CHAPTER 6
FASHION SYSTEMS

The previous chapters have discussed an array of approaches to sustainable fashion but have also highlighted the limitations of tackling specific problems without considering the system as a whole. This chapter zooms out to take a holistic view of fashion systems, as defined by Alice Payne in her book *Designing Fashion's Future*:

> All clothed humans participate in a fashion system, meaning that they *fashion* themselves in time, place and culture through technology and human labour. Fashion-as-change, fashion-as-culture and fashion-as-industry are the three elements I use to define "the fashion system" as an overarching model for how human dress practices function. There are innumerable fashion systems in the world, and therefore many degrees to how tightly change, culture and industry are bound.[1]

We will critically examine the world's mainstream fashion system, which has its roots in western Europe but has spread through much of the world via globalization. As Payne explains, this is not actually a single homogenous system; there are "myriad versions, played out in different cultures and cities." But in all versions of this dominant system, the fashion-as-change element is constantly driven forward by industry, and particularly by the fast fashion sector, "meaning regular fresh offerings of product replace the old with the new."[2] Furthermore, the mainstream system is, throughout the world, "cosily encircled by the dominant economic system of globalized capitalism."[3]

We will also explore fashion systems that differ from this status quo by challenging its entrenched norms and conventions. To support this exploration we will draw on Fashion Fictions, an international participatory project established by Amy in 2020. The project brings people together to generate, experience, and reflect on engaging fictional visions of sustainable fashion cultures and systems. The first stage of the project involves contributors writing one-hundred-word outlines of worlds in which invented historical junctures have led to familiar-yet-strange sustainable cultures and systems. These worlds are then explored further via creative prototyping and enactment activities. Alongside insights into the material and social practices that arise in the fictional worlds, the research aims to identify historical real-world examples with relevance to the fictional systems, in recognition of the value of such examples in generating ideas for the future.

For a genuinely holistic view, we must consider the mainstream fashion system as part of the wider economy. As economic anthropologist Jason Hickel explains, "the global economy . . . is now dramatically overshooting what scientists have defined as safe planetary boundaries, with devastating consequences for the living world."[4] This activity is not evenly spread; although most countries in the global South could increase their use of resources to meet the human needs of their citizens while remaining within planetary boundaries, high-income countries use far more than their fair share.[5] Rapid and radical reductions are needed if we are to avoid the direst consequences of climate change.

A recent report by sustainability think tank Hot or Cool shows that if we are to meet the target of 0.7 tonnes of carbon dioxide lifestyle emissions per person per year (required to keep warming to 1.5 degrees above preindustrial levels), reductions in emissions of 91–95 percent are needed in high-income countries by 2050.[6] The carbon dioxide measured in the Hot or Cool report includes both direct emissions and emissions that are "embodied" in imported goods, such as clothing. The report emphasizes that technological improvements

Figure 6.1 Fashion Fictions is an international participatory project led by Amy Twigger Holroyd. Participants are invited to imagine radically different fashion systems, rather than—as is the typical sustainable fashion approach—attempting to build solutions within the mainstream system. This image was created to represent life in World 54, where adults can own only ten items of clothing. Textiles are therefore used in a highly flexible way, with custom making, inventive styling, and swapping common.[7]

alone will not be enough to achieve these staggeringly ambitious targets: unprecedented shifts in consumption patterns will also be required. Hickel agrees, pointing out that even if we were able to engineer entirely clean energy, this would not resolve other sustainability issues such as deforestation, soil depletion, and mass extinction.[8]

In terms of fashion, therefore, we need to dramatically reduce the overconsumption that has become the norm in the global North. This is particularly challenging because the number of garments produced globally doubled between 2000 and 2015, and continues to grow.[9] To understand the reasons for this incessant growth, we must examine the economic system that the mainstream fashion system sits within: capitalism. In a capitalist system, the means of production are privately owned and the goods or services produced are traded to generate profit; most people are workers who sell their labor for a wage. While there are many different versions of capitalism, the core idea is endorsed across the globe as "the default model for economic and material progress."[10] Hickel explains that the capitalist system is different from other economic systems (which may also involve markets and trade) because it is "organised around the imperative of constant expansion, or 'growth': ever-increasing levels of industrial extraction, production and consumption."[11] Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is used as a national indicator of this economic growth. Underpinning growth is a simple formula: taking more, from both the living world and human labor, than you give back. As WWF states, "blatant disregard for the environment [is] entrenched in our current economic model."[12] Thus, Hickel explains, "The ecological crisis is an inevitable consequence of this [capitalist] system."[13]
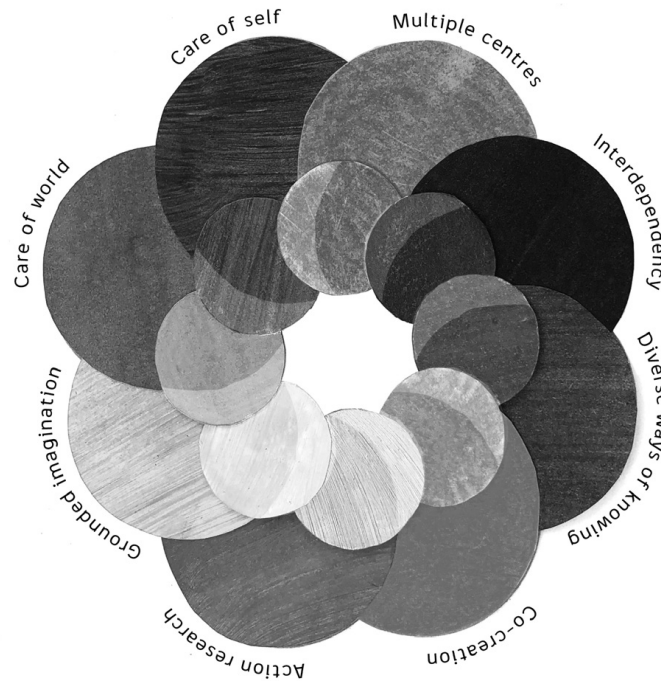
Figure 6.2 *Earth Logic Fashion Action Research Plan,* a 2019 publication by fashion and sustainability pioneers Kate Fletcher and Mathilda Tham, argues that sustainability cannot be achieved within the "growth logic" that drives the fashion sector and other capitalist businesses. They propose a new paradigm of "earth logic": placing earth first, before profit and all other considerations. As the authors explain, "Paradigms, or the accepted models of how ideas relate to one another, constitute the purpose and meaning of systems."[14] This diagram articulates eight values that will guide us into the earth-first paradigm.

Some people would disagree with Hickel's statement and argue for the value of "green growth": pursuing growth in ways that protect the environment. The notion of green growth depends on the possibility of "decoupling" economic growth from resource use, through improved efficiency and emerging technologies.[15] Yet scientific modeling has shown that this decoupling is impossible: if we continue with a growth-driven economy we can slow resource use, but not reverse it. As environmental engineer James Ward and colleagues state: "Growth in GDP ultimately cannot plausibly be decoupled from growth in material and energy use, demonstrating categorically that GDP growth cannot be sustained indefinitely."[16]

Academics, writers, and activists working in a range of different contexts have been developing ideas for alternatives to capitalism, which can be collectively described as a "post-capitalist" or "post-growth" economy. Such an economy would be organized around well-being—meeting the fundamental human needs of the global population—rather than growth for its own sake. The transition to a post-growth economy would require a managed process of "degrowth," which Hickel describes as "a planned reduction of excess energy and resource use to bring the economy back into balance with the living world in a safe, just and equitable way."[17] He explains that this planned reduction would require decisions about which parts of the economy should be radically scaled back—such as those "designed purely to maximise profits rather than to meet human needs . . . or advertising strategies intended to manipulate our emotions and make us feel that what we have is inadequate."[18] As Alastair Fuad-Luke states in his book *Design Activism,* "This demands a transition of societies that is equally as profound as the one experienced in the late 18th century at the emergence of the Industrial Economy."[19]

A shift from growth to post-growth involves not only a change in the structure of the economy but also changes in our ways of thinking and being. As we will discuss later in the chapter, capitalism both requires and generates a mindset that sees the natural world as a resource, available for humans to control and exploit—rather than an ecosystem in which we are entangled, along with all other forms of life. The shift to post-growth will certainly involve different ways of thinking about fashion, moving from the common emphasis on big-name designers, catwalk shows, and seductive imagery to the appreciation of much more diverse aesthetics, practices, and values. To support this change in emphasis, we can draw on the work of decolonial fashion theorists such as M. Angela Jansen, who proposes the use of fashion as a verb to describe a plural "multitude of possibilities" for fashioning the body.[20]

