THE ORGANIC IMPERATIVE

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by

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INTRODUCTION

Let the design:

Be inspired by nature and be sustainable, healthy, conserving, and diverse.

Unfold, like an organism, from the seed within.

Exist in the "continuous present" and "begin again and again".

Follow the flows and be flexible and adaptable.

Satisfy social, physical, and spiritual needs.

"Grow out of the site" and be unique.

Celebrate the spirit of youth, play and surprise.

Express the rhythm of music and the power of dance.

-David Pearson, New Organic Architecture: The Breaking Wave

Organic design principles have long been applied to architectural projects, most notably, throughout the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. Among these principles is the idea that a building, and more specifically, ‘the home’ should be one with its environment, rather than conflict with it. The natural world surrounding the building site dictates the fundamental design, rather than artistic whim. Imposing mere human impulse in design arguably creates work that is fleeting, and increasingly archaic and extraneous. By uniting the home with its natural environment, something more substantial and lasting, the design takes on a deeper and more timeless relevance.

Architecture and fashion have historically been considered somewhat parallel disciplines in that both fulfill a unique role in dual service to human
functionality and artistic expression. However, this so-called “timeless relevance” is largely lacking from the modern practice of fashion as evidenced by rampant consumerism, consumer frustration, and a growing quantity of textile goods in both landfills and thrift store donation bins. This thesis proposes that fashion can meet its promise for relevance, expression, and functionality through the application of organic principles such as those outlined by David Pearson in the introductory quote. This argument requires examination of the body-clothing connection, critique of contemporary fashion's implementation, exploration of the origins of ‘Organic Architecture,’ and application of these principles to fashion. By realizing the organic imperative in design, fabrication, production, and even consumer purchase, fashion can take on a timeless relevance, and be worthy of the high platform modern culture lends to it.
CHAPTER I
THE BODY AS BATTLEGROUNDS

The intimate relationship between the body and its clothing has long been compared to that of a man and his own skin. Central to this latter relationship is functionality, a perfection of biological ‘product design’ that meets the diverse and specialized needs of the body. Skin is neutral, flexible, temperature-regulating, supremely washable, and regenerative. Barring body alteration in the form of tattoos and tribal scarring, however, the skin’s functionality is limited with regards to the experimentation central to human self-expression.

Historically, humans have filled this perceived gap with the elevation of clothing, the body’s so-called ‘second skin,’ to something personally and culturally expressive. In doing so, clothing can become “Fashion.” A large part of this differentiated function involves visual stimulation and expression. Archaeologists have uncovered jewelry from even the most ancient civilizations, dating back to 2800 B.C. in ancient Mesopotamia,\(^1\) indicating that the practice of adornment is intrinsically embedded in the history of mankind.

Even modern tribal clothing which industrialized nations might deem ‘primitive,’ incorporates embellishments that serve spiritual, social, or protective

functions. The significance of this practice lies in the fact that even cultures that wear very little or rudimentary clothing, such as the Ethiopian Karo tribe, nonetheless practice adornment as an integral part of their costume.

This custom signifies that the desire for visual expression is deeply tied to human nature and not a haphazard function of urbane, highly evolved wardrobes. Regardless of type of dress, the way humans choose to cover and highlight different aspects of the body is an unspoken language in which we are all quite fluent.

Where modern Western culture differs from this universal practice of adornment, however, is in availability. Modernity has provided access to far more tools with which to adorn than earlier or indigenous cultures. The practice of decoration and adornment of the human body is an industry in itself. This presents an interesting paradox in that consumers express themselves based only on what the industry offers them. While it is possible to wear the same garment differently from someone else, and therefore participate in a somewhat individualized self-expression, the fact remains that the garment would never have been worn if it had

Fig. 1. Embellishments function as formal, celebratory costumes for girls of the Karo Tribe on their way to dance. (Photo by Brent Stirton. “Adventures in Far-Off Lands,” Life Magazine Oct. [2009]. Photo courtesy of Bren Stirton and Life Magazine, www.life.com.)
not been designed, produced, and made available through the modern fashion industry. The consumer is at least one step removed. They may choose the messages they desire to send through clothing, but the fashion industry determines the choices that are made available. Thus consumers participate in a somewhat passive relationship with their clothing, in both the functionality of the garments they choose, as well as the messages they send. Decisions are often made at a much less personal, and much more professionalized level, by the fashion industry.

Ideally, while the gap between functionality and expression should be bridged, it could be argued that segments of the modern fashion industry have largely disregarded the second-skin aspects of clothing in favor of the visual stimulation of fashion. Today, consumers are often faced with an inherent disconnect between their bodies and their clothing. Rather than fulfill its function as second skin, a large sector of modern clothing is more closely equated with an ‘anti-skin.’ These garments fail to meet the basic needs of the body.

Too often, the consumer must choose between comfort and expression, as is evidenced by almost every episode of the TLC makeover program “What Not To Wear.” Highly functional garments such as sweats and other activewear are not always attractive or expressive. These qualities are not intended to be primary functions. Contrarily, high fashion, which benefits from an enviable amount of control over both design and production, often sends artistic, highly politicized, or controversial messages at the expense of wearability. High fashion’s mass-market counterparts, meanwhile, sometimes suffer from the highly segmented mass-market
production chain. While it is certainly possible to purchase a mass-produced blouse that is both flattering, tasteful, durable, and inexpensive; an undeniable achievement of industrialization, conversely, the unsatisfactory experience of buying a mass-market piece that either fits strangely, or does not wear well is likewise ubiquitous. Mass-production is vulnerable to miscommunication, compounded by several language barriers, at one of its many steps of production. These inherent weaknesses do not begin to address the toll taken by mass-production on social and environmental sustainability. All of this begs the question: How well can fashion function as ‘second skin’ if it conflicts with personal expression, comfort, social ethics, or the environment that sustains the body? The complexity of this question is indicative of the complex relationship between the body and clothing.

Dani Cavallaro and Alexandra Warwick write that, “the ambiguous alliance between body and dress could be seen as one of the most inveterate incarnations of the fusion of the natural and constructed.”2 The close association between the body and its clothing is made evident, as Elizabeth Wilson says, by a "sense of the uncanny" many feel in the presence of clothing that once belonged to someone else, whether it be in a second-hand store, or a museum:

For clothes are so much a part of our living, moving selves that, frozen on display in the mausoleums of culture, they hint at something only half understood, sinister, threatening; the atrophy of the body.3

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Alison Lurie describes the same function of clothing when she states that, “to put on someone else’s clothes is symbolically to take on their personality.” While these are both rather drastic and polarized descriptions of this function, they are indicative of the extent to which humans perceive clothing intimately. Clothes, more than any other possession, are probably most apt to become indistinguishable from the wearer. In fact, this is preferable, as indicated by the selling-feature overheard at clothing stores worldwide: “It’s so me!” Implicit within this statement is the fact that there is a keen awareness of clothing’s propensity to complete that part of the wearer that is seen as incomplete. It is questionable, however, that the consumer is aware of the deeper implications that arise from giving clothing this power.

In addition to the conscious assimilation of clothing, constant direct contact with an article of clothing lends itself to a subconscious assimilation as well. When an object is in contact with the body, “the existence of self is extended into the extremities of the object, thereby giving the individual an increased sense of size, power, movement.” It is clear that while in many ways a piece of clothing becomes its wearer, on a deeper level, the wearer also becomes the clothing. Indeed,

[i]n its relationship with dress, the body is an eminently osmotic shell: when we adopt certain garments, we do not confine ourselves to knowing their qualities and attributes, since, through direct physical contact, we also assimilate them, we make them our flesh. (emphasis in original)

Here, a more powerful function of clothing is revealed. For in giving clothing the power to complete, wearers are left vulnerable to the possibility that they may need to complete the clothing. Cavallaro and Warwick describe this process best when they state,

[d]ress may then be said both to compete with the body’s decarnalized frame, by asserting its own materiality as an alternative to the body’s own, and yet also to operate as a kind of guardian angel, by filling... vacant space.\(^7\)

The implication of a sort of competition between bodies and clothing sounds far more sinister than the innocent, mutually beneficial union between skin and cloth that might be preferable. However, clothing, as well as any analysis of its role, is replete with paradox. As the body’s most intimate of enclosures, clothing both defines the boundaries of the body as one entity unified against an outside world, and simultaneously alters or augments its natural shape. It both highlights, and obscures... It both is, and seeks to change, the body.\(^8\) And, most importantly, it cannot fulfill both of these functions, without some measure of conflict.

In many ways, this conflict is indicative of what Cavallaro and Warwick reference as Lacan’s “Procrustean arbitrariness,” referring to the character Procrustes (most often depicted with an axe in hand), who mythically forced the bodies of unlucky travelers into pre-made beds through violent deformation of the

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\(^7\) Cavallaro and Warwick, *Fashioning*, 116-117.

\(^8\) Ibid., xvii.
While certainly not as ghastly, modern clothing largely seems to disregard the organic shape and biological needs of the body, and instead distracts from natural forms in favor of standardization or oftentimes, gross augmentation. Unlike some previous eras, where clothing was constructed by the wearer, a family member, or a tailor and was therefore necessarily made to fit the body, modern clothing is made, in both conception and production, so that the body is dressed in pre-conceived forms or standardized sizes. Industrialized fabrications and fits have addressed the lack of comfort present in earlier garments to great extent, but they do so at the expense of individuality. These garments may ‘fit,’ but the fit is not personal.

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Patrizia Calefato attests that “when a garment is made to measure it is certainly unique, though with the invention of standard sizes, the body has been squeezed into numerical limits.”\textsuperscript{10} While separates, as well as tall and petite sizing, have addressed the standardized fit issue to a great extent, there still exists a remarkable, if unsurprising, contrast between custom-made and mass-produced clothing. Here, a differentiation needs to be made between custom-made clothing and haute couture. While there is some overlap, haute couture regularly requires the body to conform to overly dramatic, if fashionable, silhouettes through the use of various visual and construction techniques.

The disconnect inherent to standardized sizes lies in the fact that something considered so individually expressive and personal to the wearer is actually anything but unique. The majority of consumers of the American fashion industry are faced with an endless number of similar garments that are merely contrivances of fleeting runway trends that even in their original form may not be wearable. Clothing of this variety expresses only the visually experimental: arguably the most superficial and fleeting aspects of the wearer’s personality. It is probably more accurate to say that the wearer, in donning these mass-produced, ill-conceived garments, is expressing the clothing.

