

‘TALE ME ABOUT YOUR FIBERS’: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE FASHION REVOLUTION WEEK FRANCE

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ABSTRACT

Before the advent of fast fashion in the 1980s, people used to make and take care of their clothes. Nowadays, the emotional attachment to the fashion products is increasingly poor, the consumer lacks awareness and is almost no longer a user of their garments. This paper explores the way social movements are fighting to restore the roots of a sustainable fashion production system and provide their audience with ‘slow’ food for thought. Indeed, this research analyzes the revival of slower principles fostered by fashion activists who try to educate and raise awareness on the fast fashion industry mechanisms. This qualitative case study depicts the approaches of five activists during the Fashion Revolution Week (April 19 to 25, 2021). It is based on semi-structured interviews triangulated with the actual discourse that the interviewees had during the events they attended. The main aim of this research is to aggregate the various dimensions of the tales they embody and weave the fabric of their collective fight for sustainable clothing production. The findings show that their movement is more oriented towards a re-evolution and that it is deeply embedded in their personal relationships to materials and garments.

Keywords: activism, sustainable fashion, sustainable production systems, slow design

INTRODUCTION

“The revolution is not only going to be born from the makers. We all have to step up. [...] Consider the impact of the material [our clothes] are made of. Consider the supply chain that produces them. Consider the tenets of the company that created and distributed them. We need to fashion a personal style that does more good to the world than ill.” (Thomas, 2019: 290)

This quote is an invitation to take actions, collectively, for a sustainable clothing production and a conscious fashion consumption. This invitation resonates today as an imperative because, as Burns already denounced in 2010, fast fashion keeps favoring aesthetic obsolescence. Indeed, the conventional fast fashion industry still relies on a business strategy focused on the continuous renewal of trends and collections, which is enabled by the production of clothes at an ever-increasing pace (Camargo, & Pereira, 2020). It results in an addictive consumption behavior of fashion products that have poor emotional value and a short lifespan (Hirscher & Niinimäki, 2013). This rhythm is also unsustainable as it causes persistent unfair manufacturing conditions and a tremendous accumulation of textile waste in landfills (Hirscher, 2013).

Kate Fletcher (2008) acknowledged that only a few decades ago, before the fast fashion industry and its ready-made products thrived, the clothing production processes were slower, more local and more collaborative along the supply chains. In other words, fast fashion stimulated a cultural shift that has concealed the roots of a more sustainable system. For instance, compared with the previous generations, people have lost knowledge and skills in the making and maintenance of textiles and clothing (Fletcher, 2008). Moreover, even if consumers tend to be increasingly aware of the environmental and social impacts of the products they purchase, their attitude-behavior gap in fashion consumption is significant (Carrigan, & Attala, 2001). Indeed, no radical change is happening and Niinimäki (2010) argued that this is due to the fact that sustainable

fashion designs are not appealing to today's consumers who consider them too expensive and lacking in style and compatibility with their wardrobes. To solve this issue, change agents keep fighting. They resist the conventional system and alternative solutions are implemented. For instance, conscious designers stimulate aesthetic sustainability through slower approaches. They encourage proactive and closer collaboration with the consumer during the design process and create a stronger product-user relationship (Niemelä, 2010).

However, the impact of the sustainable fashion movement seems to be confined to a narrow group of people who already share this awareness (Portway, 2019). According to Portway (2019), if some designers are trying to create appealing and sustainable products, sustainable fashion is far from being a mainstream market. To fix this failure, many actors are involved, and among them, the activists seem to have a wide educational role to play (Portway, 2019). For instance, the NGO Fashion Revolution believes in “a global fashion industry that conserves and restores the environment and values people over growth and profit” (Fashion Revolution, 2021). This NGO was created after the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory in Bangladesh on April 23, 2013. Their Fashion Revolution week is every year commemorating the anniversary of this tragedy. Moreover, this week is meant to foster safety, accountability and transparency in the fashion industry. The researcher is using this week of events as a case study to explore and answer the following question: *How do activists currently fight to restore the roots of a sustainable fashion production system?*

This study contributes to the research done in both the fields of sustainability in the fashion industry and communication and action methods in activism strategies. This paper aims at exploring the approaches taken by different activists during the French Fashion Revolution Week that took place from April 19 to 25 of this year. The title of the study illustrates the vision of the

researcher. In her perspective, the different approaches associated with the activists' stories, values and projects represent their fibers. While they collectively fight for a more sustainable fashion industry, they weave their fibers together and shape the fabric of the social movement they support.

The following section presents where academia stands on the issues related to a more sustainable fashion industry. Then the method section exposes how the study has been performed to gather data on the activists' approaches to sustainable fashion. Afterwards, the results show the way that activists spread awareness on the fashion industry. Finally, the discussion part provides a conclusion regarding the methods activists are currently implementing to restore the roots of a sustainable fashion production system, limitations and guidance for further research.

THEORY

The Slow + Design Manifesto to question the fast fashion industry mechanisms

Fast fashion can be defined as the rapid and continual turn-over of low-cost clothing collections based on luxury fashion trends (Joy, Sherry Jr, Venkatesh, Wang, & Chan, 2015). This system is denounced as unsustainable because it relies on the just-in-time production of disposable products (Fletcher, 2008). Indeed, new trends behind the shop windows of fast fashion stores continuously lure consumers and invite them to get rid of the old and acquire the new trendy products (Lipke, 2008). The extremely fast paced production enables retailers to renew parts of their in-store collections twice a week (Cline, 2012). Fashion shopping thus becomes increasingly addictive according to consumers because of perpetual newness (Joyner Armstrong, Hiller Connell, Lang, Ruppert-Stroescu, & LeHew, 2016). This consumption pattern fuelled by the fast fashion industry involves negative economic, social and environmental consequences (Bielh-Missal, 2013).

However, raising awareness around the three pillars of sustainability, namely economic, social and environmental, participated in the emergence of the alternative slow fashion movement against the fast fashion system (Elkington, 1997; Ertekin, & Atik, 2015). The concept of slow fashion was first mentioned by Kate Fletcher from the Centre for Sustainable Fashion (UK) in 2007. According to Fletcher (2007), sustainability in fashion is meant to socially bridge fashion and pleasure with responsibility and awareness. The negative environmental impact made by disposable fashion products is also targeted by slow fashion through resource conservation, assured by less trends and seasons, and resource valorisation, assured by quality and local production (Cataldi, Dickson, & Grover, 2010).