As we start to explore plural possibilities for fashion, we must, in the words of Lynda Grose, "unfreeze" cultural and social norms: that is, bravely question taken-for-granted aspects of fashion culture.[21] For inspiration we might look to those who are already doing so, such as artists Abigail Glaum-Lathbury and Maura Brewer. Through their JUMPSUIT project, Glaum-Lathbury and Brewer—who work together as the Rational Dress Society—invite people to reject the endless choice of consumer capitalism and replace their clothes with an ungendered utilitarian monogarment. As their website explains, "JUMPSUIT offers a way to forego the insular logic of self-expression in favor of forming communal bonds."[22]

Figure 6.3 The JUMPSUIT project is described by its founders the Rational Dress Society as "an experiment in counter-fashion."[23] Their ungendered jumpsuit design is available in over 300 size variations and in two forms: as a ready-made garment or as a pattern, available to download free of charge. The artists behind this initiative take inspiration from various dress reform movements, including the nineteenth-century society from which their name is borrowed and artists of the early Soviet Union, who sought a radical new approach to dress. Yet the project is firmly located in the contemporary context. It prompts us to critically reflect on the endless variety offered by a consumerist fashion system and to see, as journalist Heather Radke puts it, "the choices that have been shoved outside of our field of vision: to mend the clothes we have, to halt consumption, and perhaps to opt out of capitalism entirely."[24]

Post-growth fashion systems will also rebuild local textile infrastructures and value the situated knowledge that has been eroded by globalization. An influential leader in this work is Rebecca Burgess, who in 2009 set herself the challenge of wearing only clothes sourced and dyed within a 150-mile radius of her home in California.[25] Burgess discovered a wealth of farmers and producers in the region but identified a lack of connectivity between them, which led to the founding of the Fibershed movement. As Burgess explains: "Similar to a local watershed or a foodshed, a fibershed is focused on the source of the raw material, the transparency with which it is converted into clothing, and the connectivity among all parts, from soil to skin and back to soil."[26] The movement has since grown significantly, with dozens of affiliate communities worldwide now building regional fiber systems in diverse geographic and cultural contexts. Community and learning are core to the Fibershed philosophy; Burgess describes how people working together are able to develop grounded and resilient strategies and articulates the value of "learning from regional indigenous communities, whose understanding of the human role in the ecosystem is unparalleled."[27]

A plural and inclusive view of fashion should also bring into focus what J.K.Gibson-Graham (two feminist economic geographers who publish under a joint pen name) describe as "diverse economies": practices of nonconsumption and nonmarket consumption such as gifting, loaning, sharing, and bartering.[29] These practices are often located in the home and in community spaces, rather than in the commercial locations that we typically associate with the discussion of the economy. Although the mainstream fashion system can seem all-consuming, in fact, as design researcher Cameron Tonkinwise states, "everyday life involves a wide range of activities that are not capitalist in nature." He goes on to argue that transitions toward sustainability will mean "finding and amplifying all the ways of being in the world that are persistently non-capitalist, that defy technological ratcheting of expectations around efficiency and comfort and instead entail everyday practices of sustainment . . . localist systems of resourcing, commons and shared resource use, ways of consuming time that are regenerative of ecosystem health and diversity."[30]

Figure 6.4 The North West England Fibreshed launched an ambitious project, Homegrown Homespun, in 2021. The project, led by botanical dyer and educator Justine Aldersey-Williams (pictured) and involving various local partners, drew a group of volunteers and experts together to revive the cultivation of linen in Britain. In its first phase, the community grew a crop of flax and woad on a patch of disused land and used the crop to produce a piece of naturally dyed indigo linen denim. The project's ambition is to produce Homegrown Homespun linen denim jeans commercially by 2023.[28]

Figure 6.5 *A Temporary Outpost of the Blue Fashion Commons* is an interactive installation that explores the notion of clothing as a shared community resource, or commons. Created as part of the Fashion Fictions project, the installation is presented as a window into World 43, where—for environmental reasons—the sale of all blue textiles, whether new or used, has been banned. With the supply of new items cut off, systems of exchange have developed in which blue items are traded and repaired at community-run hubs. Visitors to the installation are invited to get a taste of life in this alternative fashion system by exchanging and mending their real-world garments.

In order to generate new thinking about diverse fashion systems for the future, there is great value in looking to the past. In this chapter we will look in more detail at the development of the capitalist system within modernity and then examine various historical alternatives, including both "genuine" fashion cultures and systems and unrealized utopian proposals that aimed to instigate fundamentally new ways of practicing fashion. Throughout, we hope to highlight the transformative potential of imagining otherwise, as described by economist Ha-Joon Chang:

> SF [science fiction], history and comparative studies all allow us to see that the existing economic and social order is not a "natural" one: that it can be changed; that it has been changed; and, most importantly, that is has been changed in the way it has only because some people have dared to imagine a different world, and fought for it.[31]

How Did We Get Here?

In previous chapters we have focused on the period from the Industrial Revolution to the early twenty-first century, and our discussion has largely been centered on the United States. In this chapter, we expand our view in terms of time, looking back as far as the medieval period, and shift our focus to western Europe. We will consider the development of the capitalist system in the era of modernity and the fashion system that emerged within it.

Enclosure, Capitalism, and Modernity

To set the scene for the development of capitalism, it is necessary to outline the system that preceded it: feudalism. Under the feudal system in Europe, powerful lords and nobles controlled the land; peasants, or serfs, were forced to work and fight for them in exchange for protection and use of the land for

subsistence. The later capitalist system is quite different, being based on the production and trade of goods for profit and with workers selling their labor in exchange for money to buy goods. There are conflicting theories about how and why feudalism gave way to capitalism. One school of thought sees capitalism as reflecting a natural human tendency for self-interest. From this perspective, it was inevitable that capitalism would arise: the gradual development of trade and urbanization enabled the transition from feudalism. Another school of thought, which corresponds with post-growth thinking, fundamentally rejects the notion that capitalism is natural or inevitable and offers an alternative story of its development.

Writing from this second perspective, Jason Hickel draws on the work of historians including Silvia Federici and Fernand Braudel to argue that feudalism was destroyed not by early capitalism, but by peasant movements in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These movements, which spanned Europe, rebelled against the oppressive feudal system and through violent struggle eventually managed to initiate new forms of society based on egalitarian ideas and self-sufficiency.[32] This self-sufficiency was supported by access to the commons: collectively managed resources such as pastures, forests, and rivers that provided fuel and food for local people, known as commoners, and their animals. While some commoners undertook waged labor, the resources provided by the commons gave them autonomy. They could choose whether to work and could negotiate their wages.[33] The elites were deeply unhappy about this autonomy, as it diminished their own power and wealth. One writer stated in the early 1500s: "The peasants are too rich . . . and do not know what obedience means; they don't take law into any account, and wish there were no nobles . . . and they would like to decide what rent we should get for our lands."[34]

Figure 6.6 Historically, many people had rights to collectively managed resources such as pastures, forests, and rivers, known as commons. One of these rights is "pannage": the right to release pigs in a forest to feed on acorns and chestnuts. This fourteenth-century image shows men knocking down acorns to feed their pigs. Common rights connected people to the land and provided a means of self-sufficiency. These rights were violently removed through the process of enclosure, which historians consider to be central to the development of capitalism.

The elites took action, taking the commons into private ownership through a process known as enclosure.[35] As historian Ellen Meiksins Wood explains, "enclosure meant not simply a physical fencing of land but the extinction of common and customary use rights on which many people depended for their livelihood."[36] This process took place over the course of three centuries in Britain and across Europe, resulting in millions of people being removed from the land and therefore from their means of subsistence.[37]

Enclosure was crucial to the development of capitalism in two key ways. First, it enabled the initial accumulation of wealth necessary to kickstart capitalist production and trade. Second, it removed the peasants' ability to be self-sufficient and forced them to become entirely dependent on waged work. As Wood states: "capitalism was advanced by the assertion of the landlords' powers against the peasants' claims to customary rights."[38] Thus, enclosure created the cheap and abundant labor on which capitalism depends. According to Hickel, this arrangement, which is familiar to us today but was unprecedented at the time, was ripe for abuse: "Those who controlled the means of production could get away with paying rock-bottom wages, and people would have to take it."[39] Overall, he explains: "Capitalism rose on the back of organised violence, mass impoverishment, and the systematic destruction of self-sufficient subsistence economies."[40]

Let us now turn to modernity, which sociologist Anthony Giddens defines as "modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence."[41] Decolonial futures expert Vanessa Machado de Oliveira explains that modernity is typically seen as "a general project of civilization that seeks to engineer society through humanism, reason, science, progress, and technology."[42] Furthermore, as Alice Payne states, modernity "venerates the self-actualisation of the individual above all else."[43] The origins of modernity are contested. It is variously framed as emerging in response to the authority of the church in medieval times; being initiated by the Renaissance in the seventeenth century or the European Enlightenment in the eighteenth century; or commencing with the colonization of the Americas in the late fifteenth century.[44] Regardless, it is fair to say that the development of modernity is deeply entangled with the development of capitalism.

