal politics participate. They also deny the organizational and mobilizing power of blogs and related computer-mediated communication technologies for youth, artists, and marginalized and diasporic communities. Thus, blog studies inadvertently represent bloggers as politically efficacious subjects only when they are blogging about formal or ‘serious’ politics (such as electoral politics and so forth) – a domain that is historically and structurally male-dominated.66

Thus ignoring and even denigrating culture themed blogs, which make up about 50 percent of the internet and focus on entertainment, hobbies, and autobiographical journaling, is realized by associating culture with the private or domestic sphere, and ultimately, femininity. Fashion and style bloggers, who share their interests in the


production and consumption of the beauty and fashion industry, are particularly
denigrated as too feminine. Yet the pleasures of consumption can create spaces for
political subjectivity, as has been revealed in studies of romance novel readers, soap
opera viewers, and even informatics workers. In Barbados, for example, such workers
used fashion to re-define the companies’ idea of the ‘professional, ideal worker,’
ultimately creating their own ‘pink-collar’ identities. In fact, Nan Estad’s study of labor
leaders in women’s unions during the early twentieth-century revealed that for many of
these young women, consumption of romance novels and the newest fashions helped to
shape their political and activist identities. Here again fashion proves to be a
particularly compelling ‘technology of the self’ in the way that it promises (and often
delivers) transformation of one’s identity into a particular type of citizen-subject, in some
cases, as ones infused with political and organizing potential. Furthermore, while
criticisms of fashion blogging’s emancipatory and democratizing narrative are right to
point out the inherently anti-democratic structures and processes in which these
technologies are embedded, it is important to not diminish the pleasure that many people
derive from fashion blogging. Certainly as a blogger myself, I can attest that blogging,
while being immense (unpaid) work, has fueled and enriched my creative and intellectual
curiosities. The question then perhaps should not be centered on whether fashion
blogging is inherently democratic, but rather how bloggers can construct a multiplicity of
meanings and practices – cultural, political and otherwise – within the context of global
neoliberal capitalism. These questions will be further elaborated in subsequent chapters.

67 (Freeman, 2000)

68 (Estad, 1999)
The first fashion blogs, *LookOnline Daily Fashion Report* and *She She Me*, were created in 2002. They quickly ushered in a wave of fashion bloggers whose ascendance can be credited to “generational differences, consumers’ recession-conscious spending habits, and, of course, technologies that allow ‘anyone’ to be visible in the mediated public sphere.”\(^{69}\) The emergence of these blogs came to represent fashion’s so-called ‘democratization.’ That discourse was furthered when couture designers such as Isaac Mizrahi, Jason Wu, Vera Wang, and Anna Sui produced lines for mass retailers such as Target and Kohl’s.\(^{70}\) 2009 was declared “Year of the Fashion Blogger” when eighty bloggers were invited to cover New York Fashion week, and couture brand Dolce & Gabbana famously seated a few popular bloggers in the front seat while delegating chief executives of Saks, Neiman Marcus, and Bergdorf Newman to the second and third rows. Even with the speculation that this was a publicity stunt, the move perfectly captured the tensions between “new media ‘citizen journalists’ and old media professional journalists.”\(^ {71}\) This discourse is even more relevant now, as a recent piece in the *New York Times* revealed that the rise of digital media such as Instagram has drastically changed the way fashion is “reported, consumed and shared.”\(^ {72}\)

Fashion collection coverage, no longer confined to the authority of trade papers and websites, is now the turf of the individual with a camera who can share that collection with her many followers. This shift has inspired designers to consider how

\(^{69}\) (Duffy, 2013, 100)  
\(^{70}\) ibid  
\(^{71}\) (Pham, The Digital Decade in Fashion (and then some), 2010)  
\(^{72}\) (Schneier, 2014)
their collections will appear on a two-dimensional screen, thus influencing the design process itself. And it has once again sparked a conversation in the fashion industry on whether fashion should become more exclusive or democratized. On the one hand there are concerns that online ubiquity could result in “overexposure and copycatting” which is why designers like Tom Ford and Phoebe Philo of Celine have chosen to ban cellphones from their shows (Philo actually provided the media with her own photos once the collections arrived in stores). Others, such as Givenchy’s creative director Riccardo Tiscy, confided that being able to use Instagram to demonstrate the process of creating a collection to his many followers is “quite beautiful.” Furthermore, as Duffy notes,

Digital communication devices that offer instantaneous access to fashion shows also helped to fuel this democratization by significantly reducing the time from the runway to the real world. In announcing Style.com’s movement from Conde Nast in 2010, the Wall Street Journal’s Russell Adams said, “The internet has empowered shoppers to influence tastes and set trends, blurring the line between consumers and professionals.”

Indeed, a recent study found that “word of mouth marketing from a trusted source” is the most significant factor behind 20 to 50 percent of all marketing decisions. Given that prominent magazines have seen a decline in ad pages over the last decade, it is no wonder that analysts predict that interactive fashion media will grow into a “$55 billion industry and represent 21 percent of all marketing spending.”

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73 Ibid.
74 Ibid
75 (Bughin, Doogan, & Vetvik, 2010)
76 (Clifford, 2009)
77 (Pham, The Digital Decade in Fashion (and then some), 2010)
Discourses that equate digital technologies with democratization however, are complicated by the fact that the Internet filters the most popular web sites and blogs so that they most frequently show up in web searches. This contradicts popular narratives that articulate claims of democratization with regard to blogging and new media technologies, which are animated by “fantasies of abundance, participation, and wholeness.” These fantasies obscure the anti-democratic processes in which these technologies are embedded, for example, the idea that one can find anything they wish on the Internet. But the blogosphere privileges blogs by white men, despite the fact that the Pew Research Center found that bloggers are “less likely to be white than the general population.” In fact, research has also supported that African-American and Hispanic families tend to highly value the Internet for its “educational purposes” and see it as an investment in their child’s future. Still, as Minh-Ha T. Pham points out, “while the Internet may democratize communication systems, it is a democracy of popularity rather than equitability,” noting that the “same Web sites and Web logs appear in the top three to five results of every Web search.” This is part and parcel of the digital media complex, in which neoliberal governmentality intervenes to corrupt potentially democratic spaces.

Fashion blogs have become immensely popular, and for many readers, are perceived to be a more reliable, or authentic, source of information about the fashion

78 (Dean J., 2005)

79 (Herring, 2004; in Lenhart & Fox, Bloggers, 2006)

80 (Nakamura, 2008, 175)

industry due to their perceived distance. Bloggers are supposedly not paid by any brands, thus creating the impression that their opinions are completely their own. Indeed, studies have revealed that blogs are more likely than magazines to inspire a beauty product purchase.\footnote{New Survey Shows that Blogs are Two Times More Likely to Drive Beauty Product Purchases than Magazines, 2011} Fashion blogs, much like women’s magazines, employ a personal tone that is often homespun and autobiographical, heightening this sense of authenticity. Besides offering a forum for creative self-expression, style blogs illustrate the “fantasy of self-determination and future prosperity through fashion.”\footnote{Nathanson, 2014, 138} This reflects the discourse of post-feminism (or also, ‘choice’ feminism) which emphasizes the ability to purchase fashion as a mode of liberation and an indication of a woman’s success. As Carrie Bradshaw said on the show “Sex and the City,” women should have the right to fashion. Nathanson writes in her article, “Dressed for Economic Success:” “In declaring passions for creativity and aesthetics, everyday girl blogs blend labor and leisure, production and consumption through the rhetoric of personal style.”\footnote{Nathanson, 2014, 147}

This promise of autobiographical free-expression may be appropriated by the online shopping and consumer fashion and beauty industries. First, digital labor is generally unpaid, and while many fashion bloggers hope that their blog will become a platform from which they can launch a career, the reality may suggest otherwise. As Pham writes in her piece, “Why Are We Willing to Pay for Fashion Magazines and Not Blogs?”:

\footnote{New Survey Shows that Blogs are Two Times More Likely to Drive Beauty Product Purchases than Magazines, 2011}
\footnote{Nathanson, 2014, 138}
\footnote{Nathanson, 2014, 147}
If you’re not willing to pay to read blogs (and maybe not even to maintain a blog), is there another way to valorize (give value to) a blog? Some bloggers have been materially compensated with gifts from designers in the form of free clothes and accessories; invitations to exclusive parties and shows; ad revenue; book deals; and salaried employment with established print and digital media companies. But the “glittering prizes”\(^85\) of this digital jackpot economy are unevenly distributed upwards to those who already have a large and mainstream following, who have already been acknowledged by traditional media (a glowing write-up in the *New York Times*, for example), and whose blogs already show up in the top 5 results of Internet searches (determined by several factors such as: their number of unique daily and monthly visits or “hits,” the frequency in which blogs appear in top bloggers’ blogrolls, and the number and prevalence of reader commentaries).\(^86\)

Thus, while blogs have been heralded as facilitating the collapse of fashion’s famously impenetrable boundaries between the privileged elites and mass consumers, those same classed, gendered, and racial hierarchies can just as easily be re-articulated to reinforce the status quo of privileged aesthetics, tastes, and knowledge *within* the fashion blogosphere.

This aspirational fantasy of ‘making it’ in the fashion industry by engaging in unpaid creative labor is also sold to viewers of reality shows, from *Project Runway*, *America’s Next Top Model*, *The Hills*, and *The City*. As an article in *Dissent* magazine noted,

In the popular MTV reality series *The Hills* and *The City*, young women are effortlessly transported from their lives as carefree California teens to the fast-paced world of New York Fashion Week as unpaid interns at *Teen Vogue* and Kelly Kutrone’s publicity firm, People’s Revolution. From the beginning of their glamorous journeys to their conclusions, in which their total transformation into successful fashion designers is achieved, these shows situate unpaid internships as vehicles of economic mobility, creativity, and self-actualization.\(^87\)

\(^85\) (Pham, *Linkage: The Future of Fashion Work*, 2010)

\(^86\) (Pham, *Why Are We Willing to Pay for Fashion Magazines and not Blogs*, 2010)

\(^87\) (Strassel, 2014)
In doing so, these televised spectacles of fashion work obscures the exploitative creative labor behind them. This speaks to the dissonance between the aspirational fantasies represented in these ‘reality’ shows, and the true reality in which labor struggles are masked behind the glitz and glamour of the industry. This mask was effectively peeled away when Ohio State University student Diana Wang sued Hearst Corporation, claiming that its unpaid internship program was exploitative and did not cultivate any kind of educational experience.\(^{88}\)

Furthermore, there is a special irony that in all these discourses surrounding new media democratization and the ‘power’ of the fashion blogger, in that the ultimate goal for many of these young bloggers is to become affiliated with a major fashion entity such as *Vogue* and *Glamour*. As Duffy notes, magazine producers employ two main strategies to help strengthen these boundaries and sustain the prestige of their publications. The first is to “reaffirm professional expertise” of their paid writers and contributors. The second is through the incorporation of bloggers into their own brands, whether it is by inviting teen blogger Tavi Gevinson to contribute a piece to *Harper’s*, or inviting YouTube ‘stars’ to give beauty advice to *Seventeen* readers. Duffy notes that in the latter example, these young women who were chosen by *Seventeen* also were able to benefit the magazine’s audience (and advertisers) because they came with a large audience, thus aiding in cross-promotion of their respective brands.\(^{89}\) In turn, advertisers have reached out to blogging platforms, which they believe are viewed by readers as more trustworthy and authentic than magazines, in the wake of splintering of the consumer market. These

\(^{88}\) (Shaefer, 2012)  
\(^{89}\) (Duffy, 2013, 109)
advertising opportunities can include banners, giveaways, events, sponsorships, etc. In fact, corporations heavily promote several of the most popular blogs. In 2012, Conde Nast bought the promotional network of top fashion blogs called Nowmanifest, which currently heavily promotes street style and personal fashion blogs such as Scott Schuman’s *The Sartorialist*. While Schuman has opined that this does not create a conflict of interest, one has to question whether the “required opinion is implicit in the acceptance of the pay cheque or gift.”

Furthermore, this ideal of authenticity and transparency is at odds with what is often the main purpose of fashion blogs: self-branding. Self-branding can be defined as primarily a series of marketing strategies applied to the individual. It is a set of practices and a mindset, a way of thinking about the self as a salable commodity that can tempt a potential employer. Self-branding, which would be impossible without the affordable means of information distribution that the Internet provides, is intrinsically linked to the features of social media technologies that make self-promotion on a wide scale possible.

In a *New York Times* expose of fashion blogging endorsements during Fall Fashion Week, reporter Ruth La Ferla claimed that bloggers were becoming “billboards for brands,” and that the most popular bloggers could earn thousands of dollars wearing designer outfits as a form of advertisement for these companies. And a profile of fashion bloggers for *Texas Monthly* revealed how the company rewardStyle offers commissions of up to 20 percent if a blogger helps sell an item on their platforms.

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90 (Amed, 2011)

91 (Hoskins, 2014, 44)

92 (Marwick, 2013, 166)

93 (La Ferla, 2012)

94 (Mari, 2014)
Thus, blogs are navigating the same tensions of traditional magazines, in which they must maintain the myth of editorial independence and integrative while at the same time giving in to commercial pressures. Calling authenticity a “productive myth,” Duffy continues:

That is, the themes of authenticity and autonomy that bloggers draw on conceal the fact that they are often embedded in the same commercial milieu as those institutional sites from which they distance themselves. This may help to explain why magazine workers and fashion bloggers perform a strange dance in which they sometimes critique and at other times celebrate one another.  

While one accuses bloggers of being dishonest, or even sell-outs, it seems perhaps a little unfair to criticize people - the majority of whom are young women – who want to be paid for their work. Still, there are legitimate questions regarding transparency, and also, that a successful blog is now often designated by the amount of followers it has instead of the conversations it raises. These tensions are raised by Julia of the blog alagarconniere, who writes:

Monetization” has a category all to itself on the Independent Fashion Blogger website. Years back it was, “how do we make money from our blogs?” Today, questions like “Do we disclose?” It seems every blogger either makes money from their hobby, or wants it to seem as though they do. Do we brag? Do we pretend it’s something we don’t care about to create a nice illusion for our readers? Or do we reject it altogether? and look for alternatives? In the end it all seems to come down to capitalism – which, whether we want to acknowledge it or not, is a political structure. Whether we be challenging fashion bloggers, style bloggers, or lifestyle bloggers, it is an overarching element we can’t take out of the picture.

As a blogger myself, I can attest that blogging, while gratifying, is indeed hard work. It takes a tremendous amount of time and commitment to write text, insert pictures, and, if one is a fashion blogger, put together outfits and model them. That fashion bloggers

95 (Duffy, 2013, 106)

96 (Fashion Blogging Culture: Demanding Substance Over Style, 2013)
must ‘do it all’ supports neoliberal discourses of the entrepreneurial self as well as postfeminist representations of consumption and self-determination. It is thus not a surprise that many bloggers have essentially become brands, both for themselves and the advertisers they sponsor. Does this trend, however, support the argument that these supposed ‘collapsed boundaries’ of traditional media have in essence been “remade to preserve historical and identity articulations”\(^{97}\) and ultimately support the status quo? Media producers have attempted, for example, to create distinctions between different media platforms (as having unique content), between professional and amateur producers, and those who have technological experience with those who have little. Furthermore, the emphasis on self-promotion and the possible conflict of interest with brand advertisers can arguably disable critical conversations around fashion politics, such as those that focus on body politics, race, class, and labor.

However, there are those who argue that the blogosphere can potentially be a space for political engagement. Minh-Ha T. Pham, in her article on Asian-American fashion blogs, brilliantly reveals the ways in which Asian-American fashion blogs in particular, with their focus on revealing bloggers’ *individual* tastes and thoughts, challenges hegemonic representations of Asian women and femininity. At the same time, she also contends that these blogs critically engage with globalized discourses of racialized femininity and labor politics by disclosing personal stories of familial struggle and discrimination. These “hybrid and deessentialized, unstable and destabilizing representations of Asianness”\(^{98}\) reveal that the fashion blogosphere, while not a perfectly

\(^{97}\) (Duffy, 2013, 140)

democratic one, can indeed be a site of cultural tension where meanings and practices
around dominant systems of class, race, gender, and sexuality can be interrogated and
even clarified.

Jessalynn Keller’s ethnographic research on how girls use blogs to create
alternative spaces for feminist protest further elaborates on the complex and contradictory
space of new media intervention. Her interviews with young women bloggers reveal that
contrary to the ‘slacktivist’ rhetoric, these young girls and women view blogging as a
more accessible form of activism than traditional forms of protest (often designated to the
public and adult sphere) that actually help to solidify their identities as activists and
connect their meaningful discourses with other discourses. At the same time, the desire
of young bloggers to “market” feminism and make it more mainstream positions them
squarely within the neoliberal framework which promotes ideals of branding, even when
organizing for larger social change.99

VII. Conclusion

Dominant discourses around new media activism tend to be positioned as either
decrying internet advocacy as a form of ‘slacktivism’ or over-touting digital technologies
as ‘creating revolutions,’ such as the “twitter revolution” that was credited with spurring
the Arab Spring. This dissertation will ultimately argue for a more complex position,
which is that the dilemma of fashion blogging, as a “technology of the self,” offers the
promise of self-transformation and democratization while still being firmly tied to
concealed discourses of governmentality rooted in capitalism. The next three chapters,
which will build upon the historical foundation of the blogosphere laid out here, will

99 (Keller, 2014)
reveal that although the organizing potential of the Internet and blogosphere is rife with possibility, it is also at profound risk for co-option by the neo-liberal project.
Chapter Four
Labor in the Fashion Industry: Fighting for a Living Wage in the Neo-Liberal Economy

Part I. Introduction

You can say I’m not talented…but when you say that I don’t care about children…How dare you? – TV Host Kathie Gifford, 1996

Walmart and Children’s Place claimed they were deeply saddened over the loss of the life in their factories in Bangladesh, but not saddened enough, apparently, to lift a finger to help the families of the victims. These companies should join the compensation plan without further delay. – Judy Gearhart of the International Labor Rights Forum, 2013

On May 1, 1996, a distraught Kathy Lee Gifford appeared on her television show, fighting back tears as she responded to allegations leveled at her by Charles Kernaghan of the National Labor Committee that exploited women and children were making her clothing line for WalMart. These damning accusations came at the height of what has been dubbed by Andrew Ross as “the year of the sweatshop,” in which highly visible awareness campaigns implicated other prominent retailers, including Gap, Guess Jeans, and Nike, in using sweatshop labor to make their clothing. Gifford, with her squeaky-clean celebrity daytime image, was an especially good target for the anti-sweatshop movement, not least because her label guaranteed a share of the proceeds to be donated to children’s non-profits. Her defensive stance was thus widely perceived as hypocritical,

1 (Howe, McNeil, Aria, Podesta, Wright, & Otey, 1996)

2 (ILRF, 2013)

3 (Ross, 1997)
placing her public persona as a child advocate in danger of being damaged. By the end of
the month she and her husband had traveled to Honduras to speak to workers, and
Kernaghan had arranged for a meeting between Gifford and fifteen year old factory
worker Wendy Diaz to take place in New York. After hearing Wendy speak articulately
and passionately about the exploitative working conditions the women had to endure,
Gifford promised to advocate for independent monitoring of factories and met with
politicians in New York and DC to discuss child labor issues and urge reform. She had,
in essence, become a “responsible moral agent” after being held so publicly accountable
by activists, workers, and the media.4

Gifford’s celebrity status helped to bring much needed visibility to the sweatshop
issue, and other high-profile campaigns against major brands quickly followed. This
wave of activism aimed at ending labor exploitation was no better captured than in
Naomi Klein’s book No Logo (2000), in which Klein enthusiastically documented the
strategies of student activists, “culture jammers” and ethical shareholders whom she
described as trying to seize globalization from the “grasp of multinationals.”5 Conceding
that these activists were at the early stages of demanding citizen-based alternatives to
brand hegemony, and that there’s much more work to be done, she ends the book by
writing,

That demand, still sometimes in some areas of the world whispered for
fear of a jinx, is to build a resistance – both high-tech and grassroots, both
focused and fragmented – that is as global, and as capable of coordinated
action, as the multinational corporations it seeks to subvert.6

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4 (Ross R. J., 2004, 228)
5 (Klein, 2000, 445)
6 (Klein, 2000, 446)
More than a decade later, the eight-story Rana Plaza building in Savar, Bangladesh collapsed, killing over 1,000 people and injuring more than 2,500. Local workers and relatives were some of the first on the scene, digging out mutilated bodies, including those of children who had been staying at the building’s day care center, from the rubble. One picture, a haunting image of two people clinging to each other for survival, with their lower parts of their bodies buried under concrete and a tear of blood running down the man’s cheek, went viral. The image served as a shocking reminder of what happens when we treat humans as just numbers, or as simply ‘cheap labor’ within a global supply chain that feeds the consumption patterns of the United States and European Union by delivering low-cost clothing from Bangladeshi factories to stores in the Global North. It was also a scathing indictment of an industry that operates according to a “logic of distance,” in which a consumer is so removed from the condition under which a producer labors that they are less likely to have awareness, let alone any motivation to protest.

In an age of new media technology, haunting pictures like the one mentioned above can indeed be circulated more easily and to more people than it could have been back in the mid-90s. Still, this image is surely not the first time that the issue of sweatshops has entered into the global public consciousness, including that of the global north. Why then the collective shock and surprise? If 1995 was dubbed the ‘year of the sweatshop’ because of nascent public awareness, how could the immediate, highly visible

7 (Dawisha, 2013)

8 (Nguyen Tu, 2011, 27)
advocacy that followed give way almost twenty years later to one of the greatest industrial disasters in history?

The focus of this dissertation is the discursive technologies that both enable and constrain fashion to be an agent of social change. As this chapter will reveal, the last one hundred years of advocacy around the issue of sweatshops has not been in vain, and various actors have indeed been able to claim many prominent ‘victories’ using a variety of tools to close this distance between producer and consumer. Yet those working towards greater accountability, transparency, democratization, and authenticity in the apparel industry have had to work against a strengthening neoliberal governmentality that serves to co-opt many of their efforts. As Naomi Klein noted earlier, organizers must draw from various tools and cultural resources to build a coordinated movement that is effectively able to engage with the contested terrain at the intersection of culture, labor, and fashion.

Yet it is important to note that individuals and social movements, while recognizing the political and ideological hegemony of neoliberal governmentality, are also continually engaged in a process of exposing its many contradictions. This chapter will thus reveal how the entangled discourses of authenticity, transparency, accountability, and democratization have been brought into a cultural debate about labor issues, and how at different historical moments they have been simultaneously articulated to resist the ills of capitalism and also re-articulated or co-opted to support neo-liberal governmentality. It will examine how power operates – how it affirms, oppresses, and acts unrecognized – in both hegemonic institutions (such as states and corporations) and within resistance movements.
The first part of this chapter will discuss how neoliberal governmentality has operated over the last century to facilitate the rise of the sweatshop. The next section of the chapter will dissect various forms of intervention and discursive strategies to ‘fight back’ so to speak, from twitter hashtag campaigns to living wage factories to ‘shop for the cause’ initiatives and self-described ‘ethical blogger’ interventions, and will examine the tensions between different movements in how these strategies are articulated and enacted. My hope is that the multiplicity of exemplars can reveal the many agile interventions that are able to engage these oppressive spaces in a way that potentially paves the way for more egalitarian arrangements.

II. Industry Always Rebels: On the Persistent Rise of Sweatshops

Throughout history, industry has always rebelled against regulation. And so government and activists always have to push the tide back for more regulation. So when it comes to this outsourcing to factories abroad, we need to have a system where these western brands that are making all this profit aren’t just self-regulating, but that there’s actual accountability and traceability. Because at the end of the day, there’s a profound violation of human rights that needs to be accounted for. – Andrew Morgan, director of the upcoming documentary, *The True Cost* \(^9\)

This section will interrogate the rise of sweatshops in the garment industry in the twentieth century as a socio-cultural phenomenon that illustrates industry’s capacities to use fashion as a site for repeatable processes of labor exploitation. It will demonstrate the potential for, but complicated conditions of, resistance and disruption of these processes, which draws from some of the same cultural resources that enable industry exploitation.

Workers have traditionally been threatened by the rise of Fordism – the industry’s ability to separate workers from each other to disrupt solidarity and to demean the laborer

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\(^9\) (Dawisha, "The True Cost": A Documentary on the Global Fashion Industry's Impact, 2013)
who has no ownership over the start to finish of making a product. This creates a
discursive space where there is a struggle over meaning and values, such as
democratization and authenticity, which has been laid out in other chapters and will be
further articulated here. This struggle is familiar to many industries, but labor
exploitation has always been the bedrock of the fashion industry in part because the
softness of the fabric and intricacy of the patterns prevent easy mechanization, which is
what allows other industries to keep costs low.\textsuperscript{10} Fashion provides an abundance of other
cultural resources to inform the struggle (such as consumerism, novelty, ‘trends,’ and
gendered labor) and capitalist governmentality is constantly employing these resources to
reify industry power and a cycle of resistance and co-option.

Ultimately, what will be told in the following sections is the story of the rise of
unions (and their eventual co-option) specifically in the United States; the rise again of
sweatshops globally; the unleashing of branding and outsourcing as outcomes of
discursive struggle accomplished through fashion’s cultural resources.\textsuperscript{11}

In the fall of 1909 the women’s shirtwaist workers of Local 25 who led the largest
industrial strike by women known at that time. Referred to as the “Uprising of 20,000,”
twenty percent of its workforce walked out in protest over labor conditions and poor
wages. Many of these young women were actually girls of fourteen or fifteen years of
age.\textsuperscript{12} Their clear depiction of a dirty, dark workplace in which the ‘girls’ toiled for hours
with little break and pay shattered the popular illusion of the time, that of the Industrial

\textsuperscript{10} (Featherstone, 2002, 3)

\textsuperscript{11} (Featherstone & Sweatshops, 2002, 3)

\textsuperscript{12} (Ross R. J., 2004, 56)
Revolution as being solely equated with progress and upward mobility. These young picketers garnered the crucial sympathy of middle and upper class women who were involved in the Women’s Trade Union League. A turning point occurred for the workers when these women joined the picketers and were arrested by the police. Media coverage changed and became more sympathetic, and public opinion shifted toward supporting the strikers. The actions of the women inspired the men’s strike consisting of sixty thousand cloakmakers, also known as the “Great Revolt.” Both of these strikes resulted in state intervention in labor rights, which included provisions for better pay, prohibition on ‘homework,’ and limits on hours worked per week. The women’s strike helped to initiate the making of the International Ladies Garment Workers’ Union, while the men’s strike gave way to the Protocols of Peace.

These strikes in 1909-1910 helped to strengthen the ILGWU and ACWA (Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America) and increase its membership in the few years that followed. It also set the much-needed groundwork around labor exploitation that would help the public better understand just two years later what would become one of the deadliest industrial disasters in the U.S., the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire.

On March 25, 1911, a fire started on the eighth floor of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, eventually killing 146 people, many of whom leapt to their deaths. It was discovered soon after that the back door had been locked, presumably to prevent union organizers from the outside to chat with workers in this nonunion factory.\(^{13}\) Ross writes in *Slaves to Fashion*,

\(^{13}\) (Ross R. J., 2004, 63)
The Triangle Fire. It seems self-defining now: a firm of callous owners who had neglected fire equipment, who murderously allowed the back door to be locked, who employed children and worked their people seventy or eighty hours a week. The fire is a metaphor for the bad old days of sweatshops, a day we were to have overcome, a past whose horror only illumines the civilized nature of contemporary life.¹⁴

Of course, history would repeat itself many times since that fateful day and into the next century. It was just in 2012, after all, that more than three hundred workers died in a factory fire in Pakistan, after factory employers locked the doors to prevent the workers from stealing the jeans they were making.¹⁵ Still, after 400,000 marchers protested in a public funeral on April 5, 1911 and workers staged another public strike, the Factory Investigating Commission launched an investigation into worker conditions and proposed safety and wage regulations, including a minimum wage.¹⁶ World War I did indeed bring higher wages and employment to both garment workers and the rest of the nation, and union membership shot up to 129,000.

However, just as quickly as labor unions re-articulated the status quo to protect workers’ rights, those in power began the process of de-centralizing factory workplaces by creating the jobber-contractor-subcontractor system in the 1920s. Class theorists such as Marx and Braverman have argued that the compartmentalization of labor separates laborers from each other and disrupts worker solidarity. Braverman also argues that this division of labor only serves to demean the laborer, who no longer is able to gain

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¹⁴ (Ross R. J., 2004, 62)

¹⁵ (Wand, 2012)

¹⁶ (Ross R. J., 2004, 67)
ownership over a product by making it from start to finish.\textsuperscript{17} Indeed, the subcontracting of work allowed New York manufacturers to evade the labor conditions determined by the union contract, and this growing industry decentralization even allowed some shops to leave the garment district where they could avoid union-friendly workers.\textsuperscript{18} A growing “fashion consciousness” and consumer culture fueled by burgeoning mass media advertising further supported this decentralization.

The cultural and economic shifts that arose with Great Depression made it increasingly difficult for labor unions to build on their union gains, as workers, struggling to find jobs, became more willing to accept exploitative working conditions. Prices inevitably dropped about 25 percent during the years from 1929 to 1933. Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins noted this price decline as a troubling reflection of union losses when she stated: “The red silk bargain dress in the shop window is a danger signal. It is a warning of the return of the sweatshop, a challenge to us all to reinforce the gains we have made in our long and difficult progress toward a civilized industrial order.”\textsuperscript{19}

Workers, faced with this loss of gains, began to push harder in leveraging their cultural resources to secure labor rights. Roosevelt’s presidential election and Frances Perkins’ (who had worked with the New York State Factory Investigating Commission) appointment as Secretary of Labor offered renewed hope, but it is important to emphasize that Roosevelt didn’t build structural reform out of the goodness of his heart. He was the owner class's designated negotiator when labor had the power to force compromise from

\textsuperscript{17} (Braverman, 1974)

\textsuperscript{18} (Ross R. J., 2004, 69)

\textsuperscript{19} (Ross R. J., 2004, 72)
capital. Ultimately he passed two acts that would change the face of the industry – the National Labor Relations Act (also known as the Wagner Act) and the Fair Labor Standards Act. The NLRA, passed in 1935, guaranteed the basic right of workers to join a union, bargain for better conditions, and strike if necessary. The Fair Labor Standards Act, passed in 1938, mandated a forty-hour workweek, a national minimum wage, the prohibition of most forms of child labor, and the guarantee of time and a half for overtime.20

Thus began the so-called “era of decency,” the period between the 1940s and 1970s in which labor rights were strong and sweatshops were generally regarded as a thing of the past. Even though there is some evidence that the ILGWU did not fight so aggressively for collective bargaining on behalf of Puerto Rican and African American workers, even then, the wages and conditions of these workers did not fall below minimum wage and did not meet what was then defined as a sweatshop.21

This began to drastically shift starting in the second half of the twentieth century, when an aggregate of several troubling cultural and economic trends emerged that would give way, once again, to the rise of the sweatshop. Many prominent apparel companies, as a way to avoid the extra costs that union factories required to make improvements, began to relocate production to the union-weak southern states starting in the 1950s and even Asia, where production was significantly cheaper than in the United States, and where governments were quick to shut down union organizing.22 The decline of

20 (Samuel, 2000)

21 (Ross R. J., 2004, 94)

22 (Williams, 2010, 44)
communication and transportation costs in the 1960s hastened this trend. Trade agreements such as the Multifiber Arrangements (1974-2004) that set export quotas for different countries were ultimately weak protectionist measures however, and apparel imports to the U.S. increased steadily over the next few decades. The final nail in the coffin was when the World Trade Agreement was created in 1994, ensuring that the quotas of the Multifiber Arrangement would be gradually phased out over the next ten years so that by 2004, any country could export apparel in unlimited amounts to the U.S.

How is it that just fifty years after the radical changes brought by the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire to protect worker and union rights, these gains were wrestled away? The promotion of neoliberal, ‘free trade’ policies that emerged out of “deliberate policy decisions by elites across the globe,” initiated during the Reagan and Bush administrations and strengthened by the Clinton administration, is at the root of this shift. Distinguished by its rhetoric that focuses on ‘free trade’ and deregulation, neoliberalism ultimately reorients the economic regulatory system in a way that benefits multinational corporations at the expense of collective labor organized by vulnerable groups. It is characterized by deregulation, ‘cost-cutting’ and privatization. Deregulation

23 (Featherstone, 2002, 4)
24 (Williams, 2010, 45-46)
25 (Williams, 2010, 51)
26 (Williams, 2010, 48)
is defined as an intentional policy by which industry is left to market forces, while privatization transfers public, government goods and services into private ones.\textsuperscript{27}

These new systems of power cleverly employed the discourses of globalization to promote poverty reduction and class equalization, and yet globalization embedded in neoliberal policies has not delivered on its equalizing promises. Between 1960 and 1993, for example, the gap in per capita income between the Global North and Global South tripled.\textsuperscript{28} Outsourcing to other countries led to a weakening in domestic production in the United States and ultimately, union membership and strength. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics reveals the decrease in union membership has paralleled the decline in worker’s wages in the apparel industry. For example, as of 2000, wages for garment workers fell to about 55\% of the average manufacturing wage, and apparel workers brought home less than four percent more in real purchasing power from 1988 to 2000.\textsuperscript{29} It is this destruction of union power that can help explain why the labor exploitation in the beginning of the twenty-first century mirrored the exploitation in the beginning of the twentieth.

These neoliberal policies have contributed significantly to the rise of the sweatshop, a word that has metaphorically come to symbolize degrading and exploitative working conditions that are so inconceivable they are perceived to be archaic, a thing of the past. Unfortunately, sweatshops are very much an integral part of our current day reality, in large part due to the cost-reduction strategies of multinationals that fosters a

\textsuperscript{27} (Ross R. J., 2004, 150)

\textsuperscript{28} (Featherstone, 2002, viii)

\textsuperscript{29} (Ross R. J., 2004, 204-205)
“race to the bottom,” in which governments lower their labor, environmental and consumer standards in order to attract investors. These governments are aware that corporations will quickly desert their countries if lower-wage ones become available as “export platforms.” So low prices in the garment industry become the country’s best selling point in the global economy. This leads to suppliers cutting their prices at the expense of their workers, who are paid poverty wages and made to work excessive hours. Similar to what was seen I the turn of the century, workers in the garment industry are generally young women, aged sixteen to twenty-two years old, who have traveled to the cities from rural areas and are without their families, making them especially vulnerable. They are frequently subjected to gendered forms of abuse, such as forced pregnancy tests and birth control in an effort to halt their menstrual cycles.

One would think that with such rampant exploitation in the fashion industry, both domestically and abroad, more people would rise up to protest its attendant abuses. And yet, as Naomi Klein argues in her book No Logo, the rise of an increasingly branded and corporatized world gives fashion yet another cultural resource by which they can hijack any potential resistance movements. Brands and logos have taken up so much cultural and economic space, including school curricula, neighborhoods, and all-encompassing infotainment malls like Virgin Megastores, that challenging that hegemony seems to be almost an impossible task.

30 (Ross R. J., 2004, 105)
31 (Ngai, 2006)
32 (Bose, 2008, 217)
Of course, for discount retailers such as Wal-Mart, the discourse of democratization, which perpetuates the idea that the giant retailer is offering dirt-cheap prices so that poorer people can have easier access to fashionable goods, allows Wal-Mart to evade accountability for paying its workers so little. Of course, when workers are paid such a fraction of the retail price raising their wages would probably not effect the total price significantly. One need look no further than Costco, a cheap discounter that pays its workers a living wage and has soared in earnings in recent years. Still, WalMart is such a powerful multi-billion dollar global brand that contractors are simply not in any kind of structural position to raise their workers wages and improve factory conditions. Ultimately it is the brand that dictates pricing and supply and thus, power is with the brand to change how business is done and how workers are treated in global commodity chains. Thus anti-sweatshop activists, as the next section will reveal, knew that to make any kind of leverage they would have to both target the brand-name companies, and their logos, that dominate the global commodity chain as well as attempt to shift power in a way that would once again centralize workers’ rights and organizing.

III. Advocacy Strategies against Sweatshops: Using the resources of neoliberal capital to hold industry accountable

Anti-corporate activism certainly didn’t begin in the 1990s, as Klein concedes in No Logo. However, the year 1995, dubbed the ‘year of the sweatshop,’ marked the cultural moment that a true movement began to form, and there was a ‘collective click’ on the part of media and the public. It was then that an aggregate of horror stories and public relations disasters - from the Kader toy factory fire in Bangkok, to the images of

33 (Ungar, 2013)
Chinese prison labor, to child activists Craig Kielburger and Iqbal Masih speaking out against child labor, to the Kathy Gifford fiasco – that there was a cultural shift in how people viewed workers in the Global South. Klein attributes this to a kind of chance, but also, to a collective resistance against the 90s brand, which she noted had “grown so dominant that they have essentially transformed the clothing on which they appear into empty carriers for the brands they represent.”

Charles Kernaghan of the National Labor Committee recognized that if he was going to be able to launch an effective counter-strategy against sweatshops, he needed to bypass complicated laws and governmental policies and instead focus on the logos that had become so intertwined in the lives of American citizens. The film, “Mickey Mouse Goes to Haiti” produced by the National Labor Committee, was an arresting visualization of a seemingly whimsical company’s exploitation of women garment workers in Haiti. The film was screened widely on campuses and helped to spark a student anti-sweatshop movement.

Kernaghan’s tactics – using capital’s popular logos against it -had its detractors, most notably from retailers, even those seemingly interested in tackling sweatshops. Regardless, Kernaghan was effective in gaining the attention from the media and helping to spark change in the industry. Still, the backlash he received does reveal the tensions in differing ‘advocacy’ strategies, which we will explore later in the chapter in detail.

This chapter will turn to consider eight exemplars employed to increase industry accountability before turning to some of the problematics in thinking about the likelihood of progress into the future. My intent is not to provide a ‘victory narrative’ but rather, to locate how different modes of thought become dominant discourses.

34 (Klein, 2000, 28)
As a response to the Kathie Gifford sweatshop scandal in 1996, the Clinton administration established the Fair Labor Association, with the intent of forming a non-profit consortium of universities, businesses, and civil society organizations that would monitor apparel production in an effort to make it sweatshop free. However, it soon came under criticism from a burgeoning campus movement when it became very clear that industry leaders were leading the conversation and setting the terms of the arrangement. Troubling was industry representatives’ refusal to adopt a living wage, instead, they argued for language that would allow retailers to enforce the legal minimum wage, hardly a disruption of the status quo. Most worrisome, however, was that independent monitoring was not guaranteed, and retailers were allowed to hire their own monitors – a conflict of interest. Furthermore, these monitoring reports would evade transparency by being fully confidential. Initially a beacon of hope for the industry, the burgeoning anti-campus sweatshop movement soon targeted the FLA as a symbol of co-option.

By the fall of 1998, United Students Against Sweatshops was formed, with over fifty campus groups involved nationally. Their movement had its basis partly in Union Summer, a 1997 organizing campaign inspired by Freedom Summer, in which young people were recruited to work with UNITE. Also many anti-sweatshop campaigners joined the Seattle WTO demonstrations in 1999, allying with worker groups and cementing their commitment to protest neoliberal polices within global capitalism. To
this day, USAS is distinct as a student movement that works with unions and engages with class and labor issues.35

The students knew that it was the lucrative nature of university licensing contracts, in which a university licenses a company (and receives a percentage of the revenue) in exchange for its logo and name that would give them the needed leverage over these corporations. USAS thus developed their strategies to operate on two levels. The first are the strategies they use to pressure college administrators, which they are able to do in part because the university is supposed to be accountable to their students and community. The second is the more difficult task of pressuring brands that operate on the global arena.

Even before USAS’s ‘official’ launch, students had begun to coordinate with each other nationally to pressure their universities to adopt codes of conduct. The most prominent such campaign was at Duke University, which at the time sold $20 million worth of licensed goods.36 Activists at Duke had the advantage of having an administration that was particularly sensitive to the anti-sweatshop movement. I spoke with Jim Wilkerson, the director of the Duke University bookstore and Duke’s trademark licensing, who explained that he was compelled to support student efforts after watching a documentary on sweatshops. “I realized that I didn’t know who made my clothes, and I couldn’t sleep at night.”37 With Wilkerson’s support, the students wrote the first code of conduct written among colleges and universities. Their demand for a code of conduct

35 (Ross R. J., 2004, 262)

36 (Featherstone, 2002, 12)

37 (Wilkerson, 2014)
included the recognition of worker’s rights to collective bargaining, a prohibition of child labor, health and safety standards, disclosure of the factory locations to the university, and independent monitoring. Even with a few sympathetic administrators, however, these demands were not exactly given a warm reception initially. It was over the next few months that Duke activists, followed by several other universities, would develop and fine-tune their strategies that would ultimately become the basis of the USAS movement.

