

THE FUNCTION OF THE DRESS IS TO CONNECT WITH NON-HUMAN ANIMALS AND TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

The World Is On Fire But We're Still Buying Shoes. A book, by former editor of *High Snobiety*, Alec Leac, succinctly sums up the predicament humanity is facing today. Has the human-centric progress of humans from the Industrial Revolution of the 1800s, the atomic bomb in 1947 and subsequent arms race in the 50s, followed by mass air travel and the space age, permanently changed the planet?

Geologists argue that we are in the Anthropocene age because humanity has caused mass extinctions of plant and animal species, overused natural resources, polluted oceans, and altered the atmosphere, with lasting impact. A recent study published in the scientific journal, *Nature*, has found that the mass of everything made by humans on the planet in 2020, the anthropogenic mass, overtook the combined mass of living beings, the biomass, for the first time in history. If current trends hold, the anthropogenic mass will grow to three times the world's biomass by 2040.

The 21st century is marked by global crises on all fronts, war, poverty, inequality, and population explosion, leading to extreme discomfort, exacerbated by global warming and climate change. With only humanity to blame, there is a growing disenchantment with the human-centric unsustainable worldview. This is also a period that is seeing rapid digital and technological changes, and the rise of Artificial Intelligence in a hyper-connected world.

In this milieu, posthuman thought has begun to influence industry, and the fashion industry in particular, forcing it to look inwards, at the immense amounts of anthropogenic material it generates while adding to disparities of gender and social differences.

What then are the tenets of posthumanism in this new reality? We look at posthuman philosophers and designers to see how they express these posthuman traits, as the notion of the human goes through a paradigm shift.

OBJECTIVE

Beyond growth to introspection, this paper aims to investigate the influence of posthumanism on fashion by examining the features of posthumanism as described by prominent thinkers such as Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway. It also explores the works of designers who are responding to the post-humanistic ethos of redefining humanity's place in the world with a place for both the technological and the biological "green" continuum, in which, the "human" is one life form among many.

This paper endeavours to examine some of the famous designers in Europe and a young crop in India, whose designs reflect a posthuman thought in fashion. It raises the question, can the fashion of the era of humanism, which was extremely centred on humans, sustain? It examines how the fashion ecosystem is changing post-pandemic by analysing the paradigm shift in these new designers. And how can the fashion industry cooperate for a positive future society? It is hoped that the case studies and the analysis will provide a reference point for designers, brand owners, and educationists to get a fresh perspective on the impact of posthuman thought on fashion.

INTRODUCTION

“THE WORLD IS ON FIRE BUT WE’RE STILL BUYING SHOES.”

The title of the book by former editor of *High Snobiety*, Alec Leac, succinctly sums up humanity’s state of mind today even in the face of cataclysmic climate changes posing the greatest challenge of our times.

In another well-researched book, *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life after Warming* (Penguin Random House, 2019), David Wallace-Wells, an author and journalist with the *New York Times*, makes an impassioned call for action, saying that we have roughly 20 years or so to try and reverse the climate catastrophe we have brought about in the span of just one lifetime.

With humanity’s large footprint firmly imprinted on Earth eclipsing nature, geologists like Colin Waters, and chemist Paul Crutzen argue that we have created an unofficial unit of geologic time in Earth’s history called the Anthropocene. In this Anthropocene epoch, the age of humans, we are witness to the massive impact of human activity on the planet’s climate and ecosystem. The havoc that “humanism” has wrought is extensive. There has been a mass extinction of plant and animal species, we have overused natural resources, polluted oceans, and altered the atmosphere, with lasting impact. These are visible in erratic seasons, soaring temperatures, heavy rains, flash floods, and gigantic climate disasters threatening humanity’s very existence.

The Anthropocene working group¹ agreed in 2016 that the ²Great Acceleration began in 1950 with a dramatic increase in human activity which has affected the whole planet. A study in the science journal *Nature* reports, that the human-made mass has doubled rapidly at a rate of roughly, every 20 years. While the last 50 years have been the age of abundance and heyday for humans, by 2020, for the first time in history, driven by consumer demand and urban development, the entire man-made anthropogenic mass of inanimate materials such as concrete, metal, plastic, bricks, and asphalt, outweighed the Earth’s entire biomass of living things.

It doesn’t stop here; the research raises alarms for the future. If current trends hold, the anthropogenic mass will grow to three times the world’s biomass by 2040. (Emily Elacham, Liad Ben-Uri, Jonathan Grozovski, Yinon M Bar-On & Ron Milo, 9 December 2022. Global human-made mass exceeds all living biomass, *Nature*.)