Our lives today remain utterly shaped by the ideas and values of modernity. Modernity's rationalist mindset and notions of progress have affected every aspect of life for centuries: medicine, education, technology, politics, human rights, gender—the list could go on and on. The mindset has also influenced attitudes to the living world. As Hickel explains: "for most of human history . . . [people] recognised a deep interdependence with rivers, forests, animals and plants, even with the planet itself, which they saw as sentient beings, just like people, and animated by the very same spirit."[45] Within this "animist" ontology, or theory of being, the exploitation of nature as a resource is unthinkable. Modernity rejected animist ontologies, which it considered to be superstitious and primitive, and brought a new "dualist" mindset, which positions humans and nature as fundamentally separate. According to Machado de Oliveira, this separation is based on "the ideas that humans are a superior species that deserve to conquer, dominate, own, manage, and control the natural environment."[46] This ontological shift had huge consequences for human development and for ecological destruction: the extractive processes that are central to the capitalist system depend on this dualist theory of being.[47]

The European Fashion System and the Industrial Revolution

As we have explained, the early development of capitalism was linked to the expansion of commercial trade. In her influential book *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity,* fashion theorist Elizabeth Wilson explains that not only was the textile trade part of this expansion, but also the rise of capitalism shaped how clothes were used: it led to the emergence of a new fashion system.[48] This fashion system, which was the forerunner

of the mainstream globalized fashion system we know today, was characterized by rapidly changing styles—in contrast to earlier systems in which, it is thought, clothing styles were much more static.[49]

The development of the new fashion system, which originated in Europe's royal and aristocratic courts, was gradual; styles of dress were still dictated by distinctions in rank for a long period. But the new notion of changing styles did spread, influenced by various factors including the rise of the merchant class and the growth of cities. Wilson quotes Jacob Burckhardt, a nineteenth-century historian. Writing about Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Burckhardt connected the freedom of urban life with an ethos of individualism, which was expressed through fashionable consumption: "Even serious men . . . looked on a handsome and becoming costume as an element in the perfection of the individual."[50] Wilson also provides an insight into the means by which particular fashions spread, discussing the sixteenth-century popularity of costume books that "described and depicted fashionable variations in dress in different regions and no doubt contributed to the speeding up of the fashion process."[51] It was at this point in history, she suggests, that the wearing of outdated clothes began to be stigmatized.

The Industrial Revolution, which began in Britain in the mid-eighteenth century, was a period of great change. Major technological developments, including the invention of the steam engine, impacted every aspect of life. At the same time, Wilson explains, "the nature of capitalism changed drastically."[52] As historian Giorgio Riello explains, it is widely acknowledged that cotton was the "fuel" of the Industrial Revolution. It was the first sector to become mechanized, shifting rapidly from a craft industry to manufacturing on a massive scale.[53] The technological innovations that took place within the textile industry during this period, including the spinning jenny, spinning mule, cotton gin, Jacquard loom, roller printing, and chemical dyes, have been detailed in Chapters 1 and 2. The other crucial element enabling this explosion in production was, of course, labor. Jason Hickel explains that the British peasants, now utterly dependent on waged employment, "poured desperate and shell-shocked into the cities, where they provided the cheap labour that fuelled the dark Satanic mills immortalized in the poetry of William Blake."[54] As an indication of how difficult the working conditions in these cities were, Hickel notes that life expectancy in Manchester—the British epicenter of cotton production—during the first century of the Industrial Revolution fell to just twenty-five years.[55]

While the Industrial Revolution was transforming life in Britain, the country's empire was expanding: its representatives colonized lands across the globe and subjugated the people living there. The mindset of modernity drove colonization by positioning Europeans as superior to those elsewhere; this deeply problematic way of thinking is another example of the dualism discussed earlier in the chapter.[56] In fact, decolonial scholars such as Vanessa Machado de Oliveira argue that when discussing modernity we should use the hybrid term modernity/coloniality, to acknowledge that the benefits we associate with modernity were created through the violence of historical colonization. Furthermore, even though many formerly colonized countries have gained their independence, coloniality—"the enduring manifestations of colonial relations, logic, and situations"[57]—remains deeply entrenched in contemporary societies, meaning that its violence is ongoing.

The Industrial Revolution was intensely entangled with colonization; for example, money made from the slave trade was used to build the British railways that enabled the movement of materials and goods. In the case of the clothing industry there were direct connections, such as the extensive use of cotton picked by enslaved people on plantations in the United States in English mills and the export of cotton fabrics made in Britain as part of the transatlantic slave trade. Riello, discussing the history of cotton, explains that the rapid technological developments in Britain were also driven by knowledge, ideas, and expertise appropriated from other regions, and by the sale of British goods across the globe. As a result, Britain—and other European countries that were following a similar trajectory—became rich.[58] Riello argues that "This marks the beginning not just of modern industrialisation but also of a 'divergence' between different parts of the world: the rich and the poor."[59]

Figure 6.7 Cotton woven in Lancashire's mills was primarily imported from the United States, reflecting the global trade that underpinned the Industrial Revolution. During the American Civil War, a Union blockade prevented exports of baled cotton from the Confederate states, causing many British cotton factories to halt production. This had a devastating impact on textile workers, causing what was known as the Lancashire Cotton Famine. This nineteenth-century illustration depicts a soup kitchen in Manchester set up to feed unemployed mill workers and their families. Although the famine caused great hardship, Manchester workers supported the Union in its fight against slavery. In 1862, "The Working-Men of Manchester, England," pledged their support in a letter to Abraham Lincoln, stating: "Justice demands for the black, no less than for the white, the protection of the law."[60]

Consumerism and Change

The Great Exhibition of 1851, the world's first trade fair, is commonly hailed as a landmark in the development of capitalism. The event marked a shift to consumer culture, described by sociologist Don Slater as "in important respects *the* culture of the modern west . . . bound up with central values and practices which define western modernity, such as choice, individualism and market relations."[61] According to philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky, the European fashion system underwent a significant change around the same time: a new arrangement of production and consumption emerged that altered the balance of power and spread fashion beyond the elite for the first time. Lipovetsky identifies two "keystones" of this new arrangement: haute couture and industrial clothing manufacture.[62] Charles Frederick Worth, an Englishman based in Paris, set up the first haute couture house in 1857. Elizabeth Wilson describes Worth as "the first truly modern dress designer" and explains that Worth became the "arbiter of taste," a distinct rupture from earlier periods when the aristocracy held this power.[63] Trends generated by the haute couture system were followed by the manufacturers of ready-to-wear clothing that produced clothing for the masses. As explained in Chapters 2 and 4, the growth of ready-to-wear clothing production was enabled by the invention of the sewing machine and other machinery, and the labor of garment workers, often in sweatshops. As early as the late nineteenth century, the consumerism of the capitalist fashion system was being criticized. In 1884 William Morris stridently argued that

> the very capitalists know well that there is no genuine healthy demand for [fashionable goods], and they are compelled to foist them off on the public by stirring up a strange feverish desire for petty excitement,

the outward token of which is known by the conventional name of fashion, a strange monster born of the vacancy of the lives of rich people, and the eagerness of competitive Commerce to make the most of the huge crowd of workmen whom it breeds as unregarded instruments for what is called the making of money.[64]

Wilson discusses the wider societal changes that accompanied the expansion of the fashion industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, including new forms of communication—railways, telephones, cinema, and print media—that "intensified the rush and pace of modern life," along with the continued growth of cities.[65] She describes "new, huge industrial infernos where truly the stranger could lose himself or herself, or find a new identity in the anonymity of the surging crowds," and argues that this anonymity, which places greater emphasis on appearance, further increased the social importance of fashion.[66]

A more focused influence on the development of consumer culture occurred in the United States in 1928, when Edward Bernays, nephew of Sigmund Freud, wrote a book titled *Propaganda* on the application of techniques of persuasion—previously employed in the context of war—to everyday life via public relations and advertising. As climate activist and academic Alastair McIntosh explains, Bernays "used psychology not for healing troubled souls but to shift products." McIntosh argues that as a result, a system arose "that generated wants by tapping into vulnerabilities in the psyche," with businesses reaping the financial rewards through increased consumption.[67]

