Ethics Before Aesthetics: Time and More-Than-Human Agencies in Up-cycling Practices for the Future of Fashion (a case-study of *Made With Time*)

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ABSTRACT

According to some accounts examining the notion of dress, fashion is considered a form of dress, a body practice situated in both space and time (Entwistle, 2001), that inherently requires change (Eicher and Sumberg, 1995). Thus, time and fashion are intrinsically linked, flowing together yet perpetually changing. While time is crucial for fashion to manifest as a cultural expression of society, the pace at which time progresses has significantly accelerated over the past century. Since time permeates all aspects of reality, the ways we creatively interact with it can vary across different practices.

This research examines ways to integrate time as a key component in fashion design practice, both conceptually and during the making stages. Time in this research has multiple layers. On the first hand it represents diverse temporalities of artefacts before being up-cycled; secondly, the time taken for the making of new wearables, and thirdly, the time taken for the label to grow and become financially self-sustainable. The findings of this paper are drawn from the practices of the fashion label Made With Time. The ethos of this label is rooted in posthumanist philosophy, emphasising and acknowledging the interactions between human and more-than-human entities as active agents in the design process. This philosophy profoundly influences both the working modes and the artefacts generated by the label. Made With Time operates at the intersection of multiple dimensions: cultural, temporal, more-than-human, and post-capitalist.

The methods developed at Made With Time are examined after contextualising existing fashion practices that employ similar sustainable production techniques, such as up-cycling, zero-waste, and slowness. This contextualization is necessary to identify both the similarities and differences within the broader sustainable fashion industry. Based on this discussion, I conclude that the ethical principles underpinning Made With Time are fundamental, surpassing aesthetic considerations.

Keywords: up-cycling, zero-waste, more-than-human, time, posthumanism

INTRODUCTION

The ways of time and how it works are bewildering. Since immemorial times humans have been preoccupied by the concept of time: what it is, how to measure it, how to trace it, and even how to slow/expand it. As much as it is in the arts, time is elusive in quantum mechanics. The second one thinks of it, has already become a thing of the past. The notion of time, as a fundamental element of physical reality as quantum physicists used to address it, has become questioned lately by some scientists (Padavich-Callaghan, 2024) who argue that time does not exist. Nevertheless our reality is bound in time and as entities living in this reality so are we. As civilisations have developed through time, slowly but steadily, the pace with which time flows seems to have greatly changed during the past century. And because time is in everything that forms this reality, the ways we deal with it and with its pace in creative ways could differ from one practice to the other. The focus of this project is to explore how time was integrated as a key component of a fashion practice equally in the conceptual and making stages. The label *Made With Time* (referred from now on as MWT) practises fashion design by up-cycling in a slow zero-waste manner existing garments and leftover materials. All MWT wearables are fluid in terms of gender.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to several accounts fashion is defined as a form of dress, a space and time *situated body practice* (Entwistle, 2001) that requires *change* to happen (Eicher and Sumberg, 1995). Thus time and fashion work hand in hand and flow together yet always changing. While time is important for fashion to exist as a cultural manifestation of society (Kawamura, 2005; Wilson, 2003; Lipovetsky, 2002) during the past two centuries the industrial revolution has considerably sped up the cycle with which dress styles change (Lehman, 2000; Rocamora, 2011). With the rise of fast consumption paradigms (Cline, 2012; Dauvergne, 2008; Thackahara, 2005; Fletcher 2008) in the last decades, fashion had to keep up with its time. This resulted in the speeding up of the production processes even more, which subsequently engrained a different pace of the usual seasons up to the apparition of the ‘fast fashion’ (Siegle, 2011). As a result of the rise of the fast industries, fashion became one of the largest economic drivers on the globe (Thomas, 2007; Cline 2012; Kawamura, 2005). While opening avenues for the capitalist commodification of the quotidian, fast fashion is but a mirage, a form without content as most of times a fast fashion item is ‘a copy of a copy of a copy…’ to quote Trent Reznor’s lyrics from *Hesitation Marks* album (2013), strongly reverberating Walter Benjamin’s[1] essay on the devaluation of the aura of authenticity written almost a century ago (1935). While fast fashion today makes the latest trends

[1]Although the main subject of Benjamin’s work *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935) is the work of art/art object, the structures by which mechanisation of production impacts on the devaluation of the aura of the authentic through the accessibility of reproductions represent a good mirror for the design industry.

