

22



FASHION AND
TEXTILE DESIGN
AMBIVALENCES



PAD. Pages on Arts and Design

International, peer-reviewed,
open access journal
founded by Vanni Pasca in 2005

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PAD

via Festa del Perdono 1 – 20122 Milano – Italy
via Roma 171 – 90133 Palermo – Italy
info@padjournal.net – editors@padjournal.net

Publisher

Aiap Edizioni
via A. Ponchielli 3 – 20129 Milano – Italy
aiap@aiap.it – www.aiap.it

PAD © ISSN 1972-7887
#22, Vol. 15, June 2022
www.padjournal.net

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EDITORIAL #22

Fashion and Textile Ambivalences

Gianni Montagna

Universidade de Lisboa

Orcid id 0000-0002-5843-2047

Maria Antonietta Sbordone

Università degli Studi della Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli”

Orcid id 0000-0002-3780-6142



The theme of PAD Issue 22, titled “Fashion and Textile Ambivalences”, considers the nature of the changes taking place through the sharing of testimonies, case-studies as well as theoretical and design elaborations, on emerging issues. These not only affect current and future constraints but also configure the possibility of different scenarios in the fashion and textile sectors.

Among the emerging issues, *ambivalence*, in a general sense, represents a characteristic of contemporary life, crossed today by everything and its opposite. Namely, it is the manifestation of different aspects not necessarily in opposition, certainly to be interpreted in a relationship of invariable contrast or in a parallelism.

The differences between this concept and other similar ones such as “dichotomy”, “contradiction”, “dialectic”, “polarization”, etc. that refer to a family of categories that indicate a duality or a divergence of conditions, contrasting polarities, options, and meanings, do not represent the “dischronic” everyday life (Sbordone, 2020) of human feeling and acting. Conversely, the term ambivalence is the most suitable even if it originates in disciplines that scrutinize the mind and the human soul (Castigliero, 2022), which leads to the discovery of dissociation not in two people, but in several parts of the personality that coexist simultaneously. According to the Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler,¹ ambivalence constitutes a disposition of the human soul that evolves over time.

1 One of the most influential psychiatrists of his time, best known today for his introduction of the term *schizophrenia* to describe the disorder previously known as *dementia praecox* and for his studies of schizophrenics.

Its manifestations can represent a creative, artistic, and social potential, thus going beyond the boundaries of psychology, with its meaning becoming *transcultural*.

In the social sphere, it constitutes the medium for interpreting the constant inter and trans-generational contradictions; a central concept that assimilates, on the one hand, duplicity as a factor of knowledge, while on the other, it is a tool for understanding and interpreting the nuances of current events, that is to say, it helps to reflect on the multiplicity of events that are incessantly produced.

The most suitable interpretation of the ambivalence of experiences comes from Alain Finkielkraut when he states: “literature is needed to rescue the real world out of summary readings, be they those of easy sentimentality or implacable intelligence. Literature teaches us to be wary of the theorems of the intellect and to replace the realm of antinomies with that of nuance” (2012, p. 87).

Nuance like waste is an unconventional category since it is worthless according to the principles of modernity, it emerges as a new substance that adds to or replaces the value categories of late modernity, the reference to sustainability and circularity is a necessity.

In fact, a direct reference to modern society and modernity is testified by the existence of an explicit interpretative vein or “Ambivalence of modernity” (Longo, 2005) as an expression of its historical and social characterization. Some authors speak of the culture of modernity (Kumar, 1995/2000) in contradictory terms within the idea of modernity itself, as of an antagonistic culture that brings out polarized meanings, such as: reason/imagination, artifact/natural, objectivity/subjectivity, etc.