Lipovetsky identifies the period following the Second World War as a second juncture in the development of the Western fashion system, describing "the advent of a society restructured from top to bottom by the attractive and the ephemeral—by the very logic of fashion."[68] While some aspects of the earlier system
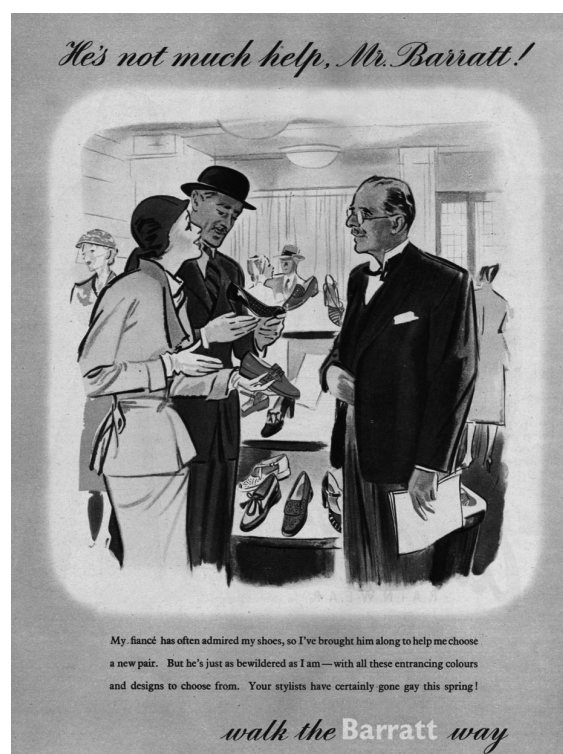
Figure 6.8 Consumer culture celebrates an abundance of choice, as shown in this advertisement for British shoe retailer Barratt published in *Picture Post* magazine in March 1951. Journalist Vance Packard highlighted and challenged practices aimed at increasing consumerism during the 1950s. His book *The Hidden Persuaders,* published in 1957, exposed the psychological techniques used by advertisers to induce desire for their products.

continued, established hierarchies were disrupted, driven by the emergence of what Lipovetsky describes as "a society rendered euphoric by novelty and consumption," combined with the new youth culture, political upheaval, and further progress in the technologies of mass garment manufacture.[69] Fashion became a widespread phenomenon spanning the whole of society. While many designers leaped to produce the inexpensive fashionable goods demanded by this new era, others questioned the collusion of design with consumerism; Alastair Fuad-Luke highlights a 1969 conference, *Design, Society and the Future*, that focused on design's economic, social and moral consequences, and Victor Papanek's influential book, *Design for the Real World*, published in 1971. As Fuad-Luke explains, "Papanek's pitch was straightforward—designers needed to take responsible decisions, spend less time designing ephemeral goods for the consumer economy, and spend more creative time on generating solutions to the real needs of the disadvantaged 80 per cent population of the planet."[70]

Alice Payne identifies the 1980s as a time of critical change in the mainstream fashion system, when the emergent ideology of neoliberalism, which promotes unfettered capitalism and free trade, led to the lowering of tariffs that had protected local garment industries and the rapid growth of offshore manufacturing, as detailed in Chapter 2.[71] A new system of clothing production developed, with complex global networks of suppliers providing "just-in-time" manufacturing for the mass market. It is this system that has delivered the incredibly high levels of garment production and "disposable" ethos of fast fashion. The shift to overseas production was part of a broader process of globalization, defined by sociologist Anthony Giddens as "the intensification of worldwide social relations that link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice-versa."[72] Another aspect of globalization is the way in which the fashion system that originated in western Europe has spread to many parts of the world. We can now talk of a single mainstream globalized fashion system, with regional variations but a core essence of systematic change, driven by industry to generate the economic growth required by the capitalist economy.[73]

As emphasized in this book, the mainstream globalized fashion system is deeply problematic. The overconsumption that it generates is contributing to ecological devastation and the climate crisis. Its industrial practices perpetuate what Payne describes as "the colonial matrix of power," entrenching global and local inequalities.[74] The system's dominating presence erases locally rooted, culturally meaningful, and materially light systems of fashioning the body that are in balance with the living world. As decolonial fashion expert Erica de Greef explains, "these alternative, so-called non-western or 'other' fashion systems have been relegated to the margins, often made redundant, and defined as traditional, non-fashion or even, anti-fashion."[75] Furthermore, the mindset of modernity—dating back hundreds of years and still shaping our thinking today—leads us to deny the severity of these challenges and to fully acknowledge the fundamental change that will be needed to address them.[76]

Inspiration for Change

Having examined the development of the mainstream globalized fashion system and the broader economic system within which it operates, we can now turn our attention to alternative fashion systems. To generate viable ideas for fashion in a post-growth economy, it is essential for us to think imaginatively about different ways of living with our clothes. As economist and writer David Fleming states, "If the mature market economy is to have a sequel . . . it will be the work, substantially, of imagination."[77] To feed the imagination, in this section we will explore utopian dress initiatives and real-world fashion systems of the past, using speculative ideas generated in the Fashion Fictions project as a guide.

How Clothes Are Used

First, we will focus on the ways in which clothes are used in historical fashion systems. The earlier chapters of this book have already provided many examples of systems in which clothes were used differently from today, which connect with ideas embedded in the fictional worlds dreamt up by Fashion Fictions contributors. The fashion system of the fictional World 107, for example, is based on garments being sufficiently valuable that they can be exchanged like money[78]—an idea which is reminiscent of clothing forming a kind of material currency, accepted by nineteenth-century tailors as partial payment for the making of new clothes (as mentioned in Chapter 3), and the earlier role of silk as a type of currency.[79] Many contributors to the Fashion Fictions project are attracted by a related idea, of clothes being valued over time: in World 27, for example, lived-in garments with embedded histories are highly prized (see Box 6.1) while in World 50 people connect via unique signatures sewn into others' clothing, with the most heavily embellished garments being the most sought after.[80]

Box 6.1

In World 27, post-pandemic consumption and lifestyle shifts force a re-examination of value systems: closets full of empty clothes no longer articulate with day-to-day experience.

Textile histories become central to the way we value garments, with Cuba as global leader in the post-capitalist heirloom-chain economy.

Value shifts to that based on palimpsestic load: the greater the number of associated histories, the greater a garment's desirability. Garments are traded and gifted within the framework of performative activities such as mending circles, where storytelling plays a significant role. A new, unscarred, non-storied garment is of little appeal; lived-in, mended, altered garments are in highest demand.

Jeannine Diego, Mexico

In Chapter 3 we encountered diverse historical examples of repair and the repurposing of existing items into new garments. These ideas also feature heavily in the fictions. In World 12, for example, every high street has a repair salon, each with its own unique style;[81] in World 41, the globalized trade in secondhand clothes has ceased and usable elements of damaged garments are consequently traded as spare parts.[82] In these visions, we see repair and reuse at the heart of everyday fashion cultures, rather than—as is typical today—somewhat niche practices within a consumption-focused system. Looking in detail at historical periods in which reuse was widespread—whether via specific items such as the waistcoat reworked into a reticule bag shown in Figure 3.4 or through more general accounts of widespread repurposing, such as the remaking of eighteenth-century dresses described in Chapter 3—can help to add depth and nuance to our imaginings.

Secondhand clothing, another aspect of reuse discussed in Chapter 3, arises in many of the worlds submitted to Fashion Fictions. In World 24, for example, a secondhand-only fashion magazine launches in 1980 and its influence eventually leads to the production of new clothes ceasing completely.[83] In World 26, compulsory school uniform libraries transform attitudes to pre-worn clothing,[84] while in World 120, clothing libraries foster an appreciation of "wearing stories" (see Box 6.2). In these speculative fictions secondhand practices are far more central than is the situation in today's mainstream system, despite the recent growth in acceptance of

pre-used items described in Chapter 3—and indicate that there is value in learning about historical periods in which acquiring used, rather than new, garments was the norm.

Box 6.2

In World 120, due to global scarcity of fabrics and other related sources as a result of mass exploitation, clothing libraries became the new global norm in the 21st century.

A brainchild of two ground-breaking entrepreneurs, the Clothing Library stores clothing articles of different fabrics, uses, decades, and styles. They host a network of guilds who help with customizing and repairing the articles. The "borrowers" are also encouraged to leave behind notes which explained how they used the clothes and pictures of the outfits they put together.

This venture gave birth to a newfound culture of appreciation and community enrichment. Clothing libraries challenged their borrowers to view clothing as much more than just fashion. People have a newfound appreciation for the clothes they wear, and look forward to the stories they share and receive whenever they visit the Clothing Library.