accessible to everyone everywhere (Cline, 2012; Agins, 1999), the prices that consumers pay for it seem hardly enough to cover the work/cost of those (all workers and more-than-humans engaged in the cycle of production) which remain *hidden* to the consumers. And that *hidden* price is much higher than imagined, is a price only visible in time through the marks left on people, cultures, and environment. The *hidden* covers a whole spectrum of entities, from the overly exploited garment-industry workers in countries like Bangladesh, Cambodia, China (Siegle, 2011) to more-than-human entities (ibid.) grown in colossal monocultures (Shiva, 2014) only for the material value of the fibres their bodies produce, to the rest of the environment that suffers from the incessant rise of garments and waste produced (Siegle, 2011). But this is no news, and although some have strongly argued about the work-price imbalance and unethical practices of fast fashion (Siegle, 2011; Fletcher, 2008), this industry continues to spread being trapped in the capitalist economic model which requires growth with no end (Papanek, 1973; Hickel, 2020). Although some accounts have pointed out the flaws of such practices (Thomas, 2007; Cline, 2012; Fletcher, 2008) it appears that our love and passion for dressing our bodies, making them trendy and anchored in the times we live in is an addiction which costs the future of this planet.

Some practices of fashion have strongly reconsidered how business mechanisms could function. From the unforgettable and provocative advert published in 2011 by Patagonia stating “Don’t Buy This Jacket” to the subversive (Radke, 2018) *Jumpsuit Project* by Radical Dress Society (Abigail Glaum-Lathbury and Maura Brewer) or the *Human Touch Project* (Juliet Seger and Christina Albrecht) and activist work done by *Fashion Revolution* just to name a few, various attempts to re-think fashion and find alternatives to the production cycle have been explored. Each model banks on a different take of the so-called brand DNA, embedding at the core of their practice a range from the wide spectrum of ethical approaches called ‘sustainability’. They all share a common ethical vision, an increased consideration in terms of how garments are produced and in what quantities, and this vision adds to each unique aesthetic identity. I argue that in sustainable fashion, ethics represents a core constituent for shaping brand identities, and in many situations this impacts greatly on the overall aesthetic of that label.

The problem of ethics in fashion is something haunting me for quite some time. While working as a fashion lecturer, when shaping the future creatives in the field I have always questioned myself *how could I instil a more considerate vision and understanding about how a fashion practice should develop?* and try to unlearn students and myself how to think about the consumerist aspects of fashion, the range plan, the SKU, the recommended retail price, the mark-up, the market niche, lead times, closing the books and so many other syntagms from the field. I have always seen myself in my students, like on the first day when I started the fashion course in London, a young someone willing to show the world how amazing I can design, and I

strongly believe that most (if not all) designers have this thought/desire hidden deep down in ourselves. This desire for greatness and for recognition pushes the fashion designer to come out for applause while neglecting the entire team that made their work possible (as beautifully resolved by Martin Margiela in the memorable 2009 Spring Summer show in Paris) and set up eponymous labels for the public to desire and become addicted to collection after collection. These thoughts led me to question myself *if design could exist without a designer's full power of control?* and subsequently, *Would it be possible to develop a fashion label that does not rely on aesthetics but on ethics*? If so*, what does it mean "a label's identity"?* As I see sustainability and designer's renown (greatness) at two opposing poles of design ethics I started thinking how one could develop a more ethical practice and test possibilities of creativity starting with a selfless attitude allowing space for other agencies, that of historical time or that of the more-than-humans who fill the world we live in in tacit and invisible ways (bacteria, fungi, mites, etc). From this desire MWT took shape.

METHODOLOGY

When establishing MWT I decided to adopt as many sustainable practices as possible. Rather than always searching for new materials and thus contributing to the demand for more textiles, MWT works only with upcycling[2] and rarely with very little amounts of deadstock[3]. In order to lessen as much as possible a designer's aesthetic will, MWT looks in depth at the provenance of the materials and their materiality. This provenance impacts on how they are up-cycled and what they will become as new artefacts (all materials originate from existing garments, textile-based cultural artefacts and in very rare cases from deadstock). Another vital decision was to start from the beginning with a very clear perspective on quantities and modes of production. For MWT these choices are more important than establishing a clear and unique design aesthetic as well as a market niche.