Nonetheless, Fletcher's vision of the slow fashion practices had been itself inspired by the Italian slow food movement (Holt, 2009) and the later Slow + Design Manifesto expounded in Milan at the Slow + Design symposium in 2006. The Slow + Design Manifesto revolves around three principles: (1) valuing local resources and distributed economies, (2) transparent production systems and less intermediation between producers and consumers, (3) sustainable and sensorial products with a longer usable life (Clark, 2008). Clark (2008) investigated whether the concept of slow fashion is an oxymoron given that fashion is regulated by the fast pace of seasons and that slowness stands against it.

Local resources and distributed economies

To gain deeper insight into the slow fashion alternative mindset it is key to first understand the value of local resources and economies. In fact, to resist global and subcontracted fashion supply and value chains, local and creative strategies emerge (Clark, 2008). If the term local is difficult to define precisely, in the context of the fashion supply chain, it can be narrowed to the locale comprising the interactions between people, goods and services necessary for production

(Parkins & Craig, 2006). Therefore, the resources are localized and united in space within a local and thus more sustainable system. Moreover, according to the Slow + Design Manifesto, the economy is distributed in the sense that the production follows the local craftsmanship tradition until the expertise is no longer adequate and then moves to another local system. This offers an alternative to botched and standardised manufacturing processes because these composite products are infused with unique skills during each stopover inside this cosmopolitan network. Clark (2008) thus specified that local resources characterize physical as well as cultural assets of the community.

Transparent production systems and proximity between actors

Then, the second principle concerns transparency in the fashion system and highlights opportunities of collaboration between the different actors of the value chain. Slow fashion breaks down the barriers between designers, producers and users. This contrasts with the isolated blocks of the conventional mass-manufacturing fashion industry that avoid communication (Clark, 2008). Sourcing information and local production skills are shared, and this transparency also conveys a sense of authenticity (Appadurai, 1996). Indeed, the appeal for authenticity is noteworthy as nowadays, individuals tend to be deskilled and passive in consuming ready-made garments (Fletcher, 2008). High-end designers, on the one hand, currently set the trend and give fashion its fast tempo rather than filling a real need (Fuad-Luke, 2007). On the other hand, users lack knowledge and prefer discarding clothes rather than thinking about maintenance, especially given that mending usually connotes poverty (Clark, 2008). This is one of the reasons why actors in the fashion value chain would benefit from dialogue and collaboration to implement slow processes and avoid clothing waste.

Sensorial products and lasting lifespans

Finally, the third principle is to recognize fashion as being anchored to tangible garments rather than ephemeral trends. Products of fashion are in fact made by human beings who use and transform raw materials. The rapid and recreational consumption experience disconnects the end-user from the story of materials (Clark, 2008). Therefore, physically reconnecting the user to the making process of a clothing product is the cornerstone of the slow mindset (Ceppi, 2010). Ceppi (2010) claimed that it corresponds to the interrelation between sustainability and the senses. As argued by Clark (2008), this alternative perception of a product puts aside its superficial sign value related to its trendiness, to unveil the deep sensorial experience its design offers. Slow fashion supports a vision of clothing products beyond the simple fashion image they display. The adoption of this critical attitude towards the values and narratives promoted by high-street fashion trends relates to the 'Barthien' invitation to question the myths in fashion. Barthes thus examined the capacity of objects to transform into language and construct myths (Calefato, 2008). If consumers are artificially busy buying feelings of belonging and continuously seek to fulfil new toxic desires, the deconstruction of myths can be considered as one escape route towards responsibility and sustainability.

Indeed, clothing production is still faced with a dilemma of continuing to quickly answer consumer demands or adopting more sustainable strategies (Beard, 2008; Solomon & Rabolt, 2004). Slow fashion principles thus seem like a boon for the future of the fashion industry, but they mostly depict an ideal model involving actors who already belong to the fashion system and are willing to change their practices towards more sustainability. One of the main targets are designers and consequently, alternative design strategies are emerging.

The crucial challenge to gather empathic knowledge for a lasting garment lifespan

From a designer's point of view, a slow approach permits extending the product lifespan while deepening the user satisfaction (Niinimäki, 2011). Indeed, sustainability resides ultimately in the longevity of the subject-object relationship either functional or emotional (Clark, 2008). The subject-object relationship in the context of clothing is strengthened by a high degree of consumer-product attachment characterised by emotional bounds which durably postpone the product disposal (Schifferstein & Zwartkruis-Pelgrim, 2008). However, as mentioned before, consumers are victims of the fashion industry mechanisms and their toxic values. Hence, establishing a durable emotional connection between the garment and the user is challenging because most of the time a relationship with a garment is very intense but very short (Chapman, 2009). Chapman (2009) developed that this obsolescence follows from the strong attraction emanating from new trends which arouses a feeling of emptiness and a nascent obsession to exist through the latest fashionable products.

Nevertheless, alternative design strategies centred on the user offer the possibility to pair value creation with sustainable consumption (Niinimäki & Koskinen, 2011). Among them, the empathic approach within the design process serves to gather knowledge and deeply understand the aspects of a lasting emotional product relationship. The designer gets close to the user in order to empathize with their experience (Steen, 2011). In the role of the researcher, the designer listens to the user and lets them select the unique and relevant aspects to analyze and depict what the garments mean to them. Garments can even be discovered to be the symbol of emotions related to the user's past (Ahde & Koskinen, 2010). This way, designers collect empathic knowledge and follow interpretative approaches to generate grounded theories about deep product relationships (Niinimäki & Koskinen, 2011). The tangible outcomes of this process are meaningful clothing

products connected to the user's memories, values and needs (Niinimäki, 2010). This sustainable design strategy invites the user at the core of the design process and guarantees a lasting satisfaction coupled with an extended usage of the product.

Furthermore, if the construction of unexpected partnerships between designers and users permits to explore deep emotional attachment to garments and paves the way for lasting subject-object relationships, it also requires extensive consumer's awareness and interest about clothing production systems (Fletcher, and Grose, 2012). While slow approaches blur the line of the conventional fashion industry, massive awareness campaigns are key to educate the public about the downward spiral of high-street fast fashion (Fletcher, 2008). Quality and durable garments which are ethically produced out of sustainable materials are still too much related to niche market preferences (Beard, 2008). Finally, the acquisition of slow fashion products depends on the user's awareness and their corresponding aesthetic preferences for designs infused with environmentalist values (Niinimäki, 2011). But a dilemma remains as to which actors should lead the fashion revolution and enlighten the consumers about their distorted aesthetic perception in clothing.