Nikita S.B., United Arab Emirates

### *New Approaches to Dressing the Body*

Many projects aiming to transform the fashion system propose to change the styles of garments that are worn. Examples of such strategies can be found in the Fashion Fictions submissions: in World 116, for example, a unisex jumpsuit is the default clothing option.[85] World 90 paints an equally radical yet contrasting vision, in which dress is used as a spectacular form of display and a way of demarcating personal space: "all genders wear skirts, tails and head-crests that can be fanned out to diameters of up to 8 feet across or neatly folded away."[86] If we look to history we can find an array of efforts to transform garment styles, encompassing both what fashion historian Aileen Ribeiro categorizes as dress reform initiatives, which are subject to practical considerations, and utopian clothing projects, which are able to explore "wild flights of fancy and theatricality" because they "will *never* have to pass the test of reality."[87]

We will start by considering a number of efforts to introduce trousers for women in the nineteenth century. The first is the community at New Harmony in southern Indiana founded by Welsh textile manufacturer Robert Owen in 1824. Owen was a leading utopian socialist thinker and created the community as a radical experiment in communal living. As historian Kate Luck explains, Owen and other utopian socialists, "mistrustful of industrial capitalism, and the inequalities it fostered in the name of private property and a free-market economy, believed that social progress lay in co-operation, rather than in competition."[88] According to dress historian Gayle V. Fischer, Owen attempted to abolish class and gender distinctions at New Harmony by introducing a new style of dress for both genders; bifurcated garments—trousers—were part of the proposed style for women.[89] A visitor to New Harmony described the women's clothes, which bore similarities to childrenswear: "a coat reaching to the knee and pantaloons, such as little girls wear among us."[90] Interestingly, despite these changes and the ideology underpinning them, interest in fashion was not eliminated. Sarah Pears, a New Harmony resident, commented that "the young girls . . . here think as much of dress and beaux as in any place I was ever in."[91] As Fischer points out, the New Harmony costume "superficially addressed the

issues of women's equality and rights, but it did not wipe out traditional stereotypes about women or help grant them rights equal to men's."[92]

While the New Harmony experiment was short lived, dissolving after just a couple of years, many similar communities were established across the United States and elsewhere.[93] Fascinating dress ideas can be found in the stories of these settlements, such as the socialist communities in 1830s France that "devised a uniform for both sexes which buttoned all the way down the back, so as to prevent one getting in or out of it on one's own, and this to further a sense of their interdependence."[94] Trousers for women continued to feature. The Christian socialist Oneida community founded in New York State in 1848, for example, promoted pantaloons for women due to a belief that, as Luck puts it, "there was an intimate connection between the form or style of dress and the social freedom of its wearers."[95] Around the same time, female trouser-wearing was being promoted in a very different context, recommended by "water-cure" practitioners as an important element of healthy living. The practice was then picked up by leaders of the Women's Rights movement including Amelia Bloomer, whose name became associated with the style of dress—full trousers and a wide tunic—shown in Figure 6.9.[96] Bloomer explained her thinking about this new way of dressing in feminist newspaper *The Lily* in 1853:

> The advantages of this style of dress over the old are so apparent, that no good argument can be brought against its adoption; and a silent acknowledgement of woman's right to fashion her dress according to her own taste and necessities is now yielded on every hand. . . . On every hand we hear the admission of its superiority, and the wish expressed that it might become fashionable.[98]
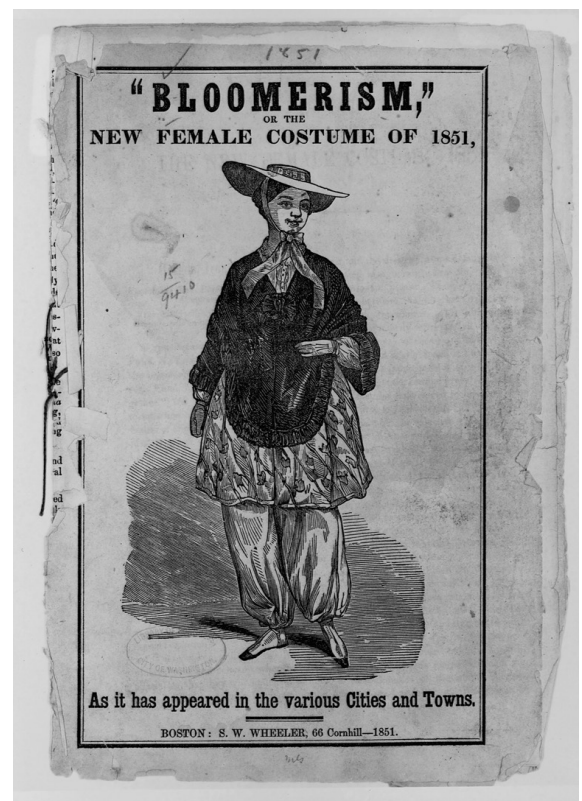
Figure 6.9 "Bloomerism," as shown in this illustration from 1851, was the name given to a new style of dress that included full trousers gathered at the cuff and a wide tunic tied with a sash. The style took its name from Amelia Bloomer, a women's rights campaigner and dress reformer. For Bloomer and her peers, "Trousers represented physical freedom, and . . . being freed from societal restraints."[97]
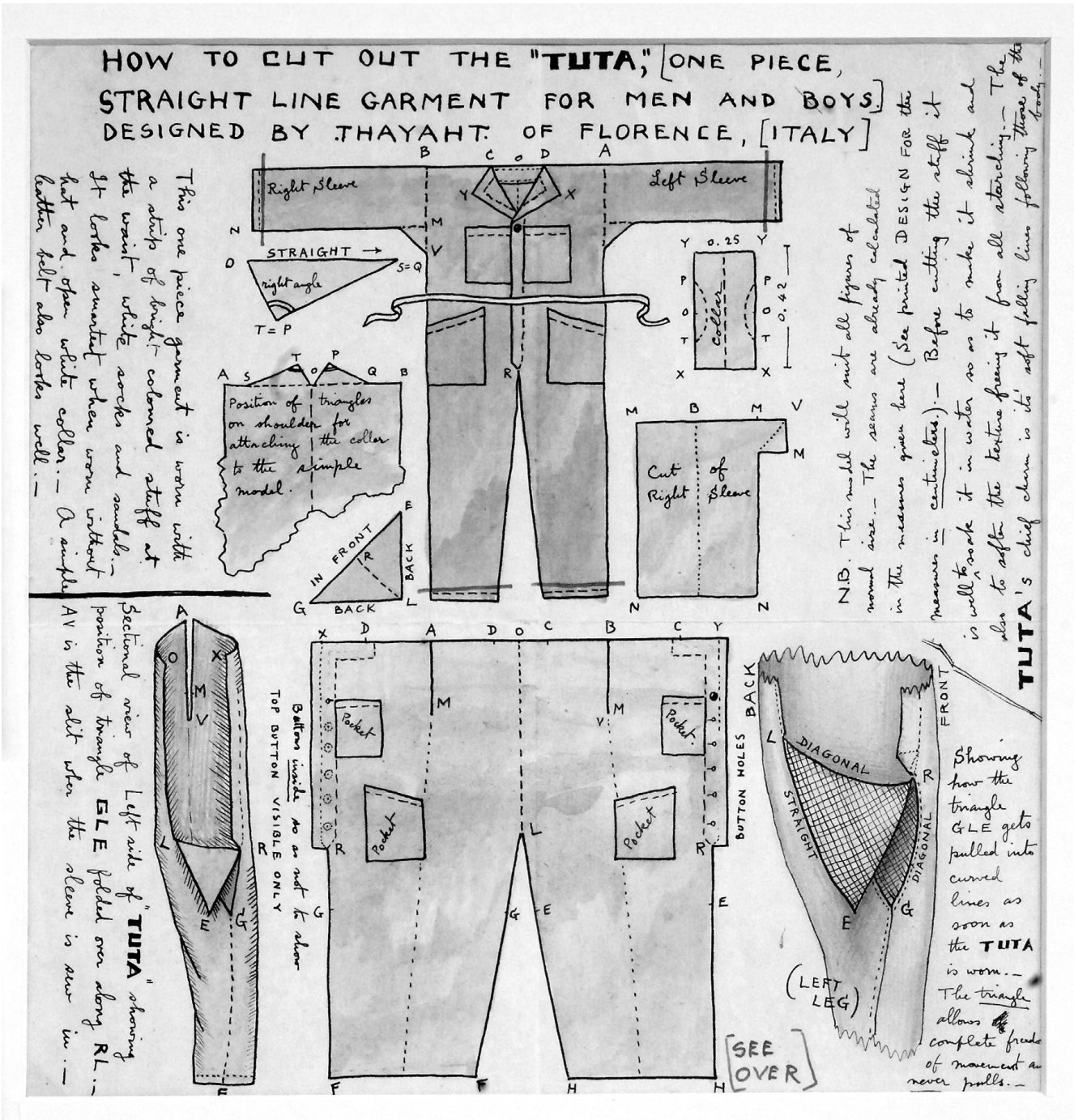
Figure 6.10 Italian futurist artist Ernesto Michahelles, also known as Thayaht, designed the *Tuta* in 1919–20. The functional one-piece garment was intended to revolutionize fashion. The pattern was published in the newspaper *La Nazione*, with a printed pattern available at a modest cost.[103] The zero-waste design made efficient use of fabric at a time when the cost of living was high: "all the fabric (4.50 metres, height 0.70) is used and not even a slither is left over."[104] Although the *Tuta* was intended as a universal item of clothing for everyday use that would abolish class distinctions in clothing, it was actually adopted as a fad by the elite.[105]

Despite Bloomer's enthusiasm and the positive feedback she reports, a backlash against female trouser-wearing soon became overwhelming: campaigners were falsely smeared as having "loose morals," leading to "public speculation that feminism, and bloomerism, had an undisclosed, anti-social, and immoral agenda."[99] Bloomer and her colleagues reluctantly packed away their pantaloons, fearing that the broader fight for women's rights would otherwise be compromised. Yet health reformers continued their promotion of a more rational style of dress for both women and men, and trousers for women eventually became socially acceptable in the twentieth century.[100]