¹ The Anthropocene Working Group (AWG) is an interdisciplinary geoscience research group dedicated to the investigation of the chronostratigraphic reality of the Anthropocene. The AWG was established in 2009 by the Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy (SQS), a component body of the International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS), the committee that oversees the standards and requirements for the ongoing review and further completion of the geologic time scale.

² The Great Acceleration is a term used to describe the rapid and widespread increase in human activity and its impact on Earth’s natural systems, which began around the mid-20th century.

ARRIVAL OF POSTHUMANISM: A REJECTION OF TRADITIONAL WESTERN HUMANISM

Posthumanism as a theory rose as a disenchantment with the anthropocentric thought of the supremacy of humans above all beings. The postmodern theorist Ihab Hassan first coined the term in an article entitled, *Prometheus as*

Performer: Towards a Posthumanist Culture? (Hussain, 1977, JSTOR Vol. 31, No. 4, pp. 830-850).

The Posthuman ideology is a rejection of traditional Western humanism, where humanism, as a term, is seen by Posthumanists as intertwined with colonialism, sexism, and racism, and is a privileged perception of the power of Man, championing individual rights, agency and self-determination. Ideas of agency and equality are common in the notion of the human as a just being. But a glance at history reveals that many were excluded from this vision of unity, as philosopher Rosi Braidotti says.

Posthuman thinkers seek to challenge the humanist notion of exclusion and hierarchies. Rosi Braidotti, contemporary philosopher and feminist theoretician defines Posthumanism as both “the critique of the Humanist ideal of ‘Man’ as the allegedly universal measure of all things” as well as criticizing “species hierarchy and anthropocentric exceptionalism.” (Braidotti, R.: Posthuman Knowledge. Polity Press, Cambridge (2019)

In her book, Posthuman Feminism, Rossi Braidotti, (2021), writes, that it may be difficult at first, for people who have never been considered socially and politically fully human before, to adopt a relation to the posthuman predicament. Women, LGBTQ+ people, the colonised, indigenous people, people of colour, the non-Europeans who have had to historically fight for the basic rights to be considered and treated as human, have a hazy idea of humanism.

POSTHUMANISM: A CONNECTION WITH OUR ENVIRONMENT AND AN AWARENESS THAT HUMAN ACTIVITY IMPACTS IT.

The connection between us and our environment has been established, and the link is deeper than we give it credit, says Donna Haraway a professor of feminist studies with a doctorate in Biology. She argues that the very concept of the human as an autonomous life form is inadmissible. She effectively illustrates this in her book, *When Species Meet*, (2017) University of Minnesota Press, saying,

Human genomes can be found in about 10 per cent of all cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 per cent of our cells are filled with genome bacteria, fungi, (...protists) and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all...

Similarly, Darwinian evolution tells us that we arrive at the human by way of a network of nonhuman transformations.

POSTHUMANISM: RELIANCE ON TECHNOLOGY

With the advancement of science and technology and the temptation to use it to elongate the human lifespan with the advancement of science, we find ourselves constantly entangled with the inorganic nonhuman. From pacemakers and prosthetic limbs to social media algorithms, the Metaverse and the rise of the common use of Artificial intelligence, human organic life today is intimately intertwined with machines and digital technology. Posthumanism responds to this entangled world by asking us to interrogate what it means to be human, to pay better attention to the nonhuman, and to consider how the boundaries between human and nonhuman may be more porous than we think. Donna Haraway, in her 1985 essay, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, (Socialist Review, US) claims that we are already cyborgs. That the boundaries between humans, animals, machines, and technology have been broken.

Accepting such premises inevitably leads to an examination of the possible connections with everything and everyone that has been excluded from the category of human.

POSTHUMANISM AND FASHION

Fashion researcher Annamari Vänskä contends that “instead of treating clothes as mute tools with which individuals’ fashion themselves, we should treat clothes as active and vibrant agents that materialize and mediate understanding of the human” (2018, 18).

Redefining the notion of the human and blurring boundaries between human and machine, posthumanism in fashion reflects a fusion of technology, sustainability, and individual expression.

The visual aesthetics of this transmutability by designers can at once be awe-inspiring and can at the same time be deeply uncomfortable, eccentric, and even eerie, writes Georgina Evans, fashion editor, Show Studio, in her essay *Posthumanism in Fashion*, as she comments on the utopic queering of humanness in contemporary fashion.