The activist mission to empower users and pave the way for the fashion revolution

Slow fashion is considered by Hirscher (2013) as a fashion activism strategy. Fashion activism aims at improving and criticising the fast-fashion machine (von Busch, 2008). Fashion designers turn into activists when their skills and experience specifically contribute to a more sustainable and transparent industry. Hence, a design activist is a change agent who acts and exploits their skills to improve their social and/or environmental context (Thorpe, 2011). Therefore, as already hinted, the profession of designer is redefined through fashion activism and driven towards knowledge democratization for an improved fashion system (von Busch, 2008). In other words, to

achieve social and environmental benefits, design activists foster empowerment through knowledge sharing and human connections within slow design processes (Hirscher, 2013).

However, if design activists essentially seek to convert consumers into responsible actors of the fashion industry, it is reasonable to wonder if this quest is realistic as they mainly reach a public of users who are already engaged against fast fashion. In fact, according to the Fashion Revolution NGO, to get involved and start caring about clothing products as well as the actual values they embody, mainstream consumers first need to think differently. Moreover, a product may be durable thanks to the emotional value it built with the consumer, but in order to be purchased in the first place, the product still has to convey aesthetic value. Indeed, marketing tools usually employ aesthetic and experiential methods to appeal to consumers and make them purchase the products (Biehl-Missal, 2013). Nonetheless, aesthetic methods are absent from the sustainable fashion product range and marketing strategies used by sustainable brands as they emphasized more on the durable characteristics. Also, even if mainstream consumers in Western countries are ethically and environmentally aware, they may not seize the link between the negative environmental impact of industrial production and their consumption behaviors (Vezzoli, 2007). Thus, their attitude is not reflected in their consumption behavior (Carrigan, & Attala, 2001). In 2011, Niinimäki underlined the increasing mainstream consumer backlash against the purchase of mass consumption products relying upon poor ethics in clothing manufacturing. Ten years later, the debate is ongoing, and no radical shift in consumers' aesthetic preferences has been manifested.

In consequence, to foster a fashion revolution and create a mainstream market for sustainable fashion specific missions have to be delegated to the right actors, which is currently not the case. Hence, there is a need to make sustainable design attractive on one side and give the floor to activist organizations on the other, to disturb and educate the public (Portway, 2019).

Portway (2019) provided a concise overview of the climate justice movement related to fashion and portrayed the successful strategies to adopt. She targeted sustainable brands and their marketing teams as well as activist groups and launched a call to action based on a critical review of historical events and existing literature. In sum, brand designers should not expect to attract mainstream consumers by sharing political claims for climate justice and sustainability (Dickson, 2000). Activists on the other hand should lead the social movement by strengthening their messages towards ethical responsibilities, environmental conservation and anti-consumption patterns (McKibben, 2012).

Indeed, sustainable fashion products deserve to be attractive to the consumer's eyes despite their environmental and social implications because on the contrary of conventional brands, they have nothing to hide, they are genuinely good for people and the planet (Portway, 2019). Therefore, to become mainstream, sustainable features should not be accentuated to try to change the consumer's preferences, they should only be displayed as value-added attributes (Rudell, 2006). Moreover, the fashion revolution leaders, characterized as the change agents driving towards consumer empowerment, should remain being activist organizations such as Greenpeace or Fashion Revolution (Portway, 2019).

Until now, even if activists are the actors who have the largest range of action to raise awareness around the downsides of the conventional fashion industry, Portway (2019) denounced that these organizations have never been able to effectively disturb their audience. In short, if history has shown that provoked trauma and anger have the potential to foster alternative practices, for now in the fashion industry, too few scandals, disclosures and civil disobedience protests have gone viral.

METHOD

The aim of the study is to explore the methods activists currently implement to fight to restore the roots of a sustainable fashion production system. In order to condense the research, the data was collected during the week of events organized in April 2021 by the French satellite of the NGO Fashion Revolution. The Fashion Revolution Week (FRW) therefore represents the case study of this research. French activists were interviewed, and their answers were cross-checked with their recorded participation in the FRW events.

Research design

Advocacy for an alternative and more sustainable fashion industry is still a nascent field of research. In consequence, the study has been conducted in the form of a qualitative case study method that resembles an in-depth investigation (Anttila, 2006). Traditionally, the case study design is used to analyze in detail a complex single case and it can be a single event (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The FRW comprises complex interactions between actors and their different approaches to the fashion industry. This research design was thus chosen to explore them (Stake, 2005). All in all, case studies are appropriate when deep understanding of a process in real-life setting is needed (Yin, 2018).

The 2021 edition of this week of events organized by the French branch of the NGO prioritized the interconnectedness of human rights and the rights of nature. In a nutshell, the three keywords to keep in mind are Rights, Relationships and Revolution. The FRW is a chance for its participants to expose their vision of sustainable fashion and share their personal projects and specific areas of interest.

Data collection

Five participants in the movement, five women, were interviewed in the same week to ensure a coherent unit of time in the case study (Table 1). The semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility in gathering novel insights for the exploratory nature of this paper (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). They followed the previously developed guide with main themes and probing questions (Appendix B). They were all conducted in French and lasted 45 minutes on average. To address ethical concerns, a consent form was sent to each interviewee and verbally iterated, and verbally agreed upon (Appendix C).

The five interviewees were theoretically sampled according to the conventional method to progressively generate theory through collection, coding and analysis of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The interviews were thus iteratively planned and conducted during the ongoing inductive process of theory building. The purpose was to refine the aggregated dimensions of the grounded theory rather than to increase the sample size (Charmaz, 2000). The semi-structured interviews were built to explore four main areas of interest: (1) the garment-user relationship & emotional attachment to fabrics, (2) the participation to the Fashion Revolution Week & values embodied, (3) the opinion on the movement & its achievements and (4) the personal role in or out of the fashion industry & own approach.