As a generalization, this claim is perhaps unfair to those who imbue their mass-market clothing with a substantial amount of personal style. As Kate Fletcher writes,

fashion can be what is set in motion when a designer presents a new collection on a catwalk in Milan. But equally, fashion can be the moment when a teenager crops a pair of jeans, adds a badge to an old sweatshirt and paints their Converse pumps. (emphasis added)\textsuperscript{11}

Personal style is certainly not absent from the consumption of fashion. In fact, the industry, to great extent, relies on this self-expression and the satisfaction that comes with it. The pleasure associated with donning clothing the wearer deems ‘fitting’ is what has made the fashion industry thrive and remain incredibly profitable. However, it is the pursuit of this same satisfaction that makes the rapidly cycling trends promoted by the fashion industry so appealing. The consumer craves it.

Rudofsky describes this compulsion in *The Unfashionable Human Body*, where he describes man consumed not so much with perfection of form but boredom with his own form and a “passion for unceasing experimentation.”\textsuperscript{12} Here, the consumer is just as often guilty of the “Procrustean arbitrariness” as the clothing’s producer.

Man’s obsession with violating his body is not just of anthropological interest, it helps to understand the irrationality of dress. The devices for interfering with human anatomy are paralleled by a host of contraptions that simulate deformation or are simply meant to cheat

\textsuperscript{11} Kate Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion & Textiles: Design Journeys* (London: Earthscan, 2008), 120.

the eye: bustles, pads, heels, wedges, braguettes, brassieres, and so forth.\textsuperscript{13}

The disconcerting implication is that more often than not the consumer is not so much an unwitting participant in the battle between clothing and the body but also a likely instigator.

While it is easy to blame the industry for clothing woes, the consumer is arguably culpable, to an extent, for requiring so little from the clothes he or she purchases. The decisions made in fulfillment of this basic human need suffer from a want of information. The consumer buys into trends and endless experimentations that subversively, or even explicitly, promote adornment simply for adornment’s sake, without regard for function, use, or ethicality. Why then is the consumer surprised when garments are as disposable as the trends they represent? They are not surprised in fact. They may be disappointed, but not surprised. Truthfully, the garments fulfilled the only function required of them.

Consumers express unhappiness when a new sweater begins to pill, or a tight-fitting dress restricts the breath, but they are not surprised. In truth, they did not expect anything different. The seemingly ubiquitous statement that this or that pair of heels is “actually comfortable” is never met with anything other than disbelief. As Rudofsky concludes, “the belief that clothes are designed in good measure to punish the flesh never really lost its hold on us... the bruises are

\textsuperscript{13} Rudofsky, \textit{Unfashionable}, 121-122.
accepted as the inevitable consequences of wearing clothes.”14 After all, in addition to the aforementioned bustles, and brassieres, almost every culture has promoted painful, yet desirable, forms of adornment, such as foot-binding or corseting, for centuries.

And while modern forms of clothing do not necessarily bruise, consumers continue to wear clothes that fight the environment of the body. They willingly participate in the very battle that is bemoaned to friends when they open their closets. While the designer is sometimes guilty of promoting an inorganic design for design’s sake, consumers are guilty of enabling it. Modern society claims clothing as self-expression, but it does not meet this function as completely as it could, or should. As the messages fashion sends become increasingly rapid and professionalized, an element of self-expression is lost. If consumers continue to participate in the escalating consumption of increasingly less valuable garments, they will be merely expressing disposability, or fleeting human contrivance. As mass-market consumers, humans are quite often instigators of the paradox that uses the body as its battleground.

This behavior speaks to the inherent disconnect between the average consumer and the clothing he or she wears. More often than not, the clothing available to the vast majority of the market is too restrictive, misleading, dysfunctional, out of the consumer’s price range, or just plain unappealing. These shortcomings have been compounded over decades of escalating consumerism to

14 Rudofsky, Unfashionable, 110.
create a culture of over-stuffed closets filled with clothing that for one reason or another is disliked. Lurie writes that "just as with speech, it often happens that we cannot say what we really mean because we don’t have the right “words”...the woman who complains formulaically that she hasn’t got anything to wear is in just this situation."15

Herein lies the primary dysfunction in the modern implementation of fashion: a failure of communication. The discipline upheld for its propensity to express, so often fails to provide the “right words.” If clothing is indicative of culture and personal identities, it is imperative that fashion should reflect the consumer’s values and suggest a deeper philosophy than that which mere trendiness allows. Instead of being a creative whim, fashion could, and should be the product of careful thought, research, and aesthetic sensitivity and be worthy of the platform modern society has given it.

CHAPTER II

THE BODY AS MERCHANDISE: A CRITIQUE OF INDUSTRY

The core of any successful industry is demand. The growth and evolution of industry requires the continued interest, financial support, and loyalty of a faithful and growing consumer base over a long period of time. Just as the consumer’s relationship with his or her clothing is replete with paradox, so the average fashion consumer’s relationship with the modern fashion industry is defined as “love-hate.”

Those who love fashion, or at least the idea of fashion, love the medium for its potential to artistically express themselves and culture. In an era where technology fosters brevity in relationships, fashion is quite literally the alluring fulfillment of the ‘a picture speaks a thousand words’ mantra. Increasingly, society has become flooded with visual learners. Fashion speaks to that which cannot be adequately express with words, or, perhaps, what there is not time to say. And while these qualities of fashion give it considerable power in a modern social climate, fashion’s unique appeal extends beyond the confines of contemporary, visually oriented, and rapidly moving society.

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Historically, fashion has long served as an expressive outlet that conveys wealth, status, and personal preference. Even archaic forms of dress such as the toga or kimono expressed unique attributes of the wearer through color or style. Rudofsky, in defense of the now-abandoned classical costume, states that, 

\[ \text{the effect of so much artlessness was anything but poor... for even though classical costume can be reduced to a few basic shapes, the manner in which it was worn resulted in a great variety of what in the garment trade is known as “styles.”} \]\(^{17}\)

Similarly, Marilyn Horn and Lois Gurel, authors of *The Second Skin*, describe the function of fashion stating that "clothing is one of the most personal components of daily life... it is an expression of social activities deeply embedded in the cultural patterns of an era."\(^{18}\) Humans intuitively examine fashion as ‘artifacts’ to learn the habits, skills, and mores of ancient cultures or different times. The same way contemporary clothing speaks to contemporary society, shorter hemlines in the ‘40s can be read as a response to a...
need to conserve and pant suits in the ’70s as an expression of a newly empowered female working force. In the case of classical costume, Rudofsky argued that different interpretations of a uniform garment expressed the confluence of democracy and individuality that defined the classical era.¹⁹ The medium of fashion has a long, rich history of function in the realms of personal and cultural expression.

Fig. 4. The change in wartime hemlines

However, the ‘hate’ of the love-hate relationship must be acknowledged. The fashion industry has a long and fundamental history of neglect towards the people who sustain it. For, while fashion’s considerable power and influence can promote a

positive cultural and personal expression, that same power has the propensity to negatively impact its consumer, both passively and actively. It is true that “fashion in its worst forms, feeds insecurity, peer pressure, consumerism, and homogeneity.”

While fashion imbues a percentage of the population with self-confidence and the tools for personal expression, it can also promote anxiety, discrimination, and self-hate in an arguably larger percentile. It has long been argued that the industry’s portrayal of fashion by ultra-thin models on the runway and in print advertisements perpetuates skewed ideas of beauty. In a 2008 survey by Unilever, 68% of women strongly agreed that, “media and advertising set an unrealistic standard of beauty that most women can’t ever achieve,” and therefore “only 2% of respondents described themselves as beautiful.” While fashion is not solely responsible for the media climate, it would be naive to assume that it is not at least a partial contributor. The fashion industry professionalizes the business of beauty, and therefore influences most media outlets that portray it.

Apart from its physical presence, fashion carries a remarkable social weight. As clothing becomes fashion, it no longer satisfies merely a physical need but also needs of social and self-definition. The industry is no longer responsible solely for functional clothing but also for the effects of the pop-culture phenomenon that it has created. Designers are, therefore, responsible for their designs and the messages

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20 Fletcher, Sustainable, 118.
they send. The industry, therefore, needs to take greater responsibility not just for
the physical product, but for the lifestyle and messages the products and the
production and promotion of those products advocate.

A designer, such as Ralph Lauren, who maintains control over the various
licenses of his products and their advertising, is sure to promote a lifestyle through
his clothing and branding. The industry also includes designers who work under
the umbrella of larger corporations, merchandisers, advertisers, retailers, and mass-
marketers, each of whom contributes to the messages sent by the industry. If one
examines these messages through an ethical lens, there are several points that must
be questioned, those being the promotion of unrealistic ideals of beauty, the
encouragement of mass-consumption by an easily-influenced public, and prevailing
standards of ethical production.

On a more literal level, fashion's abuse is seen in its connection to a “litany
of labor abuses including poverty wages, excessive working hours, forced overtime,
lack of job security and denial of trade union rights,” among other misdeeds, from its
industrial conception to its modern implementation.22 While the rapid
industrialization of the fashion industry at the birth of mass-production required an
immense staff of 97,000 workers in 1850,23 it required few provisions for their
health and safety. Such conditions lead to historic tragedies such as the Triangle
Shirtwaist Factory fire, and also to enduring production by sweatshop and/or child

22 Kate Fletcher, Sustainable Fashion & Textiles: Design Journeys (London: Earthscan,
2008), 41.
23 Lee, Fashion, 27.
labor. At the birth of industrialization, as sustainability pioneers William McDonough and Michael Braungart note, “materials were considered expensive, but people were often considered cheap.”

There is no denying the considerable reforms modernity has made to working conditions in the United States. The industry today finds itself at a crossroads between profit and contemporary conceptions of ethical labor conditions and production. With the root of success and profitability entwined with traditional practices, the fashion industry has a long way to go before resolving these issues. For instance, in a 2005 Report on Ethical Sourcing, the mass-retailer Wal-Mart found “serious violations at 52.3% of factories producing its apparel.”

The very idea of mass-production must be re-theorized both in conception and implementation to reconcile industrial practice with ethical concerns.

Re-examining the concept of mass-production requires an analysis of its viability; primarily the needs it satisfies, and how its success is determined. The question “Is the average mass-consumer being satisfied?” is rightly a different question than, “Is the average mass-consumer buying?” Whether a consumer is most apt to acknowledge the positive or negative effects of fashion, they certainly buy into them, resulting in the continuance of the industry. Condemning fashion for its negative impact on culture acknowledges its power just as much as exalting its many fine points. Similarly, when management examines a company’s sales figures,

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a consumer who is motivated by insecurity looks exactly the same as a consumer motivated by a desire to express some lovely quality she perceives in herself. The two may even purchase the same blouse out of these differing motivations. Satisfaction is not necessarily measured by purchase. The industry is more apt to apportion success based on financial gain, or number of sales, rather than on consumer satisfaction.