We will discuss the impact of posthumanism on fashion as we analyse some of the present-day designers, whose works feature post-humanistic traits.

ALEXANDER MCQUEEN AND THE POSTHUMAN ALLEGORY

The British fashion designer, Alexander McQueen elaborated a post-anthropocentric discourse that signalled, that the function of the dress is no longer to conceal our bestial nature (Soper 2001, 17), or to engage in a process of hominization (Vanska 2018,22) but to connect with nonhuman-animals-and-technology.

In other words, he was echoing, ahead of his time, what feminist philosopher and writer Braidotti in 2022, (131) wrote about the synergies between “zoe(non-human)/techno(technology)/geo(Earth).” McQueen’s alternative figurations of human and non-human bodies decentred the dominance of the dress as a covering of the human body. Whether the perspective was historical or futuristic, driven by technology or by nature, McQueen questioned what it meant to be human at the turn of the millennium. As McQueen made alliances with all kinds of nonhumans, there were two significant visions in his fashion productions: the animal-woman association, which often resulted in the creation of a feral hybrid, and the other (re)creation of the figure of the cyborg, which blurred the divide between man and woman, between nature and culture, and between human and technology.

By his admission, McQueen saw himself as a sartorial chronicler. “I am making points about my time, about the times we live in. My work is a social document about the world today.” He said in an interview. (Qtd. In Bolton 2011.12) He sought to make a statement in his much sought-after fashion shows, tackling female sexual abuse, historical events of colonisation and imperialism and in later years, issues of global warming and biodiversity reduction.

Braidotti and Diana Villanueva, a scholar in ecofeminism, commenting on this human-animal continuum and emphasis on nature, acknowledge, “the enormous contribution of the work done by ecofeminists to the deconstruction of binaries such as the human/animal” (Villanueva 2013, 151). Although she admits that the identification between women and nonhuman animals sometimes still contributes to the oppression of both groups (2013, 151), Villanueva sees a shift in some campaigns where the women-animal comparison is seen as “cues of empowerment.” Villanueva turns to the fashion shows of Alexander McQueen, where the hybrid between the nonhuman and human animal results in female empowerment since the models who strut the designer’s runway appear as anything but commodified objects or victims.

McQueen’s intention, in his own words, was “to create a woman who looks so fabulous you wouldn’t dare lay a hand on her” (Qtd. in Evans 2003, 143). Thus, female empowerment was achieved through the woman-animal hybrid.

Donna Haraway’s essay *A Cyborg Manifesto* examines the figure of the cyborg as one who is given the potential to dismantle the dualism deeply rooted in Western thought. This deconstruction is reflected in McQueen’s collections at the turn of the twentieth century, where he questions what it means to be human challenging the barriers be-

tween culture/nature, human/artificial, man/woman.

THE CYBORG AS A POSTHUMAN IMAGERY

Shooting for McQueen, Nick Knight, the legendary photographer took one of the most enduring images of the model Devon Aoki for the cover of a magazine. The young model appears as a wild cyborg one-eyed geisha.

Unprecedented in fashion before, McQueen and Nick Knight produced an issue of a fashion magazine, *Dazed and Confused* in September 1998, following it up with a ramp show. All the models featured were disabled signalling the forging of a future in which human value and aesthetic beauty are not determined by a prescribed social norm of beauty, in a post-anthropocentric critique.

In the context of an embodiment, Donna Haraway suggests, that bodies are not born but they are made. They are not perfect or pure, they are messy, fleshy, ambiguous and they come in all shapes and sizes. Haraway is an important thinker for post-humanism since she roundly rejects the idea of a pure, self-sufficient, perfect body.

TECHNOLOGY AND POSTHUMANISM - GARETH PUGH AND IRIS VAN HERPEN

In the realms of fashion, posthumanism often appears as both a signifier of our technophobia and an excited reaction to our new cultural shift.

British designer Gareth Pugh is an innovative designer who often queers the idea of humanness with exaggerated shoulders and silhouettes in strong, structural fabrics, his garments imbued with political commentary. Dirtied faces and barbed wire accessories seem to nod to a technophobic dystopic future. For his A/W 2018 show, Pugh's almost transhuman cyborgs challenged today's humanity with their metal-crushing appendages. Pugh's post-humanist pieces cater beyond the realms of gender.