In the greater context of fashion design it is critical to rethink fashion's impact on the entire ecosystem, from people to living and non-living entities with whom we share the planet with. MWT practices as a form of '*designing with'* (Wakkary, 2021) in the aim to better/improve aspects of existence, and not only those for humans. In short, for MWT 'designing with' means including the aesthetic workings of more-than-human

[2] Ellen MacArthur Foundation defines Upcycling in *Towards the circular economy Vol. 1: an economic and business rationale for an accelerated transition* (2013: 25) as *'*a process of converting materials into new materials of higher quality and increased functionality'. One year later, in *Towards the circular economy Vol. 3: accelerating the scale-up across global supply chains* the organisation offers a more nuanced articulation of upcycling as '**Converting materials into new materials of higher quality and increased functionality, also by improving on a downcycling process'** also in relation with two other notions: *Functional recycling* and *Downcycling*. (2014: 71).

[3] I refer to deadstock as the unsold, unused, or leftover material found in textile shops. Deadstock materials come as leftovers from rolls and usually in small quantities to be of any interest for businesses or textile customers, as it might be insufficient for garment-making purposes.

agents that have modified the look of textiles in time, but also a mode of design that does not override the cultural identity of a material through repurpose, which is a form of conversation with material culture through history. To be more clear, this means that in each new design every up-cycled textile keeps a trace of their original cultural value. Because MWT regards ethics before aesthetics as design principles, a new design does not start with a sketch followed by finding sustainable ways of production but rather backwards, letting the materials to call for a specific reconfiguration. Their initial origin instigates the mode of up-cycling and outcomes, as I will expose later in this project. As each piece of material is precious, because of all the efforts, energy, and care embedded in its becoming, MWT decided to operate with no textile waste policy. In some aspects the waste becomes the creative impetus for a new design as in the case of lines like the Wabi Robe or the Wabi Tote, or a mere incentive to revisit the past to identify potential solutions for textile waste that appears too hard to be re-incorporated, as in the case of Waste-Me-Not Window Pillows.

This study investigates MWT in the wider ecosystem of sustainable upcycling practices to understand how a label that does not have a clear aesthetical identity and does not operate with collections of separates but rather with ranges of unique archetypal styles (a varsity jacket, a tote bag, an aloha shirt etc) could strive to economic stability. For this purpose I looked into the practice of some fashion labels also employing upcycling. I analyse two directions, the first is how each label approaches up-cycling and how this impacts overall aesthetics and subsequently the label's identity. The second direction investigates the range of marketing approaches and distribution channels used by these labels. Following this analysis I expose the ways in which MWT works for each type of garment to outline differences in approach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 illustrates the areas investigated across 13 labels which I selected based on diverse geographical locations and design aesthetics, but all employing upcycling. While for some labels like Stan Clothing, Defective Garments, Namai studio, by Walid and Adam Jones up-cycling represents the entire source of materials, for others labels like Tata Christiane, Future Loundry, Congregation design, 4 Kinship, it represents a very high amount from the total influx of materials for production. Companies like Children of the Discordance, Re/done, Marine Serre or Rave Review have approached up-cycling in the first years of existence as a considerable source of textiles. As these labels expanded, they began to incorporate more deadstock and even new materials, a shift that ultimately reduced the overall proportion of up-cycling activities in their production processes. These labels are generating seasonal collections, in line with the established fashion paradigms of consumption. One might argue that there is a link between the size of the company and the necessity for larger companies to adhere to the marketing strategies of the functioning systems in place. In large proportion these companies are also offering a clear distinction between the women's and men's

ranges in contrast with the other labels analysed which in general have a more fluid (less strict) approach of gender.