To begin to determine consumer satisfaction, the buying habits of the consumer in the modern marketplace must be examined. It is necessary to specify the “modern fashion marketplace,” because industrialization has created a fashion industry almost unrecognizable from its pre-industrial existence. It was through industrialization that the fashion industry underwent its largest and most drastic evolution: standardization.

Prior to industrialization, most garments were custom made for the wearer. While wealthier women hired professionals to construct their clothing, choosing the fabrics, colors, and styles, those less fortunate benefited from customization to an extent as well. Michelle Lee attests that “before ready-to-wear, practically every home in America was a small clothing factory.”26 If a woman did not have the resources to hire a tailor or dressmaker, she would inevitably make or alter her family’s garments herself.

While fit depended on the skill of the seamstress, either way, a garment had a much more personal fit and attachment to the wearer than that which the majority

of us are accustomed to today. In most contemporary societies, the professions of dressmaker and tailor are all but extinct. Today, the field that most closely resembles pre-industrial fashion, at least as it is mythologized, is the world of haute couture. Customization in its truest sense is reserved for the extremely privileged, or the occasional, ever-so-lucky, middle-class bride.

While customization was necessarily present in pre-industrial garments regardless of class, the garments themselves were certainly not devoid of the influences of class structure. The gap between the clothing of the high and low social classes was probably at its widest. Here, industrialization did much to forward the cause of fashion. The advent of standardization brought with it availability, uniform construction, and the so-called “democratization of fashion.”

As Lee continues,

\[
\text{[r]eady-to-wear brought the democratization of fashion—clothes became less of a symbol of ones wealth and status as more people could afford the most up-to-date looks.}\]

C.B. Kidwell writes that the advent of ready-to-wear clothing further “served to obliterate ethnic origins and blur social distinctions.” Clothing became much less expensive through efficient production, and therefore the average consumer could own more of it than had previously been imagined.

\[27\] Lee, Fashion, xvi.

\[28\] Ibid., 27.

Pure utility was no longer as important. With only a few necessary garments, durability and appropriateness were foremost concerns. The pre-industrial garments of the middle and lower classes had to function for every occasion. The availability of low-cost, ready-to-wear options has since allowed consumers the variety that is present in contemporary fashion. The ability of clothing to function as expression, once considered a luxury, has been made available to everyone through efficient, standardized production.

For all its good points, efficiency in the fashion industry can promote passivity in the designer, manufacturer, and the consumer. Pre-modern forms of dress, although less efficient, were simpler in these regards. The conception, production, and distribution of clothing in dressmaker’s shops and even early ateliers (Chanel for example) occurred largely under one roof. Designers by necessity had to have knowledge of the complete production process. To some extent, this method of production has been lost in the post-industrial fashion industry. It just simply is not as cost-effective as breaking up the supply chain. Specialization and outsourcing seem cheaper but may have other costs.

By breaking up the supply chain, the industry allows itself to become vulnerable to the temptations of ignorance. Mass production and distribution have allowed for gaps in the knowledge of each of the separate stages of garment production. In many ways fashion participators are only knowledgeable of the stage in which they are directly involved as either professionals or consumers. They possess a rudimentary awareness of the rest. Often nothing more is required, and in
this sense ignorance is easier. If those employed by the fashion industry were truly interested in presenting a cohesive message, one would think they would participate in, or at least have intimate knowledge of, the complete production process. This type of over-arching expertise is necessary for the design and production of a piece of clothing with integrity of concept. Poor fabrication, questionable production, and wasteful distribution undermine even the most carefully conceptualized design. Fashion design is a total package. It’s about time it was treated like one.

Herein lies the argument for the re-formulation of mass production. Efficiency for efficiency’s sake is a dangerous idea. As McDonough and Braungart note, “in a philosophical sense, efficiency has no independent value: it depends on the value of the larger system of which it is a part.”30 This assessment applies to quantity as well. Quantity in itself is not valuable. Its value is dependent upon the object of which there is a quantity; it can then be reasonably concluded that making choices purely for the sake of efficiency, quantity, or the financial benefits they bring, is likewise a dangerous pursuit. One must question whether there is value to mass-production beyond quantity or financial incentive.

There is certainly documented proof that mass-production in its literal, physical capacity strains culture environmentally, if nothing else. The production of fashion products in traditional practice uses massive amounts of resources, and requires chemical aid in the fertilization of the fiber plant, the creation of synthetics,

30 McDonough and Braungart, Cradle, 65.
and the finishing and dyeing of all these raw materials. In addition to the
production of the fabrics themselves, there is considerable waste in the cutting and
construction of ready-made fashion goods, as well as in their disposal. A study by
the Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association revealed that, “4% of U.S.
landfill space is consumed by textile waste.”

In the UK, the yearly amount of
clothing and textile waste is more than 5,180,800,000 pounds, or 88 pounds of
waste per person, per year. This statistic does not include the paper waste
accumulated in merchandising and the carbon waste accumulated in distribution,
among other less
obvious environmental
ravages.

A specific
examination of the
environmental impact
of the mass-production
of something as
ubiquitous as a pair of
jeans is a good case

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32 Fletcher, *Sustainable*, 98.
The rather daunting supply chain is indicative of the carbon footprint that is potentially accumulated through international sourcing at each stage. In the case of one pair of jeans for sale in the UK, US grown cotton travelled 11,153 miles before reaching a UK retail outlet as a pair of denim jeans. If this number seems surprising, it is even more so in the context of the total energy used in the supply chain. The seemingly excessive distance that a pair of jeans travels in consumer and commercial freight transport accounts for only 4-5% of this total energy.

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34 Ibid., 780.
study concluded that the “majority of total energy used in the supply chain is consumed during cotton cultivation, denim production, and jeans manufacture.”

While the idea of smaller-scale production in a society which values quantity may seem backward, the increased awareness present in sustainable advances of the modern era suggests that fashion probably has yet to undergo its greatest transformation. The fact that mass-production has survived and evolved to this point not only indicates the industry’s potential for continued change, but also that its viability is strengthened by a growing mass-consumption.

Herein lies the truly complicated facet of the love-hate paradox. Consumers increasingly purchase whether they are satisfied or not. In fact, dissatisfaction with a product only inspires the purchase of yet another probable disappointment. Consumers have closets full of similar pieces of clothing that for one reason or another have not lived up to expectations, which is partly why they continue to purchase. Fittingly, one of Michelle Lee’s ten commandments of the fashion victim is, “thou shalt covet minutely differing variations of the same thing.” If the oft-stated mantra that insanity is defined as ‘doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result,’ is true, then every consumer is insane, at least when it comes to their wardrobe.

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36 Lee, Fashion, 5.
As Kate Fletcher argues, “central” to understanding this cycle “is an understanding of needs.” Just as clothing functions as more than just bodily protection, so clothing is purchased to fulfill more than just this need. In fact, clothing is constantly purchased in efforts to re-define identity, a fact that is even used in advertisement. Merchandisers intend the consumer to buy into the image they promote, just as consumers look for an image to buy into. The problem is that this co-dependent dysfunction has escalated to rampant consumerism in that psychological needs are not easily satisfied, and in some cases even inhibited, by consuming materials alone. Thus, consuming material goods doesn’t stem our desire for more material goods if we are buying them to meet psychological needs.

Buying to fulfill needs that cannot easily be met, affects the demand for what is produced.

If consumers require disposability and a revolving door of trends because they are desperately pursuing identity rather than self-expression, they will be provided with it. Lee describes this consumption as “McFashion,” the so-called “fast food” of the fashion world, “fast, disposable, easy, unintimidating, entertaining, and largely homogenous,” stating,

[O]ur modern-day hunger for more clothes and the latest trends, together with the premium we put on looking good, has undermined

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37 Fletcher, *Sustainable*, 120.
38 Ibid., 121.
our self-esteem, our health, the environment, our finances, our morals—but we continue to be more ravenous than ever.\textsuperscript{40}

According to Everett Rogers’ adoption theory, this “hunger” is most present in the 16\% of consumers who are considered “innovators” or “early adopters” of new trends.\textsuperscript{41} Trend-consciousness is primary within this demographic: presumably younger consumers who are experimenting with style as well as identity. However, an additional 60\% of consumers are interested in fashion trends to some extent. The implication that Rogers identified is that “everybody, except for the laggards” (the remaining 18\%), “care about fashion trends and would like to adopt some of them before they are ‘passé.’”\textsuperscript{42}

This consumption is further escalated by the fact that consumers simultaneously continue to require too little and too much from their clothing. Much is required when it comes to self-definition, a task far too steep for mere garments to accomplish alone. However, too little is required when it comes to the fit, fabrication, lifespan, and ethical production of the average wardrobe. It is here that the consumer experiences the lack of surprise at finding that a newly purchased garment is either uncomfortable or already starting to deteriorate. To some extent, unless something different is expected or required, nothing different will be provided.

\textsuperscript{40} Lee, \textit{Fashion}, xv.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
The growing tendency of consumers to ‘lower their standards’ when it comes to the wear of their clothing is indicative of what G. Birtwistle and C.M. Moore describe as the increasingly prevalent “throwaway fashion attitude.” Evidence of this attitude can be seen in an increase in the frequency of fashion purchases compounded with a decrease in price levels. They write that

[Although consumers only spent 16.6% more in cash terms between 1998 and 2002, in real terms... they actually spend 38% more [at 1998 prices].

This behavior likely accounts for the “increasing quantity of clothing donations over the past few years... in excess of other product donations,” and is further indicative of the “throwaway attitude” in that there is a distinction between whether an item of clothing is still wearable, and whether its original owner still finds it satisfying.

A secondary effect of McFashion and mass-production is that it has encouraged passivity in consumers as well. In the modern fashion marketplace, little is required of the consumer in the purchase and wearing of clothing. Ease is the utmost concern in acquisition, outfitting, and care. The industry has done much to provide the consumer with universal availability of its products. As is often

43 Birtwistle and Moore, “Fashion Clothing...,” 211.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 214.
noted, the modern consumer is, for all intents and purposes, offered the same shopping experience regardless of his or her state, or even country.\textsuperscript{47}

If the idea that efficiency and quantity, for their own sake, have no intrinsic value is taken to its logical conclusion, one may also question whether uniformity has any independent value. Its worth is not upheld nearly as much in other facets of life. The idea that varied experience should be embraced is not foreign; consumers just are not comfortable applying this idea to clothing, and they should be. Rather than express uniformity, garments should express the diverse experiences of their creators and the personal needs of their owners.