Consequently, ambivalence as a category that best captures the transformations on evolutionary or involutory internal dynamics that Bauman (1991/2010) chooses as a characterization of his “liquid modernity” (2011). Zygmunt Bauman reflects on those scraps and nuances or rather on “crude materials”, deemed unnecessary, inessential to support the idea of modernity, which are feelings. The lever used by Bauman is *consumption*, an emblematic act of late modernity, as an ambivalent example par excellence on which *dominion* and *freedom* are forcefully established. Buying is consuming and inevitably leads to the necessary consequence of contemporaneity, that is, the production of waste, of scraps that multiply since the dynamics are part of the mechanisms of reproduction and replication of the economic order that is reflected in the social. The lever is ambivalent feelings because they are the expression of *freedom* and *belonging*, established mechanisms in the world of fashion that does not dissolve the knot of consumption and waste production: are they reflected in the intangible dimension of the construction of the singular and multiple identity at the same time? *Consumption*, therefore, is an ambivalent expression of social phenomena and personal motivations in continuous transition that expresses a high performative potential that increases and qualifies the perception of reality. Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1988) observes, in relation to the change in daily life in Germany, a series of ambivalences completely detached from the social, economic and cultural context of the context of life:

[Hamlets, villages, towns] are populated by characters who even thirty years ago were absolutely unthinkable: butchers playing

golf, wives imported from Thailand, PR workers who cultivate a vegetable garden outside the city, Turkish mullahs, pharmacists active in committees for Nicaragua, vagabonds who drive around in Mercedes, self-employed workers with ecological crops, tax officials who collect weapons, direct farmers who breed peacocks, [...] (pp. 175-176)

The description if then extended to a global context does not change but is characterized by a strong accent of de-territorialization, and Arjun Appadurai (1996/2011) reveals an instantaneous immaterial nature:

When Turkish workers emigrated to Germany watch Turkish films in their German apartments, when Koreans in Philadelphia watch the Seoul Olympics thanks to satellite links from Korea, and when Pakistani taxi drivers in Chicago listen to audio tapes of sermons recorded in Pakistan or Iran, we are faced with moving images that cross de-territorialized spectators. (p. 11)

A mixture of elements that finds in the notion of “imbrication” used by Saskia Sassen (2008) the exact description of the relationship between “digital and real”, between “individual and social” which gives rise to a performative interaction that reflecting on more dimensions cannot be reduced to a polarization. The most useful term for deciphering the performative and ambivalent interaction lies in entanglement, a term coined by Neri Oxman (2016) with the intention of breaking the boundaries between disciplines and intertwining domains, reflects on the ability to graft and not subtract:

The goal is to establish a tentative, yet holistic, cartography of the interrelation between these domains, where one realm can incite (r)evolution inside another; and where a single individual or project can reside in multiple dominions. Mostly, this is an invitation to question and to amend what is being proposed.

Thus, the exercise of late modernity goes beyond the “effort to eradicate ambivalence: an effort to define with precision, and to cancel or eliminate everything that cannot be defined or cannot be defined with precision” that Bauman (2011, p. 75) notes as a distinctive trait in early modernity. Among other authors, Frenk van Harreveld, Hannah U. Nohlen and Iris K. Schneider (2015) describes the now consolidated mechanism of consumption that sums up the existence of contemporary man: “living in a consumer society in which your desires are continually teased and fulfilled but in very small doses so that you can never invest enough passion in any one specific thing”. If soliciting consumption means overconsumption, it entails on the one hand, more freedom, while on the other, more responsibility and awareness in exposing ourselves to apparently negative or positive actions that cannot be determined immediately. For Georg Simmel (1985/1910), as Lucio Perucchi comments:

[...] reality is built through a network of tensions, within which the relationship between the individual and society appears to be based both on factors of cohesion and disintegration”, in *Die Mode* (1911) he discusses “obedience” and “distinction” and if you expand into actuality you arrive at a conscious and emancipative conception of ambivalence. It is a question of observing through the lens of ambivalence a conflict in a nutshell that would tend to

redefine the political, social and cultural nature of contemporary societies. Philosophical thought attests to the conflict, setting the model of a “weak culture” from which the restart and therefore the overcoming innovates the foundations and orientates itself differently. If starting from the conviction that things are like this but could also be different or in another way, according to the notion of ambivalence, because they hold a value that must be established from time to time, there is an obligation to be able to imagine making a commitment to activate other options. Appadurai (1996/2011) speaks of the “ability to aspire” conceived as “a capacity for orientation nourished by the possibility of conjecturing and refuting on the real world [...]”. The faculty to “protest”, in Hirschman’s terms, and the completely cultural capacity to have aspirations, are mutually linked. (1996, pp. 73-74)