Table 1: 13 sustainable practices, range, and market places

Label, Country, Starting year	One off	Season / Range	Gender	Up - cycling	Zero Waste	Slow	Dead stock	New Fabric	Custom	Price Range (EUR) Low - High		Stoc kists	Own store
Children of the discordance, Japan, 2011	Yes	Yes	M	X% Patch	NS*	No	Yes	Yes	No	125	1700	Yes	Yes
Future Loundry Indonesia, 2017	Yes	No	Fluid	70% Cut + Patch	NS	Yes	Yes	No	No	50	200	Yes	No
Defective Garments USA, 2019	Yes	No	Fluid	100% Patch	NS	Yes	No	No	No	140	425	No	No
Congregation design, UK, 2017	Yes	No	Fluid	X%	NS	Yes	Yes	NS	No	30	950	Yes	No
Stan Clothing USA, 2019	Yes	No	M	100% Cut	NS	Yes	No	No	Yes	400	X000	No	No
Re/done, USA, 2014	Yes	Yes	W+M	X %	NS	No	Yes	Yes	No	400	X000	Yes	Yes
Marine Serre France, 2017	Yes	Yes	W+M	50% Cut + Patch	NS	No	Yes	Yes	No	700	X000	Yes	Yes
Tata Christiane Germany, 2007	Yes	Yes	W + Fluid	X %	Yes	Yes	Yes	NS	No	100	700	Yes	No
4 Kinship, USA, 2015	Yes	No	W	X %	NS	Yes	NS	Yes	No	150	X000	No	No
Namai studio, USA, 2020	Yes	No	W	100%	Yes	Yes	NS	NS	No	150	580	Yes	No
By Walid, UK, 2011	Yes	Yes	W+M	100 %	NS	Yes	NS	NS	No	X00	X0000	Yes	Yes
Rave Review, Sweden, 2018	Yes	Yes	W+M	X %	NS	No	NS	Yes	No	200	X000	Yes	Yes
Adam Jones, UK, 2019	Yes	No	M+W	100%	NS	Yes	NS	NS	No	100	980	Yes	No
Made With Time, Romania, 2023	Yes	No	Fluid	100%	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	80	1300	Not yet	No

* In this table “NS “is short for Not Specified

In terms of other concurrent sustainable approaches, with the exception of two labels, Namai studio and Tata Christiane who are openly employing zero-waste approaches, there is no clear mention for the other labels in terms of what happens with the

production waste resulting from production. Congregation design does employ zero-waste in parts of practice (as for example the *Fashion Consequences* workshop organised in partnership with Fashion Revolution in 2018) when garments unfit for sale even from charity shops became the material source for a limited collection of collaged t-shirts. This reduced approach of zero-waste practices across sustainable brands working with upcycling might be interpreted as a difficulty to implement the strategy for various reasons. One might be that garments are made most of the time following patterns, and for fit and shape usually some sections of textile cannot be fully integrated in the reworked items. Another reason might be that some portions of the upcycled garments are hard to be incorporated for potential reasons like stains, thorns, or discoloured areas, all marks of a previous life of the garment. This particular observation became a focus point of the zero-waste approach for MWT, and I will discuss later.

In my analysis I take Kate Fletcher's interpretation of slowness as being '*about designing, producing, consuming and living better*'. In particular to the design industry it means a *'different approach in which designers, buyers, retailers and consumers are more aware of the impacts of products on workers, communities and ecosystems'* (2008, p.173). I translate a practice as being slow, across the labels I investigate, as not conforming with the seasonal collections paradigm. That is because it means to conform with current production paradigms which are problematic in terms of the real motives for which seasonal garments are produced (ibid.) namely, gain of capital and not being truly needed by the public. Two thirds of the investigated brands produce one-off items and do not follow seasons. While some of these labels like Tata Christiane and by Walid continue to follow the approach of the 'collection' as a market output, others prefer to release a range of new designs from time to time like Defective Garments or Congregation design. Labels like Future Loundry, Adam Jones or Stan Clothing release new items throughout the year without using the pretext of a collection. Larger labels like Re/done, Rave Review, Marine Serre or Children of the Discordance, although approaching up-cycling practices, remain faithful to the seasonal collection approach.

In terms of price ranges, there is a notable difference from label to label which may vary in strong relation with the market niche for which each caters to. With the exception of two labels, Future Loundry and Congregation design who offer some items at two digit prices, all other brands start with the lowest price in the range of 3 figures. As upcycling entails detailed attention to the influx materials, each of different provenance, size, and quality, the handling of the upcycled materials stretches the production time and the number of participants involved, a process difficult to be fully mechanised, thus impacting into higher retail prices. One key aspect to note is that with the exception of larger companies like Re/done, Rave review, Marine Serre, Children of the Discordance and by Whalid, who have own flagship store(s) none of the other labels have reached yet to that point, or they never attempted to establish

one. These same companies (with exception of by Walid) also include in production deadstock and new materials. This clearly impacts on faster production for some separates.