In a distribution format that upholds uniformity to the letter, there is little room for a consumer’s input. Exceptions to this idea are present, as are exceptions to any idea. Some facets of the fashion industry have embraced small-scale customization in online programs that provide personalization of shoes, bags, and other products. This movement towards customization does not change the fact, however, that the average American consumer owns one, or maybe none, of these products, and is instead faced with a wardrobe primarily made up of mass-produced garments. It is an almost inescapable destiny for the modern dresser. Fletcher recalls that,

[as recently as two generations ago and for centuries before that, textiles and garments were regularly made and maintained by those who wore and used them, yet few people have those same skills today.]

\textsuperscript{47} Lee, \textit{Fashion}, 61-62.
Ready-made garments appear to offer us the promise of something better than we could make ourselves.\textsuperscript{48} 

This fact is unfortunately true in today's society, regardless of the quality of the ready-made garments. For while fashion is on the rise, the skills that would be helpful in providing consumers with the tools they need to have a healthy relationship with their clothing are not.

The average consumer has such little knowledge of fabrication, garment care, and alteration that an informed choice is all but impossible. In fact, stumbling upon a garment that is flattering and wears well is just as likely to be an accident as it is to be the result of careful research and choice. Well-made basic clothing items such as t-shirts, that are picked up haphazardly, become favorites, are worn the most, and last longer in closets than the items purchased because they are loved in the store. This process results in the strange phenomenon wherein \textit{consumers do not wear what they consciously consider to be their most attractive garments.}

Ignorance does not empower consumers to have an active, stable, and conscious relationship with their wardrobe. They do not know it well enough to be in control. Rather, they are at its mercy, or at the mercy of those in industry who know enough about fashion to provide the consumer with a decent product they would purchase themselves. Mass-production's true value in industrialized society was that it made fashion accessible. That is no longer entirely the case. Fletcher describes industry's relationship to the consumer best, stating,

\textsuperscript{48}Fletcher, \textit{Sustainable}, 187.
Here disengaged, passive consumers ‘follow’ the trends prescribed by industry and choose between prefabricated, largely homogeneous goods. These products boost ‘elitist myth production upon the catwalk altar’ and allow the fashion system to mystify, control and ‘professionalize’ the practice of designing and making clothes and further dictate how we consume them... the result is dissatisfied individuals who feel both unrepresented by the fashion system and unable to do anything about it.49

The burden of responsibility for this flawed system rests equally upon the producer and consumer. It is incredibly important that the fashion industry produce well-made, conscientious garments to satisfy its consumers’ needs. Mass-production in its current massive state rarely satisfies anything but the desire for quantity. Then again, quantity is what is demanded by the average mass-consumer, and quantity is profitable.

Designers and the industry at-large like the idea of this so-called ‘professionalized’ fashion. It gives creative license, a luxury that fashion careers are built upon. It is even mythologized in the passionate statement that, this or that design is, or is not “true to me.” Fashion professionals are educated to consider the consumer, but it is all too easy to confuse designing a garment that would function in a consumer’s lifestyle with designing a garment that she would buy. Considering escalating consumerism, point of purchase alone is not much of a ruler by which to measure the quality of design work. Every consumer has qualms, whether they are horizontal stripes or certain colors, but once in a store, a passive consumer can

49 Fletcher, Sustainable, 119.
easily be persuaded by merchandising and perfectly coifed mannequins. Moreover, the industry is more than aware of this tendency. In the ongoing battle between what designers like and what is realistic, they are far more willing to lean toward the first extreme. It just seems like more fun.

While artistic expression and a unique eye for beauty is something to be celebrated, it cannot be the primary motivation for designing and creating clothing. The motivations of art and service to the consumer are often appealingly intertwined, but the fashion industry is, or at least should be, *primarily* in the business of providing a service. If flair for artistic license is taken to its extreme, creative whims are merely foisted upon the public without caring if they adequately express or serve the public. This level of extremity might not be reached, but designers must be aware of where they perceive validation, whether in their own expression, or in the consumer’s satisfaction. A mandate that values consumer satisfaction is not to say that a designer should receive no validation from his or her work. Validation of this kind is necessary for the enjoyment of an artistic job, and therefore, for the ability to do the job well and with novel approach. The absence of this personal satisfaction puts a designer at risk for artistic burnout. *However,* knowing the capacity of clothing to become so much a part of the wearer, industry professionals should take their role in relation to the consumer very seriously. Careful thought and research on the part of the designer is valuable to the field of fashion design and also increasingly necessary.
If fashion is exalted for its ability to express personal and cultural values, the sad reality is that contemporary fashion, at least in the mass-production format, expresses quantity, as it is the primary need satisfied. ‘Style on the industry’s terms and quantity on the consumer’s’ is not the axiom of a creative, thriving, and valuable field. It is indicative of commercialism. Responsibility for this message lies in the hands of both the fashion industry and the consumer.

Fashion, in the modern sense, has been made profitable because consumers have made it so. They have that power, but are they pleased with what they have sustained? The power to sustain those things found valuable should lend itself to a certain amount of pride and fulfillment. So where is the pride the average consumer should have in his or her clothing? It can be sensed sometimes when complimented in passing. More often then not, however, it can be argued that the sense of satisfaction the consumer should have in wearing a piece of clothing that has been carefully selected is replaced by the fleeting pleasure he or she has by simply wearing something new.

At some level, the consumer is aware of this penchant for novelty. How often, when complimented on a piece of clothing does he or she respond with some variation of “thanks, it’s new,” or “thanks, it was on sale?” In truth, this is a common response because in many ways the average consumer’s active interaction with clothing ends at the purchase. Clothing is washed, cared for, and selected to be worn, but often the consumer would not know what else to say about a garment other than remarking on its newness or its price. That is the extent of consumer
expertise, or at least the expertise they would feel comfortable talking about, and it is just the tip of the iceberg.

Implicit within this idea is an argument for a more active relationship between the consumer and his or her fashion choices. Consumers should take pride in their clothing because it was made well, made ethically, is beautiful and becoming, and because it was chosen for those reasons. There is satisfaction to be found in wearing carefully selected clothing that is the product of active involvement. Pride in clothing should not be dependent on the nod of approval from a passing acquaintance and should not be measured merely by price or novelty. In fact, fashion consumed in this cost-motivated manner, “in the form of merchandise,”

... produces an effect of alienation... since the price of merchandise, its hard cash equivalent, is completely indifferent to the work that has produced it... the human qualities of such work are transformed into the only value admissible in the capitalist metropolis.50

Such a point of view may be extreme, but it does hint at the underlying, less-polarized conflict between something that should be regarded very personally and the impersonal nature of purchase. Further, it does not begin to describe the potential for an intimate relationship between the purchaser and the garment, where the garment acquires human qualities in a way completely indifferent to numerical value.

50 Calefato, Clothed, 43.
In responding as wearers do to compliments on their garments, they are in many ways undervaluing the potential of clothing. Would not they rather respond with some personal statement regarding the garment’s quality or how it fits into their lifestyle? Those seemingly would be features of greater importance. Instead they might as well be responding, “thanks, it’s disposable.” In these circumstances, consumers do not just buy clothing for less-than-valuable, or personal reasons, they admit to it. A wearer’s knowledge of his or her wardrobe, that which he or she uses or allows to express identity, is restricted to the retail experience: the point of purchase, and therefore reflects the valuation of it is as well.

Consumers must not only question what their buying habits say about their style, but also what they are buying. They must re-evaluate that to which they are giving the power of self-definition, and examine the messages they are unintentionally promoting. The values projected through rapid production and consumption of fashion in general is a separate thing entirely from the specific messages sent in embracing a certain aesthetic through clothing. As previously stated, the value of efficiency depends on the value of what is being made efficient. While conclusions can be drawn regarding the perils of efficiency for efficiency’s sake and its effects on the consumer, it is also necessary to examine the meaning behind the aesthetics of that which is produced so efficiently, and expressed visually.

Any analysis of fashion’s numerous and perpetually changing aesthetics must first begin with an acknowledgement of man’s likewise perpetual “urge to alter his
body.” It is here the paradox presents itself again. While fashion ideally functions on one hand as second skin, a tactile expression of identity, it is also used to express who the wearer might wish to be. Changing conceptions of what is beautiful have likewise changed the way fashion is used to conform to standards of beauty. The ever-shifting erogenous zones have influenced the movement of hemlines, necklines, and waistlines since the earliest documented styles; likewise influencing the way consumers have employed clothing to highlight, obscure, or change their bodies.

Some of these alterations have been more drastic than others. Now largely abandoned innovations such as the corset created a perfect hourglass shape and a miniscule waist while simultaneously restricting proper bodily development if laced too tightly. In hindsight, the extremes of this style are quite inarguably appalling, and contemporary society prides itself on just how far it has come from those ‘barbarous’ days. It all seems quite

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51 Rudofsky, Unfashionable, 93.
uncivilized next to the comparatively urbane way fashion is consumed today.

The idea of exalting and striving for a sort of unnaturalness is not foreign. In fact, it is quite appealing. Consumers still purchase corset-like garments such as Spanx, to make themselves appear unnaturally thin, among other deceptions, and they still spend money in the endless pursuit of clothing that advertises these effects. In fact, it has been argued that the corsetry of the past is not at all different from the types of impractical, often towering, shoes worn today. Rudofsky states,

\[ \text{the corset's crippling effects on the female body were persistently ignored, much as today we ignore the consequences of wearing deforming shoes. That would-be guardian of our health, the physician whose business it is to keep us in good working order, was then as reluctant to interfere with fashion's dictum as he is today.}^{52} \]

While not all trends conflict so radically with health, there is certainly an underlying tension between the natural and unnatural that is experienced, perhaps subconsciously, when a human gets dressed. It is this tension that those plagued with fashion-related insecurities sense keenly. Cursed with a more acute understanding of this principle, some decide they must alter their bodies to fit within the standards of fashion, and carry it out to the extreme, or contrarily, they abandon fashion altogether in favor of something more practical: mere clothing.