If this aspiration is then cultivated and enters the bed of the planned imagination, it is clear the objective that UNESCO (2012) intends to configure with the “Futures Literacy” program:

[...] the urgent need to transform human governance by empowering everyone to use-the-future more effectively and efficiently. This is not just about understanding how to prepare for potential crises or plan how to overcome grand challenges or realize the important goals of Agenda 2030. It is about moving beyond a dependency on the illusion of certainty and the fragilities this creates.

It is therefore essential to note, within the various contents of the papers received from the international scientific community, the majority dealing with the *New/Old* ambivalences which, revisited in the light of what emerged, has the flavour

of a continuous ready-made of the main theme that places one question at the centre: fashion and textile areas of production, discussion and unconditional creation of values that can be transmitted and therefore marketed, how do they respond to the challenges of the third millennium?

With reference to the theories and design practices in the *New/Old Advances* category, Margherita Tufarelli's contribution stands out for the direct comparison between the value of time in Fashion, reflecting on the evolutionary duality of the archives that highlight the Heritage, proposing a wider use, through a more conscious or digital action. In the paper by Gina Nadal Fernandez reference is made to the Emotional Experience linked to Sensory Perception which strengthens the value of direct experience in particular in tangible and intangible associations and connections, this implies that the object has its own emotional meaning and awakens past experiences by activating the personal memory of the materials and the attraction they arouse, especially with regard to textiles. The necessary evolution that makes its way in the *New/Old Advances* of the paper by Adriana Yumi Sato Duarte, Regina Aparecida Sanches, Rayana Santiago de Queiróz, Fernando Soares De Lima, reveals the ambivalence of technology that offers itself as a narrative on phases and processes involved in production (textiles), on the other hand, it offers a guide to users and producers in the post-use and recycling phase as a strategy to reinsert into a new production cycle and promote circularity.

Among the contributions that adhere to the *New/Old Production and Consumption Approaches* perspective, the paper by

Debora Giorgi, Renato Stasi, Margherita Tufarelli and Maria Claudia Coppola, discusses the textile production of one of the most important Italian textile districts, that of Prato, where the new does not exclude a millennial history of ancient production processes that used recycling techniques reinterpreted through the new model of “regenerated fabrics”. The paper by Jose Luis Gonzalez Cabrero, Ana Margarita Ávila Ochoa highlights a co-design practice that develops new strategies for the circularity of productions that echo the trades of ancient populations of Mexico rich in culture and artisan processes still intact, where tradition can contrast with the methods of co-design as well as with circularity.

Beata Hamalwa’s contribution outlines various concepts of sustainability as a theoretical framework as well as for the mapping of design thinking which, through training and benchmarking, intends to formulate a series of competitive advantages in the emerging economy of Namibia.

The category of *New/Old Features* expands the scenario of possible imaginaries that ambivalence supports and sustains in order to formulate, as in the contribution by Maria Claudia Coppola, and Elisabetta Cianfanelli, tools to promote “reflective fashion”, a feature that can discuss in greater detail the potential paradigm shift towards a future “fashion forecast”. In the paper by Rosanna Veneziano, Francesco Izzo, Michela Carlomagno a new value chain comes to life from intrinsic characteristics of a specific sector, that of sportswear, analyzing the product from design to marketing, repositioning design within the entire production cycle.

Chiara Scarpitti concludes the *New/Old Features* category by proposing a substantial opening according to the meaning of Fashion that adheres to bio textile, the formulation of a new aesthetic, biocouture, that strengthens the ability of the new to influence the perception of materials through inclusive processes and reproductive of unconventional logics.