With the exception of Stan Clothing, Defective Garments, and 4 Kinship who rely on their own digital store and social media platforms for sales, the rest of the labels, next to their own on-line shop and/or own flagship stores are also selling through stockists, which contributes to a larger visibility across various international communities. Approaching sales through a middleman (the boutique) in fashion entails a high mark-up, most of the time around 2.7 times more than the wholesale price (Webb & Shoaib, 2024). For new labels that are considering selling through stockists as a potential option, adding the mark-up inflates the price to colossal figures. This makes most of the times the items inaccessible for the majority of the public. This pushes the label to compete with the so-called *luxury* labels, which some might argue whether radical sustainable brands are aiming to become - and from here a whole 'vicious circle' begins. For this reason, Stan Clothing sells only through its own channels in order to avoid a triplication in prices for their already expensive products (given the unique range of materials used). From the range of selected sustainable labels most similar with MWT are Stan Clothing and Namai studio, both working with typologies of garments, price ranges and digital marketing strategy.

I will further address the key conceptual aspects concerning the up-cycling approaches at MWT to articulate the unique position this label occupies in the fashion market. Currently MWT upcycles vintage Japanese items, vintage Romanian crochet, second-hand sportswear, and rarely small amounts of deadstock.

After nine years spent in South East Asia I learned so much about the textile crafts of the region and discovered the diverse range of hidden agents behind each piece of cloth and how things also require time to shape and grow. While in Asia, I came across Japanese textiles and the unique zero-waste practice of Japanese wearables: Kimono, Haori, Juban, Obi etc. All these items are formed from one entire roll of fabric, usually around 34 to 40 cm wide and 11-12 metres in length. The way panels are assembled produces minimum to no waste during making (Milhaupt, 2014, p. 16). With time all these garments gain wear marks, stains, and tears, some visible on the exterior, some hidden to the eye on the linings becoming 'unwearable' and being discarded. These discarded kimonos become a good source of material given the exquisite artistry of their textiles. Some labels like *Tokyo Kaleidoscope* and *Ichijiku* up-cycle vintage Japanese fabrics into westernised attire (gowns, tailored jackets, varsity jackets etc) but none in a zero-waste manner.

For MWT the first step is to investigate the textiles' histories in order to figure out how they could be transformed into wearables for contemporary audiences. As past lives should influence futures, the practice of up-cycling does not omit nor erase previous

existences. The *Sukajan* (from Japanese: *the souvenir jacket*) is a staple form of dress born through the intersection of Japanese and American cultures (Kawamura, 2012). When American soldiers left Japan after the occupation following the second World War, they wanted a memory of Japan that took the shape of Japanese embroidered motifs done by the local artisans on their bomber jackets. Those artisans perpetuated such practices in the shape of the *Sukajan*, an appropriation form of the American men' varsity jacket with ribbed neck and hems made in Japanese textiles with elaborate motifs. This is already a mix of opposing semiotics: the American baseball jacket adorned by high-school boys with pride and as a true symbol of masculinity (Clemente, 2014) with the embellishments and colourful Japanese textiles always worn by women according to Japanese sartorial norms (Cliffe, 2017). Following this existing merger of Japanese and American cultures, MWT upcycles the discarded Japanese items into, gender fluid jackets named ‘Suka’ (fig. 1). In order to avoid as much as possible the addition of new textiles, the only solution was to make them reversible. Reversibility contributes to the wearable potential of the jacket given that although it is a single garment, it can be worn in two ways. This helps to reduce the size of the wardrobe and extends the life of owned garments, two important aspects to note for a more sustainable consumption. As each material can be used in a limited number of jackets (3 to 4), MWT has developed a customisation app which allows clients to design their own Suka to their own body size.

Fig. 1 An example of Suka Jacket (both sides), 2023

The scraps of textiles cut off when making the Suka jackets always return to the table and are re-designed in other shapes. Looking back to Japanese culture, the old

philosophy of *Wabi-Sabi*[4] came in help. By patching all scraps together, two new products came to life: the Wabi Tote (fig. 2) and the Wabi Robe (fig. 3). Both items are the result of a laborious process of patching. Through patching new materials take shape, from which the new items are cut and sewn. Although with these two products waste is minimised, there are some very small cuttings that cannot rejoin the process of patching, and because MWT strongly believes that zero-waste should be what it stands for, these small left-overs join forces and become the Waste-Me-Not Window Pillows (fig. 4) used during winter, following a long tradition from Eastern Europe some decades ago, still used by some.

