

Capstone

Literature Review: Fashion As a Revolving Door

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OUTLINE PAGE:

A. Introduction: page 1

B. Intent: page 2

C. Discussion of important authors in the field: pages 2-11

i. Section ONE- Pace, Trend and Forecasting

ii. Section TWO- Eco-chic and a global community

iii. Section THREE- Vintage and the ever-present LBD

D. Review of Main Arguments: page 11-12

E. Bibliography: page 13

Introduction

The cyclical nature of fashion is one that I am exploring further through both creative and research-based analysis. Using a metaphor to illustrate my topic, I will represent this idea of continuous change and pace through a revolving door. Revolving doors are, as we know, entrances and exits into building that control movement, capacity, and speed.

I aspire to work in the fashion industry in a field where prediction is a necessity, either forecasting, or in a magazine where you would always be producing months in advance. Through this metaphor, as it relates to fashion and its cycle, I aim to define, explore, and pinpoint several reoccurring trends to use as specific examples of repetition and re-interpretation. In this review those touched upon are; little black dresses, eco-chic and vintage clothing.

Upon exploring my topic many questions have arisen, some more relevant than others. What are the factors that contribute to this phenomenon of ever-changing styles? How does this process affect people (individually vs. the masses)? As a society with ever-advancing technology and demands how does our now global approach to fashion affect trends and forecasting? To better answer these questions research of both historical and sociological natures should be discussed and interpreted as they relate to fashion forecasting.

Intent

Now, the step of researching and investigating the cycle of fashion itself to create this installation is upon me. An investigation into the pace of changing trends and style will allow for research about the doorway, which spins increasingly faster as time passes. If fashion is a visual representation of culture, class, and self, how do we understand and utilize its cyclical nature to our advantage in forecasting? To explore this idea I will be looking into three main areas; historical background, current sociological influences (individual and group) and forecasting /predictions.

Answering these questions and illustrating my research through several different authors points of view in various sectors of the industry. This discussion will be divided up into three distinct sections; one the changing pace of the cycle and the impact of trend, two; the idea of Eco-chic and environmentally responsible fashion and three; a discussion on vintage and an exploration of the little black dress in recent history.

Section ONE

The first topic of discussion has a wealth of information. Discussing trend and forecasting geared toward the fashion and colour worlds we come across a variety of views and resources. What I found important when researching these was to understand the basic principles of the cycle of fashion and how people make their livings analyzing and interpreting the past present and future of fashion. McKelvey and Munslow provided a base for my understanding of the forecasting game in their text *Fashion Forecasting*. This

text is a introductory and informative text on the reasons behind the theories and practices of Fashion Forecasting.

Fashion Forecasting is a history of when and why forecasting became a necessity to the Western world of fashion. Though virtual fashion resources have become a norm the world of fashion forecasting these authors still maintain the importance of the tactile when predicting and interpreting for their stylebooks. Branding and its role in fashion, trend, and forecasting are also discussed, the publicity and media attention, which is formed by the branding machine of a company, is also another factor affecting what trends become widespread. This and other aspects of consumer behaviour are discussed, with the end goal of harnessing this knowledge into predicting future trends, which is ultimately my goal. Accenting certain trend forecasting companies such as WGSN, where and how these groups accumulate information, how they display and promote their findings to others with a need. Also another important figure in the fashion world, and profiled in this text is the street style photographer who documents the everyday dress of the population. This is book simply and concisely divulges the secrets of a fashionable life for the future and allows its reader to take away skills and an understanding to further their own interest in forecasting¹.

Tracy Diane and Tom Cassidy are informed upon the subject of forecasting in terms of colour they have both been involved in the fashion industry and have been educators as well. This text answers a lot of my questions about colour forecasting such as; what is it and how is it done

successfully? What forces influence colour forecasts? The book begins with a short history section to put everything into perspective, followed by some methodologies and tools to be used in forecasting. The authors also speak about interviewing and discussing these topics with their colleagues and friends in various industries. This discussion allows for a discourse on where the forecasting aspect fits into different companies and talks about how the information given to a company is used. This text explores social and economic avenues and relays the information in a business sense. It also gives a background on forecasting in order for the reader to get a basic understanding of the world of forecasting from this starting point².