TABLE 1
Overview of the activists interviewed

Name of the interviewee	Clarissa A.	Sofia L.	Catherine D.	Isabelle C.	Cécile G.
Personal project	Founder CA[RE] studio	Co-founder Atypique Atípico	President Fashion Revolution France	Founder Good Gang Paris	Founder Hummade
Area of expertise	Consulting in eco-design, sustainability, biomimetism	Consulting in eco-design, project management, responsible communication	Journalism on textile innovation, slow fashion, environmental conservation	Actions for conscious consumption, textile appropriation	Journalism on slow and art wear
Role within FR	Member of the board of directors (education committee)	/	Coordinator France	General secretary	/
Major event attended	Round table discussion: For a committed education	Troc party in 2019	Webinar: #WhatsInMyClothes traceability of linen and cotton materials	Round table discussion: Embodying values through visible mending	Talk: the third edition of the Hummade journal

Data analysis

The analysis of the data was oriented towards the building of a grounded theory that answers the following question: *How do activists currently fight to restore the roots of a sustainable fashion production system?* (Appendix A). The definition of their pattern of actions for a more sustainable fashion production system has been permitted by the aggregate of the activists' testimonies. The data was thus analyzed as each interviewee added their own 'fibers' (i.e. values and projects) to the theoretical 'fabric' (i.e. social movement for sustainable fashion). The researcher immersed herself in the empirical data to deeply understand the connections between the roots of a slower,

more sustainable fashion industry and the methods activists are implementing. She observed the fabric being woven progressively as she interviewed the activists (Eskola & Suoranta, 2008). Concretely, the data gathered throughout the interview transcripts was coded in Excel tables and consecutively triangulated with notes taken during the viewing of the recorded events attended by the interviewees. This process organically formed eight aggregate dimensions that defined the activists' approaches and the way they are fighting. At this stage, considering the ramifications and their diversity, the process of coding was reiterated to build two refined aggregate dimensions that summarized the shape of the social movement supported by the activists interviewed.

The reliability and validity of this research have been ensured according to the alternative principles established by Guba and Lincoln (1994), trustworthiness and authenticity. Concerning trustworthiness, credibility was enhanced by the effort to cross-check the findings using different data sources (Deacon, Bryman & Fenton, 1998). The primary data composed by the interviews was thus triangulated with the actual discourse that the interviewees had during the FRW events they attended. Then, the transferability of the findings can be supported by the fact that the Fashion Revolution program for this week is similar in all the 99 countries the NGO is located. But, as activist ecosystems are different in every place, the subjective interpretations cannot be transferred. When it comes to dependability and confirmability, the researcher had the opportunity to partner up with a peer student, who faithfully played the role of auditor at each step of the research.

Finally, the authenticity criterion is partially respected through fairness and tactical authenticity. Indeed, the impressions of five different actors of the movement during the FRW were collected and, in the end, the research can serve as an empowerment journey for actors who would like to take actions for a more sustainable fashion production system.

Theoretical saturation has been reached in the coding of data as the researcher reviewed the data several times to ensure it completely matched with the defined themes and dimensions. However, given the limited amount of time dedicated to the research project, theoretical saturation in terms of collection of data cannot be guaranteed.

RESULTS

The result section is built in the form of a tale. Indeed, the aim of the study is to depict how the interviewees collectively weave the shape of a movement which resists fast fashion and fights for sustainable fashion production processes. As in a story, the individual statements follow one another, reinforce each other and lead to a collective manifesto that represents the activists' approaches to sustainable fashion. This is a choice from the researcher to only provide some quotes at the beginning of sub-paragraphs as a foretaste of the ideas further developed. More quotes can be found in Appendix A.

Activists embody the inherent spirit of fibers and fabrics

This study first shows that fibers and fabrics mean something for the activist who touches and wears them. They create both a poetic and strong link between humans and materials.

Initial emotional bound

“We all have this collective unconscious around this plant, and it affects me a lot on an emotional and physical level.”

The interviewees have a particular connection with the fabrics and its fibers. They are capable of describing the feelings they experience while wearing a garment, more specifically, their favorite garment. For instance, Cécile appreciates the serenity that the cotton fiber makes her feel. She is attached to its touch because its softness relates to a constant physical and spiritual

well-being. On her side, Isabelle is more attracted to another natural fiber. Linen was her love at first touch. All in all, fabrics thus act like facilitators to physical connections throughout a quite intimate sensorial journey.

Moreover, activists consider the fabrics of their garments as manifestos that have the power to share messages and show their commitment. For example, Catherine highlighted the importance to recognize the collective unconscious around the versatile linen fiber. The cultivation of this fiber is locally anchored from Caen to Amsterdam and reveals a wide range of know-hows and traditions. Wearing linen is also a means for activists to consciously embody these local stories and eventually tell them to spread awareness. The stories behind fabrics were also described by Isabelle as a fascinating imaginary which is intergenerationally-connected. Indeed, the stories are made out of human connections and of accumulated memories over years. The culture of fabrics and the perpetuation of their inspiring universes is crucial according to the interviewees. Sofia strengthened this point by mentioning the power of garments to be vectors of emotions, but she added a political dimension. For her, using particular fabrics and consequently wearing their stories and values is a choice, the choice not to follow the imperatives of the conventional fashion industry. Finally, for Clarissa, fibers are precious resources for innovation and research. Her ultimate goal is to gather their attributes within an open-source fabric-library to increase the accessibility of the stories, feelings and knowledge behind them.

The study therefore points out that activists have the ability to fight and transmit their values by wearing their garments. Now, it is time to explore how these emotional bonds with materials establish a preliminary basis to the commitment of activists in a more practical way.

Sustainability in practice

“[E]specially the fact of trying and experimenting, to learn and nourish one's choices with knowledge and know-how, of the concrete.”

Undertaking projects in fashion is a way for them to foster the emerging codes of sustainability. These codes are further developed along three key areas of discussion. For all the interviewees, the main goal was the garment's durability and the extension of its lifespan.

To do so, the first key area of discussion was the raw materials selection. Quality has been mentioned by each person interviewed, but they characterized it differently. For Sofia noble materials guarantee quality and durability. For Catherine, it was more complex, sustainability and quality depend on the first steps of the fabrics supply chains. Quality is thus linked to an organically grown, natural and durable fiber, according to her.

The following area of discussion was the product design. Isabelle was inclined to prioritize simplicity when it came to design. Here, Clarissa and Sofia were more demanding and supported more functionality in design. In fact, Sofia advocated a sustainable fashion design that is adaptable over time to fulfill the user's ever-changing needs. Her approach consists of timeless aesthetics coupled with unique customized details.