An exciting contemporary Dutch designer to break into the scene in 2008 with her *Chemical Crows* collection, is Iris Van Herpen. Her designs reflect the sensibilities of posthumanism, and she is known for her dark, fantastical aesthetics and multi-layered hypnotic garments with kinetic sculptural form. Deeply rooted in nature, with its mystery, beauty and chaos, she draws on the elements of water, air and earth, translating them into diaphanous, textural and sculptural designs. Architectural in form, yet organic in nature, she deftly incorporates technology such as 3D printing, wireframes, sound, and kinetic movements in her designs. Exploring new fabrics created by blending unlikely materials such as steel with silks, and iron filings with magnets. Her ethereal garments seem an other-worldly extension of the human anatomy.

Iris van Herpen often invents new and rather peculiar words for her collections: "Syntopia," "Aeriform," or "Biopiracy." She also creates titles of two words that indicate paradox, or ambiguity with expressions, like "Wilderness Embodied," "Hybrid Holism," and "Radiation Invasion". Her spring, 2023 collection was inspired by aquatic architecture and Bionic innovation.

Posthumanist thinkers see these expressions of opposites of human and the non-human, biological and the technological, organic with the inorganic as a characteristic of posthumanism, which postulates a dynamic notion of life in which human bodies are inextricably entangled with nonhumans like fibres, fabrics, garments, and technologies. The notion of dynamic "becoming" is quite central to posthuman theory as seconded by Braidotti.

Indian Designers and Posthumanism

In India, quite a few designers are reflecting the posthuman trend. One can see the influence of digitisation and the use of technology to create fabrics, and while the forms are often inspired by nature, the garments are futuristic.

Rahul Mishra is one such designer. He burst into the fashion scene in 2006 after winning the Gen Next designer award at the Lakme Fashion Week. Since then, each of his shows haven't failed to enthrall. His atelier in India, as one reviewer says, resembles a lab where fashion- meets-art-meets-science.

Showcasing in London, Paris, Dubai and the Fashion Weeks in India, Rahul Mishra is one of the most promising upcoming and prominent designers in India with a significant impact on the international scene. Zendaya and Gigi Hadid are global style icons who have worn a Rahul Mishra outfit. He recently showcased his Haute Couture collection in Paris where the Cosmos-inspired collection received immense global attention.

His approach to building his brand is his respect for materials, sustainability of his production lines, preservation of traditional craftspeople of India and approaching each collection with a fresh approach. In 2014 he won the Woolmark Prize at the Milan Fashion Week and in 2015, his work featured in London's Victoria and Albert Museum.

Rahul takes inspiration from all forms of nature – plants, animals, and elements of air, water and earth, he also reflects the posthuman form with an architectural silhouette. His S/S 2023 collection in the Paris Couture Week was inspired by the great cosmos. It had earth colours with hues of blues and greens, creating visions of the mysterious outer space, yet with organic and mineral tones of plants, animals and matter that inhabit our planet Earth. The ethereal designs seemed to land on the fashion runway, as though from another planet, which was at once human and non-human, otherworldly and at the same time of Earth, deeply connected to the beauty of our blue planet.

The 3D structural embellishments of leaves, showcase the exquisite hand embroidery, quintessential of our brilliant Indian craftsmen, yet the designs are not traditional. They are three-dimensional patterns, familiar yet unfamiliar, rising up and out of the garments of the models, as though caught in a cosmic dance.

Rahul Mishra's collections reflect the harmonious dualism that exemplifies the posthuman era. It registers the non-dominance of the human form and the arrival of a new form that is organic, sensitive to sustainable principles, and reflects a form and design of an era that is getting used to the presence of Artificial Intelligence, Cyborg imagery, and an electronic and digitally enhanced human form that partially inhabits a cyber world.



Fig. 1 Sage Green Scales
All photo credits: Rahul Mishra Spring 2023 Couture

With its roots in the Sanskrit proclamation "Aham Brahmasmi," which means "I am the cosmos," Rahul Mishra's Cosmos is a conception of physical reality based on the deepest truth of who we are.



Fig. 2. Gilded Wonder.
All photo credits: Rahul Mishra Spring 2023 Couture

This collection represents their most passionate attempt at surface development. It is achieved in two and three-dimensional hand embroidery and is complemented with elements made of hand-cast reclaimed brass that is gold plated and covered in Swarovski crystals.



Fig. 3. Jewelled Jellyfish.
All photo credits: Rahul Mishra Spring 2023 Couture

Each item is individually hand-crafted in a different Indian village, creating an average of more than three thousand hours of work.