Next Stewart writes an article that begs the question, as many do, how do trends become trendy? This particular article discusses this phenomenon by using the basis of patterns, not only repeating within themselves but over time. Often these recurring patterns are traced back to a public figure (be it a royal or celebrity) whom had traveled or experienced some type of other culture (as most of these patterns originated in a certain part of the world). Also touched on is the emotional response to certain patterns and their perceptions within a certain society. An example used would be polka dots. They are interpreted as energetic often seen at joyous events or on fun garments such as hot pants. Giving a quick glance into the evolution reappearing patterns provides another template for interpretation of another type of trend and tracking its pace over time³.

Bonnie English has released a book that is about the last century's phenomenon of street versus high end. It chronicles the progression of fashion, its inspiration and end result and is relevant to my topic in that it helps set up a timeline on which to place trends, fads and important designers of the western world. The author also indicates the importance of social happenings on the impact of trend and dress. Beginning with Parisian couture and its tendency for copying or duplicating gowns for other price points or 'classes' we see how the latest style is desired by all. Copied styles caused a need for new cuts and fabrics and techniques to be used, this cycle of reproduction ultimately led to the demise of the couture business as it was. English writes about the importance of understanding the past and its cultural context (she specifically relates fashion to art and its movements) before predicting future outcomes or styles, stating in fashion timing is everything.

The Global nature of the fashion industry is reflected through the widespread use of cultural dress as an inspiration for elsewhere in the world. This type of inspiration is greatly facilitated by developing technologies that increase virtual exploration and physical travel⁴.

Also included in this section are authors Tinkler and Warsh who take a closer look into a time of great social change between World War I and II fashion also changed, especially women's dress, which we see analyzed in this article. Cycles and trends are created in the goal of striving for a modern look. This phenomenon is often documented in print media such as

magazines. This medium is heavily referenced in this articles particularly *Vogue*. The ideas of always searching for the 'new' is represented in this era by cars, corsets, and cigarettes. These were the images used in advertising that conveyed modernity and ultimately fashion as a commodity. This article is an interesting read into these three symbols and how they reflect society, gender roles and fashions that played out in the Interwar years⁵.

Dennis Hall picks up where Warsh and Tinkler left off. Discussing the latter part of the twentieth century there were some drastic changes, notably in the cultural and social developments of women. These actions forced change and broadened women's horizons, an in turn their clothing choices. This articles looks into how the sexuality of women's dress changed allowing for both very modest and revealing clothing choices. Hall discusses and argues the idea that in recent history (the 1990's on) women's fashions have evolved from a singular 'it' look to be documented onto a large variety. This argument lends itself to my research in researching the Trickle-up versus Trickle-down theories and also the influence of street style⁵.

Section TWO

Eco-chic involves more than slogans, hippies and hemp it is a reflection of today's society and one sectors growing initiative to involve the globe in re-thinking and reusing fashion.

Hazel Clark writes an interesting article concerning the pace and promises of eco-fashion. Her article highlights sustainable practices found across the Western globe and deduces what needs to be changed for these to

be implemented. Her opinion is the structure of the fashion cycle needs to be re-structured and re-routed. Consumers, designers and producers of today's garment industry should be more educated and responsible for the way in which they shop for, sell and make clothing. She also challenges the fashion industry's obsession with the new and wants to create a cycle of fashion that highlights this choice and creates durable and responsible garments. Does the seemingly new obsession with vintage reflect this 'reduce, reuse, recycle' mandate and can the fashion industry scale back to a more local process? She gives some current examples of how this change in mandate has succeeded on smaller scales and believes more of these responsible and transparent companies should follow suit. Clark is outlining the current cycles and methods of the fashion machine and suggests a new way for all involved to become more aware and conscious of sustainability.⁶

Hethorn and Ulasewicz consider not only the fact of 'eco-chic' and environmentally conscientious dress but also question the timing of this movement. Their quest to situate and contextualize the movement is exactly what I am interested in. Where do the pieces fit in on the social and historical timeline? They question the time frame and is also beneficial for analyzing the pace and rate of change within this specific niche of the market

Many people have had prejudices against eco or green fashion supporters and/or consumers. This book allows us to break the stereotype of this particular movement and delve deeper to really get at the inner workings of this ultimately commercial concept, which we hope has a high level of

competence even if its efforts are sometimes masked by beautiful famous faces.⁷.