The last area of discussion concerned the production and product lifecycle. Indeed, a lasting garment lifespan does not only depend on raw materials and design. In Cécile's opinion, a quality making process is a key prerequisite to the garment's lasting lifespan. Sofia also pointed out the importance she attributes to the safeguarding of craftsmanship in fashion production systems. In parallel, all the interviewees cited the issue of clothing maintenance and fabric repair. For Isabelle, the durability of a garment widely depends on the singularity of the product-user emotional relationship and mending is one of the most powerful appropriation processes. In this

perspective, Catherine referred to the recreational mending of garments as being a relaxing process. Afterwards, Sofia and Clarissa briefly alluded to the question of the reuse phase and alternatives to waste such as clothes swap or upcycling workshops.

Moreover, in parallel to the exposition of their own projects and approaches related to sustainable fashion production, the study demonstrates that the activists tend to implement practical action methods alongside with a larger spectrum of actors, sometimes inexperienced in the fashion sector.

They first encourage the building of participative slow alternatives for a more sustainable fashion industry. For instance, Clarissa and Sofia strongly promote eco-design processes to transform the fabrics. These processes widely depend on the construction of human-nature relationships and the respect of their mutual rights which is a key statement of the FRW this year. Design processes must also belong to a smart and collaborative approach as emphasized by Clarissa during the guest lectures she uses to deliver at design schools. She confessed being currently particularly involved in a user-centered design approach which enables closer relationships and exchange of knowledge between inexperienced users and makers. Furthermore, Sofia argued that slower design approaches would benefit from handcrafted parts in the garment making process. In parallel, Isabelle preached about visible mending workshops for novices. She described it as a creative process to easily enhance damaged fabrics and garments and avoid wasting them. Finally, on her side, Cécile declared participating in the strengthening of the lobbying power of the Fashion Revolution organization. In fact, she practices slow journalism and takes part in the extensive media coverage of all these alternative solutions.

Secondly, they create the appropriate tools to invite the audience to in turn, take actions during the FRW. Clarissa emphasized the fact that she is autodidact in eco-design and that following her intuitions has always benefited her. She thus always encourages her audience to resist conventions and act according to what matters to them, independently of what is considered to be the norm. Then, in Isabelle's opinion, it is essential to provide handbooks and to organize practical activities in order to make an impact for textile sustainability. Indeed, she argued that it is always worth trying to make do with what is at hand. She added that recreational learning processes permit gaining accessible and simple skills that users have lost over the past few decades. Isabelle's motto is therefore, to always try and experiment even if the task seems too difficult.

Activists make the Re-evolution grow

Catherine qualified the Fashion Revolution of Re-evolution, because the transition that the NGO has always praised is in fact a partial step backwards, a revisit, a restoration of the production processes preceding the fast fashion surge. The challenge raised by the activists is to fuel this re-evolution by convincing mainstream consumers that sustainable alternatives can be both available and attractive. The study indicates that to restore the roots of a sustainable fashion production system, activists also focus on education and collaboration between actors to achieve this goal.

Illustrate to educate

“[T]o advance mentalities in the exploration of the textile production chain, which is very complex when you are not part of this universe.”

The interviewees acknowledged that the transition towards sustainable fashion is a shared responsibility between the fashion brands and the consumers. Their discourse is addressed to both groups of actors. They expect them to change their behavior, to do so, the study shows that activists fight without compromising on their set of values.

They first communicate their core values. Cécile cited three precise words to qualify her state of mind during the FRW: solidarity, inclusion and respect. In this sense, Catherine added that the key mentality to adopt is a peaceful, calm and patient approach to activism and focus on the positive. This way, every new ally to the movement feels welcomed in a non-judgmental way. Isabelle summarized this approach with the word empathy. She also argued that as a result of perseverance, the initiative to take care of the garment and mend it during the use phase starts to draw away from its negative connotation to poverty and starts to illustrate ecological consciousness. According to her, there is an intention behind mending clothes that could have been discarded. The intention is to choose to give a new momentum to the concept of usefulness and to adopt a virtuous behavior. In this dynamic, Sofia evoked the challenge of the necessary shift towards small scale production and frugal consumption.

Then, when it comes to their actual communication methods with fashion brands and consumers, the study highlights that they balance a visionary gaze on alternative production and consumption models, with a critical gaze on the conventional fashion industry. Indeed, Cécile talked about her desire to depict an independent, committed and responsible alternative fashion industry. She exposed her critical gaze on garments but what matters to her is to expose solutions and change makers. Nevertheless, Sofia indicated that the movement may facilitate mindful consumption but that it mainly touches people who are already environmentally aware. On her side, Clarissa informed of the potential danger of guilt-inductive radicalness and moralization in communication methods. For her it may be a counter-productive way to build awareness among mainstream consumers. Working on social change and transition mainly means for her to break down the barriers of communication by transferring knowledge and helping people to make sense. Isabelle strengthened this necessity to raise awareness and play an educational role on consumers

for them to start to buy less and to choose well. To gain visibility, she encouraged the communication of illustrative figures such as ‘one t-shirt equals three thousand liters of water’. Furthermore, all activists respected the duty of remembrance of the Rana Plaza disaster. Although Catherine and Clarissa mentioned the concerning current Uighur situation, the Rana Plaza collapse is the event that keeps building the most support around the movement. Finally, Catherine emphasized on the inspiration and information mission of the Fashion Revolution movement and she believes that continuing to denounce the fashion industry's downsides will force the stakeholders to fulfil their duty to support sustainable processes.

Moreover, this year, new hashtags have been introduced in the Fashion Revolution awareness campaign: #WhoMadeMyFabrics and #WhatsInMyFabrics. The study shows that the purpose of activists is mainly to teach the audience about the complex fashion industry apparatus.

They first explain why the supply chains are so complex. Indeed, all the interviewees denounced that clothing production can hurt both humans and nature. It can lead to health and environmental damages in each and every step of the chain from the chemical or natural fibers, to the fabrics and then to the clothes. Sofia mostly linked these negative impacts to the various transformation processes of the materials used for clothing products. She highlighted the challenge to bridge human rights and the right of nature by guaranteeing both ethical production and positive ecological impact. In this perspective, Clarissa emphasized on the importance of being able to recognize sustainably-sourced materials. Catherine wrapped up her argumentation by stating that the two core issues to take into consideration are transparency as well as traceability.

