Writing alternative fashion worlds: frustrations, fictions and imaginaries

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Introduction

The globalised fashion and textile industry is deeply implicated in the devastation of Earth's life-supporting systems, with negative environmental and social impacts generated at every stage of a garment's lifecycle (Fletcher, 2014). As understanding of these issues has developed in the last two decades – driven by academic research and rising public concern – an array of industry-led sustainability initiatives has emerged, typically focusing on production-related issues such as material choice, traceability and recycling. Yet any positive gains delivered by these initiatives are overshadowed by a dramatic growth in clothing production and consumption: the number of garments sold worldwide doubled from 2000 to 2015 (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). With the IPCC (2018) calling for 'rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society' in order to limit climate change to 1.5°C, the need to pursue a profoundly different approach could not be more urgent.

Earth Logic Fashion Action Research Plan, a recent publication by fashion and sustainability pioneers Kate Fletcher and Mathilda Tham, provides a compelling framework for radical academic work in the fashion and sustainability field. Fletcher and Tham's argument is simple: sustainability cannot be achieved within the 'growth logic' that drives the fashion sector and other capitalist business and thus a new paradigm of 'Earth logic' – working within the Earth's capacity to support life – must be created. As they explain, this paradigm requires an uncompromising reduction in resources used in the global North, of between 75% and 95% (Fletcher and Tham 2019). To achieve this, we must look beyond specific strategies for design, manufacture and disposal – which remain the focus of much public, professional and academic attention – to reimagine the entire fashion system.

A participatory project that I founded in 2020, Fashion Fictions, responds to the need for radical change by bringing people together to generate, experience and reflect on engaging fictional visions of alternative fashion cultures and systems. Fashion Fictions uses speculation to imagine radically different fashion systems, rather than – as is the typical approach – attempting to build solutions within the inherently unsustainable contemporary system. Various thinkers, from science fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin to Transition movement founder Rob Hopkins, have highlighted the crucial role of imagination in social change and climate justice. As David Fleming (2016: 209) states, 'If the mature market economy is to have a sequel … it will be the work, substantially, of imagination.'

This paper presents and analyses the 120 short fictional outlines of alternative fashion cultures and systems that were contributed to the Fashion Fictions project between January 2020 and August 2021. The analysis provides insights into the range and scope of contributors' imagined alternatives, identifying common themes arising within them and the imaginaries that the fictions evoke. Overall, the paper considers the kinds of sustainable fashion systems the contributors to this project are wishing for, and how far these wishes diverge from the dominant fashion and sustainability discourse.

Generating fictional worlds

Fashion Fictions' participatory process for collective speculation has a three-stage structure, with Stage 1 inviting people to submit 100-word written outlines of worlds in which invented historical junctures have led to familiar-yet-strange sustainable cultures and systems. In Stage 2's prototyping workshops, diverse groups of participants add complexity to these fictions, while in Stage 3's 'everyday dress' projects, participants performatively enact the prototyped cultures and systems.

Alongside insights into the material and social practices that would arise in the fictional worlds, the research aims to identify historical or contemporary real-world examples with potential relevance to the fictional systems. The overall ambition of the project is to help reshape academic, professional and public understandings of the possibilities for sustainable fashion, from incremental changes to the design and manufacture of clothes to radically different ways of fashioning our identities.

The scope for the imagined worlds outlined in Stage 1 is broad: they could be inspired by personal daydreams as much as academic research or accounts of historical dress practices, leading to scenarios in which, for example, wartime clothes rationing continues to the present day; learning to sew is a teenage rite of passage; or Cuba has become a postcapitalist fashion centre. These outlandish – though physically possible – fictions enable the exploration of diverse approaches to sustainability in fashion, conceptually liberated from the constraints of the status quo.

I wrote the outlines of the first five fictional worlds, drawing on my experience, since 2003, of practising and researching in the field of fashion and sustainability. Recognising the value of diverse perspectives to the project, I then opened an invitation for others to contribute their own worlds. I published details of how to contribute on the project website[1] and publicised the call to my networks via Twitter and Instagram. To catalyse the development of submissions, between November 2020 and June 2021 I ran six two-hour online interactive workshops which guided people through the process of imagining and writing a world. The first workshop was promoted via a festival promoting public engagement with academic research and via Eventbrite; the sixth was run as part of a higher education institution's public events programme. The others were promoted via my social media accounts and by email to those who had expressed interest in taking part in the project. Various higher education institutions around the world ran their own Fashion Fictions activities with their students – from short workshops to extended projects – which generated around a quarter of the contributions.

When the call was launched I provided some initial guidance for contributors, advising that fictions should (a) imagine contemporary realities in parallel worlds, rather than futures in our own world; (b) explore positive and enticing worlds, in terms of individual satisfaction, social justice and sustainability; (c) focus attention on use and associated practices, rather than design and production of garments; (d) be physically possible; and yet (e) think beyond what feels plausible, from the author's perspective. As I ran the workshops, I iteratively developed this guidance into a flexible step-by-step process for writing a fiction. Integrated into this process is an interactive fiction generator which can be used either to illustrate the 'building blocks' of a fiction or to kickstart ideas. I published the process on the project website,[2] along with advice for anyone wishing to run their own world-writing workshop, in early 2021.

The process encourages contributors to start by targeting an issue that they find particularly frustrating within the real-world fashion system. A small selection of frustrations, as recorded on the fiction submission form, provides an insight into the varied nature of these starting points: 'extractive neo-colonialism'; 'the cult of newness'; 'international human and labour justice'; 'overloaded closets'; 'lack of inclusivity in the fashion industry'; 'increased consumption'; 'retail apocalypse'. The frustration is then reversed to create a positive idea. For example, a frustration with homogenous fashion culture might be flipped to create an idea based on localised fashion cultures; a frustration with clothes becoming quickly outmoded might inspire a fiction based on the dominance of classic styles or even uniforms. The next step is to consider and integrate the context for the fiction, for example specifying whether the fashion culture being described is mainstream or underground, and whether it spans the world or is located in a particular region. A backstory is then added to explain how the fictional world developed differently to our own, including a critical

[1] https://fashionfictions.org
[2] https://fashionfictions.org/contribute-a-world/

juncture at which the paths of history split from one another. Finally, contributors are invited to concisely outline what everyday fashion life is like in the fictional world.

Completed 100-word fictions, along with optional responses to three supplementary prompts (relating to the core 'what if', real-world frustration or issue addressed, and inspiration) are submitted to the project via an online form.[3] In keeping with ethical research practices, full participant information is provided; the form documents the contributor's informed consent, anonymisation preference and agreement to apply a Creative Commons licence to their creative submission. This licence allows the use or adaptation of the fiction in the subsequent stages of the project. Each submission is then minimally edited (to integrate a unique world number to the fiction and to correct any obvious typographical errors) and published as a unique page on the project website. I write a short summary of around eight to twelve words to describe each fiction on a page displaying an overview of the full collection of worlds.[4]

Analysis process
This paper presents an analysis of the first 120 worlds submitted to Stage 1 of the Fashion Fictions project. The majority of the fictions are written by individuals, with some group submissions. I do not ask contributors to describe the nature of their interest or expertise on the submission form, but do know those who are within my personal network and have met others at the world-writing workshops. From these contacts I know