United Students Against Sweatshop employs tactics that are based on direct action and escalation. They generally start their campaigns with more moderate tactics, including meetings with the administration and student educational campaigns, and if need be, escalate to petitions, sit-ins and more disruptive actions. They often build a coalition with other student groups on campus and work on gaining endorsement from the student newspapers. Thus their strategy is two pronged: direct action and changing the cultural discourse. What distinguished campus anti-sweatshop activists from other forms of advocacy challenging the global neoliberal agenda (such as the WTO protests) was their defined focus: join the WRC (Worker’s Rights Consortium), adopt a living wage and code of conduct, and disclose their monitoring audits. The Worker’s Rights Consortium is a non-corporate labor rights monitoring organization which has as its main tenants a living wage, independent monitoring free from corporate governance, and public disclosure. They also engaged in spatial strategies that connected the global exploitation with workers to the local, livid realities of students’ lives. By adopting a broad range of strategies to accomplish a finite set of goals, Duke activists were ultimately successful in forcing their administration to adopt the codes of conduct they
had demanded. Other universities followed, and by 2005 over 150 schools had adopted similar codes of conduct.\footnote{(Featherstone, 2002, 12-23)} Furthermore, in just the past decade, USAS has effectively pressured more than 180 colleges and universities to affiliate with the WRC, making it the premiere labor rights monitoring organization.\footnote{(USAS, 2011)}

USAS has been able to achieve some significant successes in large part because their mission has always been rooted in working with, not on behalf of, their allies in the Global South. The quote that they have adopted as their motto is one by aboriginal Australian activist Lilly Watson, “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”\footnote{(Sweatshops)} Indeed, student activists have achieved unprecedented victories, such as when two of the largest college apparel companies — Russell and Nike in 2009 and 2010 — had their contracts cut by over 100 universities for their actions in Honduras. Russell had shut down their factories after workers unionized, while Nike had refused to take responsibility when its two subcontractors closed their plants and failed to pay their workers severance. This student-led boycott cost the corporations millions in sales until they came into compliance with the campus’ codes of conduct. Russell eventually re-opened their factory and agreed to union neutrality across all its Honduras plants,\footnote{(Greenhouse, Labor Fight Ends in Win for Students, 2009)} while Nike paid the $1.54 million severance owed to their 1,800 workers in Honduras. As the \textit{New York Times} article on Nike put it, “The agreement is the latest involving overseas
apparel factories in which an image-conscious brand like Nike shows its sensitivity — advocates might say vulnerability — to campaigns led by college students who often pressure universities to stand up to producers of college-logo apparel over workers’ rights."Interestingly enough, there was a clear struggle over discourse in the framing of the ‘win’ between activists and Nike. While USAS stated in their campaign page that Nike had admitted responsibility by paying the “severance,” a Nike spokesperson made it clear that the payment was actually a “worker relief fund.” The word ‘severance,’ perhaps, implies greater culpability since it is giving workers the money back that was owed to them. This choice of words is revealing; it demonstrates Nike’s insistence that they control the framework even after they made such a significant concession.

Indeed, universities and multi-nationals have employed an array of discursive strategies to co-opt advocacy efforts around labor issues in the apparel industry, with an emphasis on escalation. For example, the possibility of engaging in a sit-in is usually a last resort, and often follows one or two years of initially moderate actions, gradually escalating tactics in which activists focus on education and building popular support on campus and beyond. As former Temple student and USAS activist Amy Kessel noted in an interview with me,

The USAS chapter has been really successful at University of Texas-Austin. They’re such a big school, so they’re the largest collegiate licensee of apparel in the country. And the thing is, they’ve been working with administrators for a long time, but the media really only covered the end of their campaign, when they were using more radical tactics, protesting and getting the school to cut ties with (global firm) Accenture. To the uninformed their actions may seem extreme, but put into context with how long they’ve been trying to be heard, they’re a good example of how generally USAS is pretty reasonable.43

42 (Greenhouse, Pressured, Nike to Help Workers in Honduras, 2010)

43 (Kessel, 2014)
To build popular support requires several steps. First, for their transnational campaigns to work, they must engage the support of the workers they are allying with as well, with whom communication can be difficult. This necessitates using a ‘bridge worker’ who can facilitate communication and act as a liaison between workers in the South and their allies in the North. Other advocacy organizations, most notably the Solidarity Center, have also acted as bridge-workers by helping USAS connect with workers and even conduct tours of factories abroad. Some organizations have even sponsored teach-ins and ‘worker speak tours,’ in which workers come to university campuses and provide testimonials to students and staff about their experiences laboring in exploitative global commodity chains (this will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter). Aligning with different organizations that adopt divergent tactics has proven to be an effective strategy in widening public support and increasing the effectiveness of their campaigns.

Furthermore, media coverage, both from college campuses and the larger news media, is key in winning public support for campaigns. Interestingly enough, media framing of the early anti-sweatshop movement was surprisingly positive. This contrasts with media scholars’ popular theories that the mainstream media tends to be hostile to social justice movements. There are several reasons for this, notably that the sweatshop movement was resourced by older generations of NGOS and unions, were nonviolent in nature, and had educated, articulated young people as their spokespeople. USAS also employed media to publicly shame brands. Corporations are sensitive to

44 (Gitlin, 1980)

45 (Olien, Tichnor, & Donohue, 1989)
negative media coverage on this issue because, as was laid out earlier in this chapter, they are marketed as brands. Thus it is essential to sustain a certain image that caters to the same age bracket of university students. This has been, ironically enough, one of the greatest tools of leverage in the anti-sweatshop movements - using the corporate university and its logos against itself. Students have tremendous power as consumers in the “academic-industrial complex,” leveraging their influence in creative ways. Logos can be easily hijacked, as an Ohio State chapter did when they destroyed a Nike ‘pinata’ for a “Smash the Swoosh” demonstration. So can, for that matter, recognizable university logos, which activists can quickly turn into a symbol of “exploitation and corporate greed.” USAS students have used their leverage over the university in ways that mirror the divestment campaigns of the 1980s, when student pressure forced trustees to cancel their stock in companies that conducted business in South Africa.

Universities’ fear of negative media coverage is the very reason that organizers work with organizations like the WRC, UNITE HERE and the ILRF, which produces reports based on research and then uses the threat of public disclosure as a shaming device. It is this threat of transparent reports that is employed as a tool, and if the company is not responding, then there is value in getting the report out immediately and connecting with media outlets.

For brands, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been the primary counter-framing tool that has restored the apparel industry’s legitimacy in the last two decades.

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46 (Featherstone, 2002, 32)

47 (Featherstone, 2002, 31)

48 (Featherstone, 2002, 33)
Of course, the discursive meaning of CSR is widely disputed, with some viewing it as a marketing scheme and others perceiving it as an opportunity for corporations to “give back” to the society and community they are part of. Anti-sweatshop activists see codes as flawed and a discursive strategy by which brands can co-opt labor rights, because they are voluntary and inherently paternalistic, working from a top-down approach that fails to seriously consider workers’ voices at the table.

These difficulties in holding brands and suppliers accountable and maintaining transparent supply chains have created another discursive obstacle for anti-sweatshop activists: the sweatshop-progress metanarrative. This narrative articulates sweatshops as being unavoidably situated within global commodity chains that emphasize development and industrial modernity, and some scholars and media outlets have even gone so far as to make the claim that sweatshops are the key to economic prosperity.

Those arguing for sweatshops as the only viable option for workers in the Global South are failing to consider an alternative ‘third way’ that can potentially intervene and re-articulate exploitative global commodity chains instead of just putting band-aids where they are broken. There are two examples of these alternatives, both involving USAS advocacy, that this chapter will turn to next: the first living wage apparel factory, and the Bangladesh Safety Accord.

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49 (Littler, 2009, 50)

50 (Dawisha, Bangladesh Factory Fires: Why Brands are Accountable and Must Compensate Victims Now, 2013)
B. Alta Gracia: An alternative (and challenge) to global labor exploitation

The student anti-sweatshop movement has made tremendous gains in the past ten years, but there is still much work to be done. John M. Kline’s research report on Alta Gracia outlines two main issues. The first is that even with a more rigorous monitoring organization like the WRC, the global scale of contract manufacturers producing collegiate apparel is so huge that properly monitoring each one is a “formidable obstacle.”51 The second is that individual university codes of conduct vary widely and that none require that employers pay a living wage. In response to these concerns, USAS proposed the Designated Suppliers Program (DSP) that would consolidate the production of college apparel into a small group of factories that could be more effectively monitored and certified to meet code standards, thus strengthening the WRC. The “core standards” would include freedom of association and a “living wage.” It was against this discussion that the WRC, Knight’s Apparel, student activists, and most importantly, workers in a villa called Alta Gracia, began to work together to develop the first living wage apparel company, Alta Gracia.

There are very few labor standards that are more contested than that of a living wage. Multinationals have come up with every excuse in the book, ranging from the practical to the ludicrous, to avoid paying their workers a living wage. Arguments that claim, for example, consumers wouldn’t want to pay higher prices for clothes, can be easily disputed by the fact that workers are only paid one to three percent of the total cost

51 (Kline, 2011)
of clothing. More practical concerns include “what should it cover? To whom should it apply?”

The decision by Joe Bozich, CEO of Knights Apparel, to take a risk on a living wage factory, is certainly an unusual one. However, it is significant that Knights does not own a popular ‘name brand’ and that its merchandise for sports organizations (such as the NCAA and the NFL) is distributed mainly through mass-market retailers like Target and Walmart. Thus producing goods at a living wage factory would allow Knights to enter university bookstores without having to pay the licensing costs of another brand. Ultimately, “Knights stood to develop a recognizable brand of its own without the marketing costs typically required.” Yet this was not purely a marketing venture.

Knights Apparel management did what few apparel companies based in the Global South do – they demonstrated their commitment by agreeing to produce their clothing in Villa Altagracia’s free trade zone, in a factory abandoned by BJ&B apparel just a few years earlier. USAS had allied with these workers to campaign for their severance, which they eventually won. Still, the fact remained that these workers no longer had any jobs in large part because they had attempted to form unions. Thus, Knights Apparel agreed in advance to respect freedom of association, and also to establish a living wage. Contrary to what global capitalism might imply, a living wage can be calculated within a free trade market. The WRC determined that a living wage for the factory would consist of “costs of a basket for goods and services that included food and water, housing and energy,

52 (Campaign, 2012)

53 (Kline, 2011, 8)

54 (Kline, 2011, 7)
clothing, healthcare, transportation, education and childcare, modest savings and some discretionary spending.”\textsuperscript{55} The living wage ultimately calculated out to 350% above the legal minimum wage. As Global Exchange director Medea Benjamin said when the FLA was being drafted, “Unless we talk about a living wage and start to define it, a sweatshop will always be a sweatshop.”\textsuperscript{56}

The factory has defied expectations. Breaking even in just four years and making about $11 million dollars in sales in 2013, it was determined to be financially viable in its latest 2014 report. It has maintained its high labor standards, and workers have given positive, if not gushing feedback, on the working conditions and how the living wage has completely transformed their community.\textsuperscript{57} The factory was also the only apparel factory to receive an ‘A’ for its independent monitoring and transparency in its supply chain.\textsuperscript{58}

Maritza Vargas is one of those workers who spoke effusively about Alta Gracia with me in an interview.\textsuperscript{59} Vargas worked at BJ&B and survived harassment from factory managers, unsafe working conditions, and poverty wages. When she helped organize a union at the factory, she and the other workers who had unionized lost their jobs. With the support of the WRC and USAS, she and the workers were able to get their jobs back and eventually organize one of the strongest collective bargaining agreements in the Caribbean. However, as so often happens in a global economy which emphasizes

\textsuperscript{55} (Kline, 2011, 9)
\textsuperscript{56} (Ross R. J., 2004, 165)
\textsuperscript{57} (Kline & Soule, 2014)
\textsuperscript{58} (Sale, 2012)
\textsuperscript{59} (Vargas, 2014)
the ‘race to the bottom,’” brands quickly left the factory to produce clothing in countries like Bangladesh, where labor was cheaper. After the factory was shut down, the WRC, USAS, and union leaders worked together to create what Vargas describes as a “different business model that is coming from the heart.” Vargas spoke at length on how the living wage had not just hugely impacted her family (her daughter, for example, attended university), but had created a “ripple effect” in that higher wages gives workers the ability to invest in their community and local businesses. She also spoke of the vastly improved safety conditions, and how the previous factory had “dehumanized” her by forcing her to work in an assembly line cramped next to other workers on an uncomfortable bench. Now she and other workers are able to work in ergonomic chairs with proper ventilation and air conditioning. Finally, she revealed that at Alta Gracia, the managers were all women – a sharp departure from her previous employment where male managers often harassed and abused the mostly female workforce. What was so striking about talking with Vargas was her frequent emphasis on how Alta Gracia, by providing dignified work, had humanized the ‘supply chain.’ She said: “For me it’s been a realization of a dream, that I have a job that respects me and treats me like I’m a human.” In fact, she mentioned several times how Alta Gracia had helped her “realize” several things, from her own potential (learning English) to helping her family and community. In fact, she mentioned how she felt like her co-workers were part of her “family.” This is a sharp departure from Braverman’s “compartmentalization of labor” in which workers are separated from each other (such as on an assembly line) and thus are unable to collectively organize. The union at Alta Gracia is so strong in fact, that Vargas

60 (Vargas, 2014)
proudly spoke of “training” the management to treat workers respectfully.

Vargas also strongly praised the WRC, which she credited with being a ‘neutral organization’ that is transparent. She contrasted the WRC with the FLA (Fair Labor Association), confirming student activist suspicions of this corporate-influenced factory monitor:

The FLA is basically bought by the management of the brands for the factory. The auditors come to the factories to speak with management in their air-conditioned offices. They eat really great food and stay in five-star hotels, and they’re pretty much hired to be these puppets, to represent the interests of these companies.61

Vargas’s condemnatory words demonstrate how even corporate auditors who travel to the country are unable to empathize with workers due to the myriad disconnects between brands and their workers. They are really ‘corporate lackeys’ hiding behind a façade of transparency that is ultimately compromised by neoliberal governmentality.

In just a few short years, Alta Gracia’s model has broken even and the company’s apparel has proven to be popular with college students. Knight’s Apparel absorbs minimal increase in labor costs, and is able to do so because the company’s model is based on an economic theory called “margins.” This is when the company gains in volume what it loses per item when students and universities choose to buy ethically produced apparel.62 Over 500 schools carry the apparel, and additionally, the factory is able to cut down costs because the workers work in self-managed modules and thus don’t need many managers.

61 (Vargas, 2014)
62 (Kessel, 2014)
Given that Alta Gracia is a viable model then, why are schools reticent to advertise it widely to their students or not carry it all? In my interviews with Amy Kessel and Jim Wilkerson, their answer was simple: it challenges the very basis of capitalism, corporatism and the “academic-industrial complex.” Kessel opined that universities may be worried that Alta Gracia might make their larger brands, with whom they benefit from lucrative contracts, “look bad” because it would highlight that they do not pay their workers a living wage. Wilkerson told me that he knew of some stores that had even artificially ‘hiked’ up the prices of their Alta Gracia apparel to make it less competitive with other brands. He noted:

Alta Gracia has proven that factory workers can be paid a living wage, at a retail price that’s competitive with other brands. Most companies drive their profitability based on very low wages. The last thing they want to see is that a company like Alta Gracia can work. They might have to direct a little more profit to people versus their bottom line and their investors. It would be a sea change in the way people think and operate. There is a pressure or resistance out there to companies like Alta Gracia that show there is a different and better way to do business.63

Alta Gracia disrupts the status quo argument that there is no alternative that can effectively challenge global labor exploitation and ‘sweatshops.’ Alta Gracia has provided a counterpoint to those who argue that workers can’t be paid a living wage without losing profit for the company. They absolutely can. Most importantly, the company has humanized the supply chain by sharing narratives of workers and demonstrating what can happen when different actors from different parts of the world come together in solidarity – from workers, students, an independent auditing group, and

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63 (Wilkerson, 2014)
even a corporate CEO. As Rachel Taber of Alta Gracia told me, “This isn’t about numbers or profits, it’s about the people.”64

C. Bangladesh Factory Accord65: Committing to or co-opting a legally-binding agreement:

On the evening of April 23, 2013, garment factory employees of the Rana Plaza building in Savar, Bangladesh, pleaded with management to take notice of the sudden cracks that had appeared in the walls and foundations. Their requests for evacuation were ignored on the basis that the building owner, Sohel Rana, had just hired an engineer who had pronounced the building safe. The mostly female labor force, who were threatened with losing a month’s pay if they did not return, were ordered to work the next day. As they arrived at the building, the first thing they heard over the loudspeaker was this: “All the workers of Rana Plaza, go to work. The factory has already been repaired.” Just half an hour later, the eight-story building collapsed, killing over 1,000 people and injuring more than 2,500. Local workers and relatives were some of the first on the scene, digging out mutilated bodies, including those of children who had been staying at the building’s day care center, from the rubble.

The factory collapse of Rana in Savar, Bangladesh, was not an accident, as various government officials, corporations, and even certain media outlets have described it. An accident is something that is unexpected, that occurs infrequently, but also is something that is not necessarily preventable. This tragedy was not an isolated event. It

64 (Taber, 2014)

65 This section is largely taken from my blog, listengirlfriends.com. (Dawisha, Bangladesh Factory Fires: Why Brands are Accountable and Must Compensate Victims Now, 2013)
was, in fact, one of several hundred other factory incidents that have killed over 1,000 workers from 1990 to 2012 in Bangladesh, a country that employs four million garment workers, 85 percent of whom are women, in its growing garment industry. And, like the dozens of other factory fires that have been reported across the industry in countries like China, India, and Pakistan, it could have been prevented with proper safety measures and a workplace in which factory managers listened to workers’ concerns.

Ultimately, these deadly fires only reveal the exploitative working conditions of an industry that treats its workers as disposable items. In Bangladesh, a country rich with culture and natural resources but ridden with poverty, the government has long viewed the garment industry as the path to improving a grim standard of living. Currently garments represent nearly 80 percent of the country’s manufacturing export income of $19.1 billion between 2011-2012, making it the second largest exporter of apparel in the world. Yet despite the industry’s rapid growth in the last thirty years, Bangladeshi workers are still the lowest paid garment workers in the world, earning a minimum of $37 a month – far below the living wage of $120 that is needed for basic household necessities. Workers’ efforts to organize for better pay and safety regulations are all but outlawed, and a labor law that was passed in July has been criticized by labor advocates as actually weakening, rather than strengthening, protections for workers.

Furthermore, the global demand for cheap clothing forces many factories to subcontract their work to other suppliers, making it difficult for brands to trace who is making their clothes in an increasingly complex supply chain. Wal-Mart and other big retailers place immense pressure on factories to produce forever-falling prices by selling cheap and producing quickly on shorter deadlines. Low prices in the garment industry
are, after all, the country’s best selling point in the global economy. So suppliers cut their prices at the expense of their workers, who are paid poverty wages and made to work excessive hours. Factory owners, squeezed by their buyers, often find their efforts to invest in factory safety undermined by the pressure to reduce costs. Given the tremendous emphasis on maximizing wealth in the global economy, however, it is thus not surprising that governments of poorer countries like Bangladesh often sacrifice human rights at the consummate altar of economic ‘development.’

However, the startling images of the Rana factory fire has collectivized the international community, creating another cultural shift similar to the one in 1995 as people, once again, wake up to the fact that they shouldn’t put clothes on their back that were made in conditions that have not been seen in the West since the Industrial Revolution. Currently, over 100 apparel brands and retailers in Europe, North America, Asia, and Australia have signed the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, an unprecedented *legally-binding agreement* that was created by Bangladeshi and global trade unions in alliance with leading NGOs and the International Labor Organization (ILO) to ensure safety in Bangladeshi factories. This five-year contract will require independent safety inspections of their facilities, public reporting, safety upgrades financed by brands, the integration of workers and unions in both oversight and implementation, and higher wages.

The Accord has been hailed as a transformative move away from the corporate-controlled social auditing programs that rely on largely “voluntary, confidential, and top-down” initiatives. It has also been supported broadly, with senators, students, and fashion models protesting brands that have failed to commit to the agreement. And just recently,
the Accord publicly disclosed information about the building safety of the 1,600 factories covered by the pact, bringing a measure of openness, transparency and accountability to an industry that has been shrouded in secrets.

While notable (mostly European) companies such as H&M, Inditex (Zara), and Primark have signed the Accord, there are still a number of North American retailers that have been unwilling to join the agreement. U.S. industry leaders such as Gap and Wal-Mart launched the Bangladesh Worker Safety Initiative in July, a comparatively weak agreement that promises safety upgrades, a hotline to report complaints, and regular inspections without any legal commitment. Thus, framing the Initiative in discourses that are seemingly worker-centered obscures the fact that the agreement simply reinforces the status quo by keeping corporate profit intact.

These tragedies have ultimately implicated Western buyers as complicit in the apparel industry’s dark side. However, what labor rights organizations are advocating for is not an end to this relationship between brands and the countries from which they source. In fact, the hope here is that by deepening their engagement, these companies could be the best hope for transformative change in the industry. As Kalpona Akter, executive director of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity stressed in a recent interview with The Nation:

If consumers stop buying, that is like a boycott and a boycott doesn’t help us. Instead, we want people to write letters to Walmart, talk to their communities and friends about what is happening, raise their voice and protest at the stores with their physical presence. We want US consumers to say, “We’re watching you and we demand that you pay attention.”

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66 (Jayapal, 2013)
United Students Against Sweatshops thus launched a campaign in the fall of 2013 that would require all of their licensees produce and source goods from Bangladesh to sign the Accord as well, forcing them to take responsibility for their subcontracted factories in a meaningful and committed way that can "transform the garment industry from deathtraps to safe workplaces." The universities that have signed the Accord have included prominent private institutions such as Duke, University of Pennsylvania and Cornell, and large state schools such as Michigan, Penn-State, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and University of Washington-Seattle. The university that I am affiliated with however, UNC-Chapel Hill, has not signed the Accord, and part of the letter that is included here which I published on the Huffington Post identifies the discursive strategies that are being employed by a university tied to corporate interested and my attempts to counter this framing. I wrote,

Since the fall, the UNC End Deathtraps coalition has been campaigning persistently to get Chancellor Folt to sign the Accord. Workers, community members, the Chapel Hill Town Council, and the University's Licensing Labor Code advisory Committee (LLCAC) -- a committee composed of faculty, students and administrators -- have strongly recommended that the Accord is the best option for both workers and UNC.

Despite this adoption of best practices elsewhere, President Ross, your recent memo, delivered the night before the one year anniversary of Rana, states that licensees producing and sourcing goods from Bangladesh should be given the option to sign on to either the Bangladesh Accord or the Alliance for Worker Safety. But the Alliance is a company-controlled, non-binding agreement that has been critiqued for its exclusion of workers and their representatives and for its failure to obligate brands to pay for factory safety renovations. If licensees choose to sign the Alliance, then they would not be required to make any tangible changes in garment and apparel factory workplace safety. Instead, they would be resorting to the same self-regulatory approaches that have tragically failed

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67 (USAS, Garment Worker Solidarity)
workers far too often. They would be, in essence, doing what they have already done.\textsuperscript{68}

The UNC’s newspaper, The Daily Tar Heel, which previously had written pieces that were ambivalent about the UNC USAS’s (Students Aligned with Workers, or SAW) advocacy efforts, changed its tone in the fall of 2014. They published an opinion piece pressuring UNC to sign the Accord, and began the article by stating, “When it comes to UNC’s apparel partnerships, accountability is key.”\textsuperscript{69} They kept the pressure on the administration, publishing an editorial in February of 2015 titled “Opinion: Cut Ties with VF Corp.”\textsuperscript{70} The Daily Tar Heel’s coverage of the activist group’s campaign documents the strategies of escalation that are the foundation of United Students Against Sweatshops.

The media framing of worker exploitation outside of the student activist movement however has perhaps resulted in more problematic media coverage. A media criticism piece by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) revealed how in the aftermath of several garment factory fires in 2013, mainstream media outlets were reluctant to hold corporations fully accountable, even occasionally framing them as victims.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{68} (Dawisha, An Open Letter to UNC President Ross and Chancellor Folt: Commit to the Bangladesh Safety Accord, 2014)

\textsuperscript{69} (Heel, 2014)

\textsuperscript{70} (Heel, Opinion: Cut ties with VF Corp, 2015)

\textsuperscript{71} (Jackson, 2013)
This begs the question: how do activists negotiate cultivating awareness while taking into account workers’ voices and agency? This chapter has already discussed the strategies of United Students Against Sweatshops in depth. For further insight on the questions above, this chapter will turn to research I conducted with various anti-sweatshop NGOs and Western international labor organization on “worker tours,” which include a small panel of former workers sharing their personal narratives of laboring within global commodity chains.

D. Worker’s Sweatshops Tours: Women’s Counter-narratives as potential for re-articulating dominant discourses of development and colonialism.

In the U.S., “sweatshop worker speaking tours” have provided rich insight into the possibilities and dilemmas of transnational mediation within the global public sphere. I conducted interviews with several of these NGOs and labor unions to gain better insight into how these speeches, which rely on direct experience, testimony, and self-authorship, reveal the gendered inequalities embedded within global commodity chains, while potentially providing meaningful counter-narratives to neocolonial discourses of victimization. At the same time, these interviews will hopefully add insight about the ways in which women’s counter-narratives are positioned within a variety of dominant discourses of development and colonialism that could constrain the possibilities for transnational mediation.

The persistence of social, cultural and economic inequalities introduce a host of concerns about the politics of transnational mediation and representation within feminist movements, particularly in terms of who is able to author the narratives used to frame
individual and group identities. On the one hand, anti-sweatshop NGOs such as Witness for Peace, USLEAP, Global Exchange, The National Labor Committee, SweatFree Communities, Jobs for Justice, and STICH, to name a few, have sponsored speaker tours and are thus sensitive to both the challenges and possibilities that these tours offer. National and local labor unions are also a vital part of these tours, and as workers in the global commodity chain, they are frequently seen as having the most potential in empathizing and aligning with workers from the Global South. On the other hand, difficulties often arise when workers are asked to look beyond the economic hardships of their hometowns, many of which have suffered from the effects of outsourcing, and form transnational alliances with workers who are potentially “taking their jobs.” Furthermore, gender adds another layer of complexity to this issue, as most workers in the Global South who are being exploited are women, while the majority of labor union leaders in both the “Third World” and the United States are men.

One of the challenges to forming progressive coalitions is the inevitable internal and external conflicts that arise with trying to build “common ground” despite differing goals and focuses, both in the larger anti-sweatshop movement and within individual NGOs. Furthermore, because of the poor funding, anti-sweatshop NGOs are often focused on obtaining funding for their own organizations, and thus while there’s “recognition here in the United States among NGOs that we need to cooperate,” Bjorn Claeson of Sweatfree Communities revealed that he thinks these “different organizations should be much more coordinated than they are. That’s what SweatFree Communities is doing…we’re trying to bring many different local, independent groups, together.” Still, Claeson contends that the worker tour is a very “potent organizing tool,” one that is
counter-hegemonic, so to speak, in that it “goes against the grain of a global economy.” Furthermore, foreign workers who come here can strengthen their connection and develop new contacts, so they can actually benefit from coming to the States, despite the potential obstacles and risks. Even so, the challenges of “tracing the supply chain, to get in contact with workers who are by design, separated from you,” remain. 72 This is further complicated by the fact that these worker tours might actually put “lives at stake,” by bringing foreign workers to the States to speak out against their government and/or employer. 73

Additionally, many of these unions see these workers as “sob stories” and find it hard to empathize with someone who they see as taking their job. Charity Ryerson, of the NGO USLEAP, went to a Teamsters union convention and was a little taken aback by the discourse of the union members towards these workers. She ended up changing her presentation, so that

I could talk to them about really what that relationship means, to really blow that ‘they’re taking our jobs’ out of the water. They’re definitely a lot of people who think that. Sometimes it’s even racist, sometimes it’s at the point where it’s hard to hear our union brothers and sisters sometimes say things like ‘those Indians.’ They’re definitely manifesting that feeling of threat by having racist attitudes towards these people from other countries. A lot of the challenge with these two is that by meeting one of these workers, putting a face to that, is hopefully what these tours are doing. 74

Labor leaders like Charlie Key from the Central Labor of Georgia also employed the argument of self-interest to engage other union members in why solidarity was important.

72 (Claeson, Interview with Bjorn Claeson, 2008)
73 Ibid.
74 (Ryerson, 2008)
As he told me, “Primarily there’s been apathy, but I believe that whatever we can do to help our brothers and sisters in the workforce around the world, helps us. We cannot compete against low wages and terrible working conditions. If we don’t help them improve the conditions, we’ll end up losing more jobs.”

One could make the argument that the repetition of the phrase “brothers and sisters” demonstrates that similar to the environmental movement, there is a great emphasis on common goals and unity despite the existence of conflict. Yet the reality of the situation is that there is a clear local/global divide, in that it is often difficult for people to think beyond the parochialism of their localities, be they local union representatives or university populations, who according to IRLF Campaigns Manager Trina Tocco “have problems thinking outside of their universities.” Even though she felt the labor unions were more receptive, she still believed that they treated these worker tours as “bringing ‘Suzy Q’ this poor lady in and she’s going to speak for us but then they don’t see it as an opportunity to build the union base.”

It is clear that gender issues, both on the local and global level, were often obstacles in forming effective transnational coalitions. Charity Ryerson of USLEAP divulged that “gender is a huge problem. While there are a lot of women presidents in the flower unions, there were none on the Guatemala tour. In the banana unions in Honduras, older women get teased by the men, who accuse them of having menopause

\[75\text{ (Key, 2008)}\]

\[76\text{ (Tocco, 2008)}\]

\[77\text{ Ibid}\]
and are thus unfit to work.”

Unions often don’t want to work with women because they believe that they will not work long-term, calculating that most will be leaving to have children anyway. Trina Tocco of IRLF adds:

Generally speaking, around the world, most of these unions do not see women’s work as strategic. Even in the U.S. the longest running unions are male. The problem is education level, in that the people who run unions tend to have a higher education level, and those tend to be men. ILRF actually gave 75,000 grants to women at one point, to make sure women have skills to develop their leadership roles.

These interviews reinforce the difficulties that women face within their nation states in forming solidarity networks to fight both neoliberal capitalism and patriarchy.

There seemed to be a consensus, however, that bringing speakers in to talk to people interested in the issue of sweatshop labor helped to “put a face to the operation,” as James Guzzi from Transfair put it. After all, if it is difficult to envision a face on the other end of the supply chain, then actually seeing a worker who might have made a University student’s shirt is bound to click with that student more than just reading about it in a book. Furthermore, for labor unions, who as Byron Bell from the Northeast Area Labor Federation described as sometimes indifferent to the rights of workers abroad, bringing in foreign workers is an effective strategy for getting the message across that

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78 (Ryerson, 2008)
79 (Myers, 2008)
80 (Tocco, Interview with Trina Tocco, 2008)
81 (Guzzi, 2008)
“workers here are affected by workers abroad”\textsuperscript{82} and that everyone is somehow connected in this global economy.

Still, the promises of visibility can often be mired in complications. As Trina Tocco noted, frequently the workers who are brought to the States are young women who can not speak English, and some even arrived confused about who they were speaking to. These difficulties can certainly be overcome. Barbara Briggs from the NLC revealed to me that Wendy Diaz, a 15 year-old worker for Kathy Lee, came to the United States terrified about speaking in front of a large audience. She then managed to conquer her fears to make a moving speech about her experiences working for the Wal-Mart line, so that she could “represent everyone”\textsuperscript{83} who had to endure the horrific factory conditions with her. Barbara Briggs continued by stating that the NLC has made a real effort to bring “regular” workers who can tell their own stories, instead of labor union leaders speaking on behalf of their workers.\textsuperscript{84}

Still, having one person represent the experiences of many is often problematic, especially if that person is a male labor union leader representing female workers, or a young woman not aware of what her role was going to be on these tours, or anyone having to rely on translation to relay their message. Furthermore, since the political climate in which workers are coming from is often tenuous and sometimes dangerous, there have to be great precautions that their job isn’t jeopardized if they leave, and often former workers have to be recruited instead.

\textsuperscript{82} (Bell, 2008)

\textsuperscript{83} (Briggs, 2008)

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid
That said, Chie Abad, a speaker for Global Exchange and former worker for the Gap in the Pacific island of Saipan, a U.S. territory, has spoken highly of these tours’ ability to create visibility for these labor issues and to help mobilize the base. She states that she does think “schools are important, from universities and even elementary schools. We’re trying to get public support for these things, and speaking with these students myself really helps things to click.”\(^{85}\) She continues by noting “Our tax dollars buy a lot of things. We’re trying to help workers around the world for their rights to be respected.”\(^{86}\)

As this section has revealed, these tours are embedded in multiple processes of power relations including gender, race, class and geography that make coalition-building difficult. However if done sensitively, worker speaker tours are a necessary intervention to effectively demystify the foreign worker as “other” and challenge hegemonic neocolonial narratives of victimization.

E. Where is the ‘Fair’ in ‘Fair Trade?’

Fair Trade is a trading partnership that was established to foster economically just and environmentally sound relationships primarily between disadvantaged artisans and farmers in the global South and conscious, concerned consumers in the North. Sparked in the 1940s and 50s by Mennonites and Church of the Brethren missionaries who would return from their missions abroad with artisan-goods for church and home-based sales, these early fair-trade business transactions were coined as “alternative trade organizations” (ATOs) that aimed to provide poor artisan producers who lacked

\(^{85}\) (Abad, 2008)

\(^{86}\) Ibid
economic and political power with access to a global market. Their other mission was to bridge the distance between consumer and producer, and to that end, ATOs used brochures and teach-ins as educational tools that effectively informed consumers about the conditions of the people who made their goods.\textsuperscript{87} Fair trade gained traction in the 1960s as a political intervention against neo-colonialism.\textsuperscript{88} The 1960s to 1980s also saw an expansion in fair trade catalogues and retail shops such as Ten Thousand Villages, which increased its revenue from $6.1 million in 1995 to $24 million at the end of the 2008-2009 fiscal year.\textsuperscript{89} These organizations began to collaborate, and ultimately branched off into various umbrella organizations. The International Federation of Alternative Trade (IFAT) was formed in Europe in 1989, while the Fair Trade Federation, formed in 1994, served as a “collaborative forum” for North American ATOs.\textsuperscript{90}

The fair trade symbol is significant to consumers because it promises a certain set of criteria that products must meet to guarantee that farmers are being treated fairly. It ensures, at a minimum, that farmers are paid an equitable, minimum price that covers the costs of sustainable production and living, and provides a premium to be invested in social, environmental, and educational projects. Fair trade certification also may include criteria such as independent unions and payment of a living wage.\textsuperscript{91} In short, fair trade as

\textsuperscript{87} (Littrell & Dickson, 2010, 8)

\textsuperscript{88} (Green, 2011)

\textsuperscript{89} (Littrell & Dickson, 2010, 9)

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{91} (Jaffee, 2007, 2)
an alternative trade model aims to disrupt current neoliberal arrangements. By cutting out the many middlemen (brokers, exporters, and importers) that make up an overly complex supply chain, the fair trade system is able to return a larger percentage of the consumer price back to the farmer, making the trade chain both shorter and fairer.

Yet, is this insistence on fair trade certification perhaps too narrow-sighted, too limiting? Can a company adopt fair trade/ethical practices without utilizing a certification scheme? Does the desire to expand the market to huge corporate partners open the movement up to co-option and dilution of fair trade standards?

Anti-sweatshop activists have often been the most vocal critics of fair trade, sharing the belief that it is patronizing rather than empowering for workers. Their central criticism is that fair trade relies on a third party – consumers and certifications - to protect worker rights. Activist-organizers have similarly criticized corporate social responsibility schemes, which are contingent on the “good will” of the employer. Groups like United Students Against Sweatshops have instead focused on empowering worker voice, which they believe is the only sustainable way to end sweatshops over the long term, rather than relying on the fickle tastes and shopping patterns of consumers.92

Still, there are those in the labor movement who insist certifications can be a useful tool to determine sustainability and labor commitments – as long as the certification is rigorous and transparent. As Rodney North of Equal Exchange put it in my interview with him, “We are fine with corporations selling Fair Trade, as long as the Fair Trade product represents rigorous standards and isn’t watered down. We want to

92 (Williams, 2010, 134)
keep upping the game. And our concern is that Fair Trade USA will allow large corporations who have just a weak commitment to Fair Trade to source from plantations, because they might offer the lowest price, without the highest social impact.” The question then is, if fair Trade offers a more direct connection between producers and consumers, will expansion possibly complicate the supply chain and result in increasingly disconnected departments that could lead to less transparency and an inability to deal with worker-rights violations?

These concerns are no less relevant in the apparel industry. First, it is important to note that fair trade certification was originally conceived for farmers in the global south, and no rigorous fair trade standards for factory certification has yet been established. In fact, Fair Trade USA’s attempts to develop fair trade factory certification was done without labor expert consultation.93 As a result, Fair Trade USA set forth the option that companies only had to certify the final stage of production, the cut-and-sew factory, meaning that cotton production and other preceding stages of production would not be included. Labor advocates have criticized this move as the ultimate form of corporate co-option because cotton farmers in the Global South are exceedingly marginalized, due in large part to the fact that U.S. cotton subsidies allow for the market to be dominated by American farmers. Furthermore, the final standards outlined in Fair Trade USA’s fair trade apparel program do not support democratic labor cooperatives and unions, rather, they only reference a “fair trade committee” which would be responsible for distributing a premium that would amount to $35 per worker. And, while fair trade was originally conceived to support small-scale cooperatives, Fair Trade USA’s

93 (Writer, 2010-2016)
focus is on large-scale factory production. Lastly, Fair Trade USA, as a certifier, is funded in part by the very same businesses it audits. This is obviously, a troubling conflict of interest.

Labor advocates see Fair Trade USA as creating a deceptive model, or “corporate mask” as United Students Against Sweatshops phrases it, which fails to serve workers’ needs and consumer expectations. There is understandable concern and even alarm that large corporations could sell fair trade products with weak certification requirements as a form of “fair washing” - ultimately obscuring transparency and authenticity for corporate profit. Even worse, corporations like WalMart could sell their own, filtered down “fair trade” apparel at a lower price, staking a claim not just to fair trade but to accessibility for the masses. The new fashion company PACT apparel, which sells dresses under thirty-five dollars, is certified by Fair Trade USA and is thus able to stake claims to both “fairness” and “accessibility.” An article on PACT reveals that the fair trade certification ensures a fund for the workers to be invested in needed community projects, such as disaster relief and infrastructure improvements – which, while beneficial, is unlikely to transform a community the way a living wage would.94

In 2013, Fair Trade USA released their report on their pilot apparel program, finding that workers in certified factories earned fifteen percent above local minimum wage on average.95 These are dubiously defined as “fair wages.” And yet, what does a “fair wage” imply exactly? Ten Thousand Villages’ website states that they and artisans determine a “fair wage” as one that would enable a decent living. Prices of course vary

94 (Malik Chua, 2015)

95 (Pasolini, 2013)
depending on the economic and cultural context in which the artisan lives. In their paragraph on fair wages, they mention the word “fair” six times. But what constitutes “fair” exactly? It is certainly not as concrete as a living wage, which, as I discussed earlier in the section on Alta Gracia, can absolutely be calculated. The living wage in the Alta Gracia factory, for example, was 350% above the legal minimum wage. Given that, Fair Trade USA’s “fair wages,” in which factory workers are paid fifteen percent above local minimum wage, pales in comparison.

This begs the question: is the process of certification too easily co-opted for it to successfully intervene within the shifting grounds of neoliberal governmentality? Or can the entire process and meaning of certification in itself be re-articulated by the very same actors who are invested in fair trade commitments? Take for example, a company such as Fair Indigo, which works with artisan cooperatives in countries like Peru and has for years eschewed fair trade certification because their cooperative model does not easily translate to ‘fair trade factories.’ That being said, Fair Indigo concedes that a third-party label can help secure the trust of customers, and admits interest to working with Fair Trade USA to get these partners certified, even as they remain adamant that their partners continue to work in cooperatives.96 As Robert Behnke, the co-founder of Fair Indigo revealed to me in an interview:

We would like to be certified, because that certification would bring trust to some of our consumers. The problem is, we’re a small company, and many of our cooperatives only have a few people. In order to get all of those little places certified, it would be complicated and expensive. A company like Patagonia can afford to work with Fair Trade USA and be

96 (We’re All in This Together, 2015)
certified. If you have a lot of resources you can move the needle faster and with less pain.\textsuperscript{97}

He then added, “I call what we’re doing grassroots fair trade. We’re doing good things, but we can’t and won’t put a stamp on it yet. We’re in the initial stages of discussion, but we hope that Fair Trade USA can evolve to embrace our model.”\textsuperscript{98} The very concept of “grassroots fair trade” reveals the tensions of a certification process that may only benefit those with resources, which of course, is counter to fair trade’s original goal and mission. Behnke’s hope that they can help Fair Trade USA evolve to embrace more models outside of the factory one offers exciting potential for small-producer, grassroots intervention of a large, corporate-influenced certifier.