Then they empower the audience to better understand the system. Isabelle thus shared her enthusiasm around the fact that the consumers are able to autonomously seize and

decipher the issues around the production of fabrics. Hence, she believes people will increasingly seek for values and coherence in their consumption behaviors. However, Catherine declared that mainstream consumers already show more exacting demands on these codes of ethics along the supply chain and that through the awareness campaigns during the FRW, they have the opportunity to ask the brands to meet their expectations.

Partnerships build community

“This commitment allows me to be in contact with other people with different backgrounds and experiences than mine and this is what allows me to nourish and develop my vision”

The study highlights that all the activists are embedded in the same local social movement. Indeed, Fashion Revolution France partners up with organizations that are part of the same ecosystem and ultimately share the same hopes for the future.

Cécile underlined the strong human aspect of the movement and that most projects in fact rely on the community. She even qualified the other activists of ‘brothers and sisters on the battlefield’. Clarissa on her side, emphasized on the synergy of the team and the opportunity to create multidisciplinary collaborations. Isabelle was in favor of regularly organizing gatherings in the form of participative workshops for people of different horizons to communicate. She argued that the key to assimilate messages and be motivated to share them is interaction. Catherine also talked about the imperative initiative to collaborate with other Parisian schools and NGOs. She even envisaged broader collaborations outside of the capital but for now she claimed a lack of organizational means. However, Sofia warned against the potential risk of disunity within the ecosystem in the long run in case of disagreements on action methods for example.

All in all, the activists interviewed share the same priorities for the future. They all believe in timeless designs to be valuable assets for sustainable fashion production systems. But they all have something to add to the concept. Cécile first acknowledged the genuine character

of such design because pioneer designers have thought about it for a long time. Isabelle defended a simply attractive design that can last. Catherine added that timeless is genderfluid as it has been a constant over the last decades. Clarissa was more anchored in a biomimetic approach because for her, nature is the ultimate teacher. In the same dynamic to respect the biosphere, Sofia advocated a circular model for the garment life cycles.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to explore the activists' approaches and understand the social movement they are collectively weaving to foster sustainable fashion. During the Fashion Revolution Week, actors from different horizons spoke, exchanged knowledge and took actions to draw the outline of a virtuous fashion industry. In this sense, they were all activists. This study exposes that the way activists currently fight to restore the roots of a sustainable fashion production system is dual (Appendix A).

The first line comprises the way they emotionally and practically embody the values of the sustainable fashion industry they aim to spread. Their fight in favor of sustainability in clothing production is very much linked to their attachment to the stories of fibers and fabrics. Indeed, the activists are themselves influenced by the legacy conveyed by the universe behind garment materials and know-hows.

The second line is related to the way they educationally and collectively make the re-evolution grow. Indeed, currently the issue in the movement is the lack of awareness of the consumers around fashion production systems (Portway, 2019). To enable the re-evolution, that is to say, the fight for a transition towards slow and creative processes, the activists are widening the community of people who are able to decipher the downsides of the conventional fashion industry.

Fashion activists overcome the oxymoron of a sustainable industry

To begin with, the path to the restoration of traditional and slow principles for lasting garments is paved by the actions of activists who launch projects. The interviewees were both activists and entrepreneurs. The fact that their roles are blurred contrasts Portway's (2019) conclusions as she distinguished between the brand designer and the activist. The interviewees were militants, but they also have their own project in parallel. These projects spread values revolving around the principles of slow fashion that Clark (2008) listed: local and transparent production and lasting product lifespans. Therefore, the activists interviewed were closer to fashion activists in the sense of Hirscher (2013).

Moreover, the fashion activists were particularly enlivened by experiments on fabrics and upcycling workshops. These kinds of activities are the innovative and creative sparks that kindle the fashion restoration towards aesthetic longevity. As Fletcher (2008) also emphasized, slow fashion produces garments that are aesthetically designed to last. All in all, both slowness and creativity illustrate the word re-evolution mentioned earlier. This way, slower garments can be either lovingly made by hand, through age-old techniques embedded in local communities, or creatively upcycled from pre-loved clothes.

In consequence, at this point of the study, there is a theoretical adjustment to make concerning the concept of sustainable fashion industry. In fact, the NGO Fashion Revolution claims to build a global community that initiates a better and more sustainable fashion industry. Nonetheless, the findings of the study emphasize on the fact that a sustainable fashion production system does not only rely on the industry. Indeed, it also comprises handicraft and Do-It-Yourself processes that the interviewees cited and linked to slower approaches of clothing production. These processes are not compatible with an industrial production scale. Therefore, one could argue that

slow fashion and its sustainable production systems cannot directly fight against the fast fashion mechanisms as it cannot fully compete as an industry.

Demonstrate sangfroid and collaborate are key to empower the fashion revolution actors

If activists are fighting, the study shows that this is mainly an ideological dispute based on the power of the values embodied in the clothes. Being an activist in the current context is being patient, steady and realizing that being true and transparent is key. The slow philosophy is spreading because people need trustworthiness. Gwilt and Rissanen (2011) stated that developing a personal style was a way to foster slow fashion. Indeed, the garments here are shown to be the most comfortable tools to create a personal style that allows the user to embody their values. Therefore, slow fashion has the potential to become the new mainstream comfort zone.

Moreover, in this study, the activists show their willingness to weave together their individual fibers to enable the creation of the appropriate social fabric for the fashion revolution to happen. Indeed, to rally the audience to the fight, the activists rather stay in a peaceful and calm attitude which does not follow the call to action Portway (2019) made. Fletcher (2007) denounced a gap, the one with pleasure and fashion on one side and responsibility and awareness on the other. To bridge it, the activists interviewed rather use communication methods close to slow activism practices. Their approach to the restoration of a sustainable fashion production system mainly prioritizes conversations with the audience to favor the emergence of new behaviors. According to Kapchan (2016), listening is a very important source of knowledge and many revolts came from slow activism strategies that favored language and communication. If they sometimes denounce the conventional industry, they do not target a fashion brand in particular. They do not really

confront the fast fashion industry by showing scandalous images or performing violent actions against the current system.

Finally, the findings of the study define a sustainable clothing production system as a system which provides fewer and more functional products. To do so, they were widely in favor of a user-centered design as Niinimäki and Koskinen (2011) presented. This approach enables closer relationships between the maker and the user (Fletcher, 2008). It also creates an appropriate context to exchange knowledge for the user to take care of a product that has been designed to fill a real need.