The root of this idea begins in part with standardization, for the human body is not nearly as symmetrical as the post-industrial garments used to clothe it. While it may be suitable for the majority of consumers to wear clothing with arms and legs

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{52 Rudofsky, *Unfashionable*, 105-106.}
of the same length because the miniscule differences in anatomy do not require the
differentiation, the logical end must be considered. Imposing symmetry on the body
imposes the unnatural on the natural. The clothing the average consumer takes for
granted today, is not perhaps as ergonomic as it could be. These flaws are rather
accepted as the natural state of clothing. Rudofsky describes the ubiquitous tailored
jacket arguing that,

[w]hen making a jacket, the tailor—a trompe l’oeil artist without fear
and reproach—or for that matter, the garment manufacturer, more
than compensates for what nature withheld. Even a physique about
as articulate as a bag of potatoes in their hands becomes endowed
with shoulders and a waist. The shape is the thing and by no means
the human shape.\footnote{Rudofsky, Unfashionable, 151.}

The same is true of the traditional style of trouser that has seemingly been
universally adopted regardless of country. This cut of pant “represent[s] a typical
paradox of modern dress—an abstract shape, the tube, superimposed upon an
organic shape, the leg.”\footnote{Ibid., 157.} While society should probably not go as far as Rudofsky
and seek the abandonment of the pant, his extreme opinion does bring to light a
rather alarming precedent. Design for the majority of designers begins in the head
and is then translated to the unrealistic proportions of the illustrated “fashion
figure,” and later created on a dress form, with little reference to the actual human
body. The entire design process superimposes unnaturalness onto the natural. It is
no wonder then that fashion has a flair for the dramatic instead of the realistic, and
that the woman of average proportions bemoans the physical constraints of her mass-produced clothing. Although consumers similarly should not seek a complete lack of fit, nor the abandonment of deceptively flattering clothing, perhaps they would do well not to dismiss the organic quality of their bodies so quickly in search of something better.

Trends that advertise the promise of something better than the natural form will never be particularly enjoyable or comfortable to wear. They might be interesting or stimulating to behold, but they will satisfy only in those ways. Designs of this kind will compete with the organic form, and arguably create much of the tension the average consumer experiences when confronted with “Fashion.” It could be argued that the majority of consumers do not enjoy fashion so much as they do the pursuit of it.

Trends in general, or at least the speed at which they currently cycle, do not reach the deep personal potential of fashion. At some point, early adopters may become frustrated with the constant change, leading to one of the preeminent excuses for poor appearance, “I just can't keep up.” This critique walks a fine line for while consumers cannot and should not eliminate change and diversity from their wardrobes, it is vital that they consider the styles they choose to purchase and wear more closely and more slowly.

If trends are considered in their simplest forms as expressions of an idea, it is understood that the value of expression is not determined by the sheer quantity or variety of ideas expressed. Rather, it can be diluted by quantity. Ideas that are truly
valuable should not be abandoned so very quickly. The speed at which the modern consumer unquestionably accepts a new ideal delegitimizes the value of the previous and now abandoned ideal. The consumer may quickly become merely “a stylish peg for clothes.”

If humans crave meaning when confronted with their wardrobes, an ideological quality should be pursued over ideological quantity. Expressing a few things well is far more valuable than expressing many trivial things. Clothing should express a consumer’s most integral, important, personal values in a simple manner. These values could be evident in the ethical production of a garment, the fabrication, the color, the cut he or she finds personally flattering, or even the nostalgia associated with a certain garment or style. Clothing should say something, and it should be something personal.

Designers then, should endeavor to express something of value, not something that is merely visually stimulating, or something that is only of interest or applicable to them. Designers should experiment, but not with the natural form. That is a set constraint not to be trifled with. The importance of this constraint is perhaps most eloquently described by saying that “works of art exist only in the minds of those who create them... the so-called improvements perpetrated on our anatomy are no exception.”

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55 Rudofsky, *Unfashionable*, 123.
56 Ibid., 94.
Designers should be cautious with the trends they promote and pursue diversity, but not just for diversity’s sake. They should seek authenticity and encourage personal interaction between their consumer and fashion. Perhaps most importantly, professionals within the fashion industry should endeavor to avoid the opposite extreme of those values: “the sex appeal of the inorganic, the sex appeal of devitalized nature, of the corpse-like body as merchandise.”\(^{57}\) In the business of providing a creative, functional, service, the fashion industry can, and needs to be, far better than that.

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\(^{57}\) Benjamin.... (1982), 70, 124-126. quoted in Calefato, Clothed, 43.
CHAPTER III
THE BODY ENCLOSED: THE SEARCH FOR ARTISTIC INTEGRITY

The body has not one, but two primary enclosures. Architect Peter Hubner writes,

[humans are much closer to buildings than is commonly thought. Buildings are, in a way, our ‘third skin’. Now that our skin is no longer in direct contact with our surroundings, but is instead protected from the elements by clothing and houses, we begin to understand that our buildings must adhere to certain rules that satisfy more than just aesthetic demands.]

John Ruskin (1819-1900) the philosopher and art critic once wrote that “nothing can be beautiful which is not true.” At a time when the rapid industrialization of society was eliminating the so-called ‘human touch’ from the production of goods, and even art, Ruskin confronted the increasing inclination of artwork to portray little, pre-fabricated meaning, or as he argued, even the wrong meaning.

His critiques were founded on his ideas regarding the production of artwork by numerous disciplines, most notably, painting and architecture. He theorized, and adamantly publicized, the fact that the appreciation of a piece of art by any audience is dependent upon its perception of human input, or the evidence of the ‘artist’s

hand.’ He wrote,

... every good piece of art, to whichever... ends it may be directed, involves first essentially the evidence of human skill, and the formation of an actually beautiful thing by it.59

Taking this idea to its logical conclusion, Ruskin likewise argued that the pre-fabricated and increasingly pristine products of a post-industrialized society would offer their consumers comparatively little appeal. He stated that one cannot “substitute mechanism for skill,” for risk of losing our innate human “delight” in skilled work. 60 This idea is probably best described by the following summary:

Perfect workmanship does not arise from a natural state of things. The moment the average human being sets out to create, she passes from the rarefied realm of the ideal into the inevitability of flaw and mistake. We are imperfect beings, and the things we make and build are naturally inscribed with eccentricity and error. Because these errors are what make us individuals, so called “perfect” work often strikes us as cold and impersonal. In its aversion to error, such work strains to disavow its human origins.61

Ruskin wrote and lectured extensively on his artistic ideals, but his relevant principles can be summarized as follows: First, “the art of any country is the

60 Ibid.
exponent of its social and political virtues.” Here Ruskin recognizes the inseparability of artwork from the environment that creates it. Second, a work of art must possess an appropriate utility, the so-called “vital element.” Ruskin argues that while artwork may be permissibly, if certainly not desirably, awkward or ugly, “uselessness or... unveracity” are the greatest sins perpetrated by ineffective art. And lastly,

... the mind of man never invented a greater thing than the form of man, animated by faithful life. Every attempt to refine or exalt such healthy humanity has weakened or caricatured it.

Here, as in all of Ruskin’s critiques, he upholds nature as the primary and indomitable inspiration for all artistic endeavors.

Ruskin’s ideals became ‘artistic gospel’ for a group of artisans that famously emerged in the 1880s to create what is now known as the Arts and Crafts Movement. The unifying theory that linked these artists from an array of disciplines was a response to the lack of integrity they perceived in their environment. Industrialization, they believed, had removed the ‘soul’ from produced good such as furniture, housewares, textiles, and buildings that had previously been labored over by an artisan’s hand.

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62 Ruskin, Selections.  
63 Ibid.  
64 Ibid.  
65 Ibid.
These pieces no longer expressed the artistic intent of a personal creator, the values of society, or the customized needs of the consumer, but increasingly expressed little other than their uniformity. The artifacts left by this industrialized society would tell little, or at least little that was truly valuable, about the humans that had created them. The products of human hands were alarmingly beginning to lose any evidence of the humanity that they had originally expressed. In her book, *The Arts and Crafts Movement*, Gillian Naylor writes the following concerning the motivation behind the movement:

In a little over a generation, therefore, industry seemed to have outgrown its early promise, and far from being considered a source of rejuvenation and vitality, a tool that would unite and improve mankind, it had come to be seen as a negative force, stultifying both artist and artisan.  

In response to this perceived fault, participants of the Arts and Crafts Movement endeavored to re-popularize skilled handwork, custom design, and overall craftsmanship, these “endeavours” being “directed, ultimately, towards a social end.” As Naylor writes,

[t]heir concern... was not focused exclusively on end-products but on the society that shaped them, the men who designed and made them and on the people who bought them.

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67 Ibid., 7.
68 Ibid.
They formed societies and guilds intent on practicing and improving their skills, and created literature to document their ideals. In radical opposition to industrialization, they wrote of the “pleasure which comes from kinship with Nature and the kind of work that calls forth all their resources in the way of self-reliance and the power of initiative.” While Arts and Crafts styles became popular in home furnishings and textiles, the discipline that took the successful application of these ideals the furthest, was that of architecture.

It can be argued that a home, one of a human’s most personal possessions and bodily enclosures, would suffer the most from a want of human input, just as it would flourish when carefully crafted and furnished. It is for this reason that one may feel uneasy in an empty or abandoned home, for these buildings are not entirely serving their purpose. They lack humanity. As the body’s ‘third skin,’ it is the function of architecture to intimately serve its dweller. Houses without either dweller or evidence of personal touch are not actually homes in that they do not fulfill this vital function. Therefore, styles that express a human connection, such as the Arts and Crafts Movement, would inevitably create innately appealing, warm, and natural human environments, or at least that would be the intent.

The Arts and Crafts style of building was probably most notably seen in the appropriately named American Craftsman style of architecture. This style, popularized in the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s, fulfilled these ideals not only in its emphasis on the ‘craftsmanship’ which its name denotes but

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also in its use of natural materials, intent on functionality, simplicity, and accessibility. While there are numerous mansions and homes for the elite designed in this style, particularly across the West Coast, Craftsman architects became most famous for their popularization of a home for the American middle class family: the bungalow, the so-called “house reduced to its simplest form.”

Housing the middle class was an imperative in complete agreement with the Craftsman doctrine that did not “believe in large houses with many rooms elaborately decorated and furnished.” The Craftsman instead concentrated on designing according to “the fundamental principles of honesty, simplicity, and usefulness,” with regards to the needs of the average American family. The most important implications of this directive were large living rooms to foster “common family life,” as well as small, centralized kitchens to ease the work of matriarchal housekeeping.

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70 Stickley, Craftsman, 89.
71 Ibid., 195.
72 Ibid., 196.
73 Ibid.
The need to house the expanding middle class was a concern shared by Frank Lloyd Wright, who once wrote, “the house of moderate cost is not only America’s major architectural problem, but the problem most difficult for her major
architects.” Beginning with his design of The Prairie Houses and continuing throughout his design work, Wright was especially concerned with satisfying the practical requirements of the American family in addition to the sentient needs of the body. Wright addressed these needs by taking into account a home’s intimate relationship with the body. These bodily considerations led Wright to abandon air conditioning, arguing that “external changes in temperature that tear down a building also tear down the human body.”