Building on the idea of a grassroots Fair Trade movement, In 2006, Media, Pennsylvania became the first “Fair Trade Town” in the United States, meaning they had met a number of criteria by the organization Fair Trade Towns USA that demonstrated their commitment to fair trade in their communities. As of 2015, forty-two cities and towns were similarly recognized; one of which is Chapel Hill – a campaign I led in 2013.\textsuperscript{99} To achieve the status of a Fair Trade Town, a diverse steering community of activists, consumers, faith-based groups, local government, and socially responsible businesses and retailers work to create community awareness about fair trade and social and economic justice. The other criteria include: a certain number of retailers offering

\textsuperscript{97} (Behnke, 2016)

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{99} (About, 2016)
fair trade products; media coverage; educational events in churches, schools, etc.; and a local ordinance passed by the city council supporting fair trade.

In 2013 I worked with the manager of Chapel Hill’s Ten Thousand Villages to officially become recognized as a fair trade town. We essentially built upon the work of Judith Blau, a human rights professor who in 2010, worked with her students to petition the city council to get a local fair trade ordinance passed. We reached out to local community partners to screen documentaries, created an after-hours event at the Ten Thousand Villages store where artisan groups showcased their products, gave educational presentations at churches, high schools, and at the university, and even sponsored a fair trade artisan from Guatemala. Our campaign was even featured on the official website, and we received local media coverage – including an editorial in the student newspaper arguing for more retailers to adopt fair trade items.\(^{100}\)

Given the criticisms around fair trade (some of which I share), are there concerns with promoting a movement such as this? Certainly, one could argue that the entire purpose of a “fair trade movement” would promote an uncritical embrace of fair trade and facilitate the corporate co-option of economic and social justice. Yet, I did not personally find that to be the case. First, the movement is based on a grassroots, locally-based, community-organizing model, and encourages education, dialogue and awareness – important tenants of democracy. The people involved in our campaign included organizers, professors, and artisans, all of whom were fully committed to social justice and honest dialogue. At many of our events, we spoke openly about the concerns around authenticity and transparency in fair trade labeling. I gave a presentation to the fair trade

\(^{100}\) (Lang, 2013)
club at the university and raised a discussion about whether the process of certification and “fair trade labeling” was needed if a company was in fact committed to sustainable practices. I also found, surprisingly, that the fair trade label was perhaps more disruptive than I initially believed it to be. Several retailers expressed their concern to me that an increase in fair trade goods in their stores would only highlight how their other products were not fair trade – which could incite questions among their consumers that they clearly were not comfortable fielding. Thus we made sure in our campaign to highlight the work of community retailers who were committed to fair trade practices, such as the local coffee shop, which was quoted in the local news article as stating, “We believe in having relationships with everyone involved in the coffee process, from the grower to the roaster to the customer.”

Much of the discussion around fair trade in this chapter has centered on the dangers of blindly trusting corporations and a label to deliver ethical commitments. A community-based movement that encourages critical dialogue can thus be an effective strategy to re-articulate citizen apathy into action, and blind acceptance of corporate hegemony into criticism and even resistance. And education and awareness (in the form of media coverage, for example) are important tools to sustain these movements in the face of corporate co-option.

F. “Made in the U.S.”: Local Production Obscures Exploitation

If the fair trade movement, at its heart, aims to empower disadvantaged artisans and farmers in the global South, then the “Made In USA” movement aspires to foster domestic production that has largely been lost to cheap overseas labor. I discussed the loss of domestic apparel earlier in this chapter – that neoliberal policies has effectively

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101 (Surendranathan, 2012)
led to 95 percent of local apparel manufacturing being priced out of the global market.
The discourse around the “Made in” label – whether it matters; how much it obscures and conceals – has provoked as much dialogue and debate as fair trade.

According to industry research, the average price of a garment sold in the United States is $13.49, due in large part to big corporations such as WalMart and Target sourcing from low-cost countries like Bangladesh and Cambodia.\(^{102}\) However, in recent years large retailers like Wal-Mart have made claims to committing to manufacturing in the United States – in 2013 they started a program that would increase American-made goods by $50 billion over the next ten years.\(^{103}\) They also have been criticized for not being transparent, such as when they labeled a makeup product as “Made in the U.S.A” online when in fact their product labels stated “Made in China.”\(^{104}\) Wal-Mart’s capitalization of a burgeoning cultural movement as a way to obscure both its economic aim of increasing consumer trust and its own role in contributing to the global neoliberal economy reveals the predicament of corporations claiming space in said movements.

Furthermore, even when a garment fully meets the requirements for the “Made in U.S.A.” logo, that label could still obscure exploitation in American factories. The U.S. Department of Labor and other watchdog agencies have revealed shocking levels of violations in Los Angeles garment factories, and a 2007 film, Made in L.A., documented the fight by three Latina immigrants to win labor protections from their employer – fast-

\(^{102}\) (Clifford, 2013)

\(^{103}\) Ibid.

\(^{104}\) (Malik Chua, Walmart’s Website Chock-Full of Deceptive “Made in U.S.A.” Claims, 2015)
fashion retailer Forever 21. In fact, a 2012 study by the U.S. Department of Labor found that of the 1500 investigations of retailers located in Southern Los Angeles, a whopping 93 percent uncovered violations.\footnote{(Miles, 2012)} Much like factories in countries such as Bangladesh, workers in the United States are often unable to organize, and thus are not protected from retaliation if they speak out against their bosses. Workers in a city like Los Angeles are usually poor, women, and with precarious immigration status – thus placing them at high risk of exploitation. Americans may be unwilling to accept that this abuse is happening in their own backyards because of cultural (mis)conceptions of the United States as a country that promotes economic opportunity and equality.

In the last several years, a myriad of “Made In” initiatives have launched throughout the country. In North Carolina, a state that has seen a steady decline in the textile industry since the 1990s (despite being the second-largest textile state), a movement has strengthened to reinvigorate “Carolina cotton.”\footnote{(TS Designs, 2016)} Redress Raleigh, an organization that provides support for local designers and manufacturers, states its goal as being to “heal the disconnect that exists or rebuild the broken ties between all key players of the USA’s fashion and textiles industry.”\footnote{(Aframian, 2013)} Similarly, TS Designs, in a page titled “Where Your Clothing,” states that their garments have “completely transparent supply chains.”\footnote{(Designs, 2016)} They cite Cotton of the Carolinas, the first Carolina farm to grow organic cotton, as starting a “revolution” with “no compromises” and a backstory. His website

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\footnote{(Miles, 2012)}

\footnote{(TS Designs, 2016)}

\footnote{(Aframian, 2013)}

\footnote{(Designs, 2016)}
allows consumers to track your supply chain, from “dirt to shirt,” and even gives the location, name, photo, address, and even phone number of each member of the supply chain. When I spoke with Eric Henry, founder of TS Designs, he emphasized how transparency in and of itself was an important tool to counter the ways in which companies are constantly concealing how they are “cheating” the system when they sell clothes that don’t represent the true cost. He also noted how vague terms such as “local” often don’t consider the overall impact of the global economy. In other words, is buying at a local boutique that sells clothes made overseas truly ‘local’? As he put it, “You really have to develop the tools to do this long term. You have to have a long-term approach to a living wage, climate change, to make this work.”

Both Henry and Mor Aframian, who is a board member of Redress Raleigh, stressed that “Made in the US” is more about ‘equalizing the scales’ in the global economy rather than an unrealistic emphasis on bringing domestic manufacturing back completely. Henry, for example, told me how he “witnessed firsthand” the devastating effects of NAFTA to the apparel industry, resulting in “destroyed communities, bankrupt businesses and tens of thousands of unemployed people.” Yet he and the others I spoke with who advocate for domestic manufacturing also acknowledged that global trade is “here to stay.” To that end, they articulated various ways to move forward to protect human and environmental rights in a way that would reflect the reality of the global economy. Henry, for example, noted the importance of government stepping in and putting regulations in place given that “WalMart employees have zero power in the

109 (Henry, 2016)

110 (Henry, 2016)
Aframian felt that one of the reasons why the United States lost the textile industry is because they did not invest in the technology that allowed other countries to dominate in manufacturing. She thus advocated for state of the art knitting machines, or even solar panels. As she stated, “If we can give people a skillset to use across multiple industries we’re setting ourselves up for success.” She emphasized the importance of revitalizing local eco-systems to help “rebuild the nation” and “weather the storm” when international economies crash. Kathryn Hildebrand, founder of the Good Clothing Company in 2015, and David Brown of the production company New South Manufacturing, located in North Carolina, launched production companies with the goal of bringing manufacturing back to the United States. To that end, both Hildebrand and Brown emphasized the importance of raising funding to provide training programs to teach people how to sew, especially with the millennial generation who, as Brown noted, “like to build things with their hands.” Azmara Asefa, an Ethiopian-American fashion designer who sources out of factories in Los Angeles and uses fair trade practices, expressed to me that “creatives should be more creative about how you compete.” Asefa believed that since “most people are counting their pennies,” it would serve

111 (Henry, 2016)

112 (Aframian, Interview with Mor Aframian, 2016)

113 (Aframian, Interview with Mor Aframian, 2016)

114 (Brown D., 2016)

115 (Asefa, 2016)
designers to think of ways to get costs and production lower – such as cutting out advertising and wholesale.\textsuperscript{116}

In other words, as stressed throughout this chapter and others, those advocating for domestic manufacturing revitalization must pull from various cultural resources and draw from a multiplicity of interventions to successfully re-articulate labor conditions in the United States. This is especially in the face of the global capitalist economy where a low price point has become the norm and the greatest barrier to equalizing the scales, so to speak. David Brown commented on how the culture hadn’t really “shifted completely” in that “we want to look like we care about these things, but there’s a battle going on in people’s psyche where we want the cheap stuff.”\textsuperscript{117} The solution the interviewees gave to this conundrum, so to speak, was education and honest dialogue. As Mor Aframian put it, “apathy is the roadblock to giving a shit.”\textsuperscript{118} Kathryn Hilderbrand was equally as blunt, stating: “I have no sympathy for elective ignorance.”\textsuperscript{119} As she noted on her website, she is dedicated to “speaking the truth about the industry,” and to her, that truth is not sugar-coated. For example, she educates people on how the industry has turned marginalized women and children into a commodity, so that if you know the shirt you are wearing is made by a child, then you also understand “you are a child abuser.”\textsuperscript{120} This perhaps speaks to why so many consumers claim ignorance – because they are aware that

\textsuperscript{116} (Asefa, 2016)

\textsuperscript{117} (Brown D., 2016)

\textsuperscript{118} (Aframian, Interview with Mor Aframian, 2016)

\textsuperscript{119} (Hilderbrand, 2016)

\textsuperscript{120} (Hilderbrand, 2016)
knowledge implicates them in global labor exploitation. Thus education and awareness is an important tool for mobilizing action around labor exploitation because it makes it more difficult, if not impossible, for consumers to escape their own complicity.

Localized movements and incubator factories aren’t just bridging the gap between producers and consumers; they are connecting workers at every level of the supply chain to each other. In doing so, they are powerfully intervening in a system that has been established since Fordism, in which workers are separated from each other within a convoluted and large supply chain. Whether this revitalization of localized manufacturing will lead to a resurgence of labor protest movements in the U.S. garment industry remains to be seen, but the ways in which these locally-based movements are forging connections and building coalitions offer exciting potential for societal transformation when everyone takes care of their own backyard.

The next sections will delve into how different actors – bloggers, filmmakers, and organizers - employ various media tools to create greater awareness of and advocate for worker rights beyond their backyard and across the globe.

**G. B(v)logger Interventions: How do you re-articulate the status quo within the inevitability of neoliberal governmentality?**

YouTube, a social networking site created in 2005 by two PayPal employees, was originally touted as a platform for *amateur* producers and performers. In fact, its original promises – that it would provide “small, independent, self-expressive, user-created, alternatives to Big Media” – were borrowed from the DIY ethic of print zines.\(^{121}\) These promises of giving everyone equal access, including marginalized groups, at first seemed

\(^{121}\) (Marwick, 2013, 36)
promising. Young women immediately began making beauty and fashion videos, and within a few years, ‘shopping hauls,’ in which vloggers show off their purchases, had become one of the fastest-growing categories on the site, with clothing and makeup hauls of popular ‘beauty vloggers’ sometimes attracting millions of views. By 2010, there were over 200,000 haul videos on YouTube, and they steadily increased to a whopping 700,000 in 2013.\(^{122}\)

Viewers are often attracted to the supposed ‘authenticity’ of these usually young women who are more often than not speaking to their followers from the privacy of their bedrooms. Marketers have capitalized on this fact, forming relationships with haulers by sending them their products – for free - to review. As Eli Portney, a chief brand strategist, noted in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, "What better way to reach your customers than from what seems to be independent voices saying 'I love these products and I love these stores'? Instead of you promoting your products, they're doing it for you."\(^{123}\) These partnerships can be lucrative for the beauty ‘vlogger’ (popularity referred to as ‘beauty gurus’), who receives products and a cut from the profits of ads that run with their video if they join YouTube’s partner program. Companies also benefit in the form of free advertising – a 2012 study found that four out of ten people who watched a haul video virtually or physically visited a store that was mentioned by the hauler.\(^{124}\)

While some have praised these videos as giving young women a platform to connect with each other on a large, even global scale, others have criticized them for promoting the

\(^{122}\) (Khrais, 2013)

\(^{123}\) (Chang, 2010)

\(^{124}\) (Parker, 2012)
worst types of consumerism - and for blurring the lines between honest reviews and paid advertising. While fashion blogging initially promised to be a ‘democratizing’ tool wherein young women could subversively employ technology to connect and “launch their personal voice,” that promise has been undermined as blogging has been incorporated into the mainstream – in the form of increased exposure, but also, product placement, endorsements, and corporate control.

Furthermore, as Brooke Erin Duffy and Emily Hund put it in their journal article on fashion blogging, the perfectly coiffed images of many of these bloggers mask the hours of labor and hard work that go into creating that online persona. Self-branding in this genre requires reconciling the competing demands of appearing ‘authentic’ while also being ‘on brand,’ creating an aspirational fantasy of beauty and style even if it means concealing hours of labor, and fulfilling the expectations of both the readers and companies that subsidize them. Even more troubling, because of an increasingly over-saturated market, bloggers are more than ever feeling compelled to compete with each other for sponsorships and compensation. Thus, this may lead many bloggers – especially those with smaller followings but big aspirations – to endorse products they don’t enthusiastically support.

Fashion and fashion blogging in this way are “technologies of the self,” which Foucault uses to describe the everyday processes by which people operate on their bodies and souls in pursuit of self-transformation and to constitute themselves as subjects.

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125 (George, 2011)

126 (Duffy & Hund, 2015)

127 (Brodwin, 2015)
Mainstream fashion blogging is an alluring technology of the self for young women (and men) desiring access to the fashion industry. The blogosphere assures bloggers that self-transformation through one’s ‘look’ can guarantee insider status to the industry. These new media forms have often been uncritically framed within a democratization narrative, and as such tend to overlook the ways in which these technologies are interlinked to dominant cultural and economic structures (such as capitalism) that are hierarchically structured along racial, classed, and gendered lines. To reiterate a point made in chapter three, the question then should not be focused on whether the blogosphere and internet is democratic, but rather on what meanings and practices that bloggers can produce around consumption, self-improvement, and even political mobilization while navigating within the context of neoliberal capitalism?

Within this neo-liberal governmentality then, how are self-described ‘ethical fashion bloggers’ able to intervene and advocate for more egalitarian arrangements? This community of “conscious” and critical fashion bloggers use their platforms to create a counterpoint to the conspicuous consumption of mainstream style bloggers. These blogs focus on creating consumer awareness and shifting the paradigm on how people relate to their clothes and purchasing decisions.

My interviews with these bloggers revealed that while all of them were committed to transparency and authenticity, they were nonetheless frustrated by having to navigate a morally ambiguous space in which their desire to disrupt the status quo of mainstream blogging was complicated by capitalist interventions. Christine Tjahjadi-Lopez from *Beyoutiful Hope* asserted that the main distinction between mainstream and ethical
fashion blogs is transparency, in that ethical bloggers are more likely to mention when a post is sponsored. She noted that this aligns with the ‘mission’ of ethical fashion bloggers, who “attack a lack of ethics and transparency in the fast fashion industry.”¹²⁸ In fact, she argued that mainstream bloggers’ acceptance of sponsorships without transparent disclosure mirrors the industry at large, in that they see people and processes through a lens of what can “be given and taken,” while the ethical fashion blogosphere critically interrogates the “process of how things are given and taken.”¹²⁹ The bloggers I spoke with voiced varying opinions around this tension of feeling pressured to perform unpaid work (not accepting affiliate links and/or sponsorships) to satisfy their readers. Several bloggers who didn’t accept sponsored posts spoke of the ‘freeing’ nature of not having to navigate these tensions. Catherine Harper of Walking with Cake, for example, shared that she doesn’t even check her analytics numbers because she wants “complete freedom to say what I want to say.”¹³⁰ She also noted that the ethical fashion industry is much smaller and thus compensation is likely to not be significant. To that end, Katie Roberts mentioned that ethical fashion blogs can be a great way for small brands to be “found” in a “sea of corporate giants.”¹³¹ Despite this potential for ethical fashion blogs to be employed as a tool to “disrupt” mainstream advertising, she nonetheless “opted out” because the possibility of “monetary bias” was “contradictory to my mission.”¹³²

¹²⁸ (Tjahjadi-Lopez, Interview with Christine Tjahjadi-Lopez, 2016)
¹²⁹ Ibid
¹³⁰ (Harper, 2016)
¹³¹ (Roberts, 2016)
¹³² Ibid
For these bloggers, employing capitalism’s own tools against itself was not an option; the chance for co-option was too great. Others, such as Holly Rose of Leotie Lovely, spoke passionately about how in fact, she sees accepting sponsored posts as part and parcel of her ethical mission to ensure that workers – bloggers included - get paid. As she pointed out, ethical fashion bloggers are paid considerably less than mainstream ones, even though they often do more work putting together a thoughtful post that critically examines the industry. She argues:

This industry is not sustainable if we don't support each other and if brands are asking for advertising (an editorial) than the publication should get paid, that's how the mainstream industry became so powerful, so we can't even begin to compete if there isn't an exchange of funds to support one another with.\(^{133}\)

She did address the concerns expressed by bloggers such as Rebecca Magee above, that promoting ethical brands might conflict with a message of minimalism and slow consumption. She emphasized to me the importance of making sure readers understand that ethical bloggers are not relaying a message of “you go out and replace your own wardrobe.”\(^{134}\) But to Rose, working within the capitalist system (via ‘exchange of funds’) isn’t conceding to it, rather, it’s an extension of her ethical commitments to both help the ethical market grow and support wages for (mostly women) fashion bloggers.

Similarly, Katie Roberts agreed that bloggers and activists must demand compensation for their work. She noted that while there is the image of the “sad foreigner” in the fashion world, there is less visibility around the unpaid interns who are

\(^{133}\) (Rose, 2016)  
\(^{134}\) Ibid
told they should be grateful for their jobs, and the store clerks who sell fast fashion but are unable to pay their rent.\textsuperscript{135} Injustice is indeed present in the entire system, and the reluctance of the fashion industry, and bloggers themselves, to address this reflects both a perennial ‘othering’ and concealment of poverty and oppression that only serves to maintain the fashion industry’s glamorous facade.

I do not consider myself an ‘ethical’ fashion blogger, because I do not actively participate in that community nor do I want to make any ‘claims’ to ethics. I do consider myself a ‘critical fashion blogger,’ because my blog attempts to deconstruct the social, cultural, economic and political meanings of fashion. Similar to these self-described ‘ethical fashion’ bloggers, I invest a lot of time and energy constructing a post that is aesthetically appealing but also thoughtful and well-researched. It can be difficult to invest so much effort without a financial incentive or advertising to help promote your blog. Furthermore, having a successful blog requires constant engagement and interactivity. Christine of \textit{Beyoutiful Hope} lamented to me that because of a busy schedule, she was not able to interact with other bloggers, thus preventing her blog from growing. As she noted:

> When looking at comments of blogs, you will see that many of the bigger ethical fashion bloggers are in constant conversation with each other and are part of multiple ethical fashion networks. I realize that my readership increases with increased participation in these networks. Social capital is expressed through free marketing from others in the community and shared resources which make shared content more wholesome, which drives more traffic and increases.\textsuperscript{136}

\textsuperscript{135} (Roberts, 2016)

\textsuperscript{136} (Interview with Christine Tjahjadi-Lopez, 2016)
This speaks to Maurizio Lazzarto’s concept of immaterial labor discussed in chapter three. These bloggers are performing unpaid work through the cultivation of social relationships. However, unlike mainstream fashion bloggers, whose social networking creates more value for advertisers and corporate interests, ethical fashion bloggers seem to be working more to gain social capital within their community. Of course, a successful ethical fashion blog can create pathways for opportunities and jobs in the industry. But increasing readership and as Christine put it, ‘social capital’ requires a time commitment that many bloggers do not have, especially without financial incentive.

The ethical fashion bloggers I spoke emphasized to me the importance of pushing for larger systemic change, while encouraging ethical shopping as an intervention that could instill in people the desire and intentionality to become engaged with sustainability on a deeper level. Katie Roberts of Sustainability in Style shared in our interview this particularly insightful statement, which I am quoting at length:

> Fortunately there are benefits in ‘baby steps’ to environmentalism because being good and feeling good is addictive. If we could get everyone out there realizing that their dollar is a vote for the world they want to live in huge changes would happen. If just a small percentage of these people started to get more active in their community as a result of these baby steps, even better. If just a handful of these people got into positions of power across the Globe our World’s issues could be solved overnight. I don’t think its about encouraging people to do both, its about fostering this ethic as social norm and then allowing those who want to stay on the forest floor to create ground cover and supporting those who want to grow tall and strong and create the forest canopy, to grow tall and strong.\(^{137}\)

Thus for Roberts, encouraging people to “vote for the world they want to live in” is part and parcel of a larger strategy which creates a culture shift (“social norm”) by ultimately normalizing sustainability in their lives. This speaks to research that has found only a

\(^{137}\) (Roberts, 2016)
small percentage of the population needs to be mobilized to win resistance movements, as long as they are protesting in support of views held by the majority. The key then, is changing the hearts and minds of the masses.\textsuperscript{138} She, and the other bloggers I spoke with, understood that most consumers were unlikely to become dyed in the wool organizers. It is about planting the seeds, so to speak, of consciousness in people’s minds. The argument then, is that getting as many people ‘on your side’ by encouraging them to make even the smallest ethical commitment (whether it’s through consumption or recycling) will enable a much larger cultural shift around this issue.

To that end, do ethical fashion bloggers feel like they are making impactful interventions in the mainstream fashion blogosphere and industry? In response to that question, there was a certain degree of ambivalence. Christine at \textit{Beyoutiful Hope} revealed to me that she doesn’t think there is much room for intervention given the huge corporations and (money) behind mainstream bloggers. Leah Wise of \textit{Style Wise}, however, expressed hope that the ethical fashion blogosphere could help shape the mainstream one, noting that ethical fashion blogger blog \textit{Seasons of Salt} had inspired the fashion blog \textit{Un-Fancy} to become more minimalist. Rebecca Magee from \textit{This I Wear} noted that hugely popular fashion blogger Susie Lau from \textit{Style Bubble} wrote a piece during Fashion Revolution day on how she struggles negotiating her desire for better conditions in the fashion industry with working in an industry that emphasizes newness and aesthetic beauty. As Lau put it, “supply chains and environmental impact don’t always enter into my line of questioning when appraising a young designer or a new

\textsuperscript{138} (Flowers & Zeese, 2014)
collection.” This reveals an unusual degree of self-reflection from a mainstream blogger on how she is implicated within a problematic industry, and speaks to the potential of engaging her sizeable audience (300,000 followers on Instagram alone) outside of the sustainable fashion community. Katie Roberts of *Sustainability in Style* was able to use her blog to pressure the Australian brand Tigerlily to commit to taking steps towards greater transparency in their supply chain. She firmly believes that ethical fashion bloggers can help to “chip away” at corporations by asking relentless questions and providing positive reinforcement for “baby steps” as the industry moves to reform. And, like most of the bloggers I spoke with, she balanced idealism with realism, noting that bloggers are working within a flawed economic system in which corporations are unwilling to take short-term multi-million dollar loses at the risk of losing shareholders.

It is important to note that these bloggers are employing a multiplicity of discursive technologies – mostly social media ones - to spread awareness and mobilize around this issue. Certainly traditional mediums such as film can effectively help make a convoluted issue such as fashion exploitation appear tangible and accessible to audiences. As Andrew Morgan of fast fashion documentary *The True Cost* told me, film is unique as a medium that can present all of these complex ideas and voices into a 90 minute movie, ultimately making the world (and by extension, the seemingly overwhelming problem of global fashion exploitation) smaller than it really is. As he stressed, “Ultimately I want to

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139 (Lau, 2015)

140 (Roberts, 2016)
acknowledge this complexity, while giving voice to a moral clarity.”\textsuperscript{141} But not everyone has the resources or skills to make a film or even an online series. The bloggers who I spoke with cited social media as a democratizing platform because it gave them a voice. As Holly Rose from Leotie Lovely stressed, “It's hugely affective, you have a voice now and the more social media power you have the more your voice is heard.”\textsuperscript{142} Several of the bloggers spoke to the ‘public shaming’ aspect of social media, which makes it harder for brands to ignore tough questions in a public forum. Yet they also acknowledged the very real issue of co-option. Leah Wise for example, agreed that social media has helped to equalize the flow of information and put the power “back in the hands of the people.”\textsuperscript{143} She also expressed to me, however, that she felt it was “dangerous” that corporations were employing social media to fully integrate their advertising strategy. To that end, while Catherine Harper of Walking with Cake acknowledged that social media can indeed help to get brands attention, she also expressed frustration that she had been ignored by brands that she’s contacted through social media and her blogging platform. Of course, this speaks to the differential in power between small, ethical fashion blogs and huge, multi-million dollar corporations. It also speaks to how the Internet works in general, where only the most popular blogs with the greatest number of likes and hits show up in web searches.\textsuperscript{144} This is a product of capitalism, not democracy, in that the

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid

\textsuperscript{142} (Rose, 2016)

\textsuperscript{143} (Wise, Interview with Leah Wise, 2016)

\textsuperscript{144} (McGill, 2010)
very tools and cultural resources that enable marginalized people to re-articulate the status quo can be employed by corporate power to maintain it.

Several bloggers also spoke enthusiastically about the organizing potential to create a community of sustainable fashion advocates. Many of these bloggers expressed to me that they had few people with outside of the blogosphere with whom they could discuss sustainability issues, so connecting with other like-minded people was “amazing” and “powerful.” Verena Erin of My Green Closet detailed the Facebook page she had created where people could share resources, ask questions, and support each other in their blogging and advocacy. This speaks to the power of consciousness-raising groups (popularized by feminists in the 1960s) in which people –marginalized groups, activists, political groups - isolated from one another can connect and deepen their own understanding of the issue. That being said, as Katie Roberts of Sustainability in Style noted, participating in these small online communities can reinforce a sense of false comfort that people are more engaged with these issues then they really are. After all, one can create their own little world on social media, since platforms like Facebook allows users to control their newsfeeds. As she said, “You can create a feedback loop that makes your world seem like there is a huge revolution towards conscious fashion consumption. All you have to do is take a trip to the department store to get a reality check.” Ethical fashion bloggers and advocates must thus rely upon a multiplicity of tools – both online and off-to address global labor exploitation and push for truly transformative change in the industry. As Rebecca Magee of This I Wear opined:

\[145\] (Roberts, 2016)
What does a movement look like today? Is it the sit-ins of the 60s? Is it twitter? It’s very powerful that anyone can put out their opinions. It will likely be a combination of things to make change happen. My little blog isn’t going to make a difference, it’s about a collective voice. The more that we can build a lot of voices around these issue and create that visibility around the issue, that’s when we can make change.\textsuperscript{146}

The ethical fashion blogosphere’s focus on community is a promising intervention within this system of neoliberal governmentality that prioritizes individual profit and gain. It also, perhaps, reflects a harsh reality revealed by Magee, which is that ethical bloggers \textit{must} form collective solidarity given an Internet structure where only the blogs with the most traffic (i.e., popular mainstream bloggers) are likely to show up in the top web searches. To that end, the next section will turn to ‘Fashion Revolution Day,’ an awareness-based movement that brings ethical fashion advocates together with the purpose of collectively raising awareness and fighting for reform in the industry.

\textit{H. Fashion Revolution: Do new media technologies enable or constrain organizing?}

Although the fashion blogosphere is certainly a contested space for activism, other forms of new media, such as twitter, have been employed more obviously for activist purposes. Critical conversations around the role of mass media in social movements have often engaged with the notion of the public sphere. Popularized by Jürgen Habermas, the public sphere refers to the spaces that citizens create, in which everyone is granted equal access and participation.\textsuperscript{147} Habermas argues that when civic societies are truly rooted in a participatory democracy, they have platforms in which people can engage in free debates, allowing them to emphasize their specific concerns

\textsuperscript{146} (Magee, Interview with Rebecca Magee, 2016)

\textsuperscript{147} (Habermas, 1992)
and interests. Author Naomi Klein employed the public sphere in her book *No Logo*, which argues that ‘super-brands’ like Disney and Nike have progressively taken over virtually all ‘public spaces,’ including school curricula, neighborhoods, and all-encompassing infotainment malls like Virgin Megastores. Her last chapter documented how ‘hactivists’ in the late 90s used the Internet to break into (or “culture-jam”) websites of big brands, replacing corporate logos with messages of resistance. In this wake of increasing corporate influence, several other scholars have argued that mass media can thus be used as a counter-hegemonic tool to extend information and debate to a greater number of people.

Although the Internet’s power still resides in the global north (and even more so, in English speaking countries) the public has employed social media, from Occupy Wall Street to the Arab revolutions, to create globally connected movements that have attempted to circumvent censorship – with various degrees of success. Many of these online tactics – such as petitions, boycotts, letter-writing and email campaigns – have long histories of use by social justice movements.\(^{148}\) Claiming that online protests are merely forms of “slacktivism” because they are online and therefore imply lowered participation costs is thus overly simplistic. In fact, signing a petition can indeed be a high-risk form of activism, depending on the cause and context, and if done online, can even more easily be tracked than offline petitions.\(^ {149}\) Furthermore, it is important to note that many of these online forms of activism also encourage and mobilize offline protest

\(^{148}\) (Earl & Kimport, 2011, 43-48)

\(^{149}\) (Earl & Kimport, 2011, 57)
as well. Most importantly, while social movements require mass media attention as a “conveyer of public attention,” relying on the mainstream media as a gatekeeper has often come at significant costs to activist causes. This is why new forms of interactive media have been used and touted as counter-hegemonic strategies to media gatekeeping.

The twitter ‘hashtag’ has emerged as an organizing tool that activists have used to attract mainstream media attention and hold institutions accountable. Twitter is a social networking site established in 2006 and was initially employed by its users to chat, share information, and report news. Referred to as “microblogging,” it shares the blogosphere’s centrality on interactivity but differs in that it allows users to post real-time information. It has often been touted in popular literature as a media tool that enables democratization precisely because of this real-time feature, which allows for on-the-ground reporting of breaking news. Furthermore, twitter can allow activists to bypass formal organizations and mass media and “connect with each other on their own terms. These hashtag ‘trends’ can ultimately help to focus the public’s attention on an issue, provoke outrage, pressure an institution to change, and provide searchable data on who is using the hashtag and how often they use it.

Social networking sites like Twitter are inextricably linked with the blogosphere, in that they “traverse, extend, and include them.” For example, in an analysis of the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, the authors found that bloggers in Tunisia were

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150 (Earl & Kimport, 2011, 61)
151 (Small, 2011)
152 (Small, 2011, 872)
153 (Dean, 2010, 36)
responsible for the largest twitter information flows. Interestingly enough, the study found that bloggers were more likely to retweet not just bloggers, but activists working on the ground. Given that the blogosphere is by nature a participatory platform that lends itself to bloggers being more influenced by their readers than mainstream journalists, this is not a surprising finding.

Is “Hashtag Activism” a form of “slacktivism?” In other words, how does one quantify a hashtag’s impact? A hashtag’s deemed “success” is often dependent on the campaign’s goals. As activist Lina Srivasava put it,

Many social media commentators claim that the mere occurrence of heightened awareness in the perceiving and communicating audience is sufficient to count as "impact." And in the cases where hashtags created a community-driven critique, as in #IfTheyGunnedMeDown or #MyNYPD, the very engagement toward collective identity and organized participation represents a shift that will have ripple effects in similar ways that media and policy critiques do.

It is with these questions that we turn to the organization Fashion Revolution and its hashtag #WhoMadeMyClothes as a site for interrogation around the issue of social media as a tool for political and community organizing. One year after the fatal Rana factory collapse, fashion industry figures organized a “Fashion Revolution Day” that aimed to “reconnect the broken links of the supply chain” by creating more consumer awareness. Their website and Facebook page encouraged people to tweet a picture of themselves with their clothes #insideout as a way to urge ethical ‘fashionistas’ to spread

154 (Lotan, Graeff, Ananny, Gaffney, Pearce, & Boyd, 2011)
155 (Lotan, Graeff, Ananny, Gaffney, Pearce, & Boyd, 2011, 1392)
156 (Maratea, 2008, 148)
157 (Srivastava, 2014)
158 (Why Do We Need a Fashion Revolution?)
awareness. The hashtag became the number one ‘trend’ on April 24, 2014, creating a
twitter storm from different actors around the world that was picked up by media outlets
from Elle\textsuperscript{159} to Al Jazeera.\textsuperscript{160} As a self-described “global movement uniting around an
annual campaign,” the organization is attempting to sustain the conversation beyond a
trending hashtag with educational efforts and a call for brand transparency.\textsuperscript{161} The April
24, 2016 event reach was even more staggering. Over 1000 blog posts and articles were
written and featured in outlets that included fashion magazines like Elle and news outlets
such as CNN and Forbes. In the month of April alone, figures show that Fashion
Revolution was viewed over 14 billion times, which, in the digital marketing sphere,
translates to at least $60 million.\textsuperscript{162}

Fashion Revolution Week and its #WhoMadeMyClothes and #insideout campaign
demonstrates the potential of a social media platform to spark awareness of global labor
exploitation, to provide a valuable opportunity to challenge mainstream media’s
‘gatekeeper role’ by offering alternative perspectives to discourses around consumption,
and to bridge the distance and inspire solidarity between producers and consumers. For
example, the campaign encourages “producers, garment workers, and makers” to respond
to consumers’ #whomademyclothes hashtag with their own hashtag, #Imadeyourclothes.
In 2016, over 2,600 producers – from cotton farmers in India to artisans in Africa to
factory workers in Melbourne – used Instagram and twitter to share pictures of

\textsuperscript{159} (Stream, 2014)

\textsuperscript{160} (Why Do We Need a Fashion Revolution?)

\textsuperscript{162} (Knight, 2016)
themselves at their place of work. This chapter previously detailed worker speaker tours as potentially providing counter-narratives to hegemonic images of ‘third world’ victimization. These images of workers holding up signs for Fashion Revolution Day offer the same potential, but differ slightly in the context of social media. On the one hand, these pictures of producers, many of whom are living in the Global South, offer immediacy and also accessibility to millions of people around the world who may not be able to attend a speaker tour. On the other hand, unlike a speaker tour, an image produced through the Internet does not provide a comprehensive narrative of worker experience.

However, the organization Fashion Revolution goes beyond just a hashtag campaign, supporting on the ground events, protests, and education campaigns in 92 countries. Each country has their own coordinator who “power the revolution” in creative but sustainable ways. Action events have included “craftivist workshops, clothes swaps, film screenings, panel discussions, catwalk presentations and creative stunts.” Protests have been staged outside of big brands, and many of these pictures and videos of protests have made mainstream media coverage. To that end, Fashion Revolution was able to leverage awareness into pushing over 1000 brands (more than 300 of them mainstream) into answering ‘#whomademyclothes. Companies such as American Apparel shared instagram pictures of their workers and even a short film, titled Hands, that follows 86 hands of workers making a pair of jeans, a powerful visual narrative that

163 Ibid
164 Ibid
165 (Stream, 2014)
serves to humanize the supply chain.\textsuperscript{166} The organization has even created a Fashion Transparency Index, which scores forty brands (to be expanded to 100 in the following year) on what information they publicly disclose on social and environmental issues across their supply chain. Most importantly perhaps, they list various non-profit and advocacy organizations such as the Clean Clothes Campaign and Labour Behind the Label which support union organizing. Thus, Fashion Revolution as a grassroots movement encourages people to be active, engaged citizens (instead of just consumers) challenging hegemonic systems of corporate power that exploits people around the world.

Fashion Revolution’s tremendous global Internet reach and celebrity endorsements (actress Rosario Dawson shared #WhoMadeMyClothes on Instagram in Spanish) have also helped to re-articulate the labor rights movement as accessible to the masses. While the organization has supported grassroots, on the ground advocacy, social media organizing and reach has helped to push forth a cultural shift whereas caring about the person behind the label is no longer confined to the realm of anti-sweatshop activists, rather, it has now gone mainstream. This was made abundantly clear when late night host John Oliver dedicated an entire show to fast fashion, racking up eight million views on YouTube.\textsuperscript{167}

As mentioned earlier, that doesn’t mean that everyone who reads an article about Fashion Revolution will become an organizer around the issue, but it will help enact a cultural shift of mass consciousness that will make it all the more easier for those “small group of thoughtful, committed citizens,” as Margaret Mead put it, to “change the

\textsuperscript{166} (American Apparel)

\textsuperscript{167} (Pennolino, 2015)
world.” Kathryn Hildebrand, of The Good Company, was on the board of the first Fashion Revolution and firmly believes that awareness is the foundation of movement building. As she put it, “how are people supposed to mobilize when they aren’t even aware there’s a problem?”

Furthermore, those involved in Fashion Revolution can now employ social media to more forcefully articulate a framework in which the labor rights movement is presented on their terms. Editorials written by Kristoff and others can now be quickly rebutted (through counter-pieces) and disseminated to a wider audience. When speaking to several bloggers about their thoughts on the hashtag itself, they revealed that for them, the hashtag was an effective tool by which the movement could achieve heightened awareness as well as a sense of collective solidarity. All of the bloggers were involved in some capacity during the week of action, and many of them used their blog to write about it and then share on social media. Kate Black of Magnifeco spoke of the wide reach and engagement, but also of social media’s role in “connecting citizens around topics that matter to them” as “huge.” Christine of Beyoutiful Hope felt that the hashtag movement was most important for “unifying” those already involved – helping to equip that “small committed group” with resources and information “so that those in the movement can find each other and more strongly make a difference and raise awareness to the public.”

Bloggers who had a YouTube channel (i.e. ‘vloggers’) also created the hashtag #HAULternatives to show off their charity shop, vintage, and fair trade hauls in

168 (Hilderbrand, 2016)

169 (Black, Interview with Kate Black, 2016)

170 (Tjahjadi-Lopez, Interview with Christine Tjahjadi-Lopez, 2016)
an effort to subvert the YouTube Hauler phenomenon in which vloggers boast of their ‘fast fashion’ purchases. In a promising sign that ethical fashion bloggers have impacted the mainstream fashion blogosphere, several mainstream vloggers with huge followings participated in the campaign. Of course, one could argue that encouraging any kind of haul, even if it falls under the ‘ethical’ umbrella, is only fueling more consumption in general. Vloggers who are encouraging others to fashion themselves as ‘ethical’ consumers are arguably still doing so within a neoliberal governmentality that encourages people to shop as a way to fashion oneself as a particular kind of ‘citizen-subject.’ Still, encouraging followers to purchase secondhand instead of buying from corporations is certainly a form of intervention, especially given that so many of these vloggers have been accused of promoting sponsored products given to them by corporations. That doesn’t mean that vloggers who promote Fashion Revolution for one day aren’t still navigating a complicated space whereupon they must constantly negotiate their personal values with self-promotion. Encouraging vloggers to incorporate the values of Fashion Revolution into a more central part of their channel is a much larger project.