The issue ends with the presentation of an example of an Italian company, Maeko, devoted to sustainable, circular and above all conscious textile production. The basic idea that Maeko has been pursuing for years is to focus on environmental and human well-being, giving life to an integrated production ecosystem, of rich and complex ideas and knowledge. The openness to continuous experimentation to safeguard the values of the territories is achieved through the constant work of valorising the resources that fall within a framework of mutual interference and ambivalent possibilities.

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BIOGRAPHIES

Ana Margarita Ávila Ochoa

Industrial Designer specialized in the textile area. Master in History of Urban Art. Full-time Professor and Researcher at Facultad del Hábitat, Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí, and a member of the research group Design & complex thinking, where he develops design research oriented towards Evolution of thoughts, theories and concepts of Design.

aavilaochoa@fh.uaslp.mx

Michela Carlomagno

PhD student in Environment, Design and Innovation at University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli.

Before she studied Design and Communication at University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli - Department of Architecture and Industrial Design (DADI) and successively she finished her studies with a Master's degree in Design for Innovation at Department of Civil Engineering Design Construction and Environment (DICDEA) in March 2018.

She is interested in the investigation of innovative approaches to the conceptualization of new vision of design, especially on food design, cosmetic product and communication.

michela.carlomagno@unicampania.it

Elisabetta Cianfanelli

Architect and Industrial Design Specialist, is Full Professor at DIDA (Architecture Department) of University of Florence (Italy), Design Campus section. President of the CdLM in Fashion System Design, and scientific director of the DIDA Lab REI (Reverse Engineering & Interaction Design).

Her research interests are related to the world of Small and Medium Enterprises concerning the development of new products and technologies applied to design and production.

elisabetta.cianfanelli@unifi.it

Maria Claudia Coppola

PhD student in Design at University of Florence, DIDA (Department of Architecture), Design Campus section. Her research combines design approaches, future studies and digital media to foster deeper civic engagement and inclusion. In addition to her studies, she supports Professors at DIDA in managing educational and training activities, communicating with students and tutors.

Outside of the academic environment, she is a designer enjoying philosophy and politics readings from all over the world, with a strong attention to their related languages, be they carved in stone or posted on social media.

mariaclaudia.coppola@unifi.it

José Luis González Cabrero

Mexican Industrial Designer, master in Product Design from Politecnico di Milano. He is currently a Design Researcher and Professor at Facultad del Hábitat, Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí, and a member of the research group Design & complex thinking, where he develops design research oriented towards territory & aesthetics.

info@gonzalezcabrero.com

Gina Nadal Fernandez

Gina Nadal Fernandez is a final year PhD student in the Design Department at Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University. Her doctoral research is by practice, and investigates how emotional experience can be designed into digital jacquard woven textiles during a co-design process by using digital coding.

She takes a multidisciplinary approach that embraces design theory, textiles, digital coding, consumer behaviour and mass customisation in her weaving practice using a TC-1 loom and natural yarns.

Gina has presented her research at the PhD by Design workshop at the Design Research Society Conference 2018, at the Global Fashion Conference 2018 and 2020. She is also a member of the Textile Society and Design Research Society. She holds a master's degree in Fashion Graphics from Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University that looked at the relationship between digital jacquard textile practice and emotional value using digital coding.

georgina.nadal-fernandez@stu.mmu.ac.uk

Debora Giorgi

PhD, Architect, she is a Design Researcher at the Dipartimento di Architettura DIDA of the University of Florence. Since 1991 she works on Sustainable Local Development and the social implications of the project starting from the Cultural Heritage. For over 20 years she worked in projects in Ethiopia, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen, Jordan, Haiti, with the most important national and international donors – as WHC - UNESCO, UNCCD, European Commission. Since 2011 she has been collaborating with the DIDA UNIFI especially in projects around Maghreb countries and in the social field promoting Social Design projects and workshops using co-design methodologies. She is professor of Service Design at DIDA UNIFI, professor of Design for Cultural Heritage in the License Course in DesignS at Ecole Euro-Méditerranéenne d'Architecture Design et Urbanisme de l'Université Euro-Méditerranéenne de Fès EMADU – UEMF in Morocco and visiting professor in some universities in Mediterranean countries.