Fig. 4. Coral Cluster.

All photo credits: Rahul Mishra Spring 2023 Couture

While some works depict human habitations as enormous ecosystems that grow upward like a weed, others focus on other animals that are living in creative environments.



Fig. 5. Battlestar bodysuits.

All photo credits: Rahul Mishra Spring 2023 Couture

Rahul Mishra's lines aim to be "art" while still being "fashion, keeping independent of fads and retaining the whimsical quality of "classics."

Unveiling his global luxury label, AFEW, in Paris recently, Rahul Mishra's easy-to-wear collection showcases gender-neutral clothing, again drawing inspiration from kinetic forms of natural elements, echoing Donna Haraway's cyborg features and Braidotti's obfuscation of the face with paint, as posthuman elements.

OTHER INDIAN DESIGNERS WITH POSTHUMAN CHARACTERISTICS

India has a fresh crop of designers who are breaking boundaries and stretching the mutability of fashion. Most began a few years before the pandemic hit in 2019 and through the pandemic have grown exponentially using the powers of social media, making digital connections, their voices of sustainability, a juxtaposition of hyper-local with futuristic global aesthetics making them visible on the world stage. The pandemic seems to have brought to the fore the need for fashion to understand the fragility of humans and our dependency on nature. These posthuman

designers are often unknowingly engaged in a process of dialogue, questioning the anthropocentric thought, and decentring the human.

What posthumanism and new materialism share is their endeavour to rethink and undo dualisms (Coole and Frost 2010).

AKSHAT BANSAL OF BLONI

As an epitome of all that theorists describe as features of the posthuman, is a delight to see exhibited in a new Indian designer who arrived on the scene, post-pandemic. Akshat Bansal with his label, Bloni, delights in deconstructing and then reconstructing, effortlessly, amalgamating art with technology. His designs have the edginess of futurism and the eco-consciousness of posthumanism. The designer says his designs are for Generation Alpha, successors of Gen Z. His garments look interstellar but have an ecologically conscious sensitivity in their versatile form. They can be worn to create different looks.



Fig.6. Art meets tech with Bloni.
Photo credit: Bloni

Gender agnostic and forward-thinking, he is a non-conformist whose collections blend new age fabrics and are artistic with a futuristic look. His collections have experimental names such as, 'In Between X And Y,' and 'Preamble,' which was shown in the Paris Fashion Week in 2022. Creating a 'Them' wear line, his collections support efforts to break out of the gender binary in fashion. His unique clothing lines use new-age textiles created from a combination of recycled steel, Korean Vegan sculptural rubber, and vegan latex with a leather look. Jackets, shirts, and skirts are made from Econyl fabric, 3D reflective surfaces, displaying an other-worldly look with the use of photo-sensitive materials that change colour upon exposure to light.

SUSTAINABILITY IS A STRONG FEATURE OF POSTHUMANISM.

PIYUSH KUMAR OF BRAND PIEUX

Some of this awareness of the interconnectedness of fashion cultures to issues of climate change, technology and identity starts from fashion schools where there is an academic discussion on issues of climate crises, fashion waste adding to landfills and pollution. Piyush Kumar started working on the principle of modularity, as an undergraduate and carried this concept further with research on sustainability in a Master's programme.

Starting his brand, PIEUX, a luxury sustainable fashion label with circularity in its DNA, the young designer won the Circular Design Challenge in 2022, one of the highest awards in India, for innovative use of eco-friendly digital and 3D printing techniques, using fabrics such as CARTEX, R|Elan™, GreenGold and a fusion of GreenGold + FeelFresh

for its prismatic athleisure collection. For this sustainable innovative mindset, Piyush Kumar won the Clean Tech Challenge in the same year.



Fig. 7. Illusion by PIEUX.
Photo credit: pieuxorganic.com

A mannequin in retro fighter-pilot goggles with a wartime gas mask, a bomber jacket and modular boots made from Cartex, his design aesthetics have the cyborg look as described by Haraway. Piyush is not conscious of creating a posthuman look, but he says he is responding to the ubiquity of tech around and at the same time he is conscious of the need to address the challenges of climate change.

For Piyush, innovation using technology is the key to realising the 'green dream.' He makes men's and women's wear in structured silhouettes, often modular, they shift shapes from a jacket to a skirt to a bustier, the versatility attributing a longer life to the garment. While high fashion, his brand has a sustainable story to tell of reclaimed yarn from carpet weavers in India, nylon waste from Italy and eyewear made using 3D printing, minimising waste.