To that end Holly Rose of Leotie Lovely emphasized the importance of sustaining that momentum from Fashion Revolution week behind that limited time frame, noting that while social media can help peak that interest, the community who invests their time and energy into the movement needs to commit to long-term education.\(^{171}\) For Verena Erin of My Green Closet, however, a cultural shift in consciousness can start by taking small steps even if someone just “buys one less thing and has one more conversation.”\(^{172}\)

\(^{171}\) (Rose, 2016)

\(^{172}\) (Polowy, Interview with Verena Erin, 2016)
Leah Wise, ever the thoughtful, nuanced thinker, cautioned that while she agreed Fashion Revolution was a “great way to spark awareness,” it could also be hijacked by big corporations. For example, H&M was accused by those involved with Fashion Revolution of conducting a greenwashing campaign during the April 2016 week of action. They encouraged customers to drop off their old clothes for recycling in exchange for an H&M coupon; however, only a small percentage of recycled yarn is incorporated into garments. Thus, their goal of capturing 1,000 tons of unwanted clothes during the week was unrealistic and many accused the company of disrespecting Fashion Revolution’s efforts to re-focus consumer’s attention onto the people who labor in global commodity chains. Wise noted that while their campaign was ‘destructive,’ she still saw it as positive that Fashion Revolution has put so much pressure on brands that they felt compelled to respond in some way, even though the end result was ultimately co-option. The ease with which many corporations often greenwash their campaigns and ‘dupe’ consumers is with great risk to organized movements. As Erica Chenoweth, author of Why Civil Resistance Works, emphasized, even the most righteous causes can “fall flat” if organizers fail to deprive those in power of their “means of maintaining the status quo.”

To that end, movements can employ new media technologies as exciting discursive tools for reaching the masses, but to avoid the threat of co-option they must

173 (Siegle, Am I a fool to expect more than corporate greenwashing?, 2016)
174 (Stoner, 2012)
support sustainable organizing by developing long-term strategies, establishing political organizations, and cultivating leaders who are financially supported. In a neoliberal climate that stresses transformation of the self over collective solidarity, this may prove to be an uphill battle. To that end, supporting people taking ‘small steps’ must go hand in hand with “a clear game plan, ideally one with the objective of inconveniencing elites and impeding their profits.” To build a true ‘revolution’ that re-articulates the status quo, Fashion Revolution must take a two-sided approach: heightening consumer awareness while pushing for regulations and harmonized ethical compliance standards. The organization’s publication of a fashion transparency index and its support for grassroots protests and education organizing indicate positive steps towards doing just that.

Conclusion:

As this chapter has revealed, labor exploitation is found (and often hidden) within every pocket of the industry. Factory workers, artisans, interns, models, and bloggers are all part and parcel of this gritty reality that the industry conceals behind its glamorous façade. Those advocating for better working conditions and bridging the distance between producer and consumer are employing a myriad of discursive technologies to peel back that façade and articulate for greater transparency, democratization, accountability, and authenticity in the industry. This chapter has shown how at different historical moments these efforts have often been co-opted by a strengthening political, economic, and cultural neoliberal climate, and how power operates to uphold and disrupt both resistance movements and hegemonic institutions. There was no “best strategy” for

175 (Taylor, 2016)
moving forward to challenge oppressive spaces. Each one that I have articulated here is rife with possibility for re-articulating the status quo and also is at risk for maintaining it.

This was no better demonstrated than when the Asia Floor Wage Alliance released a series of reports exposing Gap, Walmart and H&M for abusing their workers – which included suppression of organizing, unsafe working conditions, and sexual harassment.\(^{176}\) The report was frustrating for labor organizers, since H&M had signed three years before the legally binding Bangladesh Fire and Safety Accord. But change does not happen overnight. Healing the broken disconnects of a complex and convoluted supply chain will take time, and this chapter has revealed the diverse tools that are employed – new media technologies, student protests, worker speaker tours, university athletic contracts, disclosure reports, certification labels, incubator factories – to articulate a vision for an industry that is more fair and responsible for all. While it will not be easy, a culture of resistance that has emerged in the last few years has paved the way for labor movements such as the Fight for 15, lawsuits from unpaid interns,\(^{177}\) and even profit hits to fast fashion retailers in the U.S. and Europe as “clothes buying goes out of fashion.”\(^{178}\) Whether these movements can be sustained is yet to be seen, but those articulating possibilities for better labor conditions will be there, as they have been for centuries, using capitalism’s resources against itself in clever and creative ways to advocate within that moving and shifting ground of neoliberal governmentality.

\(^{176}\) (Bain, “A web of terror, insecurity, and a high level of vulnerability”: H&M, Gap, and Walmart are accused of widespread worker abuse, 2016)

\(^{177}\) (Zillman, 2015)

\(^{178}\) (Daneshkhu & Vandevelde, 2016)
Chapter Five
‘Eco-Fashion’: Fashion’s Environmental Footprint

I. Introduction.

An unfortunate side effect with every sustainable or ethical business is that regardless of the altruism behind each recycled, upcycled, unpackaged or renewable product is that sustainability ultimately means the sustainability of profit, not planet.¹

In July 2007, London fashion designer Anya Hindmarch released her much-anticipated $15 canvas bag that read, “I’m not a plastic bag.” Sold out at Whole Foods in the first few hours, it was highly coveted by those looking to purchase an affordable bag from a couture designer whose purses could easily surpass a $1,000 price tag. Hindmarch expressed however, a motivation behind the making of the infamous bag that went beyond pure aesthetics. The ‘Green Movement’ resurgence was at its peak in 2007, and there was an increased concern over the massive waste of plastic bags, including by Americans who throw away more than one billion a year and recycle less than one percent.² In an effort to address this, Hindmarch sought to fuse fashion awareness with environmental advocacy by creating a reusable shopping bag. The launch of her tote in New York went hand in hand with new environmental efforts initiated by Mayor Bloomberg, notably public service announcements encouraging people to use cloth bags for shopping.³ Yet there were criticisms from the start. On the site Urban Dictionary,

¹ (Borromeo, 2014)
² (Institute, 2004)
³ (Burros, 2007)
the writers define the ‘I am Not a Plastic Bag’ campaign as having questionable ‘ethical roots’ given its production in China that did not utilize organic or locally grown materials, noting that it was “popular with softcore environmentalists and fashionistas.”

Hindmarch seemed to acknowledge this criticism in the *New York Times* article, “Just the Thing to Carry Your Conscience In,” when she says,

> To create awareness you have to create scarcity by producing a limited edition. I hate the idea of making the environment trendy, but you need to make it cool and then it becomes a habit.

But how does one sustain this awareness? In a 2011 *New York Times* article, “In Eco-Jeans, The Green Becomes Harder to Spot,” the writer notes that just two years before, embracing ‘green’ was “red-hot in the fashion industry.” Jeans’ designers made concerted efforts to include organic cotton, an important step forward given that conventional cotton is an incredible global pollutant and consumes 25 percent of the world’s chemical pesticides and fertilizers. And yet by 2011 the movement had diminished, in large part due to the global recession (which made it difficult for small, eco-fashion lines to survive), but also because eco-fashion was no longer ‘trendy.’ Kate McGregor, owner of Kaight, notes in the article that when it comes to fashion marketing, you “have to be careful not to push the concept.”

4 (Katya, 2007)

5 (Burros, 2007)

6 (Zissu, 2011)

7 (Sustainable Cotton Project, as cited in Zissu, 2011)

8 (Zissu, 2011)
Hindmarch’s campaign, whose entire goal was to blatantly market the green movement through fashion.

‘Eco-fashion’ had thus been re-articulated, from a fashionable way to join the mainstream Green movement, to an unfashionable concept with connotations of hippies and patchouli.

This chapter will focus on the dilemma of eco-fashion as an intervention of one of the greatest pollutants in the world, the fashion industry. It will examine the discursive technologies that both enable and constrain sustainability practices, including organizers’ efforts to create a more sustainable industry, in ways that meaningfully necessitates change not just at the individual level but also at the societal one. It will ask how these technologies are employed to avoid co-option by neoliberal institutions, and how those advocating for fashion sustainability – a wide variety of actors who include environmental activists, ‘eco-fashion’ designers, organic cotton farmers, ‘DIY’ creatives, sustainable fashion websites and education labs – sustain public interest in the issue while maintaining authentic, transparent sustainability commitments that defy corporate ‘greenwashing.’ It will ultimately interrogate eco fashion as a site where divergent discourses of sustainability and accessibility are negotiated, ethically or not.

The chapter will start with an overview of the main issues around fashion sustainability and its environmental and toxic footprint. It will then turn to the varying discourses around how to make the fashion industry more ethical, including that of labeling and certification, ‘shop for a cause’ incentives, and grassroots advocacy. The chapter will eventually turn to H&M as a case study of a ‘fast fashion’ chain that has won both praise and criticism for its sustainability initiatives.
Part I: Eco-Fashion’s dilemma

No amount of renewables is going to make up for the fossil fuels or change the nature of the extraction, both of which are prerequisites for this way of life. Neither fossil fuels nor extracted substances will ever be sustainable; by definition, they will run out. Bringing a cloth shopping bag to the store, even if you walk there in your Global Warming Flip-Flops, will not stop the tar sands. But since these actions also won’t disrupt anyone’s life, they’re declared both realistic and successful.9

Forty years ago in the 1970s the environmental movement was gaining momentum. Landmark legislation was passed (such as the Environmental Protection Agency) and the first Earth Day was founded. However the movement’s recent failures—such as the shelving of a global warming bill by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid in 2010—have been attributed to the overreliance of lobbyists (and marketing instead of organizing) rather than the mobilization of grassroots, local activism. Theda Skocpol, a political science professor who has studied political movements and dismisses the notion that broad support can be mobilized solely through the media, argues instead for local, sustained political organizing that reaches “far beyond friendly Congressional offices, comfy board rooms, and posh retreats.”10

Similarly, Naomi Klein writes in her book on climate change, This Changes Everything, that ‘going green’ became more mainstream after the release of the Oscar-winning film An Inconvenient Truth. However, she notes that the energy around the issue seemed to be coming “from the top tier of society” and that there was “virtually no discernible movement” coming from the grassroots.11 Instead, the public was encouraged

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9 (McBay, Keith, & Jensen, 2011, 23)
10 (Lemann, 2013)
11 (Klein, 2014, 211)
to take part in small-scale ‘solutions’, such as petitioning, turning off the lights for an hour, or becoming an ‘empowered consumer.’ By encouraging citizens to take such frivolous actions, Klein argues, the green movement ultimately conveyed the message that climate change itself was a frivolous issue, not nearly as urgent as initially assumed. In other words, instead of creating spaces for effective intervention of the status quo, the green movement ultimately reinforced it with their ‘top-down’ approach.

It is for this reason that Joe Wainio argues in an article for Truthout that the climate change movement should ‘heed the lessons’ of North Carolina progressive activists who were protesting around a number of issues in the capital of Raleigh. Referred to as ‘Moral Mondays,’ the protests drew people from diverse backgrounds and a “multitude of issues” that they were invested in. This diverges sharply from the climate change movement, where there is a disconnect between deeply engaged activists committed to ending global warming and the many Americans who struggle to understand how a seemingly vague issue can affect the “material conditions” of their lives. Furthermore, the climate change movement has been led largely by white Americans who have often overlooked the importance of viewing environmentalism through an intersectional lens, perhaps accounting for why it has been difficult to engage the poor and people of color – who are most likely to be affected by environmental disasters.12

Thus, the climate change movement has struggled to develop spaces of intervention that take into account the multiplicity of subjectivities needed to re-articulate the status quo within the shifting grounds of neoliberal subjectivity. It is here that the

12 (Wainio, 2014)
theory of requisite variety is applicable, as it calls for a diversity of responses that is as complex as the problem itself. It also emphasizes the importance of listening to how people’s lives are affected by the problem (in this case, climate change) to gain a better understanding of the context and how to sufficiently respond given that context.\textsuperscript{13} Thus, failing to connect the data of climate change to people’s vivid experiences, and excluding certain segments of the population in dialogue, does not imbue environmental movements with the discursive agility needed to properly intervene in moments where power and the status quo can potentially be re-articulated.

Both the environmental and eco-fashion movements have had difficulty sustaining public interest and momentum. Like the environmental movement, those pushing for sustainable fashion have sometimes had difficulty translating their cause to a wider public. Fashion, after all, is an industry that is tied to modernity in that it emphasizes newness, trends, and consumption, which runs counter to the sustainable fashion mantra of buying less items that are of better quality. Their promotion of clothing that is ‘ethical’ yet too often expensive has also left them open to criticism for exclusivity. These divergent discourses of accessibility and sustainability seem to be in great conflict with each other. And yet, the sustainable fashion movement has a pivotal leveraging point: everyone wears clothes, and fashion, as a ‘technology of the self,’ plays a key role in constructing and shaping our identity. Unlike global warming, which we cannot ‘see’ and thus may be difficult to conceive of in terms of its environmental impact, the clothing we wear touches our bodies in the most intimate of ways. Thus eco-

\textsuperscript{13} (Weick, 1987)
fashion pioneer Marci Zaroff indeed has a point when she claimed in an interview that “fashion is the most powerful vehicle on the planet for transformation.”

It is also an industry that is extraordinarily toxic, not to mention one of the greatest polluters in the world. A few of the startling statistics on fashion’s environmental and health impacts that were included in my blog on the issue include the following:

- *A recent study of 20 name brands revealed that clothing companies like Calvin Klein, Levi’s and Zara, contain traces of hazardous, potentially cancer-causing chemicals;*

- *Cotton represents less than 3% of the world’s agriculture, but uses as much as 25% of the most harmful insecticides, and up to 10% of the most toxic pesticides to grow it;*

- *More than 8,000 toxic chemicals are used to turn raw materials into textiles, many of which are carcinogenic, corrosive or include biologically-modifying reagents;*

- *Producing one pair of jeans requires more than 1,800 gallons of water;*

- *80 billion garments are produced new every year, and the average U.S. citizen throws away 68 pounds of clothing per year, with 2.5 billion pounds of post-consumer textile waste ending up in our landfills annually;*

- *20 percent of the world’s industrial fresh water pollution comes from textile treatment & dyeing;*

- *More than one trillion kilowatt hours are used annually in the global textile industry, representing more than 10% of the world’s carbon footprint; and*

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14 (Catalysta, 2014)
• Every half hour, a cotton farmer in India is committing suicide by drinking the very pesticides that he uses on his crops.\textsuperscript{15}

Linda Firth, creative director of Eco Age Ltd, expands on Marci Zaroff’s point made above when she notes that fashion is a “full spectrum industry.” She continues:

It extends from the farmers that grow cotton to the women beading in ateliers, it encompasses millions of people from agriculture to the creative marketing and selling. It is also dependent on the animal kingdom and some of the most fragile ecosystems on earth. Therefore fashion touches on every great environmental theme: climate change, declining available resources, lost wilderness, flooding, through to the flipside of flooding - drought. And of course, all of these are interconnected.\textsuperscript{16}

And yet, the climate change movement has failed adequately to address the fashion industry’s devastating social and environmental footprint. This is an incredible oversight, not just because the fashion industry is one of the greatest pollutants in the world, but because fashion as an economic and cultural institution offers an abundance of resources by which those advocating for sustainability could draw from to develop tools for intervention.

Livia Firth mentions however, that we are on the “threshold of a new industry where ethics and glamour co-exist.”\textsuperscript{17} Indeed, the sustainable fashion movement seems to have undergone a resurgence of sorts, co-existing with a new collective consciousness that has emerged in the age of post-recession and social media mobilizing. Marci Zaroff notes in an interview that the stigma about sustainable fashion, voiced as late as 2011 in the \textit{New York Times} article cited previously (Zissu) now no longer is relevant. She says,

\textsuperscript{15} (Dawisha, 2012)

\textsuperscript{16} (Firth, 2014)

\textsuperscript{17} (Firth, 2014)
The first stigma would be that to adopt Eco-Fashion, one must **give up style or quality**. Similar to the early years of the organic food movement, when organic food was associated with granola, today, when people hear the term ‘organic or Eco-fashion,’ they often still conjure an image of boxy, frumpy, boring, beige, rough-to-the-hand wares. But just as organic & natural food is now a far cry from just brown rice, as witnessed by walking into any Whole Foods Market, *Eco-Fashion is no longer hippie, but instead, very hip!*\(^{18}\)

Of course, anyone who has read *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* knows that the organic food movement has been diluted in its own way. Making something ‘cool’ and mainstream can often make it more open to co-option, which Zaroff also notes in the interview, to be discussed later in the chapter.

The question taken up by many of these sustainability advocates then, seems to be reflected in Professor Lucy Orta’s piece, “Questioning Identity” when she notes, “I reflected on how we can harness the power that clothing exerts – through its extreme diversity and universality – in ways that can alter our daily actions or perhaps even change society.”\(^{19}\)

The ‘Green Movement’ as we know it has a long and complex history. When writer Thomas Malthus warned in his piece “An Essay on the Principle of Population” that a population explosion would create more famine and disease, it sent shockwaves throughout much of 18\(^{th}\) century Europe.\(^{20}\) This heightened awareness that the earth’s resources were limited was rooted in viewing nature through a utilitarian lens, but it wasn’t until Europe’s colonization of the Americas that writers began to see the inherit

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\(^{18}\) (Dawisha, Ethical Fashion: How to Navigate an Industry, 2012)

\(^{19}\) (Orta, 2012)

\(^{20}\) (Malthus, 1998)
beauty and value of the earth beyond its “usefulness to humans.”\textsuperscript{21} Referred to as the “transcendentalists” of the early 1800s, writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau cultivated awareness about the beauty of the natural world. This awareness unfortunately, was not sustained as the Industrial Revolution took off in full force. Efforts were made to preserve the country’s natural resources: the Yellowstone National Park and Sierra Club were created in 1872 and 1892, respectively. The 20\textsuperscript{th} century brought increased industrialization as well as a heightened level of concern for industrialization’s massive environmental footprint. The Environmental Protection Agency was created only during the Nixon presidency; and this was followed by other landmark pieces of legislation, such as the Clean Air and Water Acts, the Endangered Species Act, and the Federal Pesticides Act, to name a few. Of course, many of these safeguards were slowly dismantled or diluted during the Reagan administration in the 1980s, as organizers struggled to stay ahead of a strengthening neo-liberal governmentality. Still, as discussed before, a new environmental movement has been mobilizing around climate change, global warming, fracking, species extinction, etc. While the early conservation movement was rooted in spirituality and had religious undertones, the current movement is based in scientific data and empirical research. However, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, disseminating this data and research to the general public has been more difficult. A successful movement ultimately relies on the “vision, the passion and the commitment of the people who make up the green movement.”\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid

\textsuperscript{22} (Lallanilla)
And it is this lack of vision that the authors of *Deep Green Resistance* argue is stifling the environmental movement. They write,

> The word sustainable – the ‘Praise, Jesus!’ of the eco-earnest – serves as an example of the worst tendencies of the alternative culture. It’s a word that perfectly meshes corporate marketers’ carefully calculated upswell of green sentiment with the relentless denial of the privileged. It’s a word I can barely stand to use because it has been so exsanguinated by cheerleaders for a technotopic, consumer kingdom come. To doubt the vague promise now firmly embedded in the word—that we can have our cars, our corporations, our consumption, and our planet, too—is both treason, and heresy to the emotional well being of most progressives. But here’s the question: Do we want to feel better or do we want to be effective? Are we sentimentalists or are we warriors?\(^{23}\)

Criticizing the individualistic culture that promotes the tenant of “be the change you wish to see,” the authors argue for a return to a collective movement, one in which a group of “concerned, committed citizens” dismantles the current industrial economy by shifting cultural consciousness and power structures.\(^{24}\)

In that sense, the fashion industry, one of the greatest pollutants in the world, faces tremendous challenges in becoming more sustainable. The industry, after all, is rooted in individualist consumption. It is also considered by some to be an art form, and many in the industry – such as designers and bloggers – are hesitant to address the fact that it is also a major creator of waste, pollution, and exploitation. The global fashion industry, including apparel, textiles, accessories, footwear and luxury goods, contributes annually over $2.5 trillion to the global economy; and the fashion and textiles sector employs over 60 million people worldwide – approximately one percent of the world’s

\(^{23}\) (McBay, Keith, & Jensen, 2011, 25)

\(^{24}\) (McBay, Keith, & Jensen, 2011, 26)
Making the fashion industry sustainable thus has enormous potential to make the world more sustainable. But what exactly does that look like? How exactly does one go about ‘dismantling’ neoliberalism within the fashion industry? The Aral Sea, once the fourth largest inland sea, located in Central Asia, is now considered one of the world’s biggest environmental catastrophes. Drained to fifteen percent of its original size, its waters are being channeled into Uzbekistan’s enormous cotton industry, currently the fourth largest exporter in the world. Cotton is a hugely water intensive industry; a single-shirt consumes 2,000 litres and a single cotton bud uses 3.4 litres. It is also a labor-intensive one, and under Uzbekistan’s dictatorship students and teachers must take time off school to meet the cotton-picking quotas. The Chinese textile industry – a notoriously inefficient one – is the third worst water polluter out of the country’s 39 industries. When Fountain Set (Holdings) Ltd., the umbrella corporation for Nike, Reebok, Tommy Hilfiger and Abercrombie & Fitch, was exposed for dumping untreated wastewater with Chroma levels 19.5 times higher than the acceptable standard, they simply moved to another province in China. In 1987, over 40 tons of aldicarb, a deadly pesticide made of methyl isocyanate (MIC), exploded in Bhopal, India, killing thousands of people and injuring countless others. Yet the pesticide has been used in the production of America’s cotton for the last thirty years, until an agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency forced Bayer Crop Science (the United States’ sole manufacturer) to

25 (About Fashion Revolution, 2015)

26 (Hoskins, 2014, 92)

27 (Hoskins, 2014, 92)

28 (“Cleaning up the Fashion Industry, as cited in Hoskins, 2014, 92)
end worldwide distribution by 2017. According to the Pesticide Action Network North America, “It never should have been registered in the first place…. The system is designed to leave things like this on the market as long as possible.”29

These are all complex environmental disasters with no simple solution, and occur time and time again because the people in charge of these systems fail to equip themselves with solutions as complex as the problem.30 Furthermore, given that education of the masses is desperately needed to sustain any kind of movement, addressing fashion’s toxic and polluting footprint with vague concepts such as ‘sustainability’ are also likely to pose significant challenges in shifting public awareness and investment in this issue. Scot Case, director of Market Development for UL Environment, notes that sustainability is a “big, huge complex, interconnected subject” which consumers may only understand a slice of. He elaborates:

[Some] consumers understand things like recycled content, other consumers understand things like energy efficiency. Other consumers might be really focused on no GMOs [genetically modified organisms], or no adverse chemicals. Other consumers look to combine those kinds of issues in some way.31

He then adds that the same confusion is shared by manufacturers, who often end up speaking past each other in what he calls “eco-babble.” As Marci Zaroff put it in her interview with me:

One of the biggest challenges I’ve come across with the large retailers I have worked with is how disconnected their different departments are. The marketing team isn’t speaking with the product development or sourcing teams, who aren’t connected with the Sustainability Directors or the buyers. These compartmentalized disconnects result in a lack of transparency, opportunity or effective communication strategies, and

29 (Hoskins, 2014, 95)

30 (Perrow, 1984)

31 (Lee, 2014)
sometimes even result in tragedy, like at the recent factory fires in Pakistan and Bangladesh. For efforts to be truly sustainable for people, planet, profit, passion and purpose (“The five P’s”), companies must figure out how to plan, design, develop, source, manufacture and market with sustainable strategy and design models. The whole supply chain, from the farm and factory to the PR, has to be connected.\textsuperscript{32}

As long as a company’s ultimate goal is profit though, who will hold corporations accountable for being transparent and sustainable? And what exactly does sustainable mean to different actors? Is there a way to unify all of these different discourses on sustainability? Is the term ‘ethical fashion’ an oxymoron, given that it “churns out billions of items of clothing, sending new stock to shops up to 50 times a year?”\textsuperscript{33} As was discussed in chapter four, the discourse around ‘ethical’ fashion is a contested one, since it is so intertwined with the issue of morality. Rebecca Luke in her piece on marketing and the ethical consumer notes that moral behaviors derive from social norms, which can differ based on one’s personal influences in life. She writes that a culture shift can happen when

Marketing to the ever-growing demographic of ‘ethical’ or ‘ethically minded’ consumers concerned about sustainability should include developing initiatives to ‘promote behavior change’ that ‘are often most effective when they are carried out at the community level and involved direct contact with people’ (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith 1999). As stylemakers, we can use multimedia, entertainment, fashion and design as a way to inspire consumers to make ethical choices.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{32} (Dawisha, Ethical Fashion: How to Navigate an Industry, 2012)

\textsuperscript{33} (Hoskins, 2014, 104)

\textsuperscript{34} (Luke, 2008, 79)
This discourse fails to complicate class, and by doing so, provides a narrow vision of what constitutes ‘ethical’ behavior. Tansy Hoskins offers a competing discourse when she argues that

Fast-fashion is not pro-working class; it must be critiqued as a product of corporations’ drive for profit, not as the fault of the poor.\(^{35}\)

While fashion sustainability advocates and enthusiasts are perhaps not making that exact argument, by targeting consumers at price points that may be out of certain people’s reach, are they not implying that consuming ‘ethically’ is only for the privileged? Is this discourse inherently elitist? Later in the chapter we will dissect the issues around “shopping for a cause” as it relates to ‘eco-fashion’ and also examine whether the seemingly divergent discourses of sustainability and accessibility can be negotiated. First though, this chapter will turn to the history of sustainable fashion, its most important issues, as well as its challenges.

**III. Fashion Sustainability History: The struggle for effective intervention**

Linda Welters, in her piece, “The Fashion of Sustainability,” locates certain movements and trends in fashion history that help to explain the current push for fashion sustainability. In the early preindustrial era (1600-1860), she argues, sustainability was a “way of life.”\(^{36}\) Fabrics took a long time to produce and were labor-intensive. Fibers, the raw materials from which textiles are based, only came from nature and thus required many steps to go from a plant to a fine linen fabric. Given that textile production was a laborious affair, and fibers such as cotton were domestically produced (India) and thus

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\(^{35}\) (Hoskins, 2014, 101)

\(^{36}\) (Welters, 2008, 8)
were expensive to import, only the aristocracy and gentry could “afford beautiful fabrics and trimmings.”³⁷ Poorer people in Europe and North America, the “common folk” who labored in the farms and homes, had limited closets and usually owned just a few clothes, made of plain, coarsely-made fabrics. Clothes were valuable and even rags were sold at local markets through traveling peddlers. This attitude towards clothing was not confined to the poor; in fact, Welters notes, “even the wealthy saved fabrics, remodeled clothes, and sold unwanted items in the secondhand market.”³⁸ Although fashion is associated with change, during this period it was very unusual to find an eighteenth century dress that did not have some form of alteration.³⁹ It was the practice of “remodeling of existing clothing, rather than buying new”⁴⁰ that was prevalent, and has since become the mantra of the current-day sustainability movement. Furthermore, there was much care and concern not just around how clothing was made, but how it was cared for after it was worn. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries laundering clothing was extraordinarily labor-intensive, and studies of laundry processes during that time revealed that some clothing was actually made in a way so that it could be “taken apart and cleaned with greater ease.”⁴¹ It was this labor-intense process of making and washing clothing that cultivated a natural tendency towards sustainability. By contrast, washing our clothes today is a simple, automated process that makes it all too easy to forget the environmental

³⁷ (Welters, 2008, 11)
³⁸ (Welters, 2008, 13)
³⁹ (Farley Gordon & Hill, 2015, 33)
⁴⁰ Ibid.
⁴¹ (Farley Gordon & Hill, 2015, 39)
footprint, which is enormous. According to Chris Jardine, who works at the environmental Change Institute, the average washing machine uses 270 kWh of electricity per year, and the average tumble-dryer 365 kWh – roughly 10% of an average household’s electricity consumption.\footnote{Jardine, 2013, 60} His suggestions to create more sustainable washing processes include drying garments outside on a washing line, while Clare Brass of the organization SEED (Social and Environmental Enterprise + Design) proposes a “pay per wash” system that would charge householders with the individual washes.\footnote{Brass, 2013, 61} Brass hopes that her latter initiative could prompt consumers to ask basic questions such as ‘Is the machine full?’ and ‘Do my clothes really need washing at all?’” Thus the contemporary sustainability fashion movement’s proposals to create a ‘greener’ industry – using drying processes that would be more labor and time intensive, encouraging individual consideration into the environmental impact of laundering – is re-articulating a more sustainable future by mirroring a return to the past.

While it is true that this ‘distance’ between people and the processes that make the very fiber covering their bodies really established itself during the twentieth century, it was during the second half of the eighteenth century that the processes of industrialization began to ‘speed up.’ There were several devices that were invented during this time to process fiber into fabric: these included the flying shuttle (1733), which quickened the weaving of cloth; the spinning jenny (1767); the power loom (1780s) that wove cloth using water-powered mill wheels; a machine that ginned cotton (1790s); and the first engraved cylinders to print cloth (1790s). These inventions laid the
groundwork for the industrial production of textiles, which in turn was instrumental in launching the Industrial Revolution. In fact, it was Richard Arkwright, who invented the water-powered spinning frame in 1769, who was credited as the “father of the Industrial Revolution.”

By the 19th century, the mechanization of cotton both in Europe and North America paved the way for an increase in supply and fall in price. At the same time, the inexpensive fashion periodical became popular, accelerating change in the fashion industry. With greater access to factory-made, inexpensive cloth, dressmakers and tailors could quickly translate the fashion laid out in these magazines into stylish clothing for clients. It was during this time that closets were included in the home to accommodate the need for growing wardrobes. According to Welters, the concern for sustainability during early industrialization was not of paramount concern; rivers and streams were often polluted by dyes and chemicals, markedly different from today where mills remove these pollutants before discharging them into the environment.

To be clear, it was textile, not apparel, production that was mechanized in the first half of the nineteenth century. Sewing was still done by hand, often in small apparel factories, and sold through retail stores and through mail order catalogues. It wasn’t until the invention of the sewing machine in 1846, by Elias Howe, that apparel production could be appropriately industrialized. That, along with the “birth of the couture system, changes in the social system, and the growth of the ready-to-wear industry,” paved the

44 (Wilson, 1979 as cited in Welters, 2008, 12)

45 (Welters, 2008, 13)

46 (Welters, 2008, 14)
way for the issues in the industry—such as exploitative labor conditions, excessive waste, and pollution—that we are dealing with today.

By the mid-nineteenth century all types of textiles, including the most expensive ones such as silk, laces, and velvets, were made by machine. William Perkin’s discovery of the color ‘mauve’ in dying ushered in the use of synthetic dyes, and people delighted in wearing clothes that featured bright pinks, purples, oranges, and blues. However, the public had little knowledge of the scientific processes behind the “synthesizing of color from coal tar.” Few knew that many of the green dyes employed in the mid-nineteenth century contained the poison arsenic, and by the turn of the century it was beginning to be understood that the illnesses of workers in aniline dye factories could be connected to carcinogenic components of chemical dyes. While dyes like azo have been shown to have toxic properties as they chemically decompose, and are currently regulated, they still hold an appeal for producers because of their efficiency and color fastness. Furthermore, these dyes and other industrial wastes were not just poisoning humans, but the environment as well. Concerns were raised by environmental advocates around the dyes and industrial wastes dumped into the waterway systems, prompting the United States Environmental Protection Agency to establish regulatory standards for waste disposal in the textile and apparel industries during the 1970s. Still, as neoliberal practices and processes strengthened in the 1980s, corporations seeking to make their

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47 (Farley Gordon & Hill, 2015, 88)
48 (Farley Gordon & Hill, 2015, 91)
49 (Farley Gordon & Hill, 2015, 92)
clothing in factories where there are less stringent environmental controls have simply
outsourced their production to countries with weak regulation and enforcement, much
like they have done to avoid higher labor costs. To address this issue, sustainability
advocates have promoted several ‘best practices.’ For example, better oversight and
management of the dying process has been touted as a way to improve the company’s
bottom line, since dealing with the end stage waste can be costly. Second, the process of
‘closing the loop,’ which involves the recovery and reuse of waste by sending it back into
the production cycle, has been “prized and promoted” since the 1930s. Sustainability
advocates, while relying on contemporary scientific research, have also looked to the past
for present solutions.\footnote{Farley Gordon & Hill, 2015, 93} Most notably, many in the sustainability movement have
promoted the return back to naturally derived dyes, as well as dying methods used before
the Industrial Revolution. This chapter will describe the efficacy of these interventions in
more detail later.

Manufactured, ‘artificial’ fabrics were also introduced into the market from the
late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. Rayon, made from
regenerated cellulose to feel like artificial silk, took off in the women’s apparel
marketplace when it was produced commercially in 1891. Nylon was patented in 1939,
followed by polyester in 1941. These new synthetic fibers came from nonrenewable
resources – fossil fuels.\footnote{Welters, 2008, 19} They became so widely-used that by 1968 they had surpassed
in popularity the use of natural fibers, including cotton.\footnote{Farley Gordon & Hill, 2015, 80} Polyester, made from
petroleum, accounted for more than 50 percent of fiber production in 2011. The environmental impact of polyester can be summed up as such:

In addition to being a non-renewable resource, the location and extraction of petroleum oil is incredibly taxing on environment. It must also be transported to nations that are heavily oil-reliant. Its production is energy-intensive, with dyeing, in particular, requiring high temperatures. The processing of petrochemicals also results in large quantities of hazardous waste, the emissions of which can be irreversibly damaging to air, soil and water. More environmentally responsible processing procedures would, however, be incredibly expensive, driving material costs upward by a considerable amount.  

We will turn to the debates surrounding non-renewable and renewable resources, and how environmental advocates are advocating for the latter, later in the chapter.  

Haute Couture is often considered an elitist form of fashion, given that its high prices excludes many from access. It was the rise of the couture system, however, that accelerated the greater demand for ready-to-wear fashion. When Charles Frederick Worth’s opened his dressmaking shop in Paris in 1857, this “shifted the design function to the dressmaker,” who at that time was ensured a healthy client base in both Paris and London due to the wealth created by the Industrial Revolution. As mentioned in chapter two, a rising middle class was emerging, who aspired to climb up the social strata in part by wearing fashionable clothing. This desire for the latest fashions was reinforced by the proliferation of women’s magazines, which encouraged women to use their own sewing skills to copy the styles they saw featured in the glossy pages. Ready-made clothing became more widespread during the second half of the nineteenth century, and even

\[53\text{ Ibid, 80-81}\]

\[54\text{ (Welters, 2008, 14)}\]
though it was often of poorer quality if made in factories, its democratic nature that allowed access to stylish fashions to those who previously could not afford them made them appealing nonetheless. By the end of the nineteenth century, the shirtwaist blouse – a ‘separate’ that could be “easily mixed and match with other items in a woman’s wardrobe – became the first widely mass-produced garment for women.\(^{55}\) When French designer Paul Poiret introduced his loose-fitting dresses and ‘balloon pants’ around 1908, women’s ready-to-wear expanded widely due to the ease with which these simple designs could be copied.\(^{56}\) Paris had been solidified as the fashion capital of the world, and American apparel manufactures copied – both legally and illegally – styles from Parisian designers while manufacturing them in the United States for a fraction of the price of the original designs. By then, America was experiencing a ‘rapid leap forward’ as a producer of manufactured clothing, due to factors such as increasing immigration and the standardization of menswear that emerged from the production of military uniforms during the Civil War. Most notably though, the invention of the sewing machine and greater availability of lower cost textiles helped pave the way for American industrialization.\(^{57}\)

The reliance on American production was heightened during World War II, when access to Paris’ fashion scene was no longer feasible. Non-Parisian labels emerged, and Americans were increasingly encouraged to ration their resources, and even send them to the front lines. Many women would forgo using nylon for their stockings and instead

\(^{55}\) (Farley Gordon & Hill, 2015, 40)

\(^{56}\) (Welters, 2008, 17)

\(^{57}\) (Welters, 2008, 16)
donated them to be used as parachutes, for example. A rising social consciousness stemming from this period ultimately influenced Americans’ consumption patterns, thereby in effect controlling production of clothing. After the war, the 1950s ushered in a decade “rife with consumption and change,” and Paris once again rose to prominence as the fashion epicenter. Most notably, Christian Dior’s 1947 “New Look” challenged the austere styles worn by women during the war years, ushering in the demand for more feminine looks exemplified by his hourglass silhouette and long, full skirts.\(^{58}\) A 1948 survey by the women’s Home Companion revealed that women had on average bought three dresses inspired by the “New Look,” indicating that Dior’s collection had created a desire and perhaps even “need” for women to replace their wardrobes they had adopted during the war. At the same time, the survey also indicated that women were continuing to be resourceful, as nine out of ten readers had altered their garments themselves to “conform to the fashionable New Look.”\(^ {59}\)

The 1960s, often referred to as the decade that “revolutionized” the fashion industry, was an era of swift change influenced by political and social unrest. This era of change and ‘movement’ was no better reflected than when the more classic stylings of the 1950s and early 1960s was replaced by “throwaway” fashion, no better epitomized than in the ‘paper dress’ that was made from nonwoven fibers and that was intended to be thrown away after one or two wears.\(^ {60}\) New synthetic fibers such as spandex, saran, vinyl, polyethylene and polypropylene “emerged with rapidity”, and were incorporated

\(^{58}\) (Farley Gordon & Hill, 2015, 44)

\(^{59}\) (Farley Gordon & Hill, 2015, 46)

\(^{60}\) (Farley Gordon & Hill, 2015, 46)
into the sexy new miniskirts and mini dresses, as well as coats, shoes, boots and hats. During the 1970s and 1980s the drive to lower prices as a result of the rising influence of neoliberal capitalism resulted in the outsourcing of the textile industry, in part to evade more expensive environmental legislation.61 The industrialization of the fiber, textile, and apparel industry led to a ‘binary’ view of production and consumption; the former became conceptualized as the process of “making goods for the purpose of profit” while the latter involved “the ‘using up’ of products or goods.”62 During the pre-industrial period, production and consumption were more connected, as both took place in the home or village. Individuals and families would make their own clothes by spinning their own yarn, weaving or knitting fabrics, and sewing them into garments. Garments were worn and then either cut into rags for cleaning, upcycled into a quilt or a rug, or given away to friends, family and servants.63 The disconnect between production and consumption was of course heightened considerably with the outsourcing of labor to factories abroad, as people could not longer ‘see’ where and how their clothing was made. People also began to see themselves more as consumers than producers, and this was largely due to a commercial market that treated people as potential profit for advertisers. As Susan Kaiser put it,

Part of the disconnect between production and consumption stems from the fact that consumers often buy more than they actually need. Advertising and cultural processes create what Williams (1980) described as a magical system through which clothing consumption becomes a process of human desires. These processes create a disconnect between

61 (Welters, 2008, 26)
62 (Kaiser, 2008, 144)
63 (Kaiser, 2008, 144)
the material side of production, resource use and textile and clothing properties; and a magical world based on a sense of promise, pleasure, and power. ²⁴

Even though the pace of consumption accelerated in the late 1960s, a renewed anti-fashion and sustainability movement was emerging to challenge fashion’s disciplinary power. The counter-culture youth movements of the 1960s in the West embraced a more ‘natural’ fashion ethic in which both women and men wore their hair long and scoured for clothes in secondhand stores. This coincided with the publication of Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring in 1962, which warned of the damage done to the environment as a result of increased pesticide use. The book brought increased attention to the environmental impact of the textile industry; it focused on the large amounts of pesticides and fertilizers used by cotton growers to achieve greater crop yields, as well as the chemicals discharged by textile manufacturers into local rivers and streams. The photograph of the earth taken in 1968 by the Apollo 8 crew, is credited by nature photograph Galen Rowell as “the most influential environmental photo taken.” ²⁵ The powerful image, which depicted an almost vulnerable earth alone in a massive orbit, demonstrated the importance of taking care of the planet and helped to fuel a growing environmental consciousness.

It is in this way that fashion once again proves to be an appealing ‘technology of the self,’ in that people employ it to create new subjectivities shaped by changing forms of governance and power. The environmental movement and counterculture groups had greatly impacted and influenced fashion by 1970, re-articulating dominant discourses of

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²⁴ (Kaiser, 2008, 145)

²⁵ (That Photograph, 1999)
trend-based, ‘throwaway’ consumption. Dress became far more casual as consumers adopted a more natural sartorial style, preferring earthy color palettes and non-synthetic fibers. Although fibers like polyester and rayon had been all the rage during the 1960s and early 1970s, the conservation movement during the 1970s ushered in a growing concern over the environmental impact of these fabrics and to what extent they depleted resources. Although cotton was a renewable fiber, proponents of synthetics argued that fibers like polyester were more durable and thus did not need to be replaced as often. That said, double-knitted polyester was declining in popularity by the end of the decade, due to its ‘plastic appearance.’ Responding to these debates, synthetic fiber manufacturers began to modify their fibers to make them more environmentally friendly. For example, in the 1990s Lyocell was produced as the new version of rayon, in which the solvent used was “more benign and easily recovered.”