He pioneered innovations such as under-floor heating that he dubbed “gravity heat” in order to “produce conditions of comfort by natural means” in a variety of climates.

In addition to immediate physical needs, Wright also considered the sensory relationship between a home and its dweller. Wright made a conscious effort to position the home as an intermediary between humans and the natural

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75 Ibid., 13.
77 Sergeant, Usonian, 13.
environment rather than as a confining “box.”\textsuperscript{78} He installed casement windows, simple glass panes that opened either inwards or outwards, that Wright described as “more human in use and effect,” than the prevailing styles of the day which were heavily dressed and less functional.\textsuperscript{79} He further addressed this imperative by including multiple access points to patios and outdoor courtyards and utilizing primarily natural lighting. In addition, Wright appealed to innate protective instincts by employing low ceiling heights and overhangs that projected from the roof itself, stating “I lik[e] the sense of shelter in the look of [a] building.”\textsuperscript{80}

Fig. 11. The overhang at Kentuck Knob suggests “shelter” and brings natural light to the patio. Chalk Hill, Pennsylvania, 1953-1956 (Photo by Robert P. Ruschak [2001]. Photo courtesy of Robert P. Ruschak and Kentuck Knob.)

Wright’s ‘out-of-the box’ design process

... countered the maelstrom of social and technical change in America by emphasizing rootedness and the security of hearth and family... Usonian Houses endeavored to realize similar goals for smaller

\textsuperscript{78} Wright, \textit{Natural}, 133.


\textsuperscript{80} Wright, \textit{Natural}, 39.
budgets and much-changed conditions of the time of the Second World War.\(^{81}\)

While Wright would refrain from association with the Arts and Crafts and American Craftsman movements in favor of his own self-proclaimed genius, it is clear that these movements served as the philosophical foundations for what would become Frank Lloyd Wright’s ‘Organic Architecture.’ Just as with the Arts and Crafts artisans, Wright’s approach to architecture is indivisible from its historic context. Here too, in the rise of industrialized production, Wright observed a gap between what he described as “quantity production,” and its “non-sentient products” and the intimate end-use of these products, especially homes.\(^{82}\) He spoke passionately against the “maw of the machine,” and “the necessity of ready-made architecture to clothe the nakedness of steel decently or fashionably.”\(^{83}\) And, just as with the participants in prior movements, he reacted against these so-called ‘advances.’

It is in his reaction where Wright differentiates himself from his predecessors. For while the Arts and Crafts Movement shunned ubiquity, and stressed the use of native materials, Wright took the application of their common anti-industrial ideals one step further. Rather than perceiving the organic order as the ultimate inspiration, Wright saw his architectural work as a “modification of the

\(^{83}\) Ibid., 132-133.
organic order.” Therefore, in addition to recognizing the need of buildings to satisfy natural human needs, he believed that at the same time, a building should not conflict with its natural environment. This subtle demarcation would create a positive, nuanced difference in his creative process and the end results of it.

In Wright’s model, one does not use artistic disciplines to express or augment the natural world, but rather, to disturb it as little as possible. Wright states,

> [a] building should appear to grow easily from its site and be shaped to harmonize with its surroundings if Nature is manifest there, and if not try to make it as quiet, substantial, and organic as She would have been [sic] were the opportunity Hers.  

Wright’s process is a rather different approach to design than that with which many are acquainted today. For this method, to some extent, delegitimizes the supremacy of a designer’s creative whims and styles in favor of a more lasting and substantial model for design, and an ensuing lifestyle. ‘Quiet,’ and unassuming, are not the positive terms typically used to describe successful design today, at least in Western culture. This idea is present in the methodology and beliefs of one of Wright’s other influences; the Japanese style. Rudd states that while the beliefs and ensuing artifacts of the West view “nature as a force challenging human intervention to acquire and control nature’s benefits... the East sees nature as a partner in one’s

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84 Sergeant, *Usonian*, 160.
85 Wright, *Cause*, 55.
search for sustainability and continuity.”

Rudd continues by stating that this value is visually expressed horizontally, uniting people with their Earthly surroundings in contrast with the towering skyscrapers of the West.

Wright’s primary belief that buildings should grow from their sites influenced his process as well. As is well-documented, Wright rejected technological advances that had no greater purpose than to standardize, or make ubiquitous that which “was once rare and precious.” Wright believed, “standardization should be allowed to work but never to master the process that yields the form.”

Sergeant agrees that,

> [O]rganic design is the conscious selection of techniques enabling the designer to achieve a desired quality of life. It negates technology for its own sake. The continued existence of the wayside flower is no less important than technical innovation.

It can be concluded, therefore, that employing technology for its own sake undermines the purpose of a project and confuses that purpose with the purpose of the technology.

What Wright and his earlier counterparts pursued in the face of rising industrial production was essentially an integrity of process; a ‘wholeness’ of design from conception, to inception, to final production. For example, if the purpose of a

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87 Wright, *Cause*, 135.
88 Ibid., 163.
89 Sergeant, *Usonian*, 160.
building is for it to be indivisible from its natural site, it should employ building practices that do not interfere with or undermine that goal. The technology should embody the purpose of the design, not its own ends. It should not only appear natural, for humans can sense the difference between apparent and actual naturalness of an object on a subconscious level. A design intended to be organic should be wholly, integrally, and authentically organic from its design, to its production, to its end use.

The importance of consistent design and production is likewise applicable to the materials used to achieve an organic quality. Wright advocated the use of largely natural materials that were native to the site or surrounding areas, or representative of their qualities such as in color or texture. He believed that integral to the design process was the selection of appropriate materials. Wright wrote,

[Fig. 12. Rock that echoes the natural surroundings is used on both the floor and the wall at Fallingwater. Mill Run, Pennsylvania, 1935 (Photo courtesy of www.cambridge2000.com.)]

[first, a study of the nature of materials you elect to use and the tools you must use with them, searching to find the characteristic qualities in both that are suited to your purpose. Second, with an ideal of organic nature, so to unite these qualities to serve that purpose, that
the fashion of what you do has integrity or is *natively fit*, regardless of preconceived notions of style.\(^{90}\)

Despite what materials were considered fashionable at that time, Wright sought to use simple, sometimes unconventional or unassuming materials that echoed the natural environment of his work and the natural intent of his design. At Fallingwater for example, one can observe the use of the native river rock throughout the home, as well as the colors of the native foliage. Similarly, Wright believed that detail, whether color or other ornamentation, should likewise not be used for its own sake.

An excessive love of detail has ruined more fine things from the standpoint of fine art... Decoration is dangerous unless you understand it thoroughly and are satisfied that it means something good in the scheme as a whole, for the present you are usually better off without it. Merely that it “looks rich” is no justification for the use of ornament\(^{91}\)

Here again, the idea of procedural and productive wholeness is reiterated.

The last of Wright’s design principles appropriate to this study is rooted in a building’s relationship with its human occupants. In addition to a human’s sensory needs, Wright concerned himself with satisfying the functional requirements of the average American family. The final step in the design process is an object’s end-use, or in the case of architecture, its suitability and functionality with regards to its dwellers. Wright is famously reported to have originated and followed the design

\(^{90}\) Wright, *Cause*, 129.

\(^{91}\) Ibid., 54-55.
idea that “form and function are one.” This idea is central to organic design, for just as production processes and materials should support the purpose of the design, so should its function. As Rudd writes,

... functional influence and the organic artifact are joined instrumentally and symbolically through an expression of role and purpose in the configuring of the artifact.

Returning to the example of Fallingwater, this principle is probably most notably present in the use of boating techniques and woods to construct the built-in storage units present on the site. The use of these techniques, developed for wet and humid environments aboard ship, supported the function of cabinetry in the similarly wet environment of the riverside Pennsylvania home. By utilizing these techniques, the cabinets had the ability to expand, and contract without buckling or cracking.

This idea further applies to the idea of customization. Wright believed that a home should reflect its occupants’ lifestyles. His architectural process of designing a unique customized home for a family or individual, contrasted with the growing practice of families purchasing pre-conceived design plans when constructing their own homes. Wright wrote,

[t]here should be as many kinds (styles) of houses as there are kinds (styles) of people and as many differentiations as there are different individuals. A man who has individuality (and what man lacks it?) has a right to its expression in his own environment.

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93 Ibid.
94 Wright, *Cause*, 55.
To achieve these differentiations, Wright incorporated a family’s professions, social habits, and daily life into his designs resulting in various designs for various scenarios of use. In the Jacob’s House (1937), Wright borrowed from the Arts and Crafts Movement by centralizing the kitchen to address the needs of Mrs. Jacob. From a single location, Jacobs could “watch the children on the terrace, bring food to the table almost without moving, and join in conversation with guests.”

Wright also increasingly referenced changing social practices by combining the living and dining spaces to encourage informal dining, as a contrast to the pre-war practice of “ritualistic” formal dining. This emphasis on informality is especially present in Usonian designs such as the Pope Leighey House (1941). In these latter designs, Wright also addressed the changing needs of the family by addressing the possibility of

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96 Ibid.
family growth. As Wright stated, a Usonian design plan might, “without deformity, be expanded later for the needs of a growing family.”

Although Wright wrote and lectured a great deal on the primacy of these design processes and beliefs, his practice of them was famously sporadic, especially regarding the functionality of his designs. While he preached the supremacy of a man’s ‘right to expression,’ he reportedly prevented clients from hanging artwork he thought to be ill-conceived, as in the Pope-Leighey House. His work also bears design flaws such as low ceiling height as in the Louis-Penfield House (1955), and universally narrow hallways that would be condemned by any modern building codes. Further, the topic of whether or not Wright’s materials were actually as cohesive as he claimed has been the subject of an entire critical book. It seems that any objective analysis of Wright’s work must acknowledge these numerous inconsistencies in addition to his numerous successes.

While perfection is certainly an unrealistic goal, striving to improve upon the fallibilities of industry should be a perpetual struggle. If there were not some legitimacy to Wright’s principles of ‘Organic Architecture,’ the practice of it would not have continued to survive, thrive, and evolve. ‘New Organic Architecture’ is a field that continues to invite interest in its practice of both these ‘Wrightian’ principles, as well as new complementary ideas such as sustainable and eco-design.