Sustainable fashion products are the ones we take care of and fuel with stories

From these theoretical conclusions emerge some implications for practice. First, concerning the attributes to look for in a sustainable product. A sustainable garment is a garment that lasts according to previous theoretical statements. The issue was the intrinsic property of fashion to be ephemeral and perishable. The fight to restore the roots of a sustainable fashion production system mainly relies on the relationship users are prone to maintain with the product. So, the study encourages the diffusion of concrete examples and stories to demonstrate that loved clothes last. These examples have the ability to reduce the influence of the ephemeral narratives and myths conveyed by conventional fashion to the benefit of self-construction of memories and values. This state of mind participates in the construction of stronger user-product relationships. The word fashion that was synonymous with perishable acquires now the potential to be converted into timeless explorations.

Moreover, slower garments may be designed to last longer but maintenance has been shown as the ultimate key to lasting lifespans. To shift from a consumer role, to an enlightened

user role, one has to possess appropriate tools. Activists have the mission to provide these tools to mainstream consumers and make the journey easy, recreational and cool. This journey would also permit shifting from recreational consumption (Clark, 2008), to recreational mending activities. Making clothes last as long as possible and infusing them with a collection of stories and memories, is the coolest thing one could do. This strengthens the relevance of a combination of strategies to achieve sustainable behaviors and lasting lifespans (Mugge, Schoormans & Schifferstein, 2005). For example, Mugge et al. (2005) advocated a pairing between local production and customization. Timeless design thus couples quality with creativity. All in all, taking care of garments, repairing them, being in love with them, is the conclusion of this study to infuse the necessary symbolic value inside the product for it to last.

Limitations and further research

This study has a few limitations. First, it relies on a narrow single case study and it is delicate to generalize the conclusions at a larger scale given that the activists interviewed were all women who are part of the Parisian sustainable fashion ecosystem (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Moreover, the researcher being deeply involved herself in the social movement for sustainable fashion, she tried her best to remain impartial even if the self-selection bias was challenging to avoid while seeking to reach objectivity of facts (Silverman, 1999). Finally, the study of such a long and complex process that is the shift of an industry towards more sustainable practices would benefit from a larger timeline of research (Queirós, Faria, & Almeida, 2017).

This research has explored the French case, further research could then replicate this method to another country. Further research could also compare and contrast the impacts conventional activism and slow activism have on the audience and the effectiveness of their mutual

methods implemented to rally people to the sustainable fashion movement. Lastly, further research could explore another aspect of the sustainable transition of the fashion industry such as the large-scale management of second-hand products or even another fight that activists take to heart such as intersectionality in the fashion industry.

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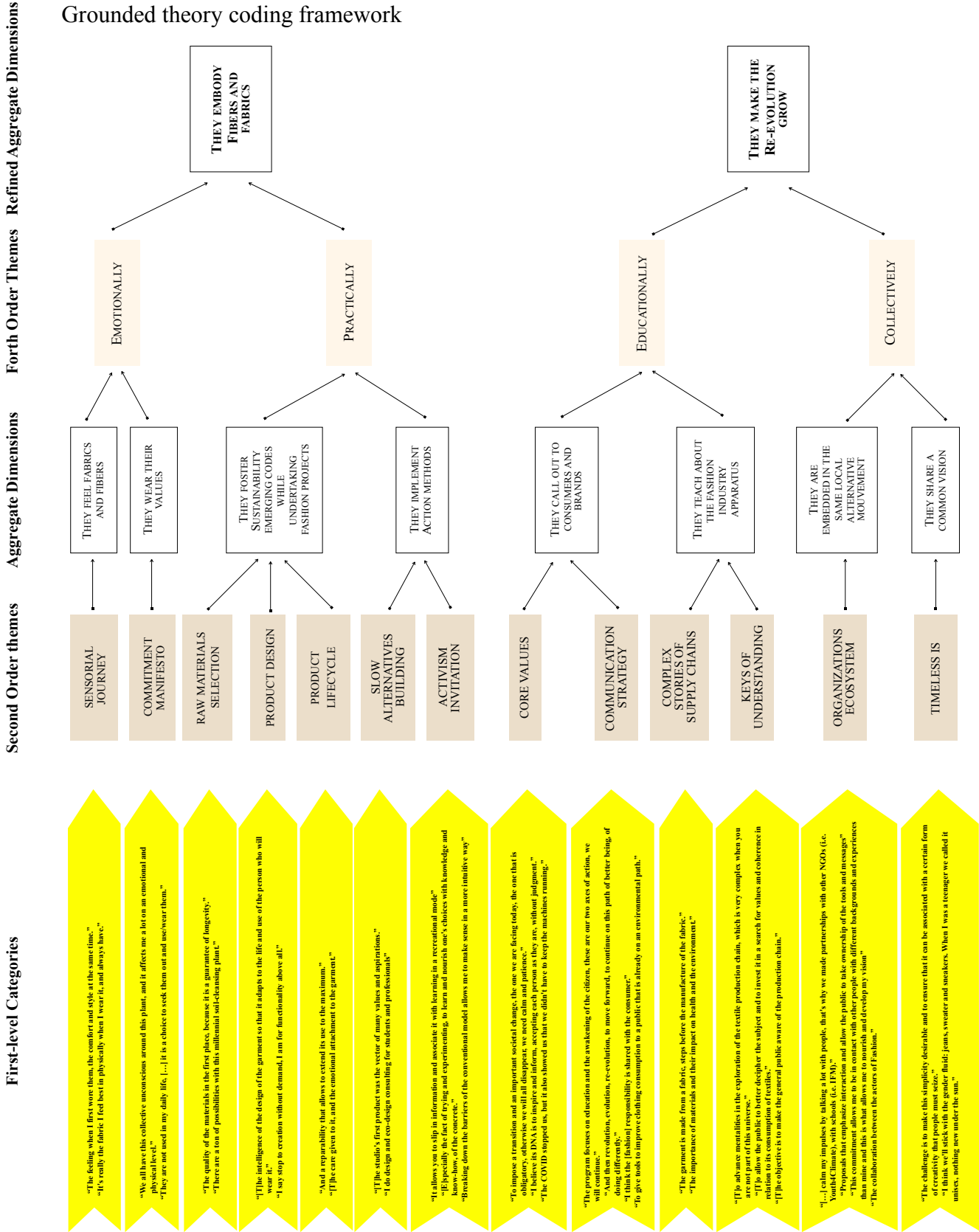
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APPENDIX A

Grounded theory coding framework



APPENDIX B

Interview guide

1 - Start with an introduction:

The purpose of this interview is to explore the way you fight to restore the roots of a sustainable fashion production system. I analyze this phenomenon among several actors during the Fashion Revolution Week to grasp the essence of the movement more easily regarding my short research timeline.