There were many more initiatives that sought to bring about significant changes to clothing styles in the nineteenth century. In addition to the utopian socialists, feminists and health reformers already mentioned were the members of the Arts and Crafts movement who were "the first design reformers intent on contributing to positive social change through improved design of artefacts [and] textiles"—including garments.[101] Moving on to the early twentieth century, various European movements focused on the transformation of dress. The Italian futurists, for example, glorified modernity, speed, technology, and violence; their all-encompassing vision included the aim "to abolish the very system of fashion by designing clothes as works of art."[102] One celebrated example of a futurist clothing design was Thayaht's *Tuta*, shown in Figure 6.10. In revolutionary Russia, meanwhile, fashion was considered to be a bourgeois phenomenon and therefore "expected to die together with the social class that produced it."[106] Avant-garde artists brought forward a range of radical proposals, including the destruction of all existing clothing, the creation of styles perfectly suited to the requirements of particular professions and even compulsory identical dress for all citizens.[107]

Challenging Social Norms

The examples discussed so far have proposed approaches to dressing the body that were radical in their time and consciously challenged social norms. To locate an even more transgressive approach, we can turn to fashion systems that involve no clothes at all. Contributors to the Fashion Fictions project have considered the benefits of eliminating clothes: in World 67, for example, a clothing tax leads to nudity becoming common in everyday life (see Box 6.3), while in World 75, plant and flower pigments injected into the skin provide color and decoration in place of clothes.[108] While the idea of promoting nudism as the basis for an improved fashion system may seem far-fetched today, a century ago the situation was very different.

Box 6.3

Public nudity in Australia in World 67 has been decriminalized, leading to social acceptance of going "de-clothed" in everyday life. Due to critical levels of depletion of natural resources from overconsumption of clothing, the Australian government was forced to enact a clothing tax in the 1980s. The substantial increase to the cost of clothing sparked changes in public attitudes towards nudity. Prolific protests regarding people's right to be naked in public eventually led to changes in law. In this nude world, clothing has become disconnected from the everyday, now only worn for special occasions or if the situation necessitates clothing (e.g. PPE [personal protective equipment]).

Evie Rosa, Australia

Dress historian Annebella Pollen, who has researched the history of nudism in England, explains that the 1920s and 1930s saw a range of bold experiments led by artists and intellectuals across various aspects of culture—including nudism. She indicates that nudists "varied in their commitment to the cause and inhabited a range of positions on a spectrum of belief," from strategies that promoted occasional nude sunbathing alongside reformed dress styles to utopian fantasies for an entirely naked world that bordered on science fiction.[109] This radical position was reflected in the way that clothes were discussed: Pollen quotes 1930s sources that describe garments as "dirty cloth jails," a "tyranny," and "the iron chains which civilisation and custom have riveted on suffering humanity."[110] J. C. Flugel, a British psychologist, wrote an influential book titled *The Psychology of Clothes* in 1930. In the final chapter, "The Future of Dress," Flugel demonstrates his appreciation for the nudist cause by concluding that "dress is, after all, destined to be but an episode in the history of humanity."[111]

Pollen explains that nudism was driven by a strident desire to solve contemporary social problems:

> Relations between the sexes would be improved, and a whole host of sexual neuroses—understood to include adultery, prostitution, and masturbation—were expected to "vanish" along with clothing and its production of false modesty and shame. Other nudists went still further and predicted a reduction in greed, the spatial reorganization of city life, population control, and pacifism among its potential effects.

From a sustainability perspective, it is particularly interesting that another motivation for the nudist movement was the intention to escape industrialization and re-establish a deep connection with nature that had, as

Figure 6.11 The nudist movement in England promoted the benefits of life without clothes. Its most radical thinkers, as dress historian Annebella Pollen describes, "dared to dream of futurist worlds in which clothes would be entirely abandoned or conceptually completely redrawn."[115] Other nudists were more pragmatic, promoting the health benefits of occasional nude sunbathing. This photograph shows unclothed attendees at the first conference of nudist organizations in England in 1934.

discussed earlier, been diminished by modernity. As Pollen explains, "what was being sloughed off with clothes was the worst of mechanized modernity, with its manifold complexities and artificialities. Nudism offered not only a means of simplification but also the potential for holistic unity with what was natural and enduring." She quotes Noel Poynter, an influential nudist, who instructed, "Dig down to the hard rock of the essential, cast off the tawdry accumulation of convention, and all the petty personal trash that the world has grafted on the individual spirit. Cast it off, I say!"[112]

How were these radical proposals received by wider society? Pollen reports that responses ranged from amusement to horror. The movement came up against practical challenges too, not least the need for clothing to provide protection in the cold British climate. Although the movement's boldest ambitions did not come to pass—nudism on London's Regent Street did not become the norm, as had been hoped—the reformist wing did influence wider dress practices. Pollen explains that "the visions of the English moderates, with their ambition for lighter-weight washable clothes and sunbathing in a minimum of attire, gained steady traction during the 1930s as part of a general relaxation of dress and manners."[113] And although the utopian nudists' ambitions were not realized, their radical agenda, which sought "a deconstruction of all social propriety in search of a new future,"[114] still has much to offer those seeking to challenge the accepted norms of fashion today.

Domestic and Custom Making

Another potential area of focus when attempting to imagine alternative fashion systems is production: the question of where and how clothes are made. The worlds submitted to the Fashion Fictions project, when read collectively, reveal a strong interest in homemade clothes, do-it-yourself practices, and craft skills. In World 30, for example, "sewing became an unstoppable trend among young people, unleashing a wave of creativity with sustainability at its heart."[116] While this may seem like an unattainable dream to us now given the dominance of industrial production, domestic making was entirely normal in many historical fashion systems. As an example, we will examine a historical period that saw a conscious increase in domestic making practices: the revolution which took place in the British American colonies in the second half of the eighteenth century.

In the 1760s, Britain imposed taxes on its American colonies and strictly enforced restrictions that required the purchase of British materials. This move was met with resistance; colonists boycotted British goods and focused their efforts on domestic production. As historian Anne L. Macdonald explains, "women ardently supported the boycott of British goods by alleging that 'naught but homespun' would cloak their bodies and that spinning wheels and knitting needles would doom 'foreign manufactures.'"[117] To support the drive for home production, spinning bees were organized where women assembled to spin and knit for hours on end. These social events became highly popular and even competitive, with groups competing to maximize their output.[118] Newspapers publicized impressive production records. For example: "One man, with the help of his wife and children, completed in one year five hundred yards of linen and woolen cloth from materials raised on his farm."[119] As time went on, the wearing of homespun cloth became commonplace but when war broke out in 1775, the need for clothing for the troops prompted a renewed focus on domestic making. As MacDonald reports, "Women tackled their knitting with a vengeance and vaunted their speed and productivity."[120]

There are countless other examples of domestic making in historical fashion systems that we could explore; as indicated earlier, making skills would have been widespread in many periods, particularly before the development of industrial mass production. At times, these movements have been consciously political; a particularly famous example would be Mahatma Gandhi's involvement in the *swadeshi* movement in India, which boycotted British goods and advocated the use of *khadi* (homespun cloth).[121] We can also gain inspiration by looking at examples from later in the twentieth century, such as the speculative *Dressing Is Easy*

system created by Italian radical architecture group Archizoom in 1972. The system supported do-it-yourself clothing production via a kit of materials, instructions and tools, with the basic component being a piece of fabric measuring seventy centimetres square. According to journalist Chiara Clarke Sivaro, *Dressing Is Easy* was part of a wider effort by Archizoom and their contemporaries to "wipe the slate clean and demolish capitalism's modes of production through design." She explains that the system sought to "[abolish] the distinction between producer and consumer, through the simplification and reduction of the techniques and practical ways of making that required such high levels of specialization in order to produce western culture and the increasingly complex objects it so fetishized."[122]

Further insights can be gained through examination of subcultures in which domestic making was commonplace, which arose after ready-made clothes were widely available. Carol Tulloch, a writer and curator specializing in dress and Black identities, has written about the importance of home dressmaking in the Jamaican community in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. Tulloch draws on the oral history of one woman, Mrs. Anella James, who emigrated from Jamaica to Britain in 1961. Anella was an expert home dressmaker and also made clothes for individual clients in her community, using what she described as a "freehand" approach to dressmaking. As Tulloch explains, "The method rejects the use of paper dress patterns, thereby requiring the dressmaker to possess competence, skill and confidence in order to draw onto, or even cut directly into, the fabric."[123] Tulloch argues that this creative and open-ended method, which enables the maker to incorporate a variety of sources of inspiration, "facilitated . . . the subliminal emotions and meanings in being a Jamaican woman in Britain and the assertion of her own aesthetic-self and by extension a collective identity."[124] The distinctiveness of the Jamaican community's home-making culture was noted by a nineteen-year-old British mod in 1964: "I once went to a West Indian club where everyone made their own clothes. It was fantastic, everyone was individual, everyone was showing themselves as they really wanted to be. [. . .] They were just expressing themselves as everyone should be entitled to do, be it in homes or private clubs or in the streets."[125] It seems, then, that the immigrant Jamaican community had managed to create their own fashion system within the broader system, with its own values and processes of making.