Vintage and its newfound fame is an interesting subject. Bringing the old in with the new. This can either be the old clothes with the new, old clothes with the new owner, or old clothes with a new means of technology. Seldom do celebrities aim to mimic or match other's red carpet looks or repeat outfits themselves. This idea of uniqueness and individuality can also be purchased in vintage shops. This idea of 'thrifting' is not a new one but the connotations that now coincide with 'vintage' are positive and commonplace among all classes. Lindroth and Tornello discuss their personal relationship with vintage, along with some of their favorite pieces. Also they bring in an expertise on buying and selling vintage, particularly through the Internet. This also touches upon the ever-present, always mentioned, target market an extremely important facet of the fashion industry in all aspects and points along the progression of a garment's life⁸.

Section THREE

Researching the history of fashion is an immense undertaking, and to better understand and illustrate its recent past I have decided to develop a social and historical timeline of its past through the Little Black Dress (LBD). The important areas being; who wore and still wears LBDs? How has this staple continued to be recognized and accepted in Western culture? And What makes it that they continuously resurface?

Steele Brings the idea to its reader if there were only one option for a garment to own that a black dress would be an appropriate choice. This book also goes through the history of the black dress and its necessity, but it digs more into the reasons why and the varied interpretations of black as a colour and how these connotations translate into a choice of garment, not just a dress. Before the time of photography black was not always celebrated in painting art which displayed clothes of the era, black was seen in the West as a mourning colour and not appropriate for portraiture. Though now black can be seen everywhere for day, night, casual and fancy dress. This book also discusses the silhouette of the female form created by the black dress and those who made it popular (Royalty to Chanel to Schiaparelli to movie stars like Garbo)

This exploration allowed for many jumping off points from people to places to subcultures who embrace black dresses, it also contains important imagery and quotations from notable designers⁹.

Ludot's text explores the tried and true, essential piece of a woman's wardrobe – the little black dress (LBD). It is a good example of fashion that seems to be ever-present and modified only slightly according to the styles of the time (body conscious, minimalist, fashion futuristic). This book establishes vintage as an article from the twentieth to the twenty-first century, then taken and modified to suit the wearer. The item easily adapted from this time frame is the LBD, a staple at any age, price point, time of year, or for any occasion. Ready-to-wear to couture the LBD has been worn

by any important figures in fashion, and interpreted by many important designers reflecting the time they were designed. This book contains a visual timeline of the Western, female draped in black by best. This chronological representation through visuals is exactly what I was hoping for to better understand the initial discussion¹⁰.

Watson's interpretation of dress and its implication immediately emphasize the importance of dressing and therefore style, likening it to a bodily function. By introducing certain Vogue designers and pinpointing their impact on fashion we see the transition from the designer being the ultimate tastemaker and decision taker. Designers are continuously thinking working and living in their own interpretation of what the future is.

Bombarded by television, Internet, and media the woman of the new millennium is more varied in dress, harder to peg down than the previous. Divided into decades we see important images of fashionable dress, Vogue covers and descriptions of the ideal female form and desired appearances of the time. Prediction and forecasting are paramount in the functioning of the fashion industry, but we must learn from the past to understand the transitional nature of fashion and the factors which effect change. ¹¹

Review of Main Arguments

Fashion is not simply a commodity for everyone, it is almost always mentioned as a method of self-expression, artistic output, or personal connection (nostalgia). This is an important reminder of the emotional value of fashion, though many dismiss the industry, and those involved, as

frivolous there is a rich history to be explored along with many analyses of the meaning of dress. These findings must be interpreted into my final creative installation, though the ultimate goal is to clothe and return a profit the individual's personal experience is also crucial. In an ever-changing and advancing world the story told through fashion is an intriguing one. You can discover and reference events from the past like war or political change, as you can also discover personal transitions within the larger society. This research has aided me in creating and referencing the importance of a timeline from which you could easily extract data and evaluate its pace and progression.

I want to achieve a creative exploration (combined with research) of a topic that fascinates me. Ultimately creating an installation that will allow people to experience and observe the feeling of the cycle of fashion. Shed new light on a familiar topic by interviewing industry professionals and average people. I also want these testimonials paired with historical research to break down some my own prejudices and allow for a new personal outlook on the life cycle of fashion.

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