Fig. 2 An example of Wabi Tote (both sides), 2023

Fig. 3 An example of Wabi Robe (front and back), 2024

[4] *Wabi-Sabi* is a Japanese philosophy centred on the acceptance of imperfection and transience. A wabi-sabi aesthetic fosters the appreciation of impermanent, incomplete, and aged objects as well modesty, simplicity, and roughness. Some well-known examples of Japanese artisanal techniques following wabi-sabi principles are *Boro* or *Kintsugi*.

Fig. 4 A pair of Waste-Me-Not Window Pillows, 2024

There are still fabrics left, those hidden fabrics: the linings. And they are a true surprise.. Through wear, due to atmospheric moisture and the sweat vapours of the bodies who wore them, most linings become small universes, like navigation maps, clusters of brown patches and discolorations formed across the entire surface (fig. 5). Usually silk habotai or crepe, these hidden linings have become the site of aesthetic expression of the invisible more-than-human agents, slowly in time. The microscopic bacteria and fungi with whom we share our daily life are usually overlooked as co-habitants of our clothes. This gentle but steady work done by these entities on the linings is intriguing but also difficult to reintegrate in the wearable circuit of clothes because of the very diverse range of connotations gained by stains on clothes in cultures and societies (Sorkin, 2008; Maynard, 2022).

Fig.5 Discoloured lining of vintage Kimono, 2023

Martin Margiela played and experimented with garments inseminating spores and bacteria in clothes for the memorable display for the *9/4/1615* exhibition of the brand's collections archive at Boijmans Van Beuningen museum in 1997. Hussein Chalayan developed his conceptual graduate collection *The Tangent Flows* by burying textiles in a friend's backyard (1993). Designers reused degraded fabrics (Martin Margiela, Jessica Ogden, Olivier Theyskens etc) or approached digital prints or various textile manipulations in their wearable lines to mimic decay (Comme des Garcons, Uma Wang, Peng Tai, Ma Ke, Ka Wa Key, St. Pour Homme etc). As Caroline Evans notes in a whole chapter dedicated to dereliction in *Fashion at the Edge* , decay, stains, and discolorations have been adopted by some avant-garde designers as forms of transgression (2007). Although Evans thoroughly investigates abjection and the grotesque in fashion as counterpoints of mainstream cultural norms, what she overlooks to examine is the agencial value of the more-than-humans engaged in the production of stains and decay and subsequently what these stains are: natural processes. Her discussion focuses more on what they represent at semiotic level in human culture. By working directly with the contribution of more-than-human agents in the production of wearables, most fashion designers have opted for mechanical and chemical degradation tricks to achieve a derelict and degraded look. This look is fake not only because it overrides the temporal process of degradation but even more, because to some extent it could be seen as the appropriation of the aesthetic of the more-than-humans without even questioning the ethical implications of this process.

Thus, working with stained and discoloured textiles demands thorough considerations. The up-cycled artefacts should be able to foster the aesthetic workings of the more-than-human agents which have already worked the textile in their own time while maintaining the historical traces of the original textiles. In order to build a conceptual link between spaces and times I returned again to historical facts. Some accounts (Hope & Tozian, 2000) expose that the contemporary form of Aloha shirt appeared as such through the re-interpretation of the traditional Hawaiian shirt made in Japanese textiles. Although traditionally made from local quilts, *tapa* cloth, or more muted floral textiles (Hughes, 2017) the Japanese trader Koichiro Miyamoto re-interpreted the shirt in vibrant Japanese textiles, first sold to the public in the late 1920's in his store in Waikiki. What makes an Aloha shirt recognisable nowadays in popular culture is the colourful print more than anything else. Taking a leap into posthuman thinking, I started imagining the archetypal silhouette of the Aloha with the v-neck opening and stand-less collar realised in the discoloured linings, a leap back to its original colour palette. The colourful prints replaced by the aesthetic workings of the more-than-humans shift the archetypal Aloha to a new ethical territory where more-than-human agency is acknowledged as part of the design process. This shift opens a discourse about the wearability of decayed materials while fostering the aesthetic workings of the more-than-human agents as replacements for the man-made colourful prints (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6 An Aloha Shirt (full garment and detail), 2024