In the culture described by Tulloch, we see an overlap between home-making and custom-making practices; again, this would have been common in many historical contexts. In Chapter 2 we discussed making items to measure as an aspect of quality manufacture; such approaches were used as a direct inspiration for outlines contributed to the Fashion Fictions project. In World 52, for example, a global digital network connects artisans and clients.[126] The author of this world envisions close relationships between makers and wearers—which, as Tulloch explains, was the case for Anella James and her clients. This is a stark contrast to the situation in the contemporary mainstream fashion system, in which garments are typically mass-produced far from the locations in which they will be sold and worn.

Local Production and Local Distinctiveness

Several of the speculative outlines submitted to the Fashion Fictions project demonstrate an interest in commercial clothing production becoming more closely entangled with everyday life. In World 14, for example, the collapse of the globalized fashion industry leads to the development of a system in which subsidized factory production is accessible to local people.[127] It can be difficult for those who have grown up in the era of globalized production to imagine a system in which manufacture is both accessible and meaningful. To provide an insight we can look to an example from history: the hand-knitting industry of Dentdale, a valley in the rural Yorkshire Dales region of England.

Figure 6.12 In the Yorkshire Dales, a vibrant hand-knitting industry thrived for centuries. As knitting historians Marie Hartley and Joan Ingilby explain, "In the lonely outposts of hamlet and village traditions were carried on that had been long forgotten in the busier lowland country. Knitting was a traditional craft; and skill in it was passed on from one generation to another. It was no idle pursuit to be picked up at odd moments."[130] Knitters in Wensleydale, shown in this print from 1814, produced stockings and other items for domestic use and export, like the knitters in the nearby valley of Dentdale. "Wensley Dale knitters," New York Public Library Digital Collections.[131]

A book first published in 1951, *The Old Hand-Knitters of the Dales,* draws on a range of sources dating back to the nineteenth century along with oral history accounts and provides a fascinating account of a craft tradition that is deeply rooted in place. As the authors, Marie Hartley and Joan Ingilby, explain, "For over three centuries knitting was an automatic employment every day during all the working hours of many men, women, and children throughout the dales."[128] Because the area was so remote, the craft continued long after industrial work had become the norm in urban areas. The knitters produced stockings, caps, gloves, mittens, and jerseys that were sold at local centers of trade and to London merchants, and became renowned for their skill and productivity.[129]

Hartley and Ingilby explain that the Dent knitters knitted incessantly, and emphasize that the sociable nature of their culture would have contrasted sharply with working life in the mills of Manchester, just sixty miles away. In a book written in 1868, Adam Sedgwick, an academic who grew up in Dent, reflected—with evident nostalgia—on his early years:

While speaking of the habits and manners of my country-women, I may remark that their industry had then a social character. Their machinery and the material of their fabrics they constantly bore about with them. Hence the knitters of Dent had the reputation of being lively gossips; and they worked together in little clusters—not in din and confinement like that of a modern manufactory—but each one following the leading of her fancy; whether among her friends, or rambling in the sweet scenery of the valley.[132]

Knitting was so embedded in everyday life that groups would meet in the evenings to knit and socialize, as Sedgwick went on to describe:

> They took their seats; and then began the work of the evening; and with a speed that cheated the eye they went on with their respective tasks. Beautiful gloves were thrown off complete; and worsted stockings made good progress. There was no dreary deafening noise of machinery; but there was the merry heart-cheering sound of the evening's talk. They had their ghost tales; and their love tales; and their battles of jests and riddles; and their ancient songs of enormous length, yet heard by ears that were never weary.[133]

This intermingling of productive work and social time, while perhaps romanticized, is reminiscent of the spinning bees in the American colonies described earlier. It also connects with ideas found in various worlds contributed to Fashion Fictions: the speculative outlines show notable interest in the creation of spaces for people to make and mend together. In World 30, for example, the popularity of sewing is supported by government schemes to place sewing machines in libraries, and these shared making spaces become vibrant social and creative hubs.[134]

The historical sources quoted in *The Old Hand-Knitters of the Dales* also mention the importance of the area's knitting schools, which taught children the craft skills needed to join the local making culture.[135] Again, this connects to interests recorded in the fictional fashion systems—such as World 83 where sewing is a highly regarded core school subject, meaning that textile-related skills are widespread in the community.[136] World 91 also focuses on school education but takes a different approach, envisaging sewing, theatre, ecology, and mindfulness as the central pillars of the curriculum (see Box 6.4).

Box 6.4

In World 91 in 2010 Caroline Lucas became the UK's first Green Prime Minister. Lucas redefined STEM subjects in schools. Through the new "Sewing, Theatre, Ecology, and Mindfulness" curriculum an ecologically minded generation of thinkers emerged who adopted mushrooms as their non-human spiritual guides.

Every Friday a Mushroom-themed Mardi Gras fills the streets. Fantastical costumes made from fungi fabrics adorn floats. Headdresses are shaped like giant puffballs; wings are coloured in shades of green by shingled hedgehog mushrooms and fans shaped like oyster mushrooms are waved at spectators. A magical night of festivities follows paying homage to Lucas and the mushroom guides.

Suzanne Rowland, UK

Yet another notable aspect of the Dent knitters' culture is the traditional patterns used: they were known for their gloves, knitted in distinctive two-color designs. The gloves can be seen as an element of the area's "local distinctiveness": the elements that make a particular place unique. As Sue Clifford and Angela King explain, these elements are constantly evolving and encompass "the invisible as well as the visible: symbols, festivals and legends stand alongside hedgerows, hills and houses"—and, in the context of Dent, knitwear.[137] The outlines submitted to Fashion Fictions demonstrate great interest in local distinctiveness. In World 42, for example, mass production is rejected in favor of locally derived archetypes, or "base-lines";[138] in World 81, global supply chains are terminated and localized fashions emerge.[139]

Figure 6.13 This smock frock, thought to come from Norfolk, a county in the East of England, dates from around 1900. It is made from brown linen and features elaborate embroidery on the front, back, collar, and cuffs. This vibrant working-class form of dress contrasted sharply with the dark, pared-down aesthetic of mainstream menswear. By the early twentieth century, the smock had come to be seen as "impractical, old fashioned and cumbersome."[145].

In these speculative stories of local distinctiveness, it is not just production that is localized, but also cultural meaning. Another English traditional item provides insights into a historical culture with readily apparent local distinctiveness: the smock, or smock frock. The smock was a practical everyday item commonly worn in the nineteenth century by working men, often sold ready-made or secondhand. It is constructed from squares and triangles without any fabric waste (making it a zero-waste item, as discussed in Chapter 2) with gathering at center front and center back held in place by decorative stitching (smocking) in horizontal bands, plus distinctive chain-stitch motifs.[140]

In an interesting link with the dress reform campaigns discussed earlier in the chapter, the smock was celebrated by the Arts and Crafts movement in the nineteenth century and by dress reformers in the early twentieth century. According to expert Alison Toplis, the reformers appreciated the smock's freedom of movement and its image as an authentic "folk" style.[141] Yet this image of the smock as an unchanging traditional item has concealed its role as a dynamic element of vibrant localized fashion cultures.[142] Particular places were known for their distinctive smock styles, such as the indigo-dyed smocks of Newark-on-Trent and the caped smocks popular in the Welsh borders.[143] Moreover, Toplis explains, the decorated smock frock was part of a "complex aesthetic" that provided a way for working men to express themselves and gain kudos within their communities: "The smock frock represented a way of dressing that was antithetical to fashionable male dress, 'an island of identity' which suggested some other world that the elite were not party to, beyond their control and grounded in community pride and the practical realities of the environment."[144] These locally distinctive styles and meanings are a stark contrast to the homogeneous fashions generated by the mainstream fashion system today.

Restricting and Managing Production

We will now consider a final aspect of historical and fictional fashion systems: the volume of production. As stated earlier, the volume of clothes produced worldwide has increased dramatically in recent decades and continues to rise, driven by the capitalist system's ethos of growth. Kate Fletcher and Mathilda Tham

argue in their influential publication *Earth Logic* that transitioning to a fashion system based on much lower production levels will be difficult, but necessary: "LESS is the largest provocation associated with transition to sustainability. Here lies the greatest temptation to veer into techno fixes. Yet, only by staying with the trouble of less can the scale of change deemed necessary be achieved."[146]

Contributors to the Fashion Fictions project are keen to imagine systems based on dramatically reduced levels of production and consumption. Some speculate on the imposition of set limits for consumption: in World 58, for example, each family has a monthly carbon budget for all daily necessities including clothing,[147] while in World 106, each citizen receives 20 kilograms of silk yarn as their birthright.[148] Historical insights could help us to contemplate more fully a system with controlled consumption: we could, for example, examine the practices that developed during the rationing of the Second World War, as discussed in Chapter 3. Various Fashion Fictions contributors imagine systems based on the issuing of standardized garments in order to remove the excess production and consumption associated with choice and changing fashions. In World 64, for example, uniform garments are issued to all citizens, prompting people to use diverse accessories to express the self (see Box 6.5). These ideas echo ideas such as the *Tuta* shown in Figure 6.10 and the JUMPSUIT project in Figure 6.3. An alternative interpretation would be to halt the production of new clothes entirely, as is proposed in several of the Fashion Fictions worlds.