debora.giorgi@unifi.it

Beata Hamalwa

Beata Hamalwa founded Fashion Design Diploma at College of the Arts, Windhoek, Namibia, and Fashion Design Certificate at City Varsity, Cape Town, South Africa, and co-founded the Heroes Primary School - all became imperative in employment creation. Her versatile educational background from Poland, Namibia and South Africa in arts and fashion design has provided a valuable foundation for her career in several art training programmes. She holds a Master of Technology in Design. Her Master's thesis, titled 'Beadwork and its impact on contemporary fashion in South Africa,' investigates the cultural wealth contribution to decolonizing fashion. She believes that modern arts and trends do not imply the demise of indigenous culture. Her latest endeavour is to investigate the possibility of sustainability in the current fashion industry in Namibia, which led me to PhD research at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. As an artist, Hamalwa has showcased at premier fashion events in Namibia, Portugal, Germany, France, Poland, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Botswana, and Reunion Island.

beatkash@yahoo.com

Francesco Izzo

Full Professor of Strategic Management of Innovation at the University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli, where he teaches also Strategic Analysis. He has been Dean of Department of Economics from 2017 to 2020. He is member of the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Ph. D. teaching board. He has been visiting professor of Innovation Management at the University of Naples Federico II. His research interests include innovation strategy, international strategy of SMEs, innovation in creative industry, cultural entrepreneurship. He is author of a large number of scholarly publications on these topics. He is member of Valuation Committee of University L'Orientale. He has been head of Valuation Committee of the Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn, a public research organization in the fields of marine biology and ecology, from 2010 to 2016. He served as a consultant to Ministry of Innovation, collaborating at programs about regional innovation systems, academic spin-off and venture capital, and member of the Steering Committee of Council of Ministers for the program High-Tech for Southern Italy.

francesco.izzo@unicampania.it

Regina Aparecida Sanches

Degree in Textile Engineering at University Center of FEI (1987), Master in Mechanical Engineering at State University of Campinas (2001), Ph.D in Mechanical Engineering at State University of Campinas (2006) and Postdoctorate in Design at University of Lisbon (2016).

She started her academic career in 1995, was the coordinator of the undergraduation course in Textile Engineering at University Center of FEI (2001 to 2006), was the coordinator of the undergraduation course in Textile and Fashion at University of Sao Paulo (2010 to 2012), was the coordinator of the Master's Degree in Textile and Fashion at University of Sao Paulo (2012 to 2016).

She has been a professor at the School of Arts, Sciences and Humanities since 2006 and has been an associate professor at the University of São Paulo since 2011. She researches in the areas of textile materials, knitting technology and textile design.

regina.sanches@usp.br

Rayana Santiago de Queiroz

PhD student in the Textile Engineering course at the University of Minho (Portugal), master (2013) and graduated (2009) by the Textile and Fashion course at the University of São Paulo.

Since 2012 acts as a researcher at the Technical Textiles and Protection Products Laboratory of the Institute for Technological Research, where has been working especially on the following topics: vegetable textile fibers, natural dyes, comfort, characterization and performance evaluation of technical textiles.

rayanasq@ipt.br

Adriana Yumi Sato Duarte

Undergraduate (2009) in Bachelor of Textiles and Fashion from the University of São Paulo, Master (2013) and PhD (2017) in Mechanical Engineering from the State University of Campinas (Unicamp). Conducted a period of Internship of Doctorate Sandwich Abroad (SWE) - Science without Borders Program (2015-2016) at Fachgebiet Datenverarbeitung in der Konstruktion (Dik), Technical University of Darmstadt, Germany.