IS POSTHUMANISM CONCERNED WITH ETHICS?

Vino Supraja is a designer whose sustainable couture with a cultural twist made its appearance at the 2023, London Fashion Week.

Vino Supraja's eponymous eco-conscious label draws on her strong connection to her hometown in Tiruvannamalai, a small town in the Southern state of Tamil Nadu. Drawing on her cultural roots, witnessing local forms of street play, the architect-turned-designer uses traditional motifs, colours of rich yellow, bright red and blue along with symbols of local artists to create completely new contemporary silhouettes.

Her show opened with a traditional performer before the models walked out on the ramp, she displayed the post-human trait of using traditional elements with a contemporary twist.

With an active physical and online presence on her Instagram profile, she clearly says, "At VINO SUPRAJA we prioritise our planet's well-being." Apart from her clothing line, she runs advocacy campaigns, the creatives smartly made using AI such as DALL-E to sensitise consumers to become environmentally conscious of climate change, habitat destruction and the impact of human interference and fast fashion on the animal kingdom which is leading to extinction of species.



Fig. 8. Stop Killer Fashion.
Photo credit: Vino Supraja

In her arresting campaign, Stop Killer Fashion, she exhibits the posthuman trait of “hominization” of animals to subvert hierarchies of species.

In Supraja, one can find a parallel when Haraway postulates that posthumanism is an ethical position that extends moral concern to things that are different from us and to other species and objects with which we cohabit the world.

Anneke Smelik, professor of Visual Culture at the Radboud University, Netherlands, in a lecture on ‘Fashion Matter’ agrees that the definition of human is changing in the 21st Century and that there is a complex relationship between humans, plants and animals. There is a conceptual shift among designers who display posthuman traits.

A small startup brand called Wear a Paw which was into dog yoga, seeing the success and empathy for animals, is diversifying into a clothing brand for humans. Advertising ethically sourced fabrics, claiming “no bloodshed” to purpose-led clothing, the animal print T-shirts have names that convey animal love such as cow cuddles, dancing black zebra, silent roar and spot cruelty.

LARGE LANDFILLS AND URBAN WASTE ARE THE REALITY FOR POSTHUMANS.

A study conducted by corporate associations like ASSOCHAM and PwC suggests that India would require landfills the size of New Delhi by the year 2050 with the amount of waste being produced.

Ashita Singhal who is now a weaver, designer, and social entrepreneur is doing path-breaking work with an idea incubated in a master’s programme. Creating beautiful fabrics from all types of waste, she has set up an atelier of traditional loom weavers under her label Paiwand meaning patchwork. Weaving magic with scraps of cloth, foil and even leather waste, Ashita’s, tree, and Sky series has been featured in the National Gallery of Modern Art exhibiting 75 years of Indian fabrics. Listed in the 30-under-30 Forbes list of young achievers, her experiments with recycling leather scrap have led to a partnership with a shoe company, Oceedee Shoes.

Brimming with ideas and innovative thinking, Ashita’s approach to design and fashion is about putting the planet first. “I feel design is about solving problems and the biggest challenge humanity is facing today is climate change. As designers, we cannot brush it under the carpet and ignore it. We (humans) have created this problem, and as designers, we are responsible for developing new products and finding solutions.”

This concern so openly expressed as anguish for the anthropogenic material created by man is a posthuman trait.

DOODLAGE

Doodlage a sustainable brand has gained popularity in India as a fashion clothing brand pushing for zero waste. Kriti Tula, started Doodlage in 2012, as a part-time enterprise to upcycle and recycle waste material generated in textile factories and export units to create new collections. The brand was talking about sustainability when it wasn’t

fashionable to do so and there was next to no awareness of the environmental impact of fashion.

While Kriti is a designer she says with honesty, "Fashion is not a necessity. And for something that is not a necessity, to be consuming such huge amounts of resources just didn't add up for me." This she says, left her with the only option to start something that espoused the values of sustainability. While she took it up full-time in 2018, the pandemic, she says, pushed people into thinking about making sustainable choices and that extended to clothes and fashion and her brand grew.

Doodlage is a fashion label that upcycles factory waste into limited-edition collections. For instance, a 6-and-a-half-metre poly-chiffon garment is made from 30 recycled plastic bottles. And by making handcrafted reusable packaging for a corporation, Tula claims, they were able to divert more than 5000 kgs of fabric from landfills and saved over 46 million litres of water in the process.