Box 6.5

In World 64 garments are distributed by the government as a plain uniform due to tight restrictions on non-essential items as all resources became state-owned to avoid runaway depletion in the 90s.

Self-expression now comes through small accessories interchangeably attached to the uniform's surface. Different trends coexist inside this resource-light way to experience fashion and connect people to the others they see as their peers. Some use small parts of fabric that are often fragments of garments worn by pop icons before the regulations were instated and traded online as high-value items. Others make decorations from found objects with personal value, or make things from materials found in nature to personalise the functional base of the uniform.

Laetitia Forst, UK

Some historical periods have seen proposals that allow choice in dress but focus on the management of production and consumption to avoid unnecessary excess. Psychologist J. C. Flugel, who was mentioned earlier in relation to the nudism movement, noted two key problems of fashionable dress: expense to the wearer and disruption of the clothing trade when fashion underwent sudden changes. Yet Flugel also recognized the limitations of "fixed" styles—such as uniforms and traditional dress that becomes static, rather than continuing to evolve—in adequately expressing individuality and adapting to changing times. He highlighted the need for coordinated action to establish a balance between the two: "Costume must be freed, alike from the ruinous competition and commercialism of fashion, and from the unadaptable conservatism of 'fixed' dress. . . . It would seem likely that only concerted action can attain these ends; both for social and for economic reasons, the individual is relatively helpless."[149] Flugel recommended the creation of a "Clothing Board" and described in some detail how the board would assess public feeling and coordinate the work of designers to manage changes in clothing.[150]

Feminist historian Sheila Rowbotham highlights an earlier and more detailed proposal for the management of the fashion system that took place following the French Revolution of 1848, when workers and middle-class radicals overthrew the government of King Louis-Philippe. As Rowbotham explains, the capitalist economy was in a period of dramatic transformation at this time, with the clothing trades shifting from custom making to the production of ready-made clothing. During a period of struggle immediately after the revolution, workers were seeking to have their needs met. Working-class women put forward various demands for the reorganization of work, including equal pay, shorter hours, crèches, and training centers. These ideas were developed through intense discussion in cooperative associations, women's clubs, and women's journals.[151]

Jeanne Deroin, a self-educated dressmaker and committed feminist, was particularly far-sighted in her thinking. As Rowbotham explains, Deroin "turn[ed] her attention to the overall economic context of producer co-operatives and search[ed] for a means of transition from a capitalist organisation of production to a co-operative society."[152] Her proposal? A federation of workers' associations that would "establish equilibrium between production and consumer needs."[153] In practical terms, the federation would monitor the number of workers in each trade, making adjustments where necessary to avoid unemployment, and provide research into consumer needs and production methods. A social fund, funded by workers' contributions, would provide financial support for new associations. Goods and services would be exchanged directly between the workers, with their relative value managed by the associations to ensure fairness. In Deroin's own words: "The hairdressers will do the hair of the shoemakers who will supply their footwear."[154] Rowbotham explains that through this proposal, Deroin was addressing the core issues of capitalism: "she had envisaged the means of production becoming gradually the collective property of the entire society. . . . Profit and private capital would no longer be necessary."[155] The federation that Deroin proposed was set up, with 400 affiliated associations. However, the authorities considered the organization to be subversive and its leaders, including Deroin, were arrested.[156] While this vision of cooperative planned production was short lived, we may still find inspiration in the story today as we seek to generate new visions for the fashion industry.

Thinking Critically

In this chapter we have argued for the need to pursue radical alternatives to the current fashion system, rather than restricting ourselves to initiatives that tackle only particular aspects. To do so we need to challenge both the norms of fashion and the structure of the global economy: an undeniably daunting task. Yet surveys of the public across the world consistently indicate that a majority think that the environment should be prioritized, even if it damages economic growth.[157] Some might consider the post-growth thinking explored in this chapter as naive; in response, we would highlight the words of Fletcher and Tham in *Earth Logic*:

> Questioning the economic growth logic causes resistance, with a number of strategies kicking in, typically: ridiculing, the directing of attention elsewhere (whataboutism), discreditation of the messenger. . . . [Yet] today more and more people are seeing that it is business-as-usual that is illogical. If we really want to save this beautiful planet, future generations of all species including ourselves, our livelihoods and those of future generations, we must place earth first. We must dare to take a leap out of the current paradigm.[158]

Figure 6.14 The Fashion Fictions project highlights the value of imagining alternative worlds in deconstructing embedded assumptions about societal progress and the role of the fashion system. The project's prototyping workshops explore the potential of embodied, material exploration in opening up radical ideas about how we might live differently with our clothes. The collage being constructed here represents World 19, in which fashion is in the service of nature.[161]

Stories from history carry radical potential, as understanding of past cultures can be of great help in imagining fundamentally different ways of fashioning our identities in the future. The selection of examples offered in this chapter is limited both by space and by the geographical and historical scope of the book. There are many more stories to be told, particularly by exploring cultures beyond the United States and the United Kingdom. The sustainable fashion movement will be enriched by embracing plurality and investigating the abundance of fashion systems that have thrived outside the globalized mainstream. One note of caution: it is important that we are respectful when seeking to learn about cultures that we have not experienced directly, and are wary of the risks of cultural appropriation. In a 2021 conference presentation, Timo Rissanen highlighted the value of indigenous knowledge in exploring alternative fashion systems but also recognized that taking this knowledge out of context could inadvertently perpetuate the extractive mindset that characterizes coloniality. In response to the advice of Aboriginal author Tyson Yunkaporta, who suggests that "The assistance people need is not in learning about Aboriginal Knowledge but in remembering their own,"[159] Rissanen sought to "find the connection to living in kinship with earth and all her inhabitants in our own timelines" by looking to his great-grandparents' lives in rural Finland. As he explained, "Standing in the foundations of my great-grandfather's home in 2015, looking at the fields that would have provided the grain for his bread, forests with fowl and timber, the lakes with fish, our interdependence on earth's systems was clear as day."[160]

When looking to history for inspiration there is a danger of becoming nostalgic: of looking at the past with rose-tinted spectacles. When examining specific historical periods it is important to be aware of their problems and injustices. For the examples discussed in this chapter, these would include the eugenicist ideas that often intermingled with the campaign for nudism, the misogyny that cut short Amelia Bloomer's dress reform and Jeanne Deroin's effort to reorganize clothing production, and the violent oppression of indigenous and Black people in North America that took place before, during and after the drive for homespun cloth. Awareness of these realities should prevent us from romanticizing—and thereby simplifying—past eras. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that none of the historical fashion systems discussed in this chapter have continued intact to the present day; many of the utopian propositions could even be deemed a failure. Yet it would be rash to reject these stories outright; we can still learn from historical periods, even if they have problematic aspects or did not thrive over time. As design theorist Cameron Tonkinwise argues,

"de-progressive design does not mean returning to how things were," because this would be both undesirable and impossible.[162] Instead, we must find ways to draw on ideas and practices from the past but consciously shape them for the contemporary context. Ultimately, we may find renewed value in the slogan of Russian Constructivist Vladimir Tatlin: "Not toward the new, not toward the old, but toward what is necessary."[163]

Further Reading

There are many excellent sources referenced in this chapter that will provide insights into the historical development of the mainstream fashion system. *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* by Elizabeth Wilson (University of California Press, 1987) is a good place to start. To learn more about historical utopian visions for fashion, try a highly engaging video, *The Rational Dress Society presents A History of Counter-Fashion*: https://youtu.be/xFs-2cP1csE. Annebella Pollen's book *Nudism in a Cold Climate: The Visual Culture of Naturists in Mid-20th Century Britain* (Atelier Editions, 2022) includes a fascinating examination of the nudists of the 1920s and 1930s—and their ideas about clothing, which remain provocative today.

To gain inspiration for the transformation of today's fashion system, *Earth Logic Fashion Action Research Plan* by Kate Fletcher and Mathilda Tham (2019) is an essential reading: https://earthlogic.info. *Designing Fashion's Future: Present Practice and Tactics for Sustainable Change* by Alice Payne (Bloomsbury, 2021) also provides vital insights. Rebecca Burgess's book *Fibershed: Growing a Movement of Farmers, Fashion Activists, and Makers for a New Textile Economy* (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2019) is valuable in profiling the hands-on work of transformation.

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