And yet, as mentioned above, the rising neoliberal climate that produced a highly competitive global marketplace resulted in the outsourcing of textile productions to poorer countries in Asia and the Caribbean, making it more difficult for counterculture movements to find space for intervention. The lower labor costs effectively reduced the price of apparel to the point where individuals and families could afford far more clothes than they needed. Shopping indeed became a “national pastime” as malls and outlet stores proliferated. Consumers now had an overabundance of clothing, and the purging of closets into yard, church, and thrift sales became a popular pastime in itself. Used and vintage clothing rose in popularity in the 1980s, more for sartorial purposes however, than conservationist ones. The punk movement endorsed the mixing of “old clothes with

66 (Welters, 2008, 23)
new, edgy garments.” Even glamorous Hollywood stars began to wear vintage dresses on the red carpet during the 1990s to distinguish themselves from their peers. The supply of secondhand clothes became so great that it forced used-clothing chains like Goodwill and The Salvation Army to ship the excess out to “third-world” countries, especially those in Africa. This practice proved to be quite controversial, as indigenous textile and apparel industries suffered as a result.

As the nineties ushered in a new collective consciousness for labor exploitation abroad, it once again saw a rise in environmentalism. Organic cotton and hemp, both of which are grown without fertilizers, received attention. Companies began researching into whether renewable raw materials, such as soybeans and corn, could be used for fiber, and the company Wellman Inc. was successful in recycling PET polyester soda bottles for that purpose. Still, these initiatives were in the beginning stages, and fibers like organic cotton did not really catch on with consumers due to its higher prices. The discourses of sustainability and accessibility were immediately at odds, foreshadowing decades of debate around how to negotiate both within a strengthening neoliberal governmentality.

The previous chapter documented the rise of large multi-million dollar corporations in the nineties, resulting in a global marketplace that created a “race to the bottom” in labor costs and “speed to market” for consumer demand for lower prices. This cultivated an environment where “fast fashion,” the buying of new, inexpensive

67 (Welters, 2008, 24)

68 Ibid.

69 (Welters, 2008, 25)
clothes every couple of weeks, flourished. Fast fashion has had disastrous effects for the environment; Kaiser cites a report produced by Cambridge University that found that “fast clothes” has significantly contributed to the carbon emissions worsening global warming.\textsuperscript{70} Furthermore, as Elizabeth Cline notes in her book on fast fashion, Oerlikon’s 2009-2010 Fiber report noted that world fiber use has increased from 10 million tons in 1950 to 82 million today.\textsuperscript{71} The natural resources needed for fiber production currently require 145 million tons of coal and approximately 1.5 trillion to 2 trillion gallons of water.\textsuperscript{72} And currently, Americans throw away 68 pounds (12.7 million tons) of textiles per person every year, of which 1.6 million could have been recycled or reused, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.\textsuperscript{73}

Sustainability was indeed a central, natural tenant of people’s lives before the Industrial Revolution. Since then, environmental standards have often been pushed to the side for the sake of profit. While the last thirty years has seen a growing awareness of environmental issues in the textile and apparel industry, there has also been a reassertion of hegemony in the form of neoliberal capitalism. The desire to go “green” has clashed with the desire for more. This has led to different, if somewhat competing, discourses and strategies by various actors on how to create a more sustainable future. It is these discourses that we will turn to next.

\textsuperscript{70} (Kaiser, 2008, 146)

\textsuperscript{71} (Cline, 2012, 125)

\textsuperscript{72} (Cline, 2012, 125)

\textsuperscript{73} (Hawley, 2008)
IV. Debate over Fiber: A site of discursive struggle over sustainability practices

It was during the hippie movement of the 1970s, which embraced anti-establishment values and promoted a ‘return to nature,’ that young people largely rejected the synthetic fibers such as polyester, nylon, and acrylic that had proliferated for the previous two decades. Instead, they largely wore fibers like cotton due to its perceived ‘natural roots,’ and as the American T-shirt surged in popularity, so did the global demand for cotton fiber.74 Today, the fashion industry continues to promote natural fibers (those produced by plants and animals) as superior to manufactured ones, and cotton commercials touting the fiber as “the fabric of our lives” depict children cuddling in its soft and seemingly innocuous folds. Indeed, synthetic fibers have been noted for their potentially toxic health effects and environmental impact: polyester emits phytoestrogens that act as endocrine disruptors, nylon production carries and emits formaldehyde and off-gas greenhouse gases like nitrous oxide, and the production of viscose and traditional rayon uses carbon disulphide in its chemically exhaustive process.75 However, as Elizabeth Cline put it:

This massive pollution created by the textile industry can’t be pegged on a single type of fiber. Each fabric has its own complex and hefty ecological footprint. Environmental reporter Stan Cox has noted that sheep farmed for wool can cause soil erosion, water pollution, and biodiversity loss; leather tanning involves toxic heavy metals; all man-made fiber production emits greenhouse gasses and pollutes water; and the U.S. cotton crop demands 22 billion pounds of weed killer per year. Most fiber is bleached or dyed and treated in toxic chemical baths to make it brighter, softer, more fade-resistance and waterproof, less prone to wrinkles, and

74 (Baugh, 2008, 327)

75 (Eagan, 2014, 40)
any other number of qualities that we demand of modern clothing. Then it has to be dried under heat lamps – a huge energy suck.\textsuperscript{76}

Indeed, a damning report by Greenpeace in 2012 titled “Toxic Threads: the Big Fashion Stitch-Up” found that twenty popular clothing brands were implicated in the making of clothes that had hazardous chemicals such as nonylphenol ethoxylates (NPEs) and azo dyes, which can break down into cancer-causing amines. The report identified cotton as a fiber that uses up “large quantities of water and chemicals such as pesticides.”\textsuperscript{77} Eco-fashion pioneer Marci Zaroff stated in her interview with me:

Conventional cotton is one of the world’s leading sources of air and water pollution! Even though conventional cotton represents less than 3% of the world’s agriculture, it uses as much as 25% of the most harmful insecticides, and up to 10% of the most toxic pesticides to grow it! It is also incredibly wasteful in the amount of water that it uses—100 gallons to make one pound, and almost 3% of the world’s yearly water usage. In fact, not only does it take 700 gallons of fresh water to make just one cotton T-shirt, but also in 2009, the world used three trillion gallons of fresh water to produce 60 billion kilograms of cotton fabric. Furthermore, other harsh chemicals, such as chlorine bleaches and formaldehyde, are used in conventional cotton production processes.\textsuperscript{78}

Zaroff then noted,

Sixty percent of a cotton plant ends up going into the food chain—for oils, for bread products. If you read the back of many packaged products on the market today, they will have cottonseed oil as an ingredient. As I started to learn about the connection between food and fiber and the harmful chemicals used at all stages of the textile industry, I wanted to pull the curtain back, shift the paradigm, and offer consumers more sustainable choices. I was disillusioned when I discovered that the manufacturing processes of conventional textiles are extraordinarily toxic.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{76} (Cline, 2012, 125)

\textsuperscript{77} (International, 2012, 33)

\textsuperscript{78} (Dawisha, Are Our Clothes Toxic? Marci Zaroff, Eco-Fashion Pioneer, Weighs In, 2012)

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
Zaroff expresses a desire shared by many advocates, to demand transparency and “peel back” the marketing façade of an industry that all too often de-emphasizes the point of production in favor of enticing marketing. In another interview, she exposes, passionately, how the use of pesticides is fueling the “pesticide treadmill” that keeps farmers, especially those in poorer countries like India, in a cycle of dependence, poverty and debt. She describes this cycle as thus:

Just as germs infest on people who are weaker, when plants are sprayed with chemicals, they also get weaker. And then the soil weakens, and the eco-system isn’t building a healthy plant. So this ultimately results in less yield for the farmer. These bugs build resistance to these pesticides, and the farmers have to buy stronger and more expensive pesticides, which they can’t afford, so they have to leverage their farms to the banks. Then, as the cycle perpetuates and continues, the soil gets depleted & destroyed, the bugs get out of control, and the farmers can no longer sustain their livelihoods. Stuck in tremendous debt, many farmers are committing suicide with the very pesticides that they used on their plants. Every half an hour in India, a farmer is committing suicide.\(^{80}\)

She adds that there is widespread misperception over the use of GMO (genetically modified organisms) cotton, which accounts for 90% of the world’s cotton supply. For a cottonseed to be genetically modified, the natural bacteria Bacillus thuringiensis (B+) is injected to kill off pests, particularly bollworms.\(^{81}\) Although genetically modified crops are perceived to be decreasing pesticide use for farmers, Zaroff counters that this decline is an “artificial” and short term. She notes that there in an increase in pesticide use over the long term, due to genetic resistance and falling crop yields. She targets Monsanto as a corporation that has a huge monopoly on cotton production, giving it the “power to

\(^{80}\) (Dawisha, Listen Girlfriends!, 2012)

\(^{81}\) (Rivoli, 2009, 44)
dramatically raise” GMO cotton seed and pesticide prices. She firmly states that the “GMO paradigm is not sustainable” for farmers, and that they are “at the mercy” of this system. Zaroff’s strong advocacy language directly aims at a corporate hegemony that profits off of the vulnerable in a competitive neoliberal global marketplace, placing herself firmly on the side of the marginalized farmer.

This perspective contrasts with that of many American farmers, particularly those in Texas who dominate the cotton industry. As Pietra Rivoli put it in the book Travels of a T-Shirt, the price premiums and restrictions set by Monsanto and Tech have been “a small price to pay” given that the incomes of these agro-industrial corporations have most likely increased by at least $1 billion, due to GM (Genetically Modified) technology that has produced higher yields and lower costs. There is indeed reason to believe that scientists who produced the research advocating for GM had a conflict of interest: the only definitive study about the environmental and economic impacts of GM cotton in several countries was funded by Monsanto. Not surprisingly, the study concluded that GM cotton had been a “boon” for every country studied. Rivoli expresses her desire to see the research and evaluation “spread around a bit more,” reinforcing Zaroff’s criticism of Monsanto’s hegemony. Furthermore the research on GM technology has shown mixed results in the Global South, due to the fact that cotton-growing regions have distinct ecologies of weeds and pests. Thus simply exporting agricultural resistance strategies that are effective in the U.S. will not work if the farmers do not have the

82 (Dawisha, Listen Girlfriends!, 2012)

83 (Rivoli, 2009, 45)

84 (Rivoli, 2009, 47)
capacity to support such a system. Rivoli perfectly captures the issue of who wins in the global marketplace when she paints a heartbreaking picture of the hundreds of Indian farmers who committed suicide by drinking their own pesticides. As she put it, “All of these cheap and plentiful people, working all day in the Andra Pradesh sun, just couldn’t squish the worms quickly enough. They never had a chance against Nelson Reinsch, the USDA, and Texas Tech.”

Here she is referencing the dominance of the American cotton market, in that U.S. cotton makes up 40 percent of the world’s exports thanks to generous federal subsidies and innovative technology (Reinsch is a cotton farmer based in Texas). As has been revealed in previous chapters, technologies at various historical moments (such as the Industrial revolution) have promised progress in the fashion industry at the expense of workers’ laboring conditions. Similarly, these technologies have also been employed in the textile and cotton industry to reinforce existing power structures within the neoliberal global economy. The debate over cotton reveals how the meanings around these fibers (and sustainability more generally) have been re-articulated often. For example, although cotton during the 1970s represented the ‘back to nature’ movement among sustainability advocates, it is now a symbol of environmental degradation and farmer exploitation. If environmental advocates have traditionally struggled to intervene in an industry that is one of the greatest global pollutants, it is no wonder that they are finding it difficult now to translate their message to the masses.

To that end, sustainable textile advocates like Zaroff and Eric Henry promote the use of fibers such as hemp and organic cotton as appealing interventions. Although hemp is renowned as being a wonderful fiber known for its durability and sustainability,

85 (Rivoli, 2009, 73)
fashion designers have been reluctant to incorporate it into their designs because it lacks the smoothness of other fibers such as silk. Eric Henry, founder of the North Carolina-based TS Designs and a huge proponent of industrial hemp, spoke to the importance of designers adopting flexible ways of employing the fiber – such as blending it with other fibers. Reiterating his mantra that “life is a journey, not a destination,” he emphasized the importance of moving forward slowly with sustainability to ensure that one “gets it right.”

In this way, Henry is paving the way for a more sustainable future by learning from the past, in which failed interventions such as ‘cotton,’ once touted as the gold standard of ‘natural fibers,’ have made it difficult to outpace corporate co-option.

Organic cotton also draws much enthusiasm without sustainability circles, as it doesn’t rely on GMO seeds and has a less environmentally harmful footprint. The water pollution impact from organic cotton is 98% less than non-organic cotton production, and it produces 94% less greenhouse gas emissions. This is in large part due to the fact that most cotton is irrigated – which drains lakes and rivers, groundwater, and encroaches on ecosystems, wildlife and water availability. Furthermore, the artificial fertilizers and pesticides that are used in non-organic cotton production are frequently dumped in rivers and groundwater stores, polluting these fragile ecosystems. Since 80% of organic cotton production is rain-fed rather than irrigated, groundwater stores are preserved and water pollution is greatly reduced. Zaroff explains that “in order to have organic food crops,

86 (Henry, 2016)

87 (Dawisha, Are Our Clothes Toxic? Marci Zaroff, Eco-Fashion Pioneer, Weighs In, 2012)

88 (Torres, 2011)
you have to nurture and build the soil, versus conventional agriculture where you are
depleting and destroying the soil via poisonous sprays and monocropping, which is when
you grow a single crop year after year on the same land.” The use of the words “nurture
and build” reflects the “back to nature” tenant of organic cotton farmers and their
advocates.

This tenant is in sharp contrast to the one that promotes fixing environmental
problems caused by scientific “advances” with even more scientific advances. There is,
quite simply, a “philosophical divide” regarding how to move forward on this issue.

Michael Flanagan, CEO of the consultancy firm Clothesource, bluntly states,

> Europe must scrape its superstitious and unfounded ban on genetically
> modified (GM) crops. GM technology can help us develop cotton that
> needs less water, less land and less use of pesticides. The sustainability
> movement must stop trying to recreate medieval subsistence farming and
> encourage practices that help higher yields. It must discourage practices
> such as organic cotton that encourage deforestation and water depletion.\(^9\)

Flanagan works with companies such as the Gap and The Limited, hardly renowned for
their sustainability efforts. Still, his words echo that of many farmers and scientists, who
envision a future where a genetically engineered seed can survive, even flourish, without
chemical fertilizers. They view this “back to nature” mantra as looking backwards, not
forward. However, as Slack and Wise wrote in their book on technology, the notion of
technological advancements as part and parcel of “progress” is often uncritically touted.\(^9\)

As I wrote in a blog piece on the iPhone5,

> Technology has always connoted progress and development in the West.
> Because technology isn’t available to everybody, those who do not have

\(^9\) (Flanagan, 2012)

\(^9\) (Daryl Slack & Wise, 2005)
access to it are often viewed as ‘backwards,’ as ‘behind,’ as ‘less-developed,’ as ‘Third-World.’ For many, technology is a word that refers to the inaccessible, the things they would like to have but cannot afford. It allows those in the West to establish meanings of progress for the world, and to view poorer countries as less capable.91

V. Labeling/Certification: the fight for transparency and accountability

An ever growing awareness of green and sustainability issues has led to a proliferation of certifications and labels as a way to assuage confusion over sustainability standards. There is certainly no dearth of sustainability labels: “green,” “ethical,” fairtrade,” “natural,” “organic,” “sustainable,” “eco,” “zero-waste,” “upcycled,” and “handmade” are just a few of the labels surrounding the concept of “sustainable fashion.”

As mentioned previously in this chapter, these various labels can be extremely confusing for consumers, not least because consumers may understand some aspects of sustainability and not others. Consumer advocacy around labeling has a long history in the United States, and a National Consumers’ League had existed since 1899. The “Prosanis” label, created by the Joint Board of Sanitary Control and the ILGWU, was developed to mark certain goods as being made without child labor. It was also marketed as a means by which a consumer was guaranteed that their product was made in conditions in which tuberculosis, rampant during that time period, would not be transmitted from worker to consumer.92 This understanding that textiles could impact human health reflects a cornerstone of the modern sustainability movement, which emphasizes how “ethical” clothing is good for the environment and human bodies. Consumer awareness was thus articulated as a source of “empowerment” against

91 (Dawisha, The iPhone 5 and the Latest Technology: Why We Consume at the Expense of Others, 2012)

92 (Farley Gordon & Hill, 2015, 126-127)
sweatshops, and labeling initiatives were championed by figures such as Eleanor Roosevelt.\footnote{Farley Gordon & Hill, 2015, 127}

Indeed, certification and labeling are touted by leaders in the industry as the best way to bring much-needed transparency to the issue. Scot Case, director of Market Development for UL Environment, believes validation and sustainable standards are necessary, “because once you have things like environmental standards and verification protocols that provide clarity in the space, then you can actually have effective communication.”\footnote{Lee, 2014} He notes that UL Environment’s label, ECOLOGO, is meant to address different sustainability initiatives by creating a “multi-attribute environmental standard” that addresses needs “across multiple industries, from building and construction to electronics.” Similarly Marci Zaroff firmly believes that in order to give consumers confidence that their product is authentically ‘ethical,’ she asserts, “This is where certification, as well as brand integrity and commitment are paramount. Understanding how to navigate a supply chain, while crossing T-s and dotting I’s via traceability and transparency, is an absolute key to success.”\footnote{Dawisha, Ethical Fashion: How to Navigate an Industry, 2012}

The emphasis on certification has not been immune to criticism however. Pietra Rivoli provides a compelling argument for why certification schemes have, much like GM cotton, been difficult to ‘export’ to poorer parts of the world. She notes, for example, that many of the farms in the Global South were in fact already organic, given that many of them had never used chemical pesticides because they were too expensive. She writes:

> In yet another cruel irony, however, this opportunity, too, seems to have passed Africa by. While some fair trade programs have succeeded in

\footnote{Dawisha, Ethical Fashion: How to Navigate an Industry, 2012. Bold in original.}
developing the organic production of Africa’s farmers, the majority of the world’s organic cotton is from Turkey. The organic certification standards were written in Europe and the United States, and most de facto organic growers in Africa find it difficult to twist themselves into the rich country model of what an organic farmer should be. The growers cannot afford the fees to become certified, they cannot afford to meet the complicated certification requirements, and they cannot fill out the forms that even the Texas organic growers find intimidating.\(^96\)

As discussed in the previous chapter, clothing can be made in ‘ethical’ conditions without the ‘fair trade’ label (Alta Gracia is the strongest example of that). Yet the desire to placate consumer confusion with labels has, it could be argued, been prioritized over listening to the needs of the people behind one’s clothes. As mentioned previously, theories of organizational systems (such as requisite variety) emphasize developing a variety in our repertoire of responses when confronted with a problem as complex as fashion sustainability. This includes listening to people and truly understanding the diversity in contexts of how they live their lives.

Kate Fletcher and Lynda Grose in their book \textit{Fashion & Sustainability}, acknowledge that high certification standards can indeed encourage new innovations and technological developments; they cite third party assessors such as Bluesign that have had success in developing standards for environment, health and safety (EHS) issues by documenting a facility’s current activities and progress along the entire textile manufacture chain. Yet they also note that standards can drive “exclusivity” and create barriers to market access,\(^97\) resulting in “niche industries.” Sandy Black suggests the possibility of a “shades of green” labeling scheme, whereas a darker green would signify

\(^{96}\) (Rivoli, 2009, 69)

\(^{97}\) (Fletcher & Grose, 2012, 36)
This begs the question: could a “lighter green” product encourage companies to adopt sustainable commitments by taking “small steps,” or would they thus claim green status despite weak certifications? As we’ve seen with ‘watered down’ fair trade commitments, one could only suspect that similar eco-labeling schemes would also be co-opted by corporations that are most concerned with achieving their economic aim – profits.

The issue of transparency and authenticity in sustainable labeling is widely debated in the blogosphere as well. In early 2015, the print and online magazine *Granary* published an interview with sustainable fashion designer Orsola de Castro, who interestingly enough, expressed a strong dislike for the term ‘sustainable fashion.’ She argues that many designers right out of school are already deeply embedded in sustainable practices, such as hand making their collections (‘artisanal’), cutting carefully so as to minimize waste (‘zero waste’) and reusing their fabrics (‘upcycling’). She elaborates,

The reality is that the industry completely lost touch with its main values ever since it’s only been about rapid growth, mass production, fast fashion, and disposable luxury. It so detached from its origin that it then had to go and create a shit name so that people could be stigmatized. The reality is that sustainable fashion really is fashion. It’s everything else that isn’t sustainable that should be called as such. Choose whichever name you like the least, such as ‘unethical fashion’ or ‘unsustainable fashion’ to describe the way that the industry operates.99

In other words, labeling can make ‘sustainable fashion’ into a niche, not the norm.

Furthermore, the emphasis on labels only exacerbates distinctions, thus stigmatizing

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98 (Black, 2012, 240)

99 (Croese, 2015)
those who do not have the time or money to do the research on what exactly constitutes a ‘sustainable’ or ‘ethical’ fashion garment.

Jennifer Nini of the blog *Eco Warrior Princess*, while expressing her admiration for De Castro as an ‘ethical fashion’ pioneer, vehemently disagrees that labels are in essence impacting the fashion industry negatively. She argues that labels are a “mere fact of life” that allow people to categorize and make sense of the world. While she acknowledges that the desire to assign labels might be an overly simplistic means to grasping a complex issue, she cautions that “labels are merely starting points. They should never be used to assign complete definition. You can only do this by questioning and gathering more information.”100 The role of a consumer, she argues then, is to ask questions, while it is the role of those in the fashion industry to communicate why and how a garment is ‘ethical.’ In other words, meaning systems like ‘ethical fashion,’ ‘sustainable fashion,’ and ‘eco fashion’ are starting points for consumer entry into understanding these complex issues. And, as discussed in chapter four, labels that have high standards can be beneficial in increasing transparency and accountability.

Still, while a third-party ‘auditor’ can support transparency, ultimately it is the relationships and dialogue among the suppliers and retailers that are key to ensuring that the changes made in the supply chain are sustainable and long-term.101 As Marci Zaroff mentioned previously, it is the “compartmentalized disconnects” that result in poor communication and even tragedies like worker exploitation and factory fires. Should the

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100 (Nini, 2015)

101 (Fletcher & Grose, 2012, 37)
industry be relying solely on certification to bridge the gap between producer and consumer?

Rachel Taber, a labor advocate, expressed to me in an interview, that for there to be a system of “checks and balances” there needs to be “a union, a real functioning democratic co-op, a way that workers themselves can communicate directly with consumers in a way that their own words will be heard. I mean really, skyping with interpreters would probably be much cheaper than paying out of country auditors.”

Taber was specifically speaking to the chocolate industry, in which child trafficking is rampant. A multitude of labeling schemes have been produced and marketed as a response, differing greatly in their standards. In a blog post I wrote on trafficking and fair trade mislabeling in the cocoa industry (an argument equally applicable to the garment industry), I argued that both Fair Trade and non-certified Fair Trade companies are “constantly striving for transparency and are committed to giving their workers a platform to voice their concerns.”

I offered these examples of models that work to provide a “compelling rationale for why consumers need to start looking beyond the label to truly transform the system.” The problem of course, is that many consumers simply do not have this kind of knowledge or time to do this kind of research. Faced with lack of information, time and a bewildering array of labels that seemingly deliver on different sustainability promises, the average soccer mom (or dad) will most likely pick up the

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102 (Dawisha, The Chocolate Industry Exposed: Child Labor, Trafficking, and Fair Trade Mislabeling, 2013)

103 (Dawisha, The Chocolate Industry Exposed: Child Labor, Trafficking, and Fair Trade Mislabeling, 2013)

104 Ibid
product that is easily recognizable and that can help her feel she is making an ‘ethical’ choice. And in a culture that idolizes stardom, she may even look to celebrities as a form of ‘third party certification’ – celebrity approval of ‘eco-fashion’ clothing is often uncritically embraced even by sustainable fashion blogs such as Ecouterre.\(^{105}\)

Companies know this, and in an effort to make their products more appealing to consumers invested in ‘ethical’ choices, they have often been accused of co-opting sustainability by tacking on diluted labels and certifications. The next section will focus on this co-option, also referred to as greenwashing.

VI. Greenwashing: Re-articulating Sustainable Movements to Obscure Economic Aims

As discussed in the previous chapter, corporations have adopted corporate social responsibility (CSR) schemes widely since the 1990s to demonstrate commitment to social and environmental sustainability standards. The efficacy of CSR, and whether it is even possible for a corporation to in essence regulate its own behavior, has been widely debated. For example, while some see CSR as one of the only realistic ways to correct corporate power, others view CSR as a means by which corporations are given the tools essentially to escape outside regulation and thus become more powerful. As Jo Littler puts it,

To some, CSR is simply a con, a marketing confidence trick, in which corporations ‘whitewash’ their tarnished image to avoid being associated with labour exploitation or human rights abuses – or use tokenistic eco projects to ‘greenwash’ their brand name in an age of anxiety over global warming.\(^{106}\)

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\(^{105}\) (Malik Chua, 4 Celebrities Who Wore Eco-Fashion to the 2015 Oscars, 2015)

\(^{106}\) (Littler, 2009, 51)
When companies adopt CSR practices then, the fear is that this will persuade the public that they do not need any kind of governmental regulation. For example, when Tony Blair requested that Britain’s major companies publish environmental reports by the end of 2001, this was very much publicized and thus defused the escalating public pressure for government intervention. However, much less publicized was the fact that only one quarter of the voluntary surveys was returned.\textsuperscript{107}

This voluntary self-regulation among corporations has led to charges of greenwashing by environmental and eco-fashion advocates. UL Environment, a division of UL (Underwriters Laboratories) Supply Chain & Sustainability defines greenwashing as “the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service.”\textsuperscript{108} In 2007 TerraChoice, a science based marketing firm, published a now acclaimed piece titled “The Seven Sins of Greenwashing.” In it, they outlined these “seven sins” which included: making an environmental claim that cannot be verified by a third party certification, claiming a product is green for meeting one environmental attribute and not others, making broad and undefined claims like ‘all-natural’, fake labeling that gives the impression of third party endorsement, making unhelpful claims such as saying a product is ‘CFC-free’ despite the fact that CFCs are banned by law, making a claim that distracts the consumer from the harmful impact of the product as a whole (organic cigarettes, for example) and making environmental claims that are simply false. They cite on their webpage a 2010

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid, 66

\textsuperscript{108} (The Sins of Greenwashing, 2013)
study that found more than 95% of consumer products claiming to be green actually committed at least one of the “sins of greenwashing.”

Marci Zaroff noted in her interview with me that she’s witnessed a significant amount of greenwashing in eco-fashion, and that it’s historically been a challenge for consumers to differentiate between which certifications are monitored and accredited by third party certifiers. She provided two more specific examples:

Bamboo is a perfect example, because it was marketed as the poster child of Eco-Fashion, but really, it is absolutely NOT sustainable as a material. Bamboo, when grown, is a renewable plant and actually very sustainable when used for flooring and furniture. But when you break it down into a textile, you must use enormous amounts of chemicals, which, in the end, leave only traces of bamboo. It is essentially no different from Rayon, which is a synthetic. Once the FTC (Federal Trade Commission) received complaints along these lines, they did some research and slapped lawsuits on many of the companies that were marketing bamboo textiles, making them change their labels and packaging to say ‘Rayon made from bamboo.’

Another example of greenwashing is when companies sell their products as ‘organic’ when their fabrics only contain a small percentage of organic cotton. Banana Republic, as an example, got caught marketing clothes as organic cotton when really they only contained about 5% organic cotton! “Organic” is NOT a marketing proposition; it is a methodology in agriculture and a federally-regulated term.

She then stresses the importance of transparency, citing that Nike is a company that she considers transparent in its sustainable commitments because they will not label their product as ‘organic’ unless it is one hundred percent organic cotton. Thus Zaroff and other advocates’ insistence on transparency also touches on the importance of authenticity. Zaroff then offers the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) as an

109 (UL, 2007)

110 (Dawisha, Ethical Fashion: How to Navigate an Industry, 2012)
example of a comprehensive, “authentic” third party accredited certification that takes “every part of a finished textile into consideration, from the farm (must be Certified Organic fiber) to the dyes, finishes, transport, packaging, labor, etc.” Zaroff’s language emphasizes the care and concern for fabrics intrinsic to the “back to nature” movement of organic farmers. In another interview with me, she herself touts this mantra when she explains that her passion for sustainability stems from her belief that we are “all interconnected, that we are all part of the same eco-system.” She explains that the meaning behind her eco-fashion brand “Under the Canopy” is based on the Native American philosophy to “protect our canopy, to protect life for generations.”

This belief is at odds with the neoliberal capitalist incentive for global profit that results in, as she put it earlier, the “compartmentalized disconnects” that lead to environmental waste and even disasters. As Lee Holdstock, trade relations manager for certification for the Soil Association notes, negotiating high standards for sustainability with corporate pressures presents an abundance of difficulties. His piece enthusiastically endorses GOTS as the single, global “gold standard” for organic textiles. Yet he notes that while he supports regulation of the term “organic” in textile goods as a way to avoid greenwashing, regulation across a wide community can result in “the lowest common denominator.”

The US Department of Agriculture’s National Organic Program (NOP), for example, only insists that the fiber is grown in line with USDA/NOP requirements, and has been reluctant to embrace GOTS. Thus, a consumer who searches for the

111 (Dawisha, Are Our Clothes Toxic? Marci Zaroff, Eco-Fashion Pioneer, Weighs In, 2012)

112 (Holdstock, 2013, 201)
‘organic’ label on her clothes as a guarantee that the textile was made with the utmost concern to sustainability standards might not be aware that the label itself has possibly been diluted. It seems that the cost of increased accessibility and ‘mainstreaming’ of sustainable goods is corporate co-option of commitment to the highest sustainable values.

Yet, other discourses have emerged around the powerful influence that corporations can have in shifting the paradigm on fashion and sustainability. John Mowbray of Eco Textile News argues that the word “greenwash” has become an integral part of many consumers’ lexicon. This brings up an intriguing question: has the consumer concern with ‘greenwashing’ become just as relevant, if not trendy, as ‘going green’? Mowbray notes that consumer awareness around greenwashing has resulted in a shift in transparency and traceability. He attributes the creation of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition of leading brands and retailers in 2011 to this shift, noting that its members (which include H&M, Walmart, Hanes and Timberland) account for over fifty percent of world apparel sales by values.\textsuperscript{113} Greta Eagan in her book \textit{Wear No Evil} emphasizes that “the industry shifts” when a company like H&M, which in 2011 was the biggest purchaser of organic cotton, makes a commitment to their supply chain.\textsuperscript{114} And, in a piece titled “In Defense of Greenwashing” author Sophie Woodroffe argues that brands are driving the environmental movement. She contends that green marketing can foster awareness towards environmental issues, and that awareness is an important building block of \textit{action}. Furthermore, she makes an important point that multi-billion dollar companies can afford to spend far more money on environmental awareness than

\textsuperscript{113} (Mowbray, 2013, 198)

\textsuperscript{114} (Eagan, 2014, 40)
non-profits can, even though she concedes that many brands may invest more in marketing than actual sustainable practices.\textsuperscript{115} Marci Zaroff emphasized in her interview with me that Nike has been a “true leader and pioneer” in the organic cotton industry, citing their efforts as “invaluable” in shifting the industry forward.\textsuperscript{116}

There is certainly an argument to be made that when big retailers make strong sustainable commitments, they can help shift the industry. H&M and Zara’s recent pledge to source all of its fabrics outside of ancient and endangered forests by 2017 has been applauded by many within the sustainable fashion movement for this reason.\textsuperscript{117} Levi Strauss’s innovative recycling initiative that makes its jeans using 100 percent recycled water is an industry first, and their goal to share it with other key stakeholders could really make a significant difference in a way that perhaps a smaller company couldn’t. Ecouterre also notes that Levi’s was among the first apparel firms to “publicly disclose discharge data from its facilities online,”\textsuperscript{118} indicating a commitment to transparency.

That is not to say that a company like Nike hasn’t been met with criticism from environmental and eco-fashion advocates. The online blog Ecouterre wrote a piece in 2015 revealing the results thus far of Greenpeace’s “detox challenge,” in which 18 brands pledged to remove the discharge of hormone-disrupting chemicals from their supply.

\textsuperscript{115} (Woodrooffe, 2011)

\textsuperscript{116} (Dawisha, Ethical Fashion: How to Navigate an Industry, 2012)

\textsuperscript{117} (Malik Chua, H&M, Zara Commit to Eliminate Deforestation From Their Clothing, 2014)

\textsuperscript{118} (Malik Chua, Levi’s Develops Way to Manufacture Jeans Using 100% Recycled Water, 2014)
chains by 2020. The report claimed that while Adidas was “back on track” as a “detox leader,” Nike had failed to live up to its promised commitments. The report specifically said, “Instead of working with urgency to eliminate hazardous chemicals, Nike is hiding behind weak commitments whilst portraying themselves to consumers as fashion-conscious industry leaders.” The Ecouterre article thus hails Adidas as a “detox leader,” and criticizes Nike as a “greenwasher.” Thus, one could argue that the increased awareness around greenwashing has given advocates leverage to call out corporate co-option. Indeed, international and marketing consultant David Shah noted that consumers have grown wary of these eco-marketing claims, and that consumer complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority over greenwashing has quadrupled.

It also posits the question as to what exactly makes a brand ‘ethical.’ Both Greta Eagan and Marci Zaroff consider Nike to be leaders in the field of organic cotton production, and yet it is clear the company still has much to improve in terms of creating a truly sustainable supply chain. A company like H&M, while one of the world’s largest organic cotton buyers, still only uses organic cotton in a small percentage of their clothing. Marci Zaroff did mention the importance of recognizing that “The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step” and that “every positive effort to offer consumers authentic sustainable choices is a step in the right direction.” One should question

119 (Adidas Now a ”Detox Leader,” Nike Still a ”Greenwasher”, 2015)
120 (Malik Chua, 2015)
121 (Shah, 2013)
122 (Kaye, 2014)
123 (Dawisha, Ethical Fashion: How to Navigate an Industry, 2012)
then, whether the meaning of what makes a piece of clothing “sustainable” or “ethical” differs depending on an advocate’s (and consumer’s) position and personal commitments. For example, the company Patagonia is renowned among many eco-fashion advocates for their sustainable commitments in the textile industry. In a piece on the use of metaphors in sustainable movements, Patagonia is cited as an example of a company that views their supply chain more in terms of loops, or even a spider web, rather than a linear chain. The looped model addresses the need for relationships and connections to be made within a supply chain. On why a linear model, or a “chain metaphor” is failing the industry, Kaiser notes:

In my interview with Dumain of Patagonia, she pointed out that according to this system, apparel manufacturers would only interact with their fabric suppliers and retailers and consumers. Hence, the materials, processes, and people involved in earlier stages along the chain (i.e. fiber and yarn production) are “out of sight and out of mind,” as are the environmental consequences of these processes. The chain metaphor absolves apparel manufacturers from responsibility for the choices made in cotton production, for example.124

This echoes Zaroff’s concern with the “compartmentalized disconnects” in which retailers, especially larger ones, are not communicating with their different departments. Dumain emphasizes that for Patagonia to make a full commitment to organic cotton requires that everyone talks to and has access to each other. The spider web metaphor is helpful in envisioning different possibilities for the center of a company’s supply chain. Dumain notes for example, that a yarn spinner in Thailand who can help make connections with organic cotton growers and brokers can become central to the

124 (Kaiser, 2008, 151)
Patagonia’s sustainability model has in many ways broken out of the linear and binary models to create alternative solutions and achieve its short- and long-term sustainable goals. Still, despite Patagonia’s efforts to centralize their workers in their ‘web’ of a supply chain, labor rights advocate Rachel Taber, in an interview with me, criticized the company for “not paying a living wage.” For Taber, labor commitments are prioritized over environmental ones. Marci Zaroff concedes that while she respects the company as a leader in sustainable commitments, they are “honest that they still have some things to work on.”

Again, it is this honesty and transparency that advocates stress as important when pushing for improvements in companies’ supply chains. It is after all, the deceitfulness in greenwashed marketing claims that irks those invested in this issue.

Take for example, self-described ‘eco-friendly’ brand Reformation, that has been cited as one that the “cool girls pick” and has attracted celebrities such as Taylor Swift and Rihanna. The clothes are most notably, attractive and well-fitting, eschewing stereotypes that eco-fashion can not be stylish. Their website however, does also provide information about their sustainability practices along with the gorgeous clothes. On a page titled “Fabric is the Magic,” they delve into the different fibers they work with, leading with Tencel – a gold standard for sustainability fibers because it requires 80% less water than cotton and is easily able to be processed in a closed-loop manufacturing

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125 (Kaiser, 2008, 161)

126 (Dawisha, Ethical Fashion: How to Navigate an Industry, 2012)

127 (Koblin, 2014)
Yet, they also disclose on that same page that the majority of their woven fabrics are made with viscose – a man-made fiber! Although they do admit that they are “not sustainable just yet,” the marketing of their brand as ‘eco’ aggravates sustainability advocates like Kate Black of Magnifeco, who expressed in an interview that she felt Reformation’s clever marketing appealing to young people obscured their questionable ethical practices. She noted that although the brand publishes the totals for all the resources they used, saved, and offset, there is no real way to know how these amounts are calculated since that information is not given. Are these the ‘simple steps’ that Marci Zaroff stresses as so important, or, as Black cynically noted, are they just easy ways to appease consumer tastes for ‘ethical’ products without fully committing to the cause?

Transparency seems to be the key to differentiating between real change and deceitful marketing and PR. Many reject the notion that we should rely on corporations to shift the culture around sustainability. In response to the question posed by the book Green is the New Black, “Even if it is all a big PR promotion, what does it matter?” Tansy E. Hoskins of the book Stitched Up responds, “It matters both because this is a neoliberal mindset and because PR promotions obscure the reality of corporate practices.”

One example of this is the 2011 investigation into Classic Fashion factory in Jordan, where it was revealed that the all-female workforce were constantly subjected to beatings, forced labor, harassment and rape. The U.S. brands implicated in being supplied by Classic Fashion – Hanes, Kohl’s, Macy’s, Target and Walmart – did not take

128 (Our Stuff, 2016)

129 (Black K., 2016)

130 (Hoskins, 2014, 171)
proactive measures to address these abuses. Instead, they announced their “ethical” initiatives on their social policy websites in a similar way that Children’s Place and Gap did after the Rana factory fire. They stated that they were “very committed” to “empowering women around the world” and failed to back up these claims with any substantive action.\textsuperscript{131} Specifically related to eco-fashion, Wal-Mart received a tremendous amount of criticism when it announced that it was “going green” in 2007, as activists by and large viewed this as a publicity stunt that would deflect attention away from its many labor abuses documented in the film \textit{The High Cost of Low Price}.\textsuperscript{132}

Katherine Martinko, writing for the blog \textit{Treehugger}, offers a similar critique when she claims in her piece that fast fashion and sustainability are an “oxymoron.”\textsuperscript{133} Despite efforts by fast-fashion retailers like H&M to produce lines with sustainable pieces, she argues that ultimately the business models of these companies are impossible to align with sustainable values. As Livia Firth of \textit{Eco Age} insists, as long as clothes are produced in “such volumes and at such ridiculous prices, their sustainability efforts – no matter how genuine – are a form of greenwashing.”\textsuperscript{134} She urges consumers to boycott fast fashion and to adopt a slower mode of consumption – by investing in high quality pieces that last, and buying from smaller companies that have more easily traceable supply chains.

\textsuperscript{131} (Hoskins, 2014, 171-172)

\textsuperscript{132} (Littler, 2009, 105)

\textsuperscript{133} (Martinko, 2014)

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
This leads us to two discourses that have been central to the eco-fashion movement, and that have been in dialogue and even at odds with each other. We will turn to discussions of the “shop for the cause” and “slow fashion” movements next.

**VII. Shop for a Cause: Activist as neo-liberal subject?**

The ultimate sign of approval in today’s society is a credit card swipe. If you love what a company is doing, even if it will cost you a little bit more than a traditional brand, it is worth supporting it and show you appreciate the efforts they are making.135

“Ethical consumption” is an umbrella term that emerged in the 1980s and encompasses a wide array of practices including non-sweatshop brands, fair trade, cruelty-free, organic goods, consuming less, and purchasing vintage or used items.136 Ethical fashion, more specifically, can also include “employing women or certain ethnic groups,” “handmade/artisan,” “donating parts of profits to a charity,” and “awareness-raising.”