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While ‘New Organic Architecture’ certainly draws upon the oneness of building and site, it also emphasizes a building’s human connection to a far greater extent. As David Pearson states,

> [o]rganic design places special emphasis on developing a sensitive and creative relationship with both the client and the users of the building... instead of having preconceived ideas about form and structure, design begins with the community and the people and expresses their needs and wishes, even their personal idiosyncrasies. Designing for comfort is important too... “wrapping” the shape and form of each space around the function.\(^99\)

Similarly, architects such as Carola, operate under the mindset that “the starting point of any piece of architecture should be the human being.”\(^100\) These ‘New Organic Architects’ incorporate innovative technologies and new challenges into the constant evolution and re-definition of what constitutes ‘Organic Architecture.’ Sustainable design is an interesting evolution of Wright’s principle of using natural and native materials. Sustainability offers the promise of an even more organic cohesiveness in that a building might actually benefit its surroundings. McDonough and Braungart are the foremost advocates of this type of design that argues for a ‘do good’ approach to ecological change as opposed to a ‘be less bad’ approach.\(^101\) As McDonough mused during a recent lecture at Kent State University, “What if I could build a building like a tree?” McDonough’s emphasis is not upon mindless

\(^{100}\) Ibid., 82.
subversion of the human lifestyle for its waste, but rather discouraging this type of passivity in favor of knowledge and active positive choices. Central to this type of sustainable design is the human connection. The end goal is not the betterment of our natural world for its own sake, but the betterment of the natural world because we are a part of it.

The distinctions between these types of human-centered organic design and Wright’s model indicate that for all Wright had to offer as the ‘Father of Organic Architecture,’ he failed to recognize the human body as an environment in itself, not quite so separate from the organic order as he surely imagined, surrounded by human progress in an increasingly industrialized era. Wright’s attempts at clothing design for homemakers, for instance, were designed more to complement the house rather than the women who lived and worked there. Here, Wright subjected human needs to the perceived needs of our natural world, his personal aesthetic, and his own ambition.

Fig. 14. Mrs. Darwin Martin in a dress designed by Wright, c. 1910
(Photo courtesy of lievwilliamson.blogspot.com.)
In spite of these flaws, however, there is an undeniable warmth that can be perceived when entering one of Frank Lloyd Wright’s houses. This emotional appeal is the result of the type of cohesive design process he embraced. The design itself is a far more thoughtful, purposeful, and intimate product than most of the homes average consumers are aware of. The vast majority of the population does not have the advantage of living in an entirely unique home. Rather, new houses on the market today have been built all or in part from pre-conceived, standardized formats from which customers have the ‘privilege’ of choosing.

This lack may not always be perceived, but its antithesis can certainly be sensed. The homes created by more philosophical design processes garner positive reactions because they are imbued with a level of artistic wholeness that is appealing. It is authentic. It is this value that Frank Lloyd Wright expresses when he writes, “above all, integrity.”\(^{102}\) So then, is it possible to apply this concept of artistic integrity to other artistic disciplines whose primary purpose is to serve mankind?

\(^{102}\) Wright, *Cause*, 55.
Cavallaro and Warwick write,

... there is not real opposition between fashion and architecture, although Western culture has insistently encouraged us to regard the former as transient and the latter as enduring. After all, architectural and sartorial structures perform similar functions in deploying their different strategies for framing the body. Garments and buildings alike clothe the human form.\(^{103}\)

In this role, both architecture and fashion share an intimate function in relation to mankind. The so-called ‘second’ and ‘third’ skins provide enclosure, shelter, and identity for the human body in a way the other arts cannot. This relationship is implicit within various *Vogue* and other fashion photo shoots that depict a hard, modern, fashion silhouette against the backdrop of similarly hard buildings or

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\(^{103}\) Cavallaro and Warwick, *Fashioning*, 64-65.
industrial settings, for example, this image from an *Italian Vogue* fashion shoot entitled “Urban Glam.”

Similarly, silhouettes that reference either historic or retro styles are often posed in appropriately historic or retro architectural settings. The use of architecture in this manner, to enhance and clarify the way fashions are perceived by the viewer, is a further indication of the relationship between the disciplines. The “Urban Glam” photo, for instance, is made effective by expressing the same message in these differing, yet similarly functioning, areas of human interaction with the arts.

The same principle is present in Yeohlee Teng’s “Intimate Architecture” exhibit at MIT as well as the traveling “Energetics: Clothes and Enclosures” exhibit which featured her work. Teng’s work, as well as both exhibits reveal a high
awareness of the relationship between fashion and architecture by portraying their shared functionality, engineering, use of innovative materials, efficiency, geometry, and aesthetic appeal. Cavallaro and Warwick speak to this relationship stating that,

... there are numerous points of comparison between buildings and bodies: both breathe air, excrete waste, and have a skeleton, a skin and a nervous system of electricity. Buildings are, in a sense, bodies, and both are machines.\textsuperscript{104}

The occupations of both architect and designer are concerned both with sheltering the human race, and clothing either building or body. It can be reasonably concluded that disciplines with such similar functions, share elements of the conceptual process as well. Certainly, both fashion designers and architects have to consider the balance between artistic expression and human end-use in a way unique to their respective fields. As Paola Antonelli notes,

\textit{[t]he architect’s job... consists of designing not only mere shelters, but also, and more importantly, symbolic spaces. How respectful and efficient they are in regards to these primary needs—and how much talent, personality and innovative energy they exercise in their process—is one measure of their resonance and ultimately of their success. The same can be said about [clothing] designers.}\textsuperscript{105}

Architects and fashion designers alike have been aware of this overlap for centuries. Noted anti-Modernist architect Adolf Loos (1870-1933) published several critiques

\textsuperscript{104} Cavallaro and Warwick, \textit{Fashioning}, 80.
on the shared design processes of the disciplines. He remarked that architecture and fashion share a differentiation from the other arts in that,

[un]like art, which envisions new, revolutionary horizons for the future, the house and the objects of everyday life exist fully in the present, for they address immediate needs. While they also raise a claim to beauty, their beauty is not informed by the traditional dictum of purposelessness, but rather represents an attempt at blending function and form.¹⁰⁶

Applying theories from one discipline to the other begins with motivations. It could be argued that the industrialized uniformity and loss of distinct artistry feared by the Arts and Crafts and Organic Architecture movements is central to the escalating problems seen in the modern fashion industry. The fashion industry is seemingly flooded with ubiquitous styles, and mass-produced, standardized garments that more often than not fail to meet an innate desire for diversity or need for utility. While these vital functions of clothing are certainly more readily available to those who have the means to purchase designer fashions, the average consumer is often left dissatisfied. The imperative of clothing the growing middle class is similar to the imperative of housing them. It is a satisfaction of the same basic needs: individualization, function, aesthetic appeal, and price.

The benefits of applying organic principles beyond that of basic impetus come first in materialization. Clothing should be made from largely natural, organic, and sustainable materials to improve both function and cohesion of design as it

relates to humans. Humans depend on the earth and its resources. In order to achieve any level of consistency, ‘second skins’ should not compete with these resources. This idea is not unlike Frank Lloyd Wright’s primary belief that a structure should come out of its environment, not rival or distract from it. Wright applied this idea in his use of native and natural materials to enhance the relationship between his structures and their surroundings. In applying this principle to fashion, the importance of using comfortable, breathable, and durable fibers in the production of an ‘organic’ fashion must be acknowledged. The benefits of these types of fibers are undeniable to any person who has worn a polyester outfit on a warm day as the product of these factors creates anything but a pleasing, functional, and unassuming bodily enclosure.

The solution to this problem is most readily the use of natural fibers to enclose the natural human form. There is a certain indescribable appeal to the wearing of natural fibers that goes beyond their comfort. As Calefato writes,

[p]erhaps it is the tactile, tangible dimension of textiles that leads us to reflect on how important it is to rid this contact of a production that has largely destroyed the relation between human beings and nature. Perhaps our body continues to hide a secret reserve somewhere, a reserve that resists dehumanization, and in asking for natural contact we are probably implicitly alluding to this need to resist, without even realizing it, as when we enjoy a walk in the mountains, or a swim in an unpopulated sea.¹⁰⁷

This appeal is realized when a consumer purchases a cotton blouse.

¹⁰⁷ Calefato. Clothed, 87-88.
There is a distinction that needs to be made between the use of conventional natural fibers and sustainable natural fibers. While both traditionally and organically produced cotton provide the consumer with similar benefits regarding comfort and care, their effects on the natural environment are quite different. Conventionally produced natural fibers require large quantities of both pesticides and water in their cultivation and processing, arguably mitigating to some extent the benefits of their use. If our garments are evaluated from a larger, integral, perspective, natural beings cannot disregard the effects of clothing on the natural environment even at these early stages of production. A system that simultaneously destroys that which it is dependent upon is not sustainable in the long run. Therefore, the continued sustenance and growth of the fashion industry as a whole is dependent upon an understanding of this larger perspective.

Sustainably produced natural fibers satisfy both the innate human need for natural contact as well as environmental requirements. Organically produced cotton reduces negative environmental effects by using only natural pesticides that

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Table 1. Environmental costs in US dollars per T-Shirt. (Originally published in Sustainable Fashion and Textiles [2008.] Table courtesy of Kate Fletcher.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Conventional Cotton</th>
<th>Organic Cotton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Growing</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginning</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer care</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$3.79</strong></td>
<td><strong>$3.45</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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108 Fletcher, Sustainable, 8-17.
do not negatively influence local water quality and by embracing methods such as crop rotation to preserve the soil. As Fletcher notes, “organic production brings a major reduction in the toxicity profile for cotton.” In examining the footprint of a cotton t-shirt, for example, “the toxicity of the materials cultivation phase of the lifecycle drops to zero [from eliminating chemical pesticides] and overall product toxicity is reduced by 93%.” These improvements do not begin to address the positive difference organic fibers make in social sustainability.

Other natural fibers such as linen and wool can be produced sustainably by similarly reducing the use of chemical pesticides with the resulting reduction of impact on water ecology. Additionally, natural fibers such as hemp and bamboo have been developed largely for sustainable purposes. Both are rapidly regenerative, and can be produced to mimic cotton, or can serve to create sustainable fiber blends such as hemp-silk. The cultivation of hemp increases soil stability, and, when grown in place of cotton, has the potential to reduce the ecological footprint by 50%.

Fashion designers such as Natalie Chanin, Linda Loudermilk, and Leanne Marshall as well as companies such as Levi’s and EDUN embrace the use of these natural and organically produced fibers. Loudermilk has stated,

*I invest a lot of time into my research of fabrics... I am committed to showing that a person can make high design out of the unpredictable.*

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110 Ibid.
111 Ibid., 25.
There is a wealth of natural materials available to us... There is the analysis of the effect on our planet, strong consideration for fair labor, and I always use fabrics that treat our skin well.112

Natural fibers such as these are certainly preferable, but certain sustainably produced manufactured and synthetic fibers can also have positive benefits. Many of these fibers, such as lyocell and nylon, have been developed to increase functionality and comfort through the use of scientific and technological development. Modern architecture too utilizes a wide variety of engineered materials such as ‘smart textiles’ as well as solar technology to increase the interest, performance, or sustainability of structures. While these innovations should not be embraced for the sake of advancement alone, pursuing organic design should not be confused with forswearing technology and its many benefits in entirety.