The study is entitled 'TALE ME ABOUT YOUR FIBERS'. This is an invitation to build narratives around one's personal story and approach to the fashion industry and its products. The aim is to gather information on your relationship to fabrics and materials, your participation in the Fashion Revolution Week and your current projects.

L'objectif de cette interview est d'explorer la manière dont vous vous battez pour restaurer les racines d'un système de production de mode durable. J'analyse ce phénomène auprès de plusieurs acteurs pendant la FRW afin de saisir plus facilement l'essence du mouvement au regard de ma courte période de recherche.

L'étude s'intitule " TALE ME ABOUT YOUR FIBERS ". Il s'agit d'une invitation à construire des récits autour de son histoire personnelle et de son approche de l'industrie de la mode et de ses produits. L'objectif est de recueillir des informations sur votre relation avec les tissus et les matériaux, votre participation à la FRW et vos projets actuels.

2 - First questions:

What is your favorite fabric?

Quel est votre tissu préféré ?

Where does this attachment come from?

D'où provient cet attachement ?

Is there a particular feeling associated with it?

Ce tissu est-il porteur d'un sentiment particulier ?

Where is this fabric present in your life?

Où est-ce que ce tissu se retrouve dans votre quotidien ?

Do you have a garment which facilitates your relationship with this fabric?

(Who designed it? How do you take care of it?)

Avez-vous un vêtement qui traduit et anime votre relation avec ce tissu ? (Qui est-ce qui l'a désigné? Comment en prenez-vous soin ?)

3 - Structure the questions into main topics (but be ready to remain flexible)

What is the purpose of having introduced the #WhoMadeMyFabric? this year?

Selon vous, quel est l'objectif d'avoir introduit le #WhoMadeMyFabric dans la FRW cette année ?

What Fashion Revolution Week (FRW) event(s) have you attended/organized?

Quels sont le ou les évènements de la Fashion Revolution Week (FRW) auxquels vous avez participé/organisé ? (si aucun cette année, peut-être les années précédentes?)

What mission does fashion have in the climate justice movement?

Quelle est la mission de la mode dans le mouvement de justice climatique ?

What value(s) do you personally embody during the FRW?

Quelles sont les valeurs que vous incarnez particulièrement durant la FRW ?

What is the main role the FRW plays on the audience?

Quelle influence la FRW exerce-t-elle sur son auditoire ?

From experience, which events build most support?

D'expérience, quels sont les événements qui entraînent le plus d'engouement ?

What kind of disclosure offers the most visibility?

Quel genre de révélation sur l'industrie de la mode offre le plus de visibilité au mouvement ?

What type of action would you prioritize to make the most impact?

Quel genre d'action mettriez-vous en avant pour provoquer le maximum d'impacts ?

Is there something missing to the movement in your opinion?

Est-ce que quelque chose manque au mouvement selon vous ?

What is the first emotion you would pick to qualify your actions and achievements in the FRW?

Quelle est la première émotion que vous éiriez pour qualifier vos actions et réalisations dans la FRW ?

Do you have a favorite figure in the FR?

Avez-vous une figure de proue préférée au sein du mouvement Fashion Revolution?

What kind of partnership do you favor within your approach to fashion?

Quels genres de partenariat favorisez-vous dans votre démarche reliée à la mode ?

In your opinion, what is the key to longer garment life-spans?

Selon vous, quelle est la clé de l'extension de la durée de vie d'un vêtement ?

Have you changed your habits in using and wearing garments since you got involved in the FR?

Avez-vous changé vos habitudes d'usage du vêtement depuis que vous connaissez/vous êtes engagé.e dans la FR ?

Is there a method you particularly enjoy/respect/take to heart in fashion design processes?

Y-a-t-il une méthode que vous favorisez/appréciez particulièrement dans les processus de conception de produits de mode ?

4 - End on a positive note

Do you feel like a timeless design exists in fashion?

Percevez-vous l'existence ou l'avènement possible d'un design intemporel dans la mode ?

5 - Sincerely thank the interviewee in the end

Research Informed Consent

TITLE OF STUDY

‘Tale me about your fibers’: an exploratory study of the Fashion Revolution week

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Why am I being asked to review this form?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This form is provided so that you may read and understand the reasons why you might or might not want to participate in the research. Your participation is voluntary.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study contributes to the research done in both the fields of sustainability in the fashion industry and communication and action methods in activism strategies. The research specifically explores the approach of different participants to the Fashion Revolution Week in order to be able to grasp the essence of the movement in a short period of time.

In the vision of the researcher, the different approaches associated with the activists’ stories, values and projects represent their fibers. While they collectively fight for a more sustainable fashion industry, they weave their fibers together and shape the fabric of the social movement they support.

What is the goal of this interview?

The goal of this interview is mainly to understand your own relationship with your garments and their fabrics. It is also a way for the researcher to have your point of view on the events organized during the week and particularly the one(s) you attended or organized in parallel to your professional activity.

What will happen before the interview?

- You are allowed to withdraw from the study without justification and without negative consequences until May 15, 2021;
- You will review this form with the researcher before the beginning of the interview;
- You can contact the researcher or her supervisor if you have any additional questions (cf. Contact Information).

What will happen during the interview?

- You will be asked multiple questions;
- The interview will be recorded;
- You have the right to decline answering particular questions.

What will happen after the interview?

- The recordings of the interview will be transcribed and analyzed by the researcher;
- She will send you the transcription, which is allowing you to correct, review and approve it;
- This reviewed transcription will be integrated to the final report;
- Quotes from the transcription will be used as verbatim in the report;
- You will have access to this final report and the transcription;
- For confidentiality purposes, you have the right to ask to be anonymized.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Primary Researcher directly (cf. Contact).

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Signature _____ **Date** _____

Researchers' Signature _____ **Date** _____