She has experience in Mechanical Engineering with an emphasis on Mechanical Design and in Textiles and Fashion with an emphasis on product design methodology, sustainable product development, Brazilian natural fibers, knitting technology and Industry 4.0. She is currently Assistant Professor II at Nossa Senhora do Patrocinio University and Coordinator of the Fashion Design Course.

adriana.duarte@ceunsp.edu.br

Chiara Scarpitti

Chiara Scarpitti, designer and PhD, is Researcher at the Department of Architecture and Industrial Design of the University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli". Since 2006 she has been working in the field of design and jewellery at an international level, obtaining numerous awards and exhibiting her works in museums and galleries including Triennale Design Museum in Milan, MAD Museum of Art and Design in New York and HOW Design Center in Shanghai.

Member of the Board of Directors of AGC - Association for Contemporary Jewellery, she taught jewellery design at IED Moda in Milan and at the Academy of Fine Arts in Naples.

In 2018 she has published the monograph "Multipli Singolari. Contemporary jewellery beyond digital" with ListLab, Barcellona, in double edition (ita/eng), and in 2020 "Oggetti pensiero. Storie di design, organismi e nature plurali" with Lettera Ventidue, Siracusa. Her theoretical research is characterized by a speculative hybridization between digital technologies and manufacturing excellence linked to contemporary design and fashion.

chiara.scarpitti@unicampania.it

Fernando Soares de Lima

Degree in chemistry from the University of Mogi das Cruzes (2004), Master in Industrial Processes from the Technological Research Institute of the State of São Paulo (2013) and Chemical Production Engineer from Faculdades Oswaldo Cruz (2017). He is currently responsible for the Technical Textiles and Protective Products Laboratory and for the Shoes and Protective Products Laboratory of the Technological Research Institute of the State of São Paulo.

He mainly works on the following topics: technical fabrics, characterization tests and performance evaluation of textiles and PPE's, weathering and microencapsulation applied to textiles.

nandosl@ipt.br

Renato Stasi

Renato Stasi has been involved in the creation of clothing and accessories collections for the fashion segment for almost thirty years, as a designer and responsible for the development of the collection, he has worked for several companies including the LVMH Group, Redwall, Hettabretz. He is an adjunct professor at the DIDA - UNIFI Department of Architecture, in the CDL in Industrial Design and CDLM Fashion System Design. Lecturer at IED, where he is the coordinator of two three-year courses. He has carried out supplementary teaching activities at the Politecnico di Milano for several years.

He has held seminars and workshops in various universities. Stasi is Coordinator of the Steering Committee of the Master's Degree Course in Fashion System Design of the University of Florence - School of Architecture - DIDA.

renato.stasi@unifi.it

Margherita Tufarelli

Designer, PhD in Design. Currently a research fellow at DIDA (Department of Architecture) of the University of Florence (Italy), Design Campus section. The PhD thesis, with the title "future heritage and heritage futures. An exploration on meanings of the digitized Cultural Heritage" aimed at investigating the role that the digital archives of Cultural Heritage can have in the contamination between the culture of the past and contemporary creativity. Her research interests concern the heritage/creativity sphere within the digital evolution; thus, the application, impact and opportunities that lie in the relationship between digital technologies and cultural heritage. She is currently working on a research project titled "Living archive. Disseminating and reusing the Fashion cultural heritage" founded by Regione Toscana.

margherita.tufarelli@unifi.it

Rosanna Veneziano

Architect, Ph.D. in Industrial, Environmental and Urban Design, Assistant Professor of Industrial Design at the University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli - Department of Architecture and Industrial Design (DADI). Since 2002 she carries out an research activity on design oriented strategies for the local production development.

Since 2008 she coordinates (with P. Ranzo e M.A. Sbordone) the Design for Peace Lab activities. The creative lab was established following the draft agreement signed by the Province of Naples - Councilorship to Peace and International Cooperation - and the Department with the purpose of sharing experiences and best practices in the field of international cooperation and the management of humanitarian emergencies.

She teaches from 2013 to now Social Design and Design for Cosmetic - Design for Innovation Degree Course at University of Campania 'Luigi Vanvitelli'.

rosanna.veneziano@unicampania.it



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PAD. Pages on a and Design

International, peer-reviewed,
open access journal
ISSN 1972-7887

#22, Vol. 15, June 2022

www.padjournal.net



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associazione italiana design
della comunicazione visiva