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The application of organic design principles in form suggests that clothing should be unrestrictive, fluid, functional, and effortless. The body should be considered first. Clothing should conform to the plasticity of the body, rather than the body conforming to the structures of its clothing. There are several ways to address these imperatives.

First, in embracing a more consumer-oriented design process, it is necessary to forego experimentation for its own sake in favor of more lasting, flattering, and realistic silhouettes. Designers must balance their artistic desires to express ‘fashion-forwardness’ and personal messages with the very practical responsibility of dressing the consumer’s body. They must consider, very seriously, wearability, functionality, maintenance, and average human proportions as foremost concerns in addition to artistry and expression. These concerns are not unlike Wright’s philosophies regarding client-customized design, user-functionality, and realistic parameters that he described in statements such as, “let the architect cling, always to the normal human figure for his scale.”

Designers such as Yeohlee Teng emphasize functionality, by considering the consumer at every step of the design process. Teng states,

... my work is strong in functionalism... When clothing is comfortably elegant, you don’t have to wonder how you look, so you are free to think about other things. One is at ease in my clothes... The concepts of style and practicality are not in conflict.

113 Wright. Cause, 154.
Teng satisfies functional demands by considering consumer end-use, innovative materials, and experimenting with “one-size fits all” styles that are both efficiently produced, and easily worn.

As a secondary option, some designers choose to consider the body at the very core of a design, at its inception. Rudd writes that,

\[ \text{[i]n designing organically, the critical point in this process focuses on the decision made at the first state, the stage of ideation. That decision must join the artifact and nature in some coherent connection.}^{115} \]

For centuries, designers have accomplished a coherent connection through draping on either facsimiles of the human form or an actual model. In this way, the design is held accountable to the parameters of a pre-existent human form, instead of imposing its own silhouettes upon them. Madeleine Vionnet (1876-1975) is probably most noted for this type of design, which undeniably embraced a beautiful, effortless, fluid, movement across the body. Modern designers such as Isabel Toledo and Yohji Yamamoto continue to use this method. Calefato, after a meeting with Yamamoto, wrote the following about a film describing his design process:

\[ \text{115 Rudd, The Organic, 14.} \]
The film shows a designer making a dress to measure exactly on a model’s body... as if he were writing on the woman’s body, the designer stands back to get a better look, then goes up to take the measurements. On each wrist is a pincushion, which he uses throughout the session, constantly manipulating, cutting, tearing, folding, and pinning the garment on the model... the fitting session is a way of discovering the pure gesture of dressing and of the garment as the essence, the absolute form of this gesture.\textsuperscript{116}

Meanwhile, Toledo’s process has been described in the following manner:

Just as architects and engineers must consider the strengths and limitations of building materials, Isabel Toledo investigates the properties of different fabrics. From her observations she developed a principle she calls Liquid Architecture to describe the way fabrics of different weights... \textit{cascade into folds, skim the body, and fall like water to the ground... anatomical seaming redirects the natural flow of the jersey, drawing attention to the stress-points.} (emphasis added)\textsuperscript{117}

\begin{figure}[h]
  \centering
  \includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{liquid_pouch_dress.jpg}
  \caption{The “liquid pouch dress” by Toledo. (Originally published in \textit{Toledo/Toledo} [1998]. Photo courtesy of Isabel Toledo.)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{116} Calefato. \textit{Clothed}, 100-101.
The benefit of draping is that it intimately incorporates the organic shape of the body, and lends an underlying cohesion to the process of design, production, and wearing of a garment. Silhouette is suggested by the fundamentally organic, rather than an imposed shape. Here, the structure (the garment), exhibits a oneness with its environment (the body), in fulfillment of the primary organic concept.

Finally, it is important to consider the application of organic ideals to the organization of the fashion industry in general. Organic application in this manner involves the larger perspective of the production chain and a re-examination of human needs. How should the industry satisfy a lack of originality, utility, or design integrity for the average consumer beyond that of materiality or form? The industry must re-think the way it produces.

The argument for organic integrity, that all parts of a product must support its core ideals, argues for conscientious and ethical production. Organic design does
not merely emphasize the relationship between humans and nature, but the relationship between humans and their environments including people. Rudd argues that “the convergence and interdependence of nature, people, and form fundamentally describe the organic in the twentieth century.”

Although the industry has come a long way from the sweatshop days of early industrialization, mass-production in its traditional format does not necessarily count human relationship as a primary concern, which calls its viability into question. Consumers have a renewed interest in products that intentionally embrace human relationship. There is an appeal in wearing garments or accessories that have either been personally made, or that support another element of human life. Evidence of the attractiveness of these products can be seen in the recent resurgence of knitting and crochet as well as the popularity of TOMS shoes among other products that advocate social sustainability by supporting human subsistence. The success of these industries is likely indicative of a more permanent shift in consumers’ interest in the ethical production of products.

Consumer satisfaction through human connection can also be addressed through the evidence of the ‘designer’s hand.’ Garments that are transparently handmade “can address a contemporary search for authenticity.” The ‘designer’s hand’ can be seen in the production of locally made garments that emphasize unique culture and diversity, and in the work of some contemporary designers. Natalie

118 Rudd, The Organic, 9.
119 Hazel Clark, “SLOW+FASHION-an Oxymoron-or a Promise for the Future...?,” Fashion Theory, (Berg, 2008), 435.
Chanin, for example, draws upon this type of human connection in her design work. Her collections under the label “Alabama Chanin” are entirely handmade by skilled local artisans. The creation of clothing in this manner is more akin to creating artifacts that more directly satisfy the organic imperative for human connection.

In order for these types of production to be viable in any scale, there must be an important shift in the average consumer’s relationship with fashion. Smaller means of production cannot support the level of consumerism that mass-production currently satisfies. Something must be valued aside from quantity. Consumers must play a greater role in achieving their own satisfaction, and they must develop an active relationship with their wardrobe. Here, as in Slow Fashion, fashion is presented “as a choice rather than a mandate.”120

Departing from consumer behavior, industry professionals must begin making better choices. It is not sufficient to emphasize consumer change alone, for the consumer is at a profound disadvantage when it comes to making wardrobe

120 Clark, “Slow Fashion...,” 429.
decisions. Designers possess the knowledge necessary to make educated design
decisions that the majority of consumers do not. Acknowledging the reluctance of
these consumers to change their habits, industry professionals must start this
process from the top and re-examine their own habits.

Implicit within organic design is the pursuit of natural aesthetics,
functionality, diversity, sustainability, social responsibility, and ethical production.
This process is necessary for the growth, and evolution of the fashion industry in
both contemporary and future society. To accomplish these ends, the fashion
industry must first embrace that which it currently fights against: time. If fashion
speaks to human culture as architecture does, it too should be categorized as an
artifact, and created as such. The process of designing, producing, and distributing
human artifacts in place of human fads requires more thought, research, and time
than rapid cyclical fashion allows. Embracing time, however, should not be
confused with eschewing change. Fashion should change and evolve, but not out of
urgency. Rather, it should evolve as the humans who design and wear it evolve.

Fundamentally, organic design is about change... Change is coherent
with and inseparable from the passage of time. Hence, it is dynamic
and, as we shall see, this has profound implications in relationship to
the environment, culture, and form.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{121} Rudd, \textit{The Organic}, 3.
This change however, and the resulting continuance of the fashion industry, is contingent on a change in the ways we design and consume fashion. We must begin to realize the organic imperative.
CHAPTER IV

Exhibit A: A Study in Organic Fashion Design

This collection was prepared in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts degree in Fashion Design at Kent State University.

My ORGANIC 2011 collection explores the application of ‘Organic’ architectural theories to fashion design. Frank Lloyd Wright believed his work should not conflict with its environment. Likewise, I believe that clothing should not exist as a separate entity from the body but should flow with it and augment its natural, organic shape. The resulting form is fluid and supple, like the body. In bridal design, I believe this ‘naturalness’ involves the liberation of the genre from rigid formality and archaic structure, and the encouragement of celebration through simple beauty that allows for complete range of motion. The use of largely natural and sustainable materials further provides comfort and also enhances the garments’ natural and organic qualities.

I began my design process by draping on a half-size dress form that allowed me to experiment with the qualities of knitted fabric. I thought that using knitted fabric was crucial to the integrity of the design, in that it follows the lines and curves of the body with a natural fluidity. Additionally, I was exploring a radical contrast between what would be considered “body friendly” bridal attire, and the rather
structured and restrictive prevailing styles of bridal wear. In my choice of fabrication, therefore, I chose the polar opposite: soft, and unstructured knitwear.

The process of draping also suggested the form of my designs. Without the use of boning, the body is quite literally the anchor for the drape, which flows naturally from the body's natural anchors, the shoulders, the neck, and the hips, and across the body. There is a strong emphasis on the back and shoulders, which are partially exposed in each look, so that the garments complement, but do
not obscure the natural bodily form. In addition, these details speak to the fact that the back of a wedding garment is the side most visible during the wedding ceremony.

To further address the concerns of the body, comfort and wearability were of foremost consideration in both the unrestrictive form, the function of the garments themselves, and the fiber content of the final garments. The collection is composed primarily of separates, lending themselves to customization through mixing and matching as well as to the possibility of being worn again in less formal situations. I also included pockets for functionality. The garments are lined exclusively with sustainable and breathable bamboo or hemp, which adhere to the collection’s sustainability and provide the wearer with comfort. The garments themselves are composed of 100% silk in natural skin-toned ivories and beiges that impart elegance as well as a cohesive ‘naturalness’ to the collection.

I chose to extend this cohesion into the accessorizing of the collection, by purchasing handmade artisanal jewelry as well as re-worked vintage pieces to augment each look. For shoes, I dispensed with traditional high heels in favor of comfort and functionality, by purchasing handmade flats composed of sustainable hemp. I chose jewelry composed of leaf motifs and wood to appeal to the human connection with nature. The resulting collection is fluid, natural, and fundamentally organic.
ORGANIC 2011
Look One
ORGANIC 2011
Look Two
ORGANIC 2011
Look Two
ORGANIC 2011
Look Three
ORGANIC 2011
Look Three
ORGANIC 2011
Look Four
ORGANIC 2011
Look Four
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