The meaning of ethical fashion is thus fairly fluid and flexible, and ultimately relies on the consumer’s “perceptions and personal assessment of what constitutes ethical behavior.”137 The blog *FashionHedge* cites designer Sass Brown as defining ethical fashion this way:

> I think the term ethical is open to interpretation, as my ethics are likely different from yours, and highly personal. I tend to use the term sustainable when I am asked for definitions, as it is a definable term, and not a personal interpretation. Sustainable means something that does not deplete through material extraction, does not exhaust through production and does not pollute through either of the above, and can act as the raw

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135 (Valverde, 2014)

136 (Littler, 2009, 6)

137 (Editorial, 2014)
Ethical fashion is often distinguished from ‘sustainable fashion,’ which focuses more on manufacturing processes that “reduce the environmental impact of the production and distribution processes.”\textsuperscript{139} Fashionhedge lists certain requirements for a piece of clothing to be sustainable, including: eco-friendly fabrics, non-toxic dyes, controlled management of wastewater, recycled or upcycled materials, and eliminating paper from regular operations.\textsuperscript{140} ‘Slow fashion,’ a movement stemming from the slow food movement, is also distinguished for its principles that include: buying vintage clothes, buying from local producers, repurposing old garments, and making clothes at home.\textsuperscript{141}

The meanings and practices of consumption have never been static or monolithic; rather, they have varied depending on the perspective of the individual consumer. In an article on “Consumer Activism and Corporate Social Responsibility,” the authors give an example of consumers’ relationship to technology as “complex and manifold.”\textsuperscript{142} They contrast consumers who view technology as simply a tool to those who view it as a means to a community. The also highlight how many people uncritically consume technology in the belief that by doing so they are participating in a more ‘progressive’ world, without considering the landfills they are filling with their ‘stuff.’ These

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{139} (Valverde, 2014)

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{142} (Kendall, Gill, & Cheney, 2007, 242)
ambiguities thus only make it all the more easy for corporations to exploit in a way that allows them to promote even more material consumption, resulting in products that falsely claim ‘ethical’ standards such as being ‘green’ or ‘natural.’

As discussed previously, the 1970s was a period that gave rise to consumer awareness over safety and integrity of products as well as the counter-culture ‘back to nature’ movement that emphasized slower consumption and natural fibers. However, as exposed in Klein’s No Logo, the 1980s and 1990s ushered in global neoliberal consumer capitalism that re-articulated the definition of the citizen as a consumer with “individual rights but few or no responsibilities to the commonwealth.” The niche market of ‘ethical fashion’ that has to demarcate itself from the majority of production is thus a reflection of this neoliberal moment. As Jo Littler put it in her book Radical Consumption:

But the current popularity of ‘ethical consumption’ as a term and the specific character of its contemporary use indicates a particular kind, and exacerbated form, of ‘crisis,’ propelled by global neoliberal consumer capitalism and ecological catastrophe. It’s presence reveals both some of the key problems of our culture (global warming, global poverty, stark inequalities of wealth) and indicates the scale of our collective failure to deal with these problems on any significant or systemic level other than through small palliative measures orchestrated through the lifestyle choices of the sufficiently privileged.

In a blog post titled “Questioning the meaning of ethical fashion,” critical fashion blogger Julia of the blog ‘algarconniere,’ responds to a reader question about how to actually go about shopping ethically. She specifically asks her what she thinks about buying second-

\[143\] (Cheney, 2005) as cited in Kendall, Gill, & Cheney, 2007

\[144\] (Littler, 2009, 14)
hand clothing from brands such as Urban Outfitters and the Gap. Julia expresses the paradox in ‘ethical shopping’ when she says,

> Capitalism has a way of convincing us our material things are what make us who we are. That the clothing we wear is a reflection of our worth as human beings, especially as young women. I constantly struggle with my affection for fashion and my distaste for the fashion industry. I struggle because of the empowerment I’ve found through expressing myself with my clothing and style, all the while never having the wallet, desire for high-end brands, nor the materialistic drive of someone who would proudly boast the label of clothes horse or “fashion lover.”

Julia’s blog post mimics some of the concerns I expressed on my own blog, where I have written about my own feelings of conflict (and even hypocrisy) over the mutual desire to reject consumer identity politics while also undeniably feeling that fashion has provided me with an important vehicle to express myself. Her post ends by encouraging her reader to take greater civic actions beyond just ‘conscious consumption,’ such as contacting stores to complain about labor violations, asking questions, and looking at the “big picture.”

Several of the ethical fashion bloggers I interviewed acknowledged the lack of concrete definition for these terms, but there seemed to be a consensus that “ethical fashion” was more of an “umbrella” term while “sustainable” referred more to the environment. That being said, they differed on their feelings around the ambiguity of the terms, and whether one could be considered “ethical” if they only focused on one aspect of the ethical umbrella, such as fair wages, or sustainability, or animal rights. Kate Black of the eco-fashion blog Magnifeco expressed to me that it would be “fucking radical” if everyone just picked a designer that represented their values, given the extreme difficulty

145 (Julia, 2013)
of finding the “perfect ethical garment and company.”\textsuperscript{146} She also preached the importance of not judging others for their choices, noting that vegan fashionistas refused to get that indigenous people living off the land “need animals.” Verena Erin from \textit{My Green Closet} agreed with this sentiment, noting that there’s “no way to be a perfect consumer” and there are “no 100% ethical and sustainable products.”\textsuperscript{147} To that end, Kasi Martin from \textit{The Peahen} told me that the best way to “sell” ethical fashion to people who may not be engaged with it is to get to know what someone cares about and then “sell” that “cause.”\textsuperscript{148} Other bloggers, however, were more ambivalent about the flexibility of these terms’ meaning. Holly Rose from the blog \textit{Leotie Lovely}, for example, stated:

\begin{quote}
I don't cover brands who don't produce their eco products ethically, and I don't cover ethical brands who don't produce their products ecologically. You can't have one without the other or the story is incomplete. I'm trying to cover conscious companies and speak to conscious consumers to outline the circular story, or cradle-to-cradle story of every product. It is lack of education on the consumer level (and lack of care on the producer level) that has brought this industry to the state it is in.\textsuperscript{149}
\end{quote}

Rose’s stance might be interpreted as hardline, and potentially alienating to those interested in ethical consumption and production. Her discursive strategy of demanding full transparency certainly attempts to take on capitalism, rather than working within it, as other bloggers do when they express that it would be “impossible” for both consumers and producers to be “100%” ethical. And, as was discussed in chapter four, her stance

\begin{footnotes}
146 (Black, Interview with Kate Black, 2016)
147 (Polowy, 2016)
148 (Martin, 2016)
149 (Rose, 2016)
\end{footnotes}
brings into question the fashion blogosphere’s emphasis on self-promotion, marketing, and sponsorships that is the heart of the “blogger-industrial complex.” Several bloggers I spoke with expressed reluctance to take such an uncompromising position because they themselves felt they could not reasonably purchase their clothing in a way that completely reflected their values. That didn’t negate the need for critical conversations however. Christine from the blog *Beyoutiful Hope* expressed to me that while she believes ethical fashion can “mean different things to different people,”¹⁵⁰ she was frustrated by the vegan community’s narrow definition not just of ethical fashion, but of ‘veganism.’ For example, in response to a “cruelty-free” blogger who posted a ‘vegan’ jacket from Forever 21, she wrote:

> But vegan means animals weren't killed not harmed though byproducts.... However @forever21 uses factories which use dyes which kill animals in the ocean and pollute the environment plus have horrible labor rights to the human beings who sew that up .... So it isn't vegan if it isn't sustainably made. Just something to think about because people can label something vegan but use the term very liberally.¹⁵¹

Interestingly, the blogger who originally posted the picture on Instagram replied to Christine, saying she would do more research before posting again on Forever 21. In this way, bloggers are using the tools and interventions at their disposal – the immediacy of social media – to engage in critical discussion around transparency and the fashion industry. The self-described “ethical fashion bloggers” I spoke with generally shared a deep need to raise awareness through dialogue as a way to navigate through some of this “murkiness.” Leah Wise of *Style Wise* admitted her own internal struggle with the value

¹⁵⁰ (Tjahjadi-Lopez, 2016)

¹⁵¹ (veganstyletoronto, 2016)
“labeling” of “ethical fashion.” As she put it, “I struggle with it honestly. If someone is barely shopping, but shops once a year at Target, are they really ‘less ethical’ than someone who shops at a thrift store constantly?” The way to address these complexities and contradictions, she argued, is to just “keep on talking” and push everyone to be as aware and critical of all issues related to the umbrella of ethical fashion. Furthermore, she argued that it was not acceptable to “pick your issue,” but to “prioritize” your issue so as to best work towards “reconciliation.” She stated: “When it comes to justice issues there can’t be a pet cause. It doesn’t work to be interested in one thing.” For Leah and many of the other bloggers I spoke with, critical dialogue with each other and consumers on the meanings and implications of these terms was a way to navigate a way forward (“reconcile”) to create awareness in the hope that by doing so, they could create a larger cultural shift around these issues.

Given that engaging in critical dialogue was at the heart of why so many of these women blogged in the first place, several of the bloggers also expressed concerns about the use of the term “ethical fashion” and how it might alienate consumers. Rebecca Magee from “This I Wear” believed that “ethical implies someone’s going to win and someone’s going to lose. It doesn’t allow for grey area, or room to explore, and that can shut down conversation.” Mor Aframian, who is not a blogger per se but a sustainable fashion consultant, mirrored Magee’s sentiment, noting that she preferred the term

152 (Wise, 2016)
153 Ibid.
154 (Magee, 2016)
“responsible” because it’s a term that everyone can relate to and doesn’t connote perfection.\textsuperscript{155}

Indeed, the entire discourse of ‘ethical’ consumption reflects assumptions about morality that need to be interrogated. If someone does not purchase clothing that has been deemed ‘ethical,’ then do they not have morals? What if they quite simply, do not have the money to afford such fashions, or the time to do the appropriate research? Littler argues that ethical consumption is often perceived in an unfavorable position because it assumes a “puritan moralism.”\textsuperscript{156}

Furthermore, this “shop for a cause” mantra also promotes consumption, or “shopping with your dollar” as the means by which the world can be changed. For example, the description for the book Green is the New Black by Tamsin Blanchard describes it as a guide to “all things fair trade and fabulous,” a manual for the fashionista who is aspiring to be a conscious “green goddess.” It promises that, “If you want to change the world-and your wardrobe-don’t go shopping without it.”\textsuperscript{157} Rebecca Luke in her piece on marketing to the ethical consumer notes that because shopping has become so central to our culture and arguably gives consumers a sense of pleasure, satisfaction and knowledge about themselves, it seems unrealistic to promote stopping consumption. Thus ethical marketing and consumption is a way to disrupt neoliberal capitalism from

\textsuperscript{155} (Aframian, Interview with Mor Aframian, 2016)
\textsuperscript{156} (Littler, 2009)
\textsuperscript{157} (Blanchard, 2007)
Embracing this form of lifestyle politics, which constructs our identities through what consumers purchase, can even be framed as empowering.

Marketing eco-fashion can be tricky, however, especially given that the green movement has faded from mainstream visibility in recent years. In 2006 Suzy Menkes penned a piece declaring that “for the cool and stylish, green is the new black” and that the fashion industry is “taking a longer view.”\textsuperscript{159} This metaphor can be a valuable way to create a useful analogy between fashion, an industry built on constant change, and long-term eco-friendliness.\textsuperscript{160} An article released during Fashion Week in the fall of 2014 reveals that even though eco-fashion brands are now appearing next to mainstream ones on the catwalk, sustainable companies are distancing themselves from marketing their clothing as “eco” or “green” as that might “imply judgmental or worthy attitudes.”\textsuperscript{161} Thus the eco-fashion movement has perhaps been re-articulated from hip to hippie, and to counter that the article cites how marketing strategists are trying to use “language as a bridge instead of a barrier,” by “associating sustainability with aspirational qualities such as high quality craftsmanship and superior materials.”\textsuperscript{162} Employing aspirational qualities is a central tenant to fashion marketing more broadly, and propagating the notion that eco-fashion is of higher quality helps to create an air of exclusivity that is essential to making it more desirable. Sustainable fashion, most importantly, must be

\textsuperscript{158} (Luke, 2008, 93)

\textsuperscript{159} (Menkes, 2006)

\textsuperscript{160} (Kaiser, 2008, 140)

\textsuperscript{161} (Pattinson, 2014)

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
fashionable, which perhaps explains the somewhat defensive New York Mag title, “How to Wear Vegan and Still Look Chic.”

Still, the push for “ethical fashion,” which has become an umbrella phrase for fashion that considers carbon footprint and toxicity, labor rights, product sustainability, and animal cruelty, is strong in sustainable fashion circles. Several books have been published that offer manuals for consumers, offering an “ethical calculus” for consumers to try to figure out which issues matter the most to them. Hoskins explains this “ethical” dilemma this way:

A central dilemma for ethical fashion is how to prioritize all the issues thrown up by the industry. One book explains that there is ‘no simple list of moral ticks and crosses’ with which to decide which is the most important. Is it better to buy a dress sewn in a co-op in India which uses thousands of freight miles or a locally manufactured dress from a company that uses fur trim? Is it better to buy organic cotton jeans from a retailer who shuns workplace safety regulations, or conventional pesticide ridden jeans from a regulated retailer? How about a recycled polyester fleece which sheds synthetic lint fibres and contaminates oceans, beaches and marine life? Is it better to buy vegetarian shoes made in a Chinese sweatshop or leather from a designer who says fat people are ugly?

Certainly, this kind of “calculus” reveals an unwillingness to name capitalism as the problem. Indeed, ethical consumerism can have the undesirable effect of creating consumers out of citizens by encouraging that people create change with their pocketbooks, not their vote or civic actions. Furthermore, since “ethical” products tend to be more expensive, is the entire concept of ethical fashion class-based? Certainly the classed nature of sustainable consumption can be identified in leisure practices that are attainable only to those who can afford them, such as eco-tourism and the adoption of

163 (Gledhill, 2014)

164 (Hoskins, 2014, 170)
“green” technology in architecture and transportation. Eco-chic products are often marketed to aspirational consumers by referencing celebrity and luxury lifestyles, a contradiction of sorts, since luxury is often perceived as “wasteful, irrelevant and indulgent,” and the arbiter of fashion trends that is antithetical to the very notion of sustainability.\textsuperscript{165}

On the other hand, many consumer-based campaigns have historically been successful in gaining rights for people, and cites the Russian revolution as an example in which it began with “the women’s protests over bread prices, but the end was not cheap bread.”\textsuperscript{166} To gauge the differences between consumer campaigns from political ones, it is important to interrogate whether corporations are spearheading the campaigns or if they empower people to do more than just shop. While there is no harm in purchasing products that are less harmful and that might bring awareness to a larger issue, “action must not stop at the checkout.”\textsuperscript{167}

Furthermore, sustainable fashion is often being promoted in a way that leads consumers to believe that it can address deeply systemic issues. In a post on \textit{Organic Fashion Blog}, the author asks, “Can Eco-Friendly Scarves Fight Poverty?” This title removes the person from the equation, instead placing the onus on a product to solve the complex problem of poverty. The blog highlights a company in which “really cute and fashionable clothing and accessories are produced” using 100 percent recycled

\begin{flushright}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{165} (Quick, 2015)
\item \textsuperscript{166} (Hoskins, 2014, 173)
\item \textsuperscript{167} (Hoskins, 2014, 174)
\end{itemize}
\end{flushright}
material.\textsuperscript{168} The author also cites that workers are paid “fair wages” without identifying how exactly this “fairness” is measured. Really, it is markedly unclear from the post how organic scarves and fair wages will be able to put any kind of dent in poverty that stem in large part from the global neoliberal market, corrupt governments, and gender inequality. Often, products are marked as ethical without making any large claims but instead seem to offer consumers a kind of reassurance. For example, a Kurta sold on the site \textit{Soul Flower} is labeled as “ethically made” in India.\textsuperscript{169} What exactly “ethically made” means is unclear, however, and speaks to the problem of relying on unregulated labels for supposed product transparency.

\textbf{VIII. Can Corporate Interventions produce change? Upcycling, Closing the Loop, and the Dilemma of H&M.}

Recycling has long been touted as an easy, every day sustainable action step anyone can take to help the environment. However, recycling has more recently been re-articulated by sustainability advocates as downcycling, a process that actually reduces the quality of material over time. For example, a can of soda contains aluminum as a valuable material, but when recycled, the numerous metals found in a typical coke can are melted together to create a weaker and less perfect product. Furthermore, downcycling can potentially create pollution of the biosphere since so many of the paints and plastics melted into recycled steel, for example, contain harmful chemicals. It is for this reason that creative, supposedly ecologically sound uses of downcycled materials - such as wearing clothing made of fibers from recycled bottles – may in fact be misguided \textsuperscript{168} (Alana, 2015) \textsuperscript{169} (Flower)
because fibers from plastic bottles contain toxins such as plasticizers, catalytic residues, and ultraviolet stabilizers. Critics of recycling initiatives have argued that too many of them are “end of pipe” solutions, in that they intervene far too late and fail to radically transform the design of products to be more “resource efficient, reusable and recyclable.” Furthermore, downcycling ultimately expends more energy and resources by forcing materials into more lifetimes than they were originally designed for – creating a costly burden for businesses instead of a rewarding option. And, as Kristen Brodde from Greenpeace noted in an interview, recycling is in many ways a “surface option” that does little to challenge the constant cycle of consumption. The messy and expensive conversion of resources concealed behind an ecological agenda may cultivate consumer complicity and a belief that recycling is the ultimate solution to consumption.

Sustainability advocates also argue that downcycling is just part and parcel of an approach that strives for systems and people to be “less bad” instead of “100 percent good.” Another example of this is the emphasis on “efficient factories.” First, much like the word ‘natural,’ the word ‘efficiency’ is vague and can thus be easily co-opted if the aims are questionable and not clearly defined. For example, ‘eco-efficient factories’ may in fact be concealing “efficient destruction,” in that pollution is sent through high smokestacks into areas far away where it is not as easily visible and comprehensible as it

170 (McDonough & Braungart, 2002, 55-58)
171 (Greenpeace, 2016)
172 (McDonough & Braungart, 2002, 59)
173 (Brodde, 2016)
174 (McDonough & Braungart, 2002, 67)
would be if dumped into local areas. As McDonough and Braungart of *Cradle to Cradle* put it, “An efficient Nazi” is “a terrifying thing.”\(^{175}\) Because efficient destruction is harder to detect, it is more difficult to find valuable interventions. Of course, within a more effective industry that has positive aims, efficiency can certainly be an important tool to help current systems slow down their pace of production. But within a destructive system, “efficiency” in and of itself is unlikely to re-articulate the system in any meaningful way, and is in fact, likely to be hijacked.

A similar argument can be made for environmental regulation, which is ultimately a compliance measure that forces commerce to comply to “one-size-fits-all-end-of-pipe solutions”\(^{176}\) under threat of sanctions. It minimizes the harm, instead of rewarding companies for taking creating initiatives. The argument is that if design is good, regulation is not needed.\(^{177}\)

Environmental destruction is a complex system that requires complex solutions, and as such, the environmental movement has suffered from a “failure of imagination”\(^{178}\) and agile interventions that are as nuanced as the problem. To that end, sustainability advocates are experimenting with creative ways to redesign human activity to improve the planet instead of merely protecting it from human impact. One such way is upcycling, which is when discarded materials are converted into something of equal or greater value. In doing so, the waste of potentially useful materials is prevented. For

\(^{175}\) (McDonough & Braungart, 2002, 65)

\(^{176}\) (McDonough & Braungart, 2002, 61)

\(^{177}\) Ibid

\(^{178}\) (McDonough & Braungart, *Cradle to Cradle*, 2002, 67)
example, polyester scraps from the end of a bolt of cloth – called excess – can be ‘upcycled’ into a bag or piece of luggage that imbues the original materials with more value. Ultimately upcycling extends the life of a garment, which benefits the environment by promoting reuse over discarding whenever possible. It is important to note that upcycling is not a new concept. As detailed earlier in the chapter, families who were struggling during the Great Depression and World War I would reuse and repurpose everything over and over until they were no longer useful. And in poorer countries, where raw materials are expensive, people use excess to create items that are both valuable and beautiful – including bowls, baskets and jewelry. Thus upcycling advocates are not pressing for radically innovative processes, but rather ones that have been re-articulated within the shifting space of neoliberal governmentality.

Furthermore, by encouraging people to think of innovative ways to use things instead of just buying more, upcycling works in opposition to consumer culture. In that way, upcycling epitomizes the values of the slow fashion movement, which encourages slower consumptions and opposes the ‘throwaway’ ethos of fast fashion. It is important to note here that many consumers who ‘recycle’ their clothes at thrift stores do so without knowing that their clothes are less likely to be resold and more likely to end up in landfills or donated to continents in the Global South like Africa, which, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, has seen their domestic textile industry destroyed with the influx of clothing imports – a billion pounds from the United States annually. Americans buy five times more clothing than they did in 1980, and as such, donations to

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179 (McDonough & Braungart, The Upcycle, 2013)

180 (Cruickshank, 2016)
charity shops like Goodwill have increased by ten percent every single year. Textile and clothing employment in countries like Ghana fell by 81 percent between 1975 and 2000. As I documented in my blog, African co-operatives such as Mamafrica and African designers such as Kahindo Mateene are attempting to challenge this reality by using batik fabrics produced in the continent. Yet it is questionable whether these small interventions alone will be able to revitalize the African textile industry currently given the scale of the problem. In other words, ‘thrifting’ or recycling one’s clothes, while promoted as an intervention anyone can take to give back to people and planet, has in some respects reinforced dominant power structures within the global capitalist economy.

Reet Aus is a fashion designer who created an upcycling certification called Upmade in the hopes of challenging these power structures. Although working with sustainable fabrics interests her, she emphasized to me that she is invested in “disrupting” the space of post-consumer waste because it is a largely overlooked yet urgent problem – with an average of 18-20 percent production waste in each cycle. As she pointed out, leftovers in poorer countries like Bangladesh are incinerated, creating huge amounts of environmental pollution. To that end, she has been working with factories in Bangladesh, going several times a year to do waste analysis and help them upcycle products. She recently was even able to certify a Bangladeshi textile company called Beximco. The purpose in creating a certification label, ultimately, is that bigger brands can adopt it, giving sustainability advocates a tool by which they can help enact change in the

181 Ibid

182 (Dawisha, Kahindo Mateene: An African Designer Making A Difference, 2014)
industry. Aut expressed frustration that brands like H&M were touting their recycling initiatives when upcycling is a far more progressive model to transform the industry. As she put it, “there are no easy solutions, and not everything can be easy. We have to push each other and big brands to take risks.”

Both upcycling and downcycling are important components of another innovative manufacturing process - the “closed loop” system. This is where materials (labeled ‘industrial nutrients’) are perpetually re-used so that any material created is collected and recycled to make a new round of products. In other words, a company that manufactures with a closed-loop system owns their materials forever. An example of this is as follows: a company makes a piece of clothing; the person wears it and then returns it; company downcycles it into fabric; the fabric is turned into clothing. It is for this reason that this closed-loop system of ‘decay to growth’ has been labeled as “reincarnation” of the eco-system.

However, as we have seen throughout this chapter, exciting new sustainability initiatives can be co-opted for corporate aims. Thus corporations such as H&M (to be discussed in more detail later) that experiment with closing the loop need to be carefully evaluated. As McDonough and Braungart put it in their book Cradle to Cradle, “to eliminate the concept of waste means to design things – products, packaging, and systems – from the very beginning on the understanding that waste does not exist.” They argue that if the material being reprocessed is toxic, then that is a suboptimal design and not a

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183 (Aus, 2016)
184 (McDonough & Braungart, Cradle to Cradle, 2002)
185 (McDonough & Braungart, Cradle to Cradle, 2002, 104)
true closed-loop process. It thus needs to be made with the aim of eventually upcycling and downcycling it within the close-looped system. For example, plastic bottles, as mentioned previously, contain harmful chemicals that are not meant to lie near human skin. So if the goal is to upcycle bottles into fleece then, the bottles need to be cleaned with acid prior to removing chemicals so that they can be effectively upcycled and downcycled without harming people or the planet. This can indeed be done. In 2015 bottled water company Earth2o created a closed loop system by reusing 100% recycled PET plastic that were ground into flakes and systemically cleansed to eliminate all dangerous chemicals. The company claims that the recycled PET plastic uses 45% less energy and 65% less CO2 than the production of a virgin PET bottle. While the company seems to be transparent about their claims, it still requires quite a bit of education to understand exactly what constitutes a close-looped process and why it is so important to ensure that plastics are eliminated of chemicals before they re-enter the ‘loop.’ While this kind of system has not yet gone mainstream, it certainly is at risk of being co-opted by corporations all too eager to capitalize on consumers’ desire for sustainable processes.

The promise of a closed-loop system posits an interesting question: if materials can be perpetually reused in an industrial recycling loop, does there need to be such a huge emphasis on slowing down consumption? Kirsten Bodde of Greenpeace stressed that continuing education on the impact of fast fashion is essential in encouraging consumers to engage with the issue of sustainability in a way that is relevant to their

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186 (McDonough & Braungart, The Upcycle, 2013, 44)

187 (Marketwired, 2015)
lives, opening the doors for deeper engagement in the future. She also emphasized that for companies that claim sustainability commitments, such as H&M, continuing to produce their clothing at such a high turnover is a paradox that demands interrogation.\footnote{Brodde, 2016} Kate Black of Magnifeco, while a proponent of slowing down consumption, was more skeptical that this would be feasible given our capitalist system and consumer culture. She argued that instead of “fighting the system” and being “in denial” about this reality, sustainability advocates needed to focus on tweaking the system, through the process of regeneration and “closing the loop.” As she pointed out:

> What happens if we educate consumers and they don’t stop their consumption levels? Do we keep on fighting them forever? No. We have to find ways in supply chains to support these decisions. Only a small portion of the population is slowing down their consumption. So there needs to be a slow lane, a medium lane, and a fast lane. People who buy cheap clothes believe it’s garbage, so let’s convince them that they can recycle it and put it back into other clothing.\footnote{Black K., Interview with Kate Black, 2016}

In other words, her main point is that in order for sustainability advocates to pave the way for environmental progress, they need to be equipped with agile interventions that are as nuanced and complex as the problem of environmental degradation, pollution, and waste. As emphasized in previous chapters, fashion as a cultural economy accounts for much of this “discursive slipperiness” that makes it difficult to intervene in a way that effectively re-articulates the power-status quo. Part of eco-fashion’s ‘dilemma,’ is that advertising fuels consumption and a desire for aspirational living and beautiful things, which is often in opposition to sustainability aims. Yet culture will not change overnight. The need for flexibility is thus paramount. This was made abundantly clear to me when speaking with

\footnote{Brodde, 2016}

\footnote{Black K., Interview with Kate Black, 2016}
Lusmila McColl, a former ‘eco-fashion’ designer who eventually had to shut down her business because, as she put it, she focused on marketing the sustainability aspect of her designs instead of the aesthetic component. As she revealed to me, “It has to be this underground, CIA Ninja thing where you’re bringing sustainability through the backdoor, cause there’s often a stigma. Wear your badge of honor inside your jacket.” She noted Eileen Fischer as someone who started off as a renowned fashion designer first, and then embraced the ethical. For culture to shift on this issue, eco-fashion designers need to treat sustainability as part of normative cultural behavior instead of “shouting it to the rooftops.” Refusing to do so, she argued, will forever subscribe sustainable designers to the catwalk of the ‘eco-fashion’ show in London, instead of London’s official fashion week. Echoing Kate Black’s statements, McColl believed that in order to truly make a case for sustainability’s place in fashion, ‘eco-fashion’ designers needed to work within the system to re-articulate it instead of fighting the reality that in a cultural industry like fashion, the aesthetic is of utmost importance. In other words, designers need to be flexible. That is not to say that sustainability advocates haven’t effectively pressured couture designers to slow down the fashion calendar. Burberry, for example, agreed in 2016 to only have two shows per year instead of four shows – a positive step towards eliminating the pressure to constantly deliver styles and trends. Flexibility isn’t always conceding, it may in fact, be a strategic method of re-articulating dominant power structures in the face of corporate co-option.

\[190\] (McColl, 2016)

\[191\] (Greenpeace, 2016)
This is certainly the case when considering the example of H&M, a fast-fashion retailer that has in recent years made commitments to several sustainability and labor initiatives, such as signing the legally binding Bangladesh Safety Accord and committing to Greenpeace’s initiative to eliminate PFC chemicals from its products. Yet they have also been criticized for corporate greenwashing and making vague promises about their sustainability commitments. For example, they developed a ‘Conscious Collection’ line - clothing made from 50 percent sustainable materials, such as recycled polyester and organic cotton. However, less than one percent of H&M’s total material use is made up of recycled materials. H&M has also not been fully transparent about whether the production methods used to make this collection is greener than its mainstream processes.192 Furthermore, although they have been lauded as being the number one buyer of organic cotton in the world, only twenty percent of cotton that they use is organic. And while a 2014 report states that their goal is to make their clothing from 100% organic cotton by 2020, they have yet to release details on how to support the organic cotton industry to fulfill this sharp demand.193 Furthermore, given that H&M’s usage of sustainable cotton only grew 5.4 percent from 2013 to 2014, it is unlikely they will be able to reach that goal by 2010. In fact, they already failed to meet their goal of recycling 95 percent of their general waste by 2014.194 These enticing promises which conceal a more gritty reality exasperates Verena Erin from My Green Closet, who noted, “It seems crazy that a company with such massive profits can’t keep the labor and

192 (Hendriksz, 2015)

193 (H&M)

194 (Hendriksz, 2015)
sustainability goals they set and needs five years to implement them. They have enough money to enact these changes NOW.”

Furthermore, while the conscious collection’s extreme affordability can be viewed as a way to negotiate the competing discourses of accessibility and sustainability, it incenses eco-fashion designers like Jasmine Harrison, who told me that H&M ultimately “perpetuates the notion that eco-fashion has to be cheap to be viable. First of all, no piece of clothing should be that cheap, ever. If H&M wants their conscious collection to be truly disruptive, they should charge more for it to send a message to consumers that being committed to sustainability takes work, there’s no easy way out here.”

Furthermore, there’s the blatant paradox that a company that currently has almost 4,000 stores worldwide and reached about $25 billion in sales in 2015 is making sustainability commitments, given that growing the materials, dying and finishing them with chemicals, and shipping them globally puts a huge strain on the environment’s resources. Given that they are opening hundreds of stores a year, it is clear that they are still contributing to the main problem of over-production at the root of fast fashion. As blogger Holly Rose told me, “I have zero tolerance for brands like H&M who claim they’re trying while they increase their profits ten fold each year.”

This was at the heart of criticisms of H&M’s big recycling campaign, World Recycling Week, which as discussed in chapter four, clashed with the grassroots Fashion

195 (Polowy, 2016)
196 (Harrison, 2016)
197 (Bain, 2016)
198 (Rose, Interview with Holly Rose, 2016)
Revolution Campaign. First, the company launched the first global clothing collecting initiative of its kind, encouraging consumers to recycle their clothing at a local store and receive a 15 percent voucher in return. This of course has been met with responses that instead of mitigating the company’s growing environmental impact, it is only promoting more consumption. H&M has responded by asserting that encouraging consumers to recycle their clothes gives them an easy entrance into the issue of fashion sustainability, opening up the possibility that they may become more deeply engaged down the road. Yet, even if this is true, it should not detract from the fact that H&M makes claims that are simply, not true. For example, during their World Recycle Week, H&M planned to capture 1,000 tons of unwanted clothes during the week by urging consumers to “recycle them and create new textile fibre, and in return you get vouchers to use at H&M. Everybody wins!” However, as Lucy Siegle pointed out, given that only a small percentage of recycled yarn is used in new garments, it would take twelve years for H&M to use up to 1,000 tons of fashion waste.\footnote{Siegle, Am I a fool to expect more than corporate greenwashing?, 2016} Furthermore, the claim that H&M would reuse garment waste implies they are operating on a closed-loop system, when that is not yet the case – even though H&M claims in an interview that eventually, “100% of garments regardless of whether it’s been used once or repeatedly will be used again.”\footnote{Wicker, 2016} For such a large company to put so many sustainability commitments out there is certainly unusual, but setting a goal without providing tangible, transparent solutions for consumers does not demonstrate real commitment. It is for these reasons that so many bloggers used social media to express their frustration over World Recycle Week, which

\footnote{Siegle, Am I a fool to expect more than corporate greenwashing?, 2016}

\footnote{Wicker, 2016}
compelled H&M to respond and defend themselves against criticisms that their campaign was just corporate greenwashing and an attempt to hijack Fashion Revolution Week. To that end, it is worth noting that H&M, while certainly obscuring many of their ethical commitments, is willing to engage with bloggers and sustainability advocates in a way that is rather unusual for a large corporation. For example, the company’s sustainability manager gave an interview to blogger Alden Wicker, conceding that their mantra for World Fashion Week was not completely accurate but emphasizing that sustainability “is a journey, and that’s why we’re getting engaged with it. We want to move the needle on technology for recycling.”

In other words, when a large company like H&M even mentions “closed-loop manufacturing,” consumers notice in a way they may not when smaller companies like Patagonia do it. This can enact a powerful cultural shift. But the power that a large corporation has can also make it especially difficult to intervene when it resorts to co-option, or even sets well-intentioned aims that ultimately fail – sending a message to their consumers that sustainability initiatives are fruitless. Yet H&M’s willingness to open dialogue around this issue is unusual for a brand of its size and stature, and perhaps is a reflection of the fact that they are majority family-owned instead of a shareholder-owned company, allowing for easier engagement and intervention within a capitalist economy.

Certainly, there are those who believe that as long as H&M continues its rapid production pace, sustainability goals will continue to be unattainable. As Katie Roberts from Sustainability in Style told me, the dilemma of eco-fashion “all comes back to economic reform. The economy is flawed and fashion is a part of the economic

201 (Wicker, 2016)
system.”202 Kirsten Brodde of Greenpeace also criticized H&M’s World Recycle Week, calling it a “week of illusions”203 and telling me that she wished H&M had offered repair services instead of encouraging consumption through the voucher program. However Brodde, who is the project lead of Greenpeace’s ‘Detox My Fashion’ campaign, has also lauded H&M for being the first fashion brand to eliminate PFC chemicals – chemical compounds which when released, degrade in the environment very slowly and then enter the food chain, making pollution “almost irreversible.” They are used in clothing to make them water and stain resistant.204 The ‘Detox My Fashion’ campaign was launched in 2011 with three sports-fashion brands - Nike, Puma, and Adidas. Greenpeace had just produced a report called ‘Dirty Laundry’ that exposed several mainstream brands as being linked to polluting factories in China, which were found to have discharged a “range of hazardous and persistent chemicals with hormone-disrupting properties.”205 The report received much coverage in mainstream media outlets and the blogosphere (including mine), and in July 2011, Greenpeace mobilized a massive grassroots and social media campaign (using the hashtag #Detox), with people protesting outside of stores with the word “Detox” tattooed on their bodies. Other protest action events included a petition signed by tens of thousands of people, a design contest that encouraged people to submit logos to “better reflect to truly reflect the truly toxic

202 (Roberts, 2016)

203 (Bain, 2016)

204 (Greenpeace, Hazardous chemicals found in many outdoor clothing brands, 2016)

205 (Greenpeace, Dirty Laundry, 2011)
practices,” and pasting massive “Detox the future” stickers on twelve H&M stores around the globe. By September 2011, Puma, Nike, Adidas, and H&M had committed to “Detoxing” their supply chains from hazardous chemicals by 2020. Currently, there are 78 international brands, retailers and suppliers that have committed to Detox commitments. In response to my question about whether there was a single intervention that proved to be the most effective in holding corporate actors responsible, Brodde responded:

There’s no magic bullet. You have to experiment with a lot of tools. If you don’t create awareness and you aren’t visible (on the street) then you have to make a difference. We have to make scandals visible. So of course it’s important to go beyond clictivism. We have to be seen in front of stores. I still would tend to say that non-violent direct actions work. To create momentum, to create pictures, to be seen.

Brodde is thus speaking to the need for interventions that are complex, varied and agile so that they can effectively move within the murky space of corporate and neoliberal power. And similar to the Fashion Revolution campaign, the use of social media as an awareness tool is supported by on the ground, grassroots organizing to sustain movement building. That being said, Brodde emphasized that while Greenpeace was drawing from a diverse set of tools, their focus – hazardous chemicals – was a simple yet “perfect entry point” to begin the conversation of fashion and sustainability. Hazardous chemicals, unlike climate change, are more ‘visible’ and shocking, and thus can be more effectively incorporated into visual campaigns.

206 (Greenpeace, The Journey towards a toxic-free future, 2016)

207 (Brodde, 2016)
Fashion is a challenging space for intervention because the workings of the cultural economy - at the intersection of culture, fashion, and sustainability - account for the elusive discursive problems that make it difficult to recreate the status quo. To that end, Greenpeace employed clever and creative ways to hold industry accountable, namely by drawing from the same cultural resources that conceal industry exploitation. For example, their ‘poster campaign’ for their ‘Detox Catwalk’ used real models covered in chemicals. One poster for their report “Toxic Threads: The Big Fashion Stitch-Up” parodied Victoria’s Secret by outlining a ‘winged’ model (the company has models that pose as winged ‘angels’) in a chalk outline that was actually thread connected to a spool which a dead model clutches in her hand. Other images featured male and female models in bright pink outfits, holding an IV of pink blood (to symbolize the connection of clothing to health) with thick, dark blue mascara running down their faces.

Greenpeace also organized a fashion show in Beijing in which models strutted down the runway wearing oxygen masks and IV bags along with their glamorous outfits. These arresting images serve to dismantle the façade of the glamour industry by employing its most prominent signifiers: catwalks, models, and glamorous photo-shoots. Greenpeace also, in the words of Bodde, “talked fashion language” and cleverly hijacked the fashion industry’s own words into their campaign, such as “Toxic is so last season.”

208 (Greenpeace, Toxic Threads: The Big Fashion Stitch-Up, 2012)

209 (Malik Chua, Greenpeace Exposes Toxic Chemicals in Zara, Other Fast-Fashion Brands, 2012)

210 (Greenpeace warns of chemicals in global fashion, 2012)

211 (Greenpeace, The Journey towards a toxic-free future, 2016)
way, Greenpeace was able to strip some of the elusive power from the fashion industry while speaking to consumers in a language they could easily comprehend. The campaign reached millions of people within the first few days of its launch, placing immense pressure on corporations to commit to ‘detoxing’ by 2020.

On their Detox page, Greenpeace states that fashion can have an especially significant role in transforming the sector because as an industry, it holds enormous influence on suppliers and trends. For example, a collaboration of 42 companies in the influential Prato textile district in Italy announced a commitment to work together to detox. It is also for this reason that Kirsten Bodde told me that Greenpeace focuses on huge brands, because of their enormous influence - the 78 fashion brands and supplier account for fifteen percent of global production. Although many of the brands initially told her that it was not “feasible” to make these sustainable commitments, in 2016 many of them are well on their way to eliminating chemicals from their supply chain by 2020. In fact, as mentioned previously, H&M already eliminated PFCs and along with Zara, Pull & Bear, Massimo Dutti and Bershka, were hailed by Greenpeace as “Detox committed companies that are ahead of the field.”

Greenpeace is still putting the pressure on H&M to detox their supply chain beyond the eleven main groups of hazardous chemicals and to increase their percentage of suppliers reporting their Detox online. Bodde also mentioned to me that while most of the involved companies have set schedules for their commitments, they are now working on enforcement. As she put it,

\[212\) (Greenpeace, DETOX COLLABORATION – TWO TALES: OF GREATER AND LESSER AMBITION, 2016)

\[213\) (Cherrington, 2016)
‘they are not saying no anymore, they are simply trying to slow down the change. Once companies have committed to something, once we’ve held them accountable and media has covered them, they can’t greenwash because it would ruin their reputation.” This speaks to the powerful possibility for corporations to be transformed through the interventions of organizers, slowly but surely, until a ‘triple bottom line’ ethos that emphasizes the human and environmental impact along with the financial incentive becomes normative for the industry.