With the Aloha shirt the zero-waste cycle of upcycling vintage Japanese wear closes. This is a double closure as most Japanese wear (Kimono, Haori, Juban, Yukata, Obi etc) are zero-waste approaches to dress-making in the first instance. The Suka jacket - Wabi tote/robe - Aloha shirt - and Waste-Me-Not pillows represent an upcycled 'combo' that allows for a zero-waste perpetuation. Next to this closure, 'time' within MWT, gains a triple meaning. First is the time taken for textiles to develop an identity, a life prior to being upcycled. Secondly, is the time required to upcycle them into new wearables which is a slow time, a time needed for the textiles to go through a range of phases: cleaning, unpicking, cutting and sewing. And lastly is the time taken by the MWT label to grow and become financially self sustainable in an ethical manner.

Next to the Japanese cycle, MWT reworks Romanian crochet and various second-hand sportswear in another zero-waste combo formed by Balkan Baroque (fig. 7a and 7b) and The Queerset (fig. 8a and 8b) ranges. The Balkan Baroque range is composed of items shaped through a collage between crochets and sportswear, both found at a thrift market in Timisoara city in Romania. The name of the range draws on the cultural intersections of the region where Timisoara is situated, geographically and historically, part of both the Ottoman and Habsburg empires. Balkan Baroque range reflects the crossover of cultures, histories, and means of production, questioning global capitalist identities.The two products, the crochets and the sportswear, represent two opposing worlds. On one side, the crochet is a cultural signifier of a region. Each piece is the work of one woman, a time-consuming and unique project, gathering an immense intangible value. Decades ago these crocheted textiles used to be part of a woman's dowry, the richness and talent preserved from generation to generation. With the rise of capitalist economies in the past 30 years in Romania and following the explosion of new companies advertising for a minimalist home decor style replicating the global

designs of IKEA, these textiles lost their value. On this market' pavement these textiles stand as vestiges of a forgotten past, becoming old-fashioned. On the other hand, the sportswear, which some scholars argue that follows a similar trajectory with fast-fashion (Baier, Rausch, and Wagner, 2020), made mostly in synthetic fibres, industrially produced in multiple copies, is a product devoid of any local identity. An embodiment of a global persona, sportswear best illustrates capitalist placelessness (Relph, 1987).

Fig. 7a Balkan Baroque top, 2024

Fig 7b Balkan Baroque blouse, 2024

After the making of Balkan Baroque, the sportswear parts not included become remodelled as Queersets, a range of stretchable corsets. The name was born as an antithesis between the purpose of the corset, which is to shape the body, to support, to enclose, and the elasticity of the sportswear materials which subverts the original purpose of the corset. This is a process of queering through which each corset can be worn by multiple bodies, multiple sizes, and any gender.

Fig. 8a Queerset, 2024 **Fig 8b** Queerset dress, 2024

CONCLUSION

Because MWT approaches upcycling as a response to each type of garment / material it lacks a clear sole aesthetic. Here I am not talking about logos and collaterals, but the lack of an overall aesthetic direction of all the items it produces. There is an aesthetic distance between all items in the range and thus it is very difficult for the audience to comprehend the label. Such an aesthetic direction is usually approached by fashion labels to gain cohesion between designs and ranges, and this is the model buyers usually work with. This becomes a challenge for MWT to enter boutiques and stores, thus to become visible for a larger audience. Brands are known for certain values amongst which the visual identity of their collections is key. As MWT's main focus is to '*extend the value and use of some products while simultaneously learning how to express the fashion moment while minimizing the impact of material consumption'* (Fletcher, 2008, p. 164), each range is a fashion moment in itself, and has a story of its own.

Adding to this, MWT does not produce collections of separates, another aspect which complicates the situation. The notion of the collection fades even more as each item is repeatedly reproduced in the same shapes but always in different materials: no Suka is identical with another, they are all different, but they are all the same type of reversible varsity jackets. The above-mentioned factors complicate the marketing of the brand and demand for a certain mindfulness from the fashion system: a consciousness that clothes could be sold on an ethical premise as surplus of their

material value. This surplus value is intangible, it is qualitative and flows parallel to the quantifiable aspects of a product. Next to having all products available on its own website and through an instagram account, MWT is like *'many designers who try to explore a different business model'* and *' struggle because the fashion industry's infrastructure is not accommodating for deviations from the norm'* (Webb & Shoaib, 2024). Currently MWT works to build up a unique approach to the market, which is not yet clear, but with time solutions will arise.

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