Their website has information on sustainable fashion and tips on how individuals can choose consciously.

Karishma of Ka-Sha champions sustainability on a larger picture, but one major aspect of its functioning comes from upcycling and waste management. She not only incorporates materials that are recycled or repurposed but also urges other designers and fashion houses to do the same. It launched Heart-to-Haat, a socially responsible initiative to work with old/discarded clothing to reinvent and upcycle it into usable products while educating and spreading awareness on sustainability.

"We approach people by saying that if you have waste and you don't know what to do with it, we will help you resolve it. With Heart-to-Haat, we want to try and build a circular system where whatever we create, whatever we waste, goes back into the product. We have been doing it consistently in our collections." They also explored several alternate materials such as using onion sacs to create textiles and recycling saree borders.

Ka-Sha's most recent collaboration was with 'Save the Loom', to support the Chendamangalam Weavers' Association (Kerala), promoted khadi fabric in Dhaka (Bangladesh), and worked with Kota Doria Women Weavers Association. Kasha lauds itself on uplifting lives.

NECE GENE (NE-SE-JEN)

Neha Celly is a new-age designer whose concern for the environmental impact of denim waste is rethinking a designer's revenge. Concerned with the rising demand for denim and a corresponding increase in massive landfills filled with fabric cutting and scraps escalating the carbon footprint on the planet, Neha Celly collaborated with denim giant Arvind Mills, host to iconic global brands, to make a 100% sustainable brand called Nece Gene.

Celly uses denim scraps, waste produced by the factory to make complete modern collections, with the idea of mindful fashion. Her design aesthetics are inspired, in her words by "our beautiful planet". The dresses have a 3-dimensional form that borrows from hills, swamps, valleys, and estuaries. The magic lies in the surface textures each garment displays. "Sustainability doesn't have to come at the cost of style," says the designer, one of 15 international brands selected to display at the Helsinki Fashion Week 2020.

Another young designer, based out of Bangalore is Priyanka Munniyappa with her label, Grandma Would Approve. An Instagram-only label offering gender-neutral vintage, Priyanka reconstructs and restores clothing. A label with conscious zero-waste practices, she up-cycles, restoring and reconstructing vintage couture handpicked from fashion haunts across the world. For creating new designs, she often uses up to ten pieces to create a new couture piece.

Being a fashion student and researcher, Priyanka is a designer who understands the philosophy of posthumanism in fashion. She says that while their clothing designs don't focus on technology, they concentrate on the post-consumer aspect of clothing and fashion.

“We honestly don’t need any new fabrics to be created, we have a lot of waste (anthropogenic material) generated by the human race”, she says, “and it is time to take ownership of that waste. It is time to circulate, up-cycle, reuse and recycle.” The philosophy of their brand is to prevent garments from crowding landfills, through which they wish to prevent further emission of greenhouse gases that cause a spike in temperatures and release toxins, speeding up the climate crisis.

Commenting on the time, Priyanka says that posthumanism is also an era that will challenge overconsumption and the way people use their garments. So, upcycling and restoration of garments will be part of the thinking process.

CONCLUSION

For the fashion industry to move forward, posthumanism is a critical and creative way of thinking to correct past mistakes and create a future positive world.

In researching this paper, the stated purpose of this article, to understand posthumanism from a theoretical perspective and investigate the influence of posthumanism on fashion by exploring the work and analysing its influence on fashion designers in Europe and India has been met, given the scope of this paper. In analysis, it is apparent that posthumanism is not a utopian concept nor a picture of a dystopian world. Neither is it a rejection of humanity, but an interpretation of humanity in transition. A stage of transformation, considering new realities in fashion and its interconnection with climate change, technology, and a transmutable identity. Posthumanism is a useful tool to analyse and create insights for future generations in the fashion industry. It makes us ponder on the best solutions to collaborate for a more balanced and inclusive future society.

One of the primary learnings in understanding posthumanism in fashion is that even high fashion needs to be and can be sustainable. Big brands need to invest in research and development.

For instance, Stella McCartney became a fully sustainable brand in 2017 when few were talking about sustainability.

She promotes a circular textile economy and appeals to the new, more conscious Gen Z consumers. Named as one of TIME magazine’s, 100 Most Influential Climate Change Leaders of 2023, McCartney teams up with innovators to develop more sustainable raw materials. In 2022, she set up a 200-million-dollar fund called Collab SOS, which invests in companies such as Bolt Threads, and Natural Fiber Welding, which has created plastic-free alternatives called Mirium and Protein Evolution, that will allow polyester and nylon waste to be infinitely recycled.