IX. Conclusion

The analysis of H&M and other cases in this chapter reveals that those involved in the sustainable fashion movement employ a multiplicity of discursive interventions that at once have fostered greater awareness of environmental pollution and toxicity that the fashion industry so abundantly produces and at the same time shown the slipperiness of the targets of intervention. For example, what should we make of a company like H&M, which has at once been criticized for corporate greenwashing while at the same time lauded by some sustainability advocates for being a game-changer in the industry? The case of H&M demonstrates the challenges of moving within this strengthening neoliberal governmentality without risk of co-option by corporate hegemony, but also the potential for intervention and re-articulation of the status quo. Within the sustainable fashion movement there are oppositional discourses regarding the role of corporations; for example, while some eco-fashion pioneers regard H&M as a welcome addition to the movement, others critiqued the fast-fashion company as contrary to sustainable goals. The chapter has highlighted various sustainability interventions – including ‘green’

214 (Brodde, 2016)
fibers, labeling certifications, upcycling/recycling, new media technologies, on the ground protests, and ‘shop for the cause’ initiatives – that have the potential to re-articulate the issue of fashion’s toxic footprint into a more sustainable future. While many of these interventions have effectively re-articulated neoliberal spaces, they have simultaneously been co-opted by corporate interventions that have resulted in greenwashing. Still, those invested in the ‘eco-fashion’ movement express willingness to collaborate and work through these contradictions, often choosing to work within the capitalist system and employ fashion’s own resources as tools against itself. Advocacy organizations such as Greenpeace have effectively pushed corporations like H&M to incorporate sustainable commitments and seriously consider the ‘triple bottom line’ – people, planet and profit. To that end, while some may claim H&M is a mess of contradictions, the point here is not to label it as ‘bad’ or ‘good.’ It is to track the ever-shifting movement in which power is obscured by corporate hegemony and then peeled back by all those fighting for a more sustainable future.
Chapter Six
“It’s just a headdress”: Fashion and Appropriation

I. Introduction

You are in a position of power. You might not know it, but you are. Simply because of the color of your skin, you have been afforded opportunities and privilege, because our country was built on a foundation of white supremacy. That’s probably a concept that’s too much for you to handle right now, when all you wanted to do was dress up as a PocaHottie for Halloween, but it’s true.

I am not in a position of power. Native people are not in positions of power. By dressing up as a fake Indian, you are asserting your power over us, and continuing to oppress us. That should worry you.¹

Dr. Adrienne Keene’s blog post begging people to forego Native American costumes for Halloween received a great deal of backlash in the form of hateful comments in her thread. It helped to spark a national debate, however, about cultural appropriation in fashion. Over the last few years, images of these costumes and the people wearing them have spread through social media, sparking heated debates about cultural appropriation and how seemingly innocuous ‘fashion statements’ can indeed hurt.

Cultural appropriation, the “taking of intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else’s culture without permission,”² is not a new issue in fashion. As Minh-Ha Pham put it in her piece for The American Prospect, “fashion institutions and individuals have a long history of co-opting non-Western items and practices of dress for profit.”³ The Internet has given marginalized people a platform

¹ (Keene, 2011)
² (Scafidi, 2005, 9)
³ (Pham, 2011)
to voice their concerns (and anger) over the commodification of their cultural products. The objection over Gwen Stefani’s use of Japanese dancers, whom she named ‘Harajuku girls’ and fetishized in her music videos, was a source of widespread debate in the blogosphere around 2006.\textsuperscript{4} Perhaps reflecting a wider cultural paradigm shift of sorts around issues of race and identity that was brought to the forefront by bloggers using social media as a platform, the issue became popularized around 2011 when outlets from \textit{Jezebel} to \textit{The American Prospect} to \textit{The Atlantic} covered the topic in depth. Blogs like \textit{Racialicious} questioned the practice of Western fashion designers “borrowing from Africa” in a way that was closer to exploitation than appreciation.\textsuperscript{5} When Beyoncé had her face darkened for a photo shoot with an ‘African Queen’ theme, Dodai Stewart asked, “But when you paint your face darker in order to look more ‘African’, aren't you reducing an entire continent, full of different nations, tribes, cultures and histories, into one brown color?”\textsuperscript{6} 

The ‘trendiness” of cultural appropriation clearly was wearing on academic and \textit{Threadbared} blogger Minh-Ha Tham when she wrote a piece for \textit{The Atlantic} titled “Fashion’s Cultural Appropriation Debate: Pointless.” She writes that the discourse around fashion appropriation usually begins with a fashion event, and then what follows is this:

The popular chorus of \textit{cultural appropriation! cultural appreciation!} quickly becomes a performance, in which neither side misses a cue nor forgets a well-learned line. This continues for several days and maybe weeks until it peters out or until the next racist fashion event crops up—whichever comes first. The debate

\textsuperscript{4} (Van Kerckhove, 2006)  
\textsuperscript{5} (Flores, 2011)  
\textsuperscript{6} (Stewart, 2011)
around the event often gets more press and social-media attention than the event did itself, and nobody seems to change opinions for the next go-round.\textsuperscript{7}

To that end, this chapter will focus on the discursive problems that inform fashion appropriation of marginalized groups. The discursive problems at hand are those articulations of power (whiteness) to societal claims (such as what counts as trademark ownership) that make dominant cultural appropriation of marginalized groups possible and repeatable across several examples with varying degrees of violence. The chapter will interrogate the discourses around cultural appropriation and borrowing, starting with a historical analysis of cultural appropriation and authenticity, including a discussion of fashion and copyright. A broader analysis of the idea of cultural appropriation within the discourse around orientalism, including as it applies to fashion, will lead to a final specific section on native appropriation. Next the chapter will reveal the artisan movement’s efforts to preserve (and protect) their cultural artifacts. Finally it will turn to the work of bloggers and social media as a timely intervention within this contested space at the intersection of race, culture, and identity. It will interrogate whether these interventions have demonstrated the discursive agility needed to appropriately re-articulate the status quo that allows for widespread institutional marginalization and oppression.

II. A History of Cultural Appropriation: The Question of Authenticity

In Susan Scafidi’s book \textit{Who Owns Culture?}, she raises a question posed by many: why would someone pay hundreds if not thousands of dollars for a designer purse when a knock-off is so readily available on the streets? While indeed some may decline to buy knock offs because the thought of purchasing illegal goods provokes discomfort,\textsuperscript{7} (Pham M.-H. T., 2014)
for others the desire for an ‘authentic’ product assigns the bag a “certain intangible
value.” By purchasing an ‘authentic’ purse, she argues, the consumer is in essence
advertising her ability to “distinguish real from mass-produced fake, her aristocratic
intolerance for invisible flaws, her appreciation of fine craftsmanship, her economic
position, and her membership in an elite society welcomes into the most exclusive retail
venues. For the creator of the original product, an assertion of authenticity may thus
compensate for an inability to secure or protect ownership of an embodied idea, creation,
or design.” This is especially important in the fashion industry, which, as will be
demonstrated later, has little copyright protection.

It is often difficult to control or stop the proliferation of cultural products because
like intellectual properties, they are intangible, non-competitive goods. Thus, the
question of authenticity is an important one in the absence of legal intervention to
determine property rights. Scafidi continues: “The question instead revolves around who
is entitled to assign form and meaning, or at least a semiotic range, to a cultural product;
who can assert a right to define the normative use of a cultural product; or who may give
permission to copy a cultural product.” As this chapter will reveal, the question of
cultural authentication is deeply embedded in power structures rooted in colonialism and
globalization.

Furthermore, the definition of “authentic,” which the Oxford English Dictionary
defines as “really proceeding from its reputed source or author” and “entitled to

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8 (Scafidi, 2005, 53)
9 Ibid.
10 (Scafidi, 2005, 53)
acceptance or belief, as being in accordance with the fact,” deems the notion of authenticity as an objective and authoritative one that conflates the ideas of the authentic with the original. This serves the purpose of attributing the ownership of cultural products to their source communities.\textsuperscript{11} It is also at the root of critics’ (and many consumers) argument against counterfeiting, that the mass manufacturing and counterfeiting of cultural products degrades the integrity of the original product. Walter Benjamin’s now famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” addresses these anxieties.\textsuperscript{12} Benjamin describes the originality, uniqueness, and authenticity of a work of art as its “aura.” This “aura” originated in religious ceremonies and was then heralded during the (non-secular) Renaissance as reflective of an artist’s unique genius. However, he takes a more optimistic and even activist view of mass production and the potential of media to promote progressive change. Wary of the idea that the artist alone holds the key to ‘truth,’ he viewed the mechanical reproduction of art as a means by which the public could more readily access and engage with different cultural phenomena, from sports games to film.

The meaning of authenticity and how it is used to assert cultural ownership is complex. While authenticity can indeed be a form of cultural protection, disagreements within a cultural group about the authenticity of a cultural product may be stifled in order to present a ‘united front’ to the outside world. This can be especially harmful from a feminist perspective, as the voices of women and other marginalized people within a

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12} (Benjamin, 1968)
group may especially be silenced.\textsuperscript{13} Furthermore, the important point is that authenticity as a label is only really utilized when a cultural product leaves the source community and is judged by those from the outside who are searching for the most ‘authentic’ product they can find. However, this results in a process of ‘negotiation’ whereby community members may be tempted to alter their goods for outside consumption. While some modifications may result from the natural process of interaction with other cultures, others “may be the result of an overzealous attempt to standardize and fix a product’s authenticity in the public eye.”\textsuperscript{14} There is still a considerable amount of pressure for source communities to produce versions of their cultural products within a global capitalist economy that satisfy the tastes of the dominant culture.

This was made abundantly clear when I spoke with Dr. Jessica Metcalfe of the online Native artisan boutique \textit{Beyond Buckskin} over the contested meaning of the term ‘sacred.’ Metcalfe will not sell anything that is considered sacred in Native communities, such as headdresses. Similar to haute couture, making something inaccessible only increases the value of the item, heightening people’s interest in and desire for it. She revealed to me that (white) people have even accused her of “not being Native” for refusing to sell religious items. This pressure to “prove” one’s authenticity for white consumers has led to cultural negotiation, whereas trading post dealers have successfully pressured Native artists to tack on ceremonial words such as ‘sacred’ to their arts and crafts so as to get more money for it.\textsuperscript{15} It is for this reason that Adrienne Keene of \textit{Native...}

\textsuperscript{13} (Scafidi, 2005, 63)

\textsuperscript{14} (Scafidi, 2005, 64)

\textsuperscript{15} (Metcalfe, 2016)
Appropriations is cautious about using the term ‘authentic,’ which she views as a loaded one that has been used against Native people for these very reasons.¹⁶

My interview with Ashley Nemiro, one of the co-founders of Mamafrica, a woman’s sewing cooperative based in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo, also revealed the reality of this cultural negotiation when marketing clothing to the Global North. As Nemiro put it,

> We have a shop where many women in the community come to have clothing specially sewn for them including: school uniforms, wedding dresses, and children’s clothing. So many of these women love bright prints, perhaps because wearing these colors brings happiness to their lives. And since we have to tone down the colors a bit when we market to the West, it seems that these women really enjoy making brighter clothes for each other.¹⁷

Authenticity is indeed a “powerful marketing tool,” employed by artisans and companies alike who wish to win over those cynical consumers that have grown weary of corporate advertising.¹⁸ The non-profit artisan store Ten Thousand Villages, founded by the Mennonite church, frequently invokes the values of authenticity in their cultural products to appeal to their customers. They even contrast the “individualized creation of villages” with the “mass production world” which, they warn, is too often a threat to those in the village trying to preserve their crafts and cultural heritage.¹⁹ Scafidi writes, a bit cynically perhaps, that “sympathetic consumers are lured by the promise of authenticity and then given the opportunity to participate in and even rescue the lifestyle of the source

¹⁶ (Keene, Interview with Adrienne Keene, 2016)
¹⁷ (Dawisha, 2012)
¹⁸ (Scafidi, 2005, 64)
¹⁹ (Scafidi, 2005, 64)
community through purchase of its cultural products.” Indeed, Sophia Hyder, who launched her own company of recycled silk scarves made by artisans in Bangladesh, expressed in her interview with me that she finds Ten Thousand Villages problematic because she believes that they promote the idea of ‘saving’ the third world through the purchase of their products. She believes firmly in selling an outstanding product first and foremost, and that the story of the people who make her company’s beautiful silk scarves are essentially the “icing on the cake.” Jessica Metcalfe of *Beyond Buckskin* echoed that sentiment, noting that Native Americans in the United States are often viewed through a lens of charity, and to that end, she emphasizes the beauty of the jewelry on her online site to avoid the dangerous colonialist tropes of “giving to the poor brown others.” Furthermore, although consumers believe that they are purchasing a truly authentic cultural product, items sold at Ten Thousand Villages may have indeed been modified to market to a Western audience, a process of which consumers are unaware. Still, there is no doubt that the non-profit store has helped to preserve different artisan crafts around the world, and that the quality of their craftsmanship is fine. The debate around ethical choice by Ten Thousand Villages demonstrates the tensions (discussed in previous chapters) of ‘accessibility,’ in this case consumers’ access to authentic crafts that support some sustainable end.

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20 (Scafidi, 2005, 64-65)
21 (Hyder, 2015)
22 (Metcalfe, 2016)
III. The Issue of Intellectual Property: Who owns culture, and who benefits?

I think it’s like a major trend that people are recognizing that Asians are becoming a part of America. Because they’re slowing becoming mainstreamed into America. Imagine the worst case scenario if there’s nothing. That means we don’t even exist. I mean now we do exist as a caricature. Better than nothing.\(^{23}\)

We’ve been cool for a very long time in the sense that our culture has been taken for a very long time. How do we define when we’ve arrived? And it’s not when a young white girl in Berkeley is wearing nice garlands or those Buddhist beads or wearing a bindi. I don’t feel like my life has in any way improved because she has the ability to do that and thinks it’s ok, and thinks that “I can walk around and do this.” My life hasn’t improved, the life of my mom hasn’t improved. Our voice as a community within this economic system has not improved.\(^{24}\)

While cultural production is viewed as an ongoing, organic process, individual authorship is perceived as stemming from an original act of inspiration, or, as Walter Benjamin put it, its ‘aura.’ It is this fluidity of culture that makes cultural products so rife for appropriation. Those who criticize property right protection for cultural production argue that culture is ultimately a construct that is flexible and ever changing, and that “the vesting of legal rights in a source community would artificially halt cultural development on a national scale and produce frivolous lawsuits.”\(^{25}\) In fact, some have even argued that clinging to this notion of a single culture’s ‘authenticity’ would in effect reify antiquated notions of culture and identity that are no longer relevant in the current globally connected landscape.\(^{26}\) Liberal theorists have even argued that Western culture’s emphasis on the autonomous individual over the community has led to greater

\(^{23}\) (Mehta & Wang, 2000)

\(^{24}\) (Mehta & Wang, 2000)

\(^{25}\) (Scafidi, 2005, 137)

\(^{26}\) Ibid.
freedom and equality. Thus, recognizing and emphasizing the rights of cultural groups over the individuals who belong to these groups might in fact be a threat to the very foundation of our democracy.\textsuperscript{27} As we will see later in the chapter, however, this argument has in fact been enacted in case law in a way that has made it difficult for community-based cultures such as Native Americans to protect their cultural artifacts. The lack of legal protections for source communities reflects that people in power have little motivation to invest in the issue of cultural appropriation. Lawmakers, quite simply, do not have the incentive to address cultural appropriation as it largely affects disenfranchised people with little political influence. Thus, it is important to interrogate \textit{for whom} has the emphasis on the individual benefitted?

As mentioned before, the most common argument against cultural-product production is that it would be too “difficult.” Yet, as Scafidi notes,

\begin{quote}
Perhaps the most pragmatic explanation for the lack of cultural product protection is that it would be quite difficult. This suggestion may be deceptively simple, however. Laws against speeding, drug use, and littering are next-to-impossible to enforce, yet they remain in force because society disapproves of these activities. If unlimited cultural appropriation were recognized as similarly harmful, the law would at least attempt to assign rights and set guidelines for behavior.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

This is the crux of the activist argument against cultural appropriation; it is not recognized as harmful because society does not respect the cultural autonomy of marginalized groups who have little political or cultural power. However, cultural appropriation can take on many different forms. For example, a copyist has the right to use a cultural product in a transformative way that keeps with the ‘spirit’ of the original

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item [27] (Scafidi, 2005, 138)
\item [28] (Scafidi, 2005, 138)
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
while adapting it in a non-traditional manner. This practice can take the form of the offensive or harmless; a traveler who alters a culture’s art for his carpets, for example, will probably run a greater risk of offending the culture she borrowed from than an American cook who slathers Nutella on his bread.

Then there is adoptive appropriation, in which the copyist internalizes the original culture as his or her own. Of course, internalization can take different forms. Take, for example, the “white Indians” of the 1960s who adopted the Native American values of environmentalism and spirituality, sometimes choosing to abandon mainstream consumerist culture. Then there are white American suburban teenagers who appropriate the dress and mannerisms of their African American peers while maintaining their privilege when they take their clothes off. What to make then, of “Margaret B. Jones,” a supposed half-white, half-Native American former gang member whose autobiography was proven to be fabricated and who actually hailed from an upper-middle class family in Sherman Oaks, California? Or of Rachel Dolezal, a white woman who passed as black and who was apparently doing good work for the NAACP? Clearly these two women thought of themselves as activists; Rachel Dolezal, in passing as black, was certainly experiencing daily discrimination. Yet their actions were deceitful, and undoubtedly they could have made an impact on the communities they were working with without trying to pass as a non-white person. One can assume that the tension in allying with a community in a manner that was more appreciative than appropriative contributed to these two women feeling that they needed to adopt the culture fully in order for them to be effective allies.

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29 (Scafidi, 2005, 97)
Cultural appropriation can also have economic or descriptive incentives, such as Japanese companies appropriating Korean kimchi for Japanese consumer tastes. Many Koreans are skeptical that this is being done as a form of ‘cultural exchange,’ especially given the past hostile treatment of Koreans living in Japan. Instead, they view it as an easy way for Japanese companies to make a profit by selling a product that has been altered to suit Japanese tastes. Descriptive appropriation is when a cultural product provides outsiders a “medium through which to invoke, describe, or caricature the source community.” For example, even though many of these appropriations have disappeared with legislation or social disapproval, the ‘mammy’ caricature is still prevalent today in the form of Aunt Jemima.

Additionally, a hybrid form of cultural product can result when communities mutually share each other’s commodities. A fine example of this is fusion, in which dishes are created from the mutual sharing of cuisines. It is still important to interrogate however, what is meant by ‘mutual.’ One must consider, for example, that French-Vietnamese fusion cuisine is still based within the historical context of colonialism. Cultural sharing that is more appreciative, however, reflects a “heightened relationship between the copyist and the source community.” Thus a Western doctor who researches extensively and implements in her practice the benefits of Chinese acupuncture is respecting the history and practice of Chinese medicine, an appreciation that will no doubt be shared with others.

30 (Scafidi, 2005, 95)
31 Ibid.
32 (Scafidi, 2005, 96)
There are arguable civic benefits of cultural appropriation as well. First, there is an argument to be made that sharing even a simplified version of one’s culture can impact the dominant white culture and eventually lead to greater tolerance of the original source culture. This is the crux of what the man quoted in the beginning of this section seemed to be alluding to when he opined that the emergence of Asian American caricatures was a sign that Asian Americans were becoming mainstreamed into American culture. This, he felt, was better than the worst-case scenario – not existing at all. The appropriation of cultural goods then, can provide a pathway by which mainstream culture can eventually come to tolerate and even accept that source culture. As Scafidi put it,

This recognition may remain closer to an ‘orientalist’ stereotype than to a nuanced, comprehensive understanding of the source community, but it is at least formulated with a modicum of contribution from the source community rather than cut from the whole cloth of mainstream ignorance. By sharing their cultural products, many source communities are able to have an impact on the popular culture.\(^{33}\)

Ultimately, the lack of legal protection for cultural products is multi-faceted and complex. While it may indeed stem from a lack of “historical oversight,” a disregard for the “subaltern other” or the fact that as a community property it lacks the individual “spark of genius” that would require legislative action, cultural appropriation in its myriad forms can deliver civic benefits that ultimately contribute to an American society that is both “expansive and malleable.”\(^{34}\)

However it is important to note that this argument - that appropriation can be beneficial - has often been used against marginalized communities by erasing the very real power structures embedded within these cultural ‘exchanges.’ To that end, the next

\(^{33}\) (Scafidi, 2005, 141)

\(^{34}\) (Scafidi, 2005, 146)
chapters will more deeply interrogate the discursive problems that inform fashion appropriation of marginalized groups, using cultural examples such as film, magazines, and then, fashion.

IV. Cultural Appropriation: Capitalizing on ‘otherness’ for profit

Cultural theorist and African American feminist scholar bell hooks, in her seminal article “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance,” explores how dominant culture constructs the “other” into an object of desire that is both consumed and commodified in a myriad of ways. Using various media cultural artifacts as examples—including film, magazines, clothing catalogues, and hip-hop music—hooks explores issues of racial domination and subordination by delving into the difference between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation. White contact with the Other, she argues, is a means by which white youth can erase the guilt of one’s racist past and assuage feelings of deprivation that stems from the alienation of segregated living, educational, and cultural spaces. And yet, simply expressing desire for contact with marginalized people is not enough to eradicate racial domination. In fact, doing so merely crosses over into cultural appropriation, which is defined as “the taking—from a culture that is not one’s own—of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history, and ways of knowledge.”

Susan Scafidi notes:

This can include unauthorized use of another culture's dance, dress, music, language, folklore, cuisine, traditional medicine, religious symbols, etc. It's most likely to be harmful when the source community is a minority group that has been oppressed or exploited in other ways or when the object of appropriation is particularly sensitive, e.g. sacred objects.

35 (Ziff & Rao, 1997, 1)

36 (Baker, 2012)
The fact that different people face the problem of commodification in distinct ways is an important point within the cultural appropriation debate. Those who have greater power in the global economy tend to face appropriation less sharply, and thus they can “become devourous of everyone’s culture.” There is a difference, simply speaking, between a non-Native wearing a feather in one’s hair and anyone eating Italian spaghetti, in that Italians today do not face systemic oppression in the way Native Americans do. As I wrote for my blog:

So here’s the problem. The argument that you can ‘try on’ a cultural identity for a day and then discard it speaks to the ability of being able to return to your special place of privilege. You can take off your headdress and sleep at night, knowing that you don’t have to wake up the next morning to confront a history of colonialism and genocide that has left your community living in an impoverished reservation and having to deal with segregation, racism, and gross cultural misrepresentation in the form of films, sports mascots, and holidays. As the “We’re a Culture, Not a Costume” campaign put it, ‘You wear the costume for one night, we wear the stigma for life.’

And as Adrienne Keene of Native Appropriations elaborates in an interview:

People often ask me why I get so angry at Native Mascots - like the Florida State Seminole mascot, Chief Osceola - and do not have a problem with Notre Dame’s ‘Fight Irish’ mascots. The difference is the system of power in place. Notre Dame is a white Catholic University, if they wanted to change the mascot they easily could. A Native student at a majority-white university like Florida State is not in a position to change system of power. Not to mention that there’s no systemic discrimination and oppression against Irish today, while Natives are still living in poverty on reservations, Native women are still experiencing record rates of sexual violence. There’s just no comparison.

Yet, what further complicates the debate around the FSU mascot – who wears redface, rides a horse, and leads a ‘tomahawk’ chant in what has been described as “interactive

37 (Mehta & Wang, 2000)
38 (Dawisha, Halloween: The Season for Culturally Insensitive Fashion, 2014)
39 (Keene, Interview with Adrienne Keene, 2016)
- is that the Florida Seminole Tribal Council made the agreement with the university. Of note is that the tribe is different than the Seminole nation, which is based in Oklahoma and who very much opposes the name, even passing a resolution to condemn it. Yet, it is the Florida tribal council that is wealthy and powerful, owning casino hotels throughout the state. This speaks to how even within marginalized groups, power can still operate so that some people’s voices are suppressed while others are elevated to be heard.

Still, Keene, who told me she used to support tribal sovereignty, now sees the Seminole agreement as an act of “interest convergence,” a phrase coined by Dr. Derrick Bell who in analyzing the case of Brown vs. Board of Education, forwarded the theory that white people will support racial justice only when they opportunistically see something in it for them. This results in a “convergence” between the interests of white people and racial minorities. She notes that the Seminoles were the first tribe to get class-three casinos (in which you can have slot machines), which requires much political maneuvering and would likely not have happened if they had openly spoken out against the mascot. As Richard Fung asks in his seminal piece on appropriation, who has the right within the source community to “speak for the community, for the race, for the nation?” especially considering the very real pull of the capitalist economy within the current global economy? As this chapter will later reveal, these questions around who has the authority to ‘speak’ for a tribe are increasingly complex given that Natives are

40 (Zirin, 2014)
41 (Bell, 1980)
42 (Fung, 1993)
using new media as a discursive tool to elevate multiple voices against negative stereotypes.

These discourses around cultural appropriation have also been fiercely contested and debated within communities when cultural symbols have been employed in fashion. For example, some critical theorists have argued that blond celebrities such as Gwen Stefani, Madonna, and Nicole Kidman are able to wear bindis as fashion accessories, seemingly unaware and uninterested in respecting its cultural and religious significance, and make it trendy by doing so in a way that a darker Indian woman could not because they do not have the same kind of cultural power within the larger global economy as white women from the Global North. In other words, it is quite frankly unfair for a white person to wear a culturally significant symbol if they haven’t endured the hurt, fear and pain that people of color are burdened with every day, and is a marker of the history of colonialism and exoticization that marks the relations between dominant white culture and marginalized people.43

On the other hand, others believe that meanings around cultural symbols are more fluid and complex. For example Hindu writer Anjali Joshi acknowledges that cultural appropriation can be harmful when it strips the source culture of its “religious, historical and cultural context” and commodifies it for the mass market.44 Yet, she argues, bindis have long lost their religious significance for South Asians, noting that the 5,000-year old “kumkum” which she wears on her forehead is now sold as crystal-encrusted and multi-colored—from India. Culture, she argues, evolves. To that end, she contends that Hindu

43 (Mehta & Wang, 2000)

44 (Joshi, 2015)
women should appreciate that people from different cultural and religious backgrounds consider this symbol beautiful. Durham concedes that white women’s adoption of these symbols could certainly be interpreted as appreciation, and even celebration, of Asian women’s beauty. But, she cautions that as long as popular media privileges white women by conferring them the power to make a bindi “trendy,” Asian Americans are denied “symbolic access” to their very own cultural heritage. That, she argues, is not insignificant. As was revealed in the section on copyright, fashion as a cultural economy accounts for this discursive slipperiness, as it makes it difficult to re-articulate the status quo because culture itself is so shifting and ever changing according to different regimes of value.

The question of cultural authority was similarly contested when the brand Diesel featured a topless white woman wearing a denim burqa with the slogan, “I am not what I appear to be.” Although the woman who consulted the brand on this campaign was Muslim herself, and defended the ad as encouraging people to question stereotypes, others were offended at what they saw as capitalism hijacking the meaning of the veil. One woman echoed a concern that has been expressed often in appropriation debates: a white woman’s body is employed to make the burqa ‘fashionable’ while the same symbol evokes fear and distrust when worn by a darker-skinned woman.45

The appeal of ‘selling’ this exoticization through fashion is further explicated in Judith Williamson’s piece, “Woman Is an Island,” which details how dominant groups are able to naturalize ‘otherness’ of women and so-called minorities by constructing stereotypes and reinforcing them through different mediums such as advertising.

45 (Sacirbey, 2013)
Capitalism, Williamson argues, “economically needs the other, even as politically it seeks to eliminate it.”

The language of advertisements caters mostly to women, who are encouraged to consume so as to feel fulfilled. Since women’s opportunities are limited, however, the appeal of unlimited choices is simply a mirage that obscures the fact that women have fewer political and social choices than men. Women and foreigners are thus ‘otherized’—commodified and exploited within the capitalist process. In addition to examining the reification of traditional gender roles and the objectification and over-sexualization of female bodies, she also interrogates an advertisement in which a white model appears in both military khakis and a sari-style wrap, evoking both the “colonized and colonizer.”

Williamson astutely notes “the appropriation of other people’s dress is fashionable provided it is perfectly clear that you are, in fact, different from whoever would normally wear such clothes.”

Not only are women and racial minorities objectified through consumerist strategies, the same multinational companies producing these ads also rely on the exploited labor of ‘Third World’ (usually female) others. Thus these bodies of marginalized people are simultaneously needed and erased. As this and other chapters have repeatedly demonstrated, fashion is the perfect venue by which “capitalism’s constant search for new areas to colonize” can be realized. To that end, this chapter will now turn to Native American appropriation within the United States—how it has been manifested in fashion, the Native artisan movement as an ‘authentic’

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46 (Williamson, 1986, 112)
47 (Williamson, 1986, 115)
48 (Williamson, 1986, 115)
49 (Williamson, 1986, 116)
alternative to mass commodification of sacred cultural products, and the discursive strategies of the blogosphere to disrupt the cultural erosion of Native culture.

V. Native Fashion Appropriation: Fighting Against Cultural Erasure

In the book *every day is a good day* by Wilma Mankiller, she notes “the spiritual life of indigenous people has been studied, copied, parodied and exploited.”

Indeed, Native Americans have experienced extensive cultural erosion within the United States. In a chapter from her book on sovereignty, Mankiller states that tribal leaders are deeply invested in fighting for the kind of self-determination defined by the UN: the right to “freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”

Although the U.S. recognized 370 formal treaties with indigenous nations starting from 1779 to 1871, the United States government has rarely honored them. Thus, the fight to retain tribal sovereignty is hugely important for Native American tribes. Mankiller cites Faith Smith’s definition of sovereignty as “the right to define the present and the future of a people.”

However, with high rates of unemployment, poor housing, and epidemic levels of health problems that are not treated adequately due to lack of federal support, tribal authorities are sometimes forced to find economic alternatives to support their communities—such as casinos or allowing their land to be extracted of their natural resources.

The land is critical to the notion of tribal sovereignty. By the early twentieth century, the United States had stolen more than two billion acres of indigenous land that

50 (Mankiller, 2004, 11)
51 (Mankiller, 2004, 75)
52 (Mankiller, 2004, 76)
Natives had held by treaty or agreement in large part due to the 1887 Dawes Allotment Act. Currently, tribal governments hold just a fraction of their original land holdings—around 50 million acres. Even today tribal authorities must fight against external pressure to further diminish their land rights, especially against powerful gas, oil and mining companies that are destroying tribal lands to get access to natural resources. A 2015 article in the *New York Times* detailed how the U.S Congress gave away Oak Flat—2,400 acres of national forest in Arizona that is considered sacred to the Apache tribe—to a foreign mining company. Despite protections under the multiple-use mandate of the Forest Service that designated the site as owned by the public, Congress was able to override this by attaching a “fine print rider” to the National Defense Authorization Act, a military spending bill.骑士 Dorsey, a Chickasaw jewelry designer, said this in an interview with me:

Sadly land grabbing of primarily indigenous people's lands in the name of profit and mass production is a daily occurrence around the globe. Much indigenous land is rich in natural resources and minerals and as a result, indigenous communities are at the mercy of their countries’ governments to defend their lands from powerful multi-national corporations. Often times the governments side with the corporations and gladly violate indigenous rights in order to allow agriculture, mining, oil, and coal companies to extract resources from indigenous lands. When indigenous communities protest and petition their government officials to uphold the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and to allow them to determine their own land management plans, they are often ignored, or worse: jailed; subjected to military force; or sometimes even worse, killed. Indigenous communities who oppose these companies on their lands are also bullied, intimidated, or bribed by these companies. Large multi-national gold and silver mining companies feed the mass produced jewelry industry.

Here Dorsey is using strong advocacy language to reveal capitalism’s power: large multi-nationals are “bullying” indigenous communities, who are “at the mercy” of their

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53 (Millet, 2015)
national governments. It is not just multinationals however, that target Native bodies. A report by the Center for Juvenile and Criminal Justice found that police kill Native Americans at a higher rate than any other ethnic group. 54

It is against this backdrop of Native cultural erosion, discrimination, and even outright brutality that Native appropriation holds so much relevance. In the last few years, activists in the Native community have launched various campaigns to intervene in the face of widespread cultural erosion of their identity, and it is the ones focusing on the appropriation of Native Americans in the fashion industry to which this chapter shall turn.

In 2011 Harvard graduate student Adrienne Keene of the blog Native Appropriations wrote an open letter just before Halloween to the “PocaHotties and Indian Warriors,” which was ultimately a plea of sorts that people stop dressing up as racist characters for Halloween. Foregoing an “eloquent and well-researched” post for a more visceral response that was inspired after reading the comment section of another similarly themed article, she tries to unpack privilege and white supremacy in just a few paragraphs. Arguing that “privilege,” “power,” and “oppression” can be expressed through what one wears, she also critiques the claim that Native ancestry can be used to diminish accountability in appropriation. She writes,

I am not in a position of power. Native people are not in positions of power. By dressing up as a fake Indian, you are asserting your power over us, and continuing to oppress us. That should worry you.

But don’t tell me that you’re oppressed too, or don’t you dare come back and tell me your “great grandmother was a Cherokee Princess” and that somehow makes it ok. Do you live in a system that is actively taking your children away without

54 (McCambridge, 2015)
just cause? Do you have to look at the TV on weekends and see sports teams with mascots named after racial slurs of your people? I doubt it. The blog quickly went viral, and the comments were so vitriolic that Keene eventually had to close the comment section down. The anger was mostly directed at Keene’s use of the words “racism” and “privilege,” words that many readers seemed to think was too loaded to be applied to something as ‘frivolous’ as fashion. Keene later published an “annotated version” of her blog, where she addressed readers’ angry comments. For the paragraph above for example, she acknowledges that white people can have intersections of oppression (*trans, non-Christian, women, etc.) and that people of color aren’t exempt from appropriating Native fashion. But her point remains the same: no one should resort to stereotypes and turn a culture into a costume.

This appropriation debate around Native American fashion gained further traction that year when Urban Outfitters offered a ‘Navajo’ line for the fall, and other companies such as Forever 21 claimed their products were ‘Native-inspired.’ This ‘trend’ of non-Native people ‘dressing up’ and imitating Natives is not a new phenomenon, rather, it has been a staple of popular culture since the Hollywood Western of the 1930s and ‘40s, where non-native actors would essentially dress up in redface to portray ‘Indians.’ And as Jessica Metcalfe emphasized to me, while Natives are now using social media to engage the mainstream on destructive appropriation in popular culture, Natives have been talking about colonialism and the processes of removing cultural and material wealth out

55 (Keene, Open Letter to the PocaHotties and Indian Warriors this Halloween, 2011)
56 (Keene, Open Letter to the Pocahotties: The annotated version, 2013)
of indigenous hands since settle contact.\textsuperscript{57} For example, Native activists have been working since the nineteenth century to eradicate the use of ‘Indian’ sports mascots, arguing that these caricatures and stereotypes printed on millions of t-shirts have negative cultural and psychological consequences for Native Americans and contribute to the broader societal disregard of the Native American plight. The slur’s origin is rooted in the 1800s, when government bounties called for the bloody scalps of Native Americans. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) notes that during the time when the name was adopted for the team, the “Civilization Regulations” was still in place—confining Native people to reservations and banning cultural dances and ceremonies. Thus, Native people did not have a platform from which they could advocate for themselves.\textsuperscript{58} A Buzzfeed article revealed over sixty years of sports journalism employing scalping imagery in their stories about the team,\textsuperscript{59} and the term was more broadly adopted in popular culture to depict a ‘savage other.’\textsuperscript{60}

This widespread prevalence of Native stereotypes inspired several campaigns in the early 1970s to counter these demeaning and bigoted images. In 1972 the NCAI, the American Indian Press Association, and the American Indian Movement reached out directly to the Redskins to request that the team change its name. This would launch decades of work around the issue of sports mascots, and in 1993 the NCAI membership

\textsuperscript{57} (Metcalfe, 2016)  
\textsuperscript{58} (Indians, 2015)  
\textsuperscript{59} (Adler, 2014)  
\textsuperscript{60} (Krupnick, 2011)
officially passed a resolution against the Washington Redskins team name.\textsuperscript{61} As Metcalfe noted, the cultural debate around Native appropriation hasn’t really progressed as much as it has been re-articulated. She noted that the 1960s and 1970s saw a heightening Native ‘self-determination’ in which Natives both influenced mainstream culture and criticized the romanticization of it by hippies who were striving to return to a more ‘natural’ form of life. In the 1980s, perhaps due to backlash tied to conservative governance, there was little advocacy around Native representation. In the 1990s however, culture saw hip hop becoming mainstream, Colors of Benetton featured diverse models in its ads, and people were coming into “cultural inquisitiveness, sensitivity, and sharing.”\textsuperscript{62} And then in 2016, Americans nominated Donald Trump for the Republican presidential nominee, a candidate who frequently espouses his racist, anti-Immigration views.

These complex cultural flows reflect the performativity and elusiveness of culture, and reveal the moves and counter-moves that make it difficult to re-articulate the status quo. It is for that reason that Natives have pushed for laws to protect Native American cultural products from widespread counterfeiting. To that end, the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990 was passed to guarantee the authenticity of Native American art by prohibiting the sale of cultural products which falsely claimed to be made by American Indians or Alaska Natives. This built on the power of the Indian Arts and Crafts board, which was established in 1935 to protect Native crafts through the creation

\textsuperscript{61} (Friedman, 2013)

\textsuperscript{62} (Metcalfe, 2016)
and registration of trademarks and the increase in penalties.\textsuperscript{63} The Act has been criticized for recognizing only officially registered members of a recognized tribe or community, which can be difficult given the divergent criteria for tribal citizenship. Still the “basic intent of the act is sound.”\textsuperscript{64}

However, laws are only as strong as their enforcement. For example, both Jessica Metcalfe and Adrienne Keene spoke to me about their frustrations over Etsy, an e-commerce website launched in 2005 that sells handmade or vintage items and supplies as its focus. It has been lauded by those in the slow fashion movement as giving a platform to artists who are attempting to intervene in a hegemonic landscape of mass-produced fashion. And yet, within this seemingly subversive space, whiteness is re-articulated to marginalize Native artisans.\textsuperscript{65} Many non-Native artists are selling their products by attaching the word “Native American” to their products to attract more hits – a clear violation of the Indian Arts and Crafts Act. Etsy, however, has refused to shut down the hundreds of thousands of stores who do this, and when Jessica Metcalfe has sent cease and desist letters to the shops, she told me that it is she who gets charged with spam. Etsy is most likely reluctant to force stores to drop the ‘Native American’ label because it would be a huge financial hit for their profits. Within this capitalist context then, marginalized Native artisans who have little political or cultural representation are not viewed as much of a threat to the mainstream ‘artisan’ marketplace.\textsuperscript{66}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{63} (Brown, 2003, 215) \\
\textsuperscript{64} (Scafidi, 2005, 57) \\
\textsuperscript{65} (Metcalfe, Etsy is a breeding ground for..., 2012) \\
\textsuperscript{66} (Metcalfe, Interview with Jessica Metcalfe, 2016)
\end{flushright}
It is for this reason that Metcalfe created *Beyond Buckskin*, an online market boutique exclusively for Native artisans and designers. Metcalfe has previously noted that Natives have a long history of turning to artisan crafts to “protect what we had” when under threat from outside forces, such as during the early 1900s when at the height of the reservation era, Natives were confined and “essentially prisoners on these small plots of land.” To that end, *Beyond Buckskin* is a platform that allows Natives to reclaim their culture from businesses and marketplaces like Etsy that are continuously capitalizing on it. As Metcalfe emphasized, given that a third of all Native people are either practicing or are potential artists, that’s a tremendous resource that if made sustainable, can be re-articulated into a form of economic development for reservations. It is a way to control the narrative. Furthermore, it is important to note that beyond supporting Native communities, *Beyond Buckskin* is also touting values of slow fashion by selling lovingly made jewelry and fashion that can take weeks if not months to complete. By working within the western capitalist structure with her site and her work, but emphasizing slow fashion, she and all of the artisans featured on the site are effectively subverting the status quo by shifting the way we think about consumption and the exchange of goods. They have created a small, yet powerful, alternate space to counter the erosion of their artisan forms within the context of lax legal enforcement.

The Indian Arts & Crafts law also does not protect mass-produced clothing, because clothing designers are offered little intellectual property protection. The industry

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67 (Hix, 2011)
has trademark, but not copyright and patent, protection. To be clear, intellectual
copyright is an umbrella term that encompasses copyright, patent, and trademark laws.
Under the 1976 Copyright Act, owners of “original works of authorship”—which include
literary, dramatic, musical, artistic, and other published and unpublished intellectual
works—are given the exclusive right to reproduce, prepare or perform the copyrighted
work publicly.68 Patents, which are governed exclusively by federal law, protect
‘inventions,’ i.e. original ideas, machines, methods, and processes that are unique and
useful, so that others are excluded from “making, using, offering for sale, selling or
importing the invention.” A trademark is an easily distinguishable phrase, symbol,
drawing, name or word that differentiates one product from another. Some examples
include the ‘swoosh’ of the Nike logo, or the Coca Cola label that distinguishes its
similar-tasting and looking drink from Pepsi.

Since fashion only offers trademark protection then, anyone can copy a garment’s
design as long as they don’t ‘knock off’ the actual trademark label within the design.
This is why so many designers prominently feature their logos on their products—even
though this has not stopped the proliferation of “legitimate knock-offs” found in the
streets of Santee Alley in Los Angeles and Chinatown in Manhattan. Fashion, as Joanna
Blakely explains in her TED talk on “copying culture,”69 lacks copyright protections
because the courts have deemed it as too utilitarian, and have not ruled that designers
have the right to own the “seminal building blocks of our clothing” which would require
licensing every little piece of clothing. Other utilitarian, “low-IP” goods include food,

68 (Copyright vs. Trademark vs. Patent, 2015)
69 (Blakely, 2010)
Blakely contends that lack of copyright protection has only benefitted the fashion industry, in that designers are able to more easily turn a utilitarian product into art, and can sample each other’s designs for inspiration due to the “open and creative ecology” of the industry. Furthermore, she argues that one of the virtuous side effects of this copying culture is the democratization of fashion, because while designers do indeed set trends, they also ‘rip off’ inspiration from the streets.

However, Blakely is reluctant to turn her critical eye on how “sharing” implies that two people or institutions are on equal footing. She doesn’t really question the global distribution of power and how it is articulated to benefit some groups over others. For example, Bethany Yellowtail is a Crow designer whose dress – inspired by her grandmother’s collection of beadwork – grabbed headlines when another dress appeared on the runway of New York Fashion that appeared to replicate hers. This dress was a creation of London-based label Kokon to Zai (KTZ) and featured the hourglass figure and geometric, blocked-line shapes in the “arrangement of textile” that are specific to the Crow tribe. Yellowtail conceded that designers are inspired by and knock off each other’s designs frequently, and to that end did not take issue with the similarity of the hemline or silhouette of the dress, because as she put it, “I cannot claim them to be mine.”\textsuperscript{70} She opined that the dress crossed the line however, by hijacking the Crow patterns and that the inclusion of the dress in the KTZ collection “mashes and distorts the

\textsuperscript{70} (Staff, 2015)
individual indigenous perspective, design, and voice.” To her it was personal, and she felt, “gutted,” “erased” and “as if my voice and my perspective of indigenous design disappeared.”

Yet at the same time, it is clear in various interviews that Yellowtail does not see it as her mission to combat cultural appropriation, but to create a space where “an authentic voice and an authentic representation of Native America exists and thrives.” In other words, she is addressing cultural appropriation just by being true to herself. This reflects the reluctance of fashion designers to use laws against appropriation to “inhibit the freedom to innovate, manipulate, and modify even ancient traditions.” At the same time, it also reveals that the issue of indigenous creations does not fit neatly into intellectual property frameworks. Copyright law tends to favor individual rights, in part because even though cultural products may derive from and be unique to the source community, the slipperiness of culture may re-articulate meanings over time, thus requiring a constant re-evaluation of their value and identity. Thus case law has developed with the argument that it is ‘more efficient’ to assign authorship to an individual than multiple contributors in a community. However, this poses a dilemma for Native designers who wish to copyright their designs but who have very strong ties to their communities. For example, if Bethany Yellowtail wanted to pursue legal action

71 Ibid

72 Ibid

73 (Chung, 2015)

74 (Riley & Carpenter, 2015, 156)
against KTZ, she would have to trademark the design that was based off of her family-held pipe bag. However, that would mean she would have to trademark the design under her name, denying the Crow community from using it. Ultimately, Native designers are reluctant to trademark their design because Native art is usually not owned by individuals, and in some cases aren’t even owned by a tribal entity. This creates a dilemma for Native American artists and activists fighting rampant appropriation of their tribal products, which is how to go after a large retailer if it is not an individual coming forward saying that their art has been appropriated?

To that end, the Navajo tribe, which registered its trademark in 1943 to ensure consumers wouldn’t buy knockoff Navajo products, are navigating this murky space by using Western intellectual property law as a tool to ‘fight back’ to claim ownership “over their own cultural identity and future.”75 In 2011, the Navajo nation sent a cease-and-desist letter to the retail chain Urban Outfitters for violating the trademark “Navajo” that was included in the descriptions of their clothing. The company responded by changing the names to “printed Hipster Panties” and “Printed Flask,” which, as Minh-Ha Pham wrote in her piece for The American Prospect, doesn’t necessarily mean that consumers wouldn’t still read these easily recognizable prints as ‘Native’ anyway.76 By simply removing the Navajo name from its products and re-packaging these items to comply with trademark law, the root underpinnings of cultural appropriation – racism and consumer capitalism – are obscured. Furthermore, fashion’s intellectual property law’s “ethical shadings” had not prompted the company to make broader changes in their other

75 (Riley & Carpenter, 2015, 153)
76 (Pham, 2011)
retail stores, Free People and Anthropologie. Other companies not affiliated with Urban “didn’t get the memo” either, as Jenna Sauers wrote in her piece about Forever 21’s own appropriation of the Navajo trademark. Thus, by stripping clothing designs of the Navajo name but still keeping the cultural signifiers intact, intellectual-property law provides the illusion of protecting Native naming rights while still profiting off of marginalized groups. Minh-ha Pham offers a way forward:

These cases should not ask who “owns” ideas—which is difficult to determine in creative and collaborative industries like fashion. Rather, they should seek to determine who benefits from the use, exchange, production, and consumption of a particular cultural aesthetic.

Yet intellectual property law is often too narrowly defined as it stands now to protect Native naming rights in this way, which is not to say that Trademark law hasn’t provided avenues for redress. In fact, it was the Trademark language regarding “disparaging” marks that provided Native activists with a tool by which they could effectively pressure a federal court to cancel the Washington “R-skins” trademark, on the grounds that the word “may disparage” a large percentage of Native Americans based on research which found the effects of the mascot to be harmful on Native children. It is important to note that this still marked a concession, or compromise resolutions of sorts, given that the Washington Team can still use the trademarks. However, the decision still does potentially diminish in important ways the substantial power of the word to demean and suppress Native people.

77 (Sauers, 2011)
78 (Pham M.-H., 2011)
79 (Riley & Carpenter, 2015, 151)
The Navajo tribe has had far greater difficulty in their lawsuit against Urban Outfitters, which seemingly appears to be a clear-cut case of copyright infringement given that the outlet used the word ‘Navajo’ in representing their products. In the initial rulings however, the judge in the case sided with the retailer, dismissing the Navajo Nation’s trademark dilution claims – which protects “famous marks from unauthorized use.” In this case, the judge ruled that the Navajo trademark is not so well known that it would be “widely recognized by the general consuming public of the United States,” despite the fact that the Navajo tribe is the second largest in the United States. Yet the Federal Trademark Dilution Act requires that the courts have to assess whether the average family recognizes Navajo as a trademark. So because the Navajo community didn’t do active advertising campaigns to ‘brand’ themselves as a famous trademark (like for example, Coke or Pepsi), it enables courts to strip the Navajos of their trademark, and by extension, their cultural identity and claims to tribal sovereignty. Given this ruling then, the courts are in effect arguing that only powerful corporate entities that are able to spend heavily in the capitalist economy (in the form of advertising) are worthy of copyright protection. It is in this way that these intellectual property frameworks fall short in protecting indigenous rights; quite the contrary, they have in effect only served to reinforce the status quo of case law that has reaffirmed the power of dominant groups.

80 (Zerbo, 2016)

81 Ibid

82 (Donovon, 2011)
That being said, the case will still move forward to a jury trial, and has several more counts to consider, including false advertising and unfair competition.

Capitalism is about making money, and as Adrienne Keene put it, “making the most bang for our buck usually plays out by abusing indigenous people.” How to protect indigenous cultural products then? Some communities, such as the Pueblos, have taken the extreme measure of literally being in “cultural lockdown,” hiding their products to prevent Non-Natives from coming in to the community and stealing them. Susan Scafidi suggests the use of ‘authenticity marks’ as forms of protection that would essentially preserve the source community a degree of ownership while allowing for cultural exchange. Federal trademark law has already helped to establish these “authenticity” symbols, given that the Patent and Trademark Office has created a special registry for Native American symbols separate from trademarks. Thus, these labels could in fact help consumers gauge which products had actual associations with the source communities—similar to the argument for ‘fair trade’ and ‘organic’ labels on clothing and food.

Not surprisingly however, Native Americans are reticent to rely on trademark law to fight against cultural appropriation and progress Native self-determination for three main reasons. First, laws have failed to consistently protect indigenous cultural identity against cultural appropriation, as this chapter has clearly shown. Secondly, there is fear

83 (Keene, Interview with Adrienne Keene, 2016)
84 (Metcalfe, Interview with Jessica Metcalfe, 2016)
85 (Scafidi, 2005, 151-154)
86 (Scafidi, 2005, 66)
that overly restrictive federal laws could stifle community interests that are as diverse and dynamic as the tribes and members themselves. Third, it is difficult for community members to express through the language of Western law the immense harms and feelings of erasure they experience when confronted with a Victoria’s Secret model clad in a headdress, or a mascot touting the R-word.87

To that end, Native organizers have compensated for the limits of the law by employing other tools – most notably education and social media - to articulate the problems of cultural appropriation and effectuate a path for greater change.

The Native scholars, organizers, and artists who I read about and interviewed emphasized the importance of fostering understanding, creating dialogue, and building allies. In an important piece for Jezebel called “A Much Needed Primer on Cultural Appropriation,” both Jessica Metcalfe and Susan Scafidi educate readers on how to navigate Native cultural products so that consumers stand on the side of appreciation instead of appropriation. For example, after conceding that laws such as the Indian Arts and Crafts Act do not cover all Native goods (such as clothing items), the article still encourages consumers to guide one’s purchase of Native goods with the 3 S’s: source, significance (or sacredness) and similarity. The source would consider whether the community has invited you to share their culture, the cultural significance would determine whether it was just an everyday object or a religious artifact, and the ‘similarity’ element would ask consumers to gauge whether the appropriated item was just similar to the source object, or quite literally a knock-off. The article urges

87 (Riley & Carpenter, 2015, 156)
consumers to “educate themselves” and to purchase from Natives instead of buying from mass-produced chains where “Native American” goods are really knock-offs from China.

This dialogue is so very important, as non-Natives are often woefully unaware of the varying cultural significance in different Native artifacts and symbols, which is why so many young people wear headdresses to music festivals. In another article on xoJane, Dakota activist Jacqueline Keeler writes a pointed piece educating readers on the Native headdress, considered by Native nations as a sacred symbol that represents both the leaders who were killed during colonization of indigenous land, and the modern-day sovereignty and authority that Native tribes have to choose their own leaders. Thus, she argues, it is not to be worn as a fashion accessory, or on the cover of a magazine, even by those who lay stake to a claim of Native heritage. She states in her headline that she is “shocked that any American handed a headdress would wear it.”

However, as I argue:

For me, the issue isn’t so black and white, in part because we have not allowed for an inclusion of American Indian voices into the dialogue about this issue until very recently, leaving many truly ignorant about why these supposedly ‘harmless’ statements are indeed very harmful. It is difficult for me to point fingers at teenagers who, dressed up as ‘Indians’ for Thanksgiving when they were five by their parents and teachers, are now expected to understand the complex meanings behind the hipster headdress they choose to rock to signify their escape from the rigid conformity of suburbia.

Without education and dialogue, how are non-Native people who do not interact with Native Americans supposed to be imbued with all this cultural awareness and understanding? In an interview with Native American band A Tribe Called Red, the members spoke about navigating the tension of being confronted with racist symbols at

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88 (Keeler, As A Dakota, I Am Shocked That Any American Handed A Headdress Would Wear It, 2014)

89 (Dawisha, Halloween: The Season for Culturally Insensitive Fashion, 2014)
their shows (most notably, ‘hipster headdresses’) while not wanting to alienate potential allies. One of the members conceded that decolonizing these problematic spaces is difficult; he also stressed that “it takes a conversation” and sees their concerts as a “foot in the door” by which they can connect with people who have never met a Native person in their life and potentially build allies. They have also used their social capital and large social media following as a more immediate tool in which “one tweet from us and now a bunch of festivals are banning them.”

To that end, Native activists have taken to social media to describe the harm, bigotry, and pain of appropriation and to push for broad-based societal change in an effort to reclaim their cultural identity. Hashtag campaigns such as #notyourmascot and the “Proud to Be” advertisements against the R-skins have been disseminated widely across social media platforms, effectively influencing mainstream culture so that outlets from television show South Park to the New Yorker have all parodied team owner Dan Snyder’s claim that the name “honors” Native Americans. Bloggers such as Adrienne Keene of Native Appropriations and Jessica Metcalfe of Beyond Buckskin have employed the immediacy of social media interventions to post “real time real-time discussions, debates, and news stories,” detailing persistent cases of Native appropriation while also creating alternative spaces for Native expressions of culture and fashion. When Netflix

90 (Decolonization, Dance, and Hipster Headdresses – A Tribe Called Red comes to Massachusetts, 2013)

91 Ibid

92 (Riley & Carpenter, 2015, 110)

93 Ibid
posted a description of the *Pocahontas* film that was embedded not just in colonialist language, but in gendered ones (the description framed her main goal as marrying Captain John Smith), it took a couple of angry tweets from Adrienne Keene to her large twitter following for Netflix to change the description. In 2012 the band No Doubt pulled their music video “Looking Hot,” which depicted lead singer Gwen Stefani as a captured Native American writhing sexually as a cowboy pointed his gun at her, after complaints from the Native community that the video sexualized Native women (who face the highest rates of sexual violence in the country) and relied on antiquated, racist tropes.\(^{94}\)

The ensuing backlash led to further debate, as commentators on the Internet pointed out that artists have a long history of drawing inspiration from the artistic products of other cultures.\(^{95}\) Adrienne Keene conceded that ‘cultural borrowing’ is inevitable but that there have been artists such as Nelly Furtado (who featured Native hoop dancers in a music video) who have respectfully incorporated indigenous cultures into their works. And in 2014, the brand Ralph Lauren actually apologized and pulled its holiday ad campaign - which featured antique photos of stoic-looking Native Americans in Western attire - after Native blogger Ruth Hopkins criticized the company for capitalizing off of ‘assimilationist’ images for “personal gain.”\(^{96}\) The hashtags #BoycottRalphLauren and #StopCulturalGenocide were also employed as tools to elevate the collective voices of community members who took issue with the advertisements, and after twitter was flooded with thousands of tweets, the powerful house of Lauren was forced to retract. As

\(^{94}\)(Paulryanbiebert, 2012)

\(^{95}\)(Pham M.-H. T., Fashion's Cultural-Appropriation Debate: Pointless, 2014)

\(^{96}\)(LeTrent, 2014)
Adrienne Keene stated in the blog post about Pocahontas, “Sometimes I’m still amazed by the power of the internet.”

That power has also been leveraged to enable organizing for Native people, who are only 1-2 percent of the population and are widely dispersed across the country. Adrienne Keene noted that the last time Native people came together as a force was during the Alcatraz occupation in the 1970s, and that social media has made it easier to unite, connect, and organize calculated movements where Natives can maximize impact. To that end, she emphasized that new media “has been a game-changer” for organizing and shaping Native self-determination as more of a collective voice. For example, protest movements against Columbus Day have organized both at the grassroots level and online, successfully pushing several cities across the nation to adopt ‘Indigenous people’ day. By pushing for the celebration of Native culture rather than that of their oppressors, and urging communities to give back to marginalized people instead of taking from them, it is in this way that social media can be used to subvert dominant systems of colonialism.

The Internet can also circumvent gatekeepers and make it easier for marginalized groups to have access. Jessica Metcalfe started her blog in 2009 because it’s “free, easy to use, and helps me to educate the masses.” It has also changed her entire career as well, helping to carve a path for her to open her own online retail shop and eventually her

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97 (Keene, Netflix Pocahontas Update: They changed it for real this time!, 2015)
98 (Keene, Interview with Adrienne Keene, 2016)
99 (Sevett, 2015)
100 (Metcalfe, Interview with Jessica Metcalfe, 2016)
own store in North Dakota. She spoke of the “power of the internet” as being “awesome” for giving Natives spaces to tell their own stories and call attention to powerful entities that are trying to exploit Native culture.

Both Keene and Metcalfe leveraged this power to hold a corporation accountable in the fall of 2012, with very surprising results. Clothing company Paul Frank was on the receiving end of tremendous backlash when pictures from a Hollywood marketing campaign featured people dressed in Native American stereotypes – such as feather headbands, bows and arrows, and drinking from alcoholic beverages named ‘Neon Teepee.’ Both Keene and Metcalfe condemned these pictures immediately, releasing them across their social media channels and writing open letters to the company, condemning the images as caricatures\textsuperscript{101} and “playing Indian.”\textsuperscript{102} Mainstream outlets then picked up the story, and Paul Frank immediately removed the pictures and apologized. But they did more than that. They also expressed interest in collaborating with Native artisans for a collection, where all the proceeds would be donated to a Native cause. The collection came into fruition in 2013, and Paul Frank hosted a panel with the four designers in New Mexico.\textsuperscript{103}

It seems unlikely that without social media, Keene and Metcalfe would have been able to bring this issue to the attention of so many people within the Native community, and whether such a strong backlash would have occurred that effectively pressured the

\textsuperscript{101} (Keene, Paul Frank offends every Native person on the planet with Fashion Night Out "Dream Catchin’ Pow wow", 2012)

\textsuperscript{102} (Metcalf, Paul Frank’s Racist Powwow , 2012)

\textsuperscript{103} (Keene, Paul Frank Powwow Party Update: Am I dreaming?, 2012)
company to change its practices. However, social media does not erase the power structures embedded in system of power, and this was made abundantly clear to me when speaking to both Keene and Metcalfe about the collaboration. While they both acknowledged that Paul Frank (who notably prides himself as a philanthropist) “made it right” by apologizing and helping to create a collaboration, the event now seems to be more of a ‘PR move’ in hindsight rather than an opportunity for a company to acknowledge their own complicity. Keene revealed that she felt they were “exploited” and that they spent hundreds of hours on what they felt would be a bigger collaboration in more stores. As she put it, “it was really more reflective of the relationship Native people have with the industry.”

In fact, one could argue that this was another example of “interest convergence” at work, as Paul Frank was desperate to repair their image in the media and thus arguably needed this collaboration to do so. Indeed, media outlets from Jezebel to CNN lauded the company’s efforts. Keene was also disappointed that in the press release of the 2013 collection, Paul Frank erased mention of how the collaboration was born – from a racist, harmful party. As she put it in her blog, “hegemonic power structures rely on us forgetting the beginning,” so that Natives are framed as poor not because of centuries of systemic racism and oppressive policies, but because they are “lazy” and “unmotivated.”

104 (Keene, Interview with Adrienne Keene, 2016)
105 (Breslaw, 2012)
106 (Ebrahimji, 2013)
107 (Keene, The Paul Frank x Native Designers Collaboration is Here!, 2013)
Yet at the same time, Keene emphasized the importance of “being strategic and using the tools you have” within the context of the reality of the way the world works.\textsuperscript{108} Companies’ interest in maintaining their positive interest is a “powerful lever” Natives can use to achieve their aims, and social media can be used as a tool to shame and embarrass corporations. She and other Native activists are currently thinking of ways in which they can shame corporations such as Bank of America and Fed Ex for sponsoring the R-skins. As she put it, “if you affect the bottom line that’s when change is going to happen.”\textsuperscript{109} In other words, Native activists are using the blogosphere and social media to disrupt the capitalist system from within.

Yet, as discussed in previous chapters, new media technologies are tied to dominant systems of power, such as capitalism, that make it difficult to re-articulate power systems within the constantly shifting grounds of neoliberal governmentality. Both Keene and Metcalfe expressed frustration with Facebook, which has become increasingly monetized and has created algorithms so that only certain posts can be seen by their followers. To that end Keene has moved her organizing to twitter, where a single tweet of hers can “reach a million people.” But she expressed concerns about which voices are “rising to the top,” noting that her tweets about mascots get retweeted far more than her tweets about violence against women or environmentalism.\textsuperscript{110} To that end she tries to use her platform to amplify other voices and employ social media to mitigate and

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\textsuperscript{108} (Keene, Interview with Adrienne Keene, 2016)\\
\textsuperscript{109} (Keene, Interview with Adrienne Keene, 2016)\\
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid
\end{flushright}
“democratize” these inequitable power structures, which has its limitations given that social media is ultimately a reflection of society as well. Metcalfe spoke enthusiastically about Instagram as a space that has “yet to be co-opted,” attracting Native designers because they do not have to pay a third party, unlike Etsy. She also views Snapchat, the video sharing service, as an exciting platform for Native artisans because it creates this “closeness, this immediacy, this feeling that you’re on a journey with this artisan.”

This is an especially useful tool in the current cultural climate given that one of the key business trends in 2016 is learning the ‘story’ behind one’s purchase. However, in this culture of sharing that on the one hand elevates Native voices while also creating a conflict with Native’s desire for privacy, there is much to negotiate. Technology provides new ways in which information and images can be produced and circulated, threatening traditional authority. The constant emphasis on newness, in fact, threatens “the authority of tradition itself.” Metcalfe revealed that there are private ceremonies, for example, now being videoed and shared on social media. Indigenous communities have a long history of dominant white culture taking from them, thus, Natives must endure the burden of not “over-sharing” to protect the ‘authenticity’ of their cultural identity. Metcalfe elaborated on the challenges of navigating these murky spaces:

We have to use the tools in front of us and use them in ways that we can, and think about how to use them in different ways than the rest of society uses them. We have that ability to adapt in us. We have to use social media as a tool, but not the only tool. And we have to keep in mind that the next great tool is still on

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111 (Metcalf, Interview with Jessica Metcalfe, 2016)

112 ibid

113 (Brown, Who owns Native Culture?, 2003), 93
its way, and we’re going to be constantly moving over to the next one. It was MySpace first, then FB, now Instagram, and soon it will be snapchat. There’s always a new playground, a new space. As soon as we feel we are being manipulated in our playground, whether it’s through monetization or surveillance, we will leave, we will adapt, we will constantly look for new ways to move forward.\textsuperscript{114}

Native Americans have a long history of advocating for change in the face of blatant oppression, and it is thus no surprise that they are employing the Internet in new and innovative ways to fight widespread institutional marginalization and oppression. Having survived endless obstacles and numerous disappointments, they are prepared when their spaces are colonized and are always seeking out the new tool to help them carve out a new space. It is true that new media has its many limitations, which I have documented here and in other chapters. But there is no denying that the discussion around cultural appropriation has changed remarkably since Keene wrote her letter in 2011, become one that was met with resistance to a discourse that is now a central part of the mainstream dialogue, with the \textit{Huff Po} declaring 2013 the “year of Cultural Appropriation”\textsuperscript{115} and sports and culture blog \textit{Grantland} naming it on their pop-culture phenomena ‘best of’ list, describing it as “the phrase that everyone just learned.”\textsuperscript{116} While bloggers have succeeded in forcing the issue outside of its academic tower, Keene expressed to me that she wants to see the conversation “dig deeper” so that we can address the systemic issues, such as racism and capitalism, that are at the root of cultural appropriation. To that end, she is struggling with using social media to engage in these deeper, more critical conversations, which are not packaged neatly in 120 characters on

\textsuperscript{114} (Metcalfe, Interview with Jessica Metcalfe, 2016)

\textsuperscript{115} (2013 Was the Year of Cultural Appropriation, 2013)

\textsuperscript{116} (Browne, 2013)
twitter. The fundamental problem as usual, is how to sustain the movement and layer it with more complexity. Keene reveals the “beautiful burden” that marginalized people have to carry for their communities when she says:

**The bigger thing is that I don’t have an answer.** The last six years has brought massive change in terms of cultural appropriations and racism, and we’re still facing the same sorts of challenges. Now that we have started the conversations around terminology and what it is, what’s the next step. How do I move the scholarly convo move forward? I have a big audience, so there are higher expectations. People react more strongly because I show the good and bad of being a Native person, my voice has always been authentic and true. I can keep challenging through twitter. People have a lens on me. I have to vet things more carefully.  

**VI. Conclusion**

Jessica Metcalfe expressed hope for the Native artisan movement, noting that there is currently a backlash against the neoliberal policies of the 80s and 90s that led to outsourcing. People, especially the Millennial generation, want to spend money on companies that have social impact, and seek products that are handmade and artisan-crafted. Of course, these movements can always become co-opted, or re-articulated to support the neo-liberal project. But to that end education is crucial. Metcalfe emphasized that organizers can start by changing our dialogue around how we talk about our clothes, bragging about who made it instead of how little it costs. Change will not happen overnight, and one cannot deny that even for determined bloggers, it is difficult to re-articulate neoliberal governmentality. Yet Natives have a range of discursive interventions that they employ – legal redress, education, blogging, and hashtag campaigns – to counter both white supremacy and neoliberalism. Native advocacy has clearly been inspired in recent years by an “ethos of self-determination and cultural

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117 (Keene, Interview with Adrienne Keene, 2016)
revitalization”\textsuperscript{118} made possible by opportunities through technology, which has helped a hugely marginalized group find each other and raise their voices collectively against cultural racism and erasure.

\textsuperscript{118} (Riley & Carpenter, 2015, 139)
Chapter Seven
Conclusion

In a piece I wrote for my blog, Listen Girlfriends titled “New York Fashion Week – the Fantasy and the Fire,” I interrogated the discursive disconnects that enable those implicated in the fashion industry to rationalize environmental, labor, and cultural exploitation. The post notes that an article about the 2012 textile factory fire in Pakistan flashed next to a stunning advertisement of a beautiful model wearing bright clothing and jewelry for Armani. This display of beauty and fantasy alongside tragedy, I wrote, epitomized the main problematics of an industry that conceals its exploitative practices behind a façade of glamour and fantasy.

This dissertation has revealed how fashion’s disciplinary power has been articulated throughout different moments in history to reproduce the status quo so that neoliberal governmentality is strengthened, and hierarchies of class, gender, and race are reinforced. However, the case studies and interviews analyzed in this study have demonstrated how the same cultural resources that enable industry exploitation offer exciting, if complicated, potential to intervene and even re-articulate these processes. The purpose in analyzing these “lines of flight” was not to offer any tangible solutions per se, but to contextualize the workings of power in the fashion industry and how it can be both obscured to further the neoliberal project and re-articulated to disrupt hegemonic discourses of accountability, authenticity, democratization, and transparency as it relates to capitalism.
This analysis provides insight into the potential for intervention within the fashion industry. As this project has revealed, the fashion industry is a particularly difficult site for intervention, as fashion is part of the cultural economy and it is this elusiveness and slipperiness of culture that presents challenges in recreating the power-status quo. By identifying the “moves and countermoves” that reproduce and also re-articulate social orders within the ever-shifting, contested terrain of neoliberal disciplinary power and governmentality, my hope is that this project has emphasized how important multiplicity is in navigating these contradictions and complexities. Ultimately, the analysis of discursive strategies by designers, workers, organizers, and bloggers has enabled me to theorize the idea of agile interventions that are as nuanced as the problem, and that can engage with disciplinary power in all these complicated places. By shining a light on these agile interventions that are employed by various actors in the industry, my hope is that this project has helped to clarify these murky spaces and pave a way forward for change within the fashion industry and beyond.

Since spaces can be co-opted so easily, this dissertation argues for the importance of interventions that are a reflection of modernity’s emphasis on the new - especially crucial given the fashion industry’s focus on ‘trends’ and ‘newness.’ To that end, the emerging influence of new media technologies offers exciting potential as a powerful intervention into neoliberal governmentality, in that it has supposedly equalized and democratized the distance between the elite and the masses. However, as has been revealed, these “discursive technologies” are attached to dominant systems of governance such as capitalism and as such, the potential of these new media interventions can just as easily be co-opted by the spaces in which they promise to intervene. I have argued in this
study that strong organizing that effectively sustains re-articulation of the status quo requires a landscape of intervention that reflects “discursive agility.” New media is certainly an alluring tool for organizing, but it has been criticized for contributing to the fragmentation of movements. This is why, for a movement to be built that ensures participation and collective impact, education and grassroots organizing is paramount.

To that end, this dissertation has argued for various interventions that have emphasized the importance of education and collecting organizing, including Fashion Revolution, worker speaker tours, Greenpeace’s ‘Detox Fashion’ campaign, Fair Trade Town movements, and United Students against Sweatshops, to name a few.

I have no perfect answer to the problem of global exploitation in the fashion industry and how to provide a “victory narrative” for creating an industry fairer for people and plant. A main theme of my thesis is that the fashion industry is hugely complicated and rife with tension, struggle, and contested meaning. Since fashion’s inception, people and institutions have employed a myriad of discursive strategies to ignore and even justify their complicity in exploitative labor, environmental degradation, and other neo-colonial practices. The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze how people use discourse to free themselves of accountability, while locating potential interventions that can disrupt various discursive spaces in the fashion industry.

Chapter two examined fashion’s long history as a discursive space embedded in multiple sites of contestation that at different points in history, served both as a democratizing force while legitimizing and stratifying class and gender distinctions. The chapter revealed how the elusiveness of culture allowed for fashion’s disciplinary power to be enacted in ways that worked to disrupt burgeoning discourses around fashion
elitism, labor exploitation, and environmental degradation. Furthermore, it interrogated the role of marketing in the pre-industry age, alluring consumers (women especially) with its promises of accessibility and democratization even as it was intertwined with and produced by fashion elites.

Chapter three interrogated the digital media complex, grounded in marketing and advertising and tied to hidden discourses of neoliberal governmentality. The chapter revealed how media and technology can fuel these discourses while also offering the potential for disruption through these mediums. It explored the new media spaces, such as the fashion blogosphere, that young women employ as a tool for self-empowerment even as their spaces risk intrusion by corporate advertisers. It laid the foundations for an argument that I built upon in subsequent chapters – that new media technologies are rife with organizing potential, but the promises of heightened self-transformation and increased democratization are concealed by neoliberal governmentality that serve to co-opt that promise of facilitating more equitable arrangements.

Chapter four told the story of labor as a deeply contested discursive space in the fashion industry, one that has given rise to unions and sweatshops, branding and ‘fair washing.’ Those advocating for better working conditions – the factory workers, artisans, interns, models, organizers, and bloggers – employed a myriad of interventions in an effort to peel back the glamorous façade of the industry and reveal its gritty reality. Working tirelessly against a strengthening political, economic, and cultural neoliberal climate, this chapter revealed the diverse tools that are employed – new media technologies, student protests, worker speaker tours, university athletic contracts,
disclosure reports, certification labels, incubator factories – to articulate a vision for a more equitable industry.

Chapter five detailed the toxic footprint of the industry that should make them ripe for environmental advocacy intervention. Similar to labor advocates, those involved in the sustainable fashion movement employed a multiplicity of discursive tools that have fostered greater awareness around the fashion industry’s environmental footprint. The chapter detailed how many of these interventions have been co-opted by neoliberal influences that have resulted in greenwashing. Still, those invested in the ‘eco-fashion’ movement strive to work through these contradictions by using capitalism’s (and fashion’s) own resources as tools against itself. Organizations like Greenpeace, for example, have found success in targeted campaigns of brands and by employing discursive technologies (social media) and strategies (campaigns that hijack the language of fashion) that enable sustainability practices.

Chapter six detailed the discursive problems that inform fashion appropriation of marginalized groups, specifically focusing on dominant white culture’s societal claims to Native culture. Native American advocacy has been shaped in recent years by a burgeoning cultural revitalization, and to that end Native people have been empowered to employ a wide variety of interventions - such as legal redress, grassroots organizing, education and most notably, social media as both an organizing and shaming tool – to fight cultural erasure in the face of white supremacy and neoliberalism. Faced with a long history of oppression that has forced community members to be both resilient and flexible in carving out new spaces and tools to advocate for change, it was thus not surprising that Native Americans were using the Internet in innovative ways to hold
institutions accountable, whether it was employing twitter to shame a fashion company or creating an online space for Native artisans.

Fashion, as we have seen throughout these chapters, is constantly re-articulating a particular cultural aim that obscures a particular economic aim - profit. In chapters four and five, for example, the demand for socially and environmentally ethical products (in the form of ‘fair trade’ and ‘green’) has been re-articulated by fashion companies into filtered down products and targeted by activists for corporate co-option. In chapter six, the appropriation of Native trademarks and symbols by retailers like Urban Outfitters was done with claims that these products were actually a reflection of cultural inclusivity and appreciation. These cultural aims that conceal the economic motives are a reflection of capitalist governmentality’s disciplining power that serves to maintain status quo. However, the fact that some companies – such as mass retailer H&M and smaller company Paul Frank – were making some positive steps towards incorporating ethical commitments speaks to the possibility of corporations being transformed through advocacy interventions.

In my interviews with the bloggers, artisans, and activists who helped shape this study, I always asked the question, “What do you think is the greatest barrier to the fashion industry becoming more responsible and sustainable? By and large, the answer came down to ‘capitalism’ and “the bottom line.” What was so fascinating is that most of the people I spoke with seemed to accept this fact as reality, and instead offered the alternative of “using the tools you have” to hold neoliberal institutions accountable. For example, one such tool was using extensive media coverage as leverage, understanding the reputational damage that would do by shaming their ‘brand.’ United Students against
Sweatshops leveraged their power as students to pressure their schools to cut contracts with large athletics retailers like Nike – knowing that these brands might indeed re-evaluate their labor processes if their bottom line was at stake. Greenpeace, with their ‘Detox Fashion’ campaign, drew from the same cultural resources that conceal industry exploitation – notably by using fashion’s most common signifiers to speak to consumers about the industry’s toxic footprint in a language they could easily comprehend.

Adrienne Keene of *Native Appropriations* emphasized strongly that “if you affect the bottom line that’s when change is going to happen.” To that end she touted companies’ investment in maintaining a positive image as leverage for Native Americans to achieve their aims, as they could thus shame corporations, usually through the use of new media technologies.

What this analysis has demonstrated is that people and institutions employ a multiplicity of discourses to free themselves of accountability and justify their complicity, and as such, a myriad of diverse interventions are needed to disrupt these murky spaces at the intersection of culture, labor, sustainability, and fashion. This was something that most of my interview subjects deeply understood. Kristen Brodde of Greenpeace emphasized that organizers have to experiment with “a lot of tools” and that while social media was crucial in creating awareness, a broad-based movement had to “go beyond clictivism.” This was similar to the ethos of the Fashion Revolution Campaign, which reached over a billion social media impressions but is also supported by year-round education campaigns. Jessica Metcalfe of *Beyond Buckskin*, while acknowledging the power of social media in collectively organizing Native Americans and shaming corporations, noted that “social media is a tool, but it’s not the only tool.”
By using discursive interventions that are as varied and nuanced as the problem of global exploitation, organizers have had success in pushing their movements forward despite working within the shifting grounds of strengthening neoliberal governmentality. As documented in chapter four, student labor movement United Students Against Sweatshops successfully forced universities to adopt codes of conduct in the 1990s, and now are fighting for a living wage – a campaign they would have had no chance of winning if most universities hadn’t already adopted codes of conduct. Environmental advocacy group Greenpeace launched their ‘fashion detox’ campaign in 2011 demanding that companies eliminate all releases of hazardous chemicals, and four years later 171 brands have committed to doing so by 2020. And in the five years since Adrienne Keene wrote her blog post about the harm of Native American Halloween-inspired costumes, fashion appropriation has become a central part of popular mainstream discourse.

Yet while it is these moments, or discursive technologies, that facilitate fashion as a cultural phenomenon to both democratize and exploit labor, environmental and cultural practices, to both enable and constrain agents of social change.

Yet these discursive technologies and strategies, while enabling social change, could just as easily constrain it. For example, Adrienne Keene of ‘Native Appropriations’ spoke at length about how social media had been a “game-changer” for the Native population, allowing a diasporic community to organize more effectively online. Yet she lamented that now that the concept of appropriation had been adopted by the mainstream, the lens was myopically centered around the single act of appropriation – not the state of capitalism that has historically profited off of Native bodies and continues to do so, nor
systemic racism and sexism that creates a cultural environment rife for cultural exploitation. This perhaps speaks to the limiting form of new media technology. A twitter campaign calling out a company for their appropriation can effectively help end the offensive behavior, but a deeper analysis of structural racism might be too complex to be confined to new media tools and 120 characters. Even Adrienne admitted to me that one of the most effective ways to change people’s minds and hearts on the appropriation issue was simply by talking with them.

The blogosphere is also a contested discursive space where bloggers, mainly young women, are embracing this increased democratization of cultural space while also grappling with corporate advertisers. As discussed in chapter three, young women who were heralded as cultural ‘influencers’ for circulating shows like *Gossip Girl* in the blogosphere and pop culture were also performing unpaid work. Several of the ethical fashion bloggers I spoke with told me honestly that while they disapproved of sponsorships (being paid for a review) they also wished there was a way to be paid for their labor. And of course, the entire concept of ‘style blogs,’ even so-called ethical ones, reveals how fashion is re-conditioning these ideas around the self and agency – the neoliberal project. This is also reinforced in the entire “shop for a cause” culture that has been part and parcel of many sustainable movements – from the Green movement to fair trade. As a blogger myself, I have been able to experience first-hand a community where I could witness how multiple, competing discourses are situated in the fashion blogosphere.

Ultimately, I cannot locate a “best strategy” or “solution” for how to move forward to intervene in oppressive spaces. Each one that I have documented in these past
chapters is rife with possibility for challenging and re-articulating the status quo and also is at risk for reinforcing dominant power structures. The purpose of this project is to track the ever-shifting movement, and to interrogate how power operates to uphold and disrupt both hegemonic institutions and resistance movements. It is only by shining a light on this movement, created by a multiplicity of intervention, that we can understand how power is obscured by hegemony and then peeled back by those fighting for more egalitarian arrangements.

As Eric Henry from TS Designs said, “Life is a journey, not a destination.” Saul Alinsky, from Rules for Radicals, elaborates:

A word about my personal philosophy. It is anchored in optimism. It must be, for optimism brings with it hope, a future with a purpose, and therefore, a will to fight for a better world. Without this optimism, there is no reason to carry on. If we think of the struggle as a climb up a mountain, then we must visualize a mountain with no top. We see a top, but when we finally reach it, the overcast rises and we find ourselves merely on a bluff. The mountain continues on up. Now we see the “real” top ahead of us, and strive for it, only to find we’ve reached another bluff, the top still above us. And so it goes on interminably.¹

As someone who has been fighting against labor exploitation since I was a teenager, I certainly understand what it is like to feel like it is hopeless, to keep climbing and climbing and never see a mountaintop. But I have to remind myself that when I started this work back in the 1990s, the idea that big corporations like H&M would sign a legally binding agreement was almost laughable. Today, we have the Bangladesh Safety Accord. Enforcement has been far from perfect, and certainly fixing deeply broken supply chains will take time. But it is there, a glimmer of hope in a sea of despair. It is why I keep climbing.

¹ (Alinsky, 1971, 21)
The movements I documented demonstrate a multiplicity of interventions that are relevant for any organizer, both within and outside of the fashion industry. For example, citizens must recognize the limitations of the law and work outside of the system, just as Native Americans have been forced to do so in the face of lax legal protections of their cultural identity. Organizers must build broad-based coalitions and collective solidarity both locally and globally, as the students and garment workers of United Students Against Sweatshops have. Movements must extend beyond ‘clictvism’ and support social media awareness efforts with grassroots organizing and education efforts, as campaigns by Fashion Revolution and Greenpeace have demonstrated.

Whether these movements can be sustained in a cultural moment of great uncertainty and cultural divisiveness is yet to be seen. This was made abundantly clear when the U.S. elected Donald Trump as president in the 2016 election. His platform was rooted in xenophobia, racism, and misogyny. Yet it was his tirades against NAFTA and free trade policies that captured the hearts of many working-class Americans, especially those living in the Rust Belt. Writing this dissertation (while living in Southern Ohio, where industry left long ago) has surprisingly imbued me with empathy towards people who are deeply affected by the rise of neoliberalism, documented in great depth in this project. Education has urged me to listen. Articulating how to bridge the distance between people who live thousands of miles apart has made it easier for me to imagine forging connections and assembling coalitions with communities in my own backyard.

With great change breeds great uncertainty, but also opportunity for progress and the potential to re-articulate the elusive discursive problems at the intersection of culture, economy, and fashion. Fashion has an exciting leverage point for sparking discussion
around issues of labor, sustainability, and race and identity: everyone wears clothes, and as a “technology of the self,” fashion is instrumental in shaping our identity, our values, our culture, who we are. To that end, those fighting for better conditions in the fashion industry have cleverly used fashion’s resources against itself in creative ways to advocate within that moving and shifting ground of neoliberal governmentality.
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