As posthuman thinkers, new-age designers and the current generation begin to be more aware of the interconnectedness of human bodies with non-human matter, such as plants, animals, and the environment, the fashion industry needs to create more platforms to share experiences, ideas, and collaborations to build a sustainable world.

There could be an increase in the number of Fashion Summits to foster dialogue and action around relevant issues. These can be built around the fashion weeks that are held around the world in New York, London, Paris, Milan, Shanghai, Tokyo, Seoul, New Delhi, and other major cities.

More events like the Copenhagen Fashion Summit, the world’s largest event on sustainability in fashion, are needed where responsible business practices meet to discuss change. Such physical gatherings with key players from the fashion industry are necessary to exchange views, share technology and influence each other to employ clean fashion principles and work towards a net goal of zero emissions.

Another good example of the change that can be affected, when designers, producers, workers, concerned citizens, business leaders and policymakers all come together, is Fashion Revolution. Started as a movement on the back

of the horrific 2013, Rana Plaza incident, it is today the world's largest activism movement that advocates change in the way the fashion industry does business. Writing papers and researching for policy change, they run regular campaigns such as Good Clothes, Fair Pay, demanding living wage legislation in this sector. Advocating for greater transparency in the supply-chain practices of large brands, designers hold regular workshops to mobilise citizens to adopt sustainable practices. Members meet regularly holding workshops and encouraging upcycling and recycling of garments among consumers. Such platforms for concerted action are necessary to create checks from within the industry.

With technology as a transmutable pillar in the post-humanism era, digital and online virtual spaces in the new world can be theatres of thought, and tech can be used to prevent waste and reduce pollution. To take a case study, the Metaverse Fashion Council is one such annual virtual fashion summit that recently held its second online summit in December 2023. With the theme Future Heritage, the Metaverse Fashion Week showcased new perspectives on what a fashion show can look like in the metaverse. This virtual summit had avatars and digital twins of people attending the Neo Plaza, a location in the virtual world. The Metaverse Fashion Council '23, brought together the first digital fashion house in Italy, Blade Runway, and Injury, a brand featured in Marie Claire, ELLE, WWD and other top media magazines and digital fashion creators.

A similar digital fashion show, We Are Made in Italy, highlighted systemic racism in the Italian fashion industry and countered the belief that to be Italian and to be part of the show is to be white. Technology can be used to democratise fashion, is a posthuman thought.

With Artificial Intelligence gaining ground, virtual fashion influencers are fast making their debut. Noonoori is a Virtual Model created by a digital artist Joerg Zuber from Germany. With a virtual home on Instagram, the model Noonoori has 443K followers, many of them top designers. Noonoori supports ethical fashion, speaks up on issues such as breast cancer, re-wilding in Europe and afforestation in Africa and has collaborated with designer brands to model their outfits sold on DRESSX, the meta fashion store.

Sustainability conversations can be promoted on similar digital formats, podcasts and live streams to promote and change manufacturing and consumer behaviour. As discussed in the case study in this paper, Vinoo Supraja's advocacy campaign was created using AI. Featured on her Instagram page, there is high consumer two-way digital engagement with likes, and comments in support of slow sustainable fashion and a desire for a change in mindset.

Clean green fashion is today impacting fast fashion brands as well.

With sustained dialogue and pressure, fast fashion is also cleaning up its act. From the flack that H&M received a few years ago, they too are employing tech and Artificial Intelligence to reduce waste. Creating a digital twin to try on clothes virtually, reduces over order. In 2020, H&M Group launched the AI tool Movebox, an algorithm-based product redistribution based on demand, which has led to a decrease in production. They have also been forced to adopt circular measures and more sustainable materials to move to becoming climate-positive.

With 3D technology in sample production, there has been a significant reduction in the amount of fabric scraps and discarded polyester samples produced to create prototypes.

Registering this posthuman shift in fashion, these are some of the ways that the fashion industry can reduce its negative impact on the health of the planet, and encourage a more ethical, non-binary and inclusive world with greater dialogue.

The baton is being passed on and the responsibility to avoid further environmental catastrophes belongs to a single generation, which is, the present generation.

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- ⁱRana Plaza Accident – In 2013, a garment factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh manufacturing for top international brands collapsed killing more than 1,100 workers and injuring many more stirring a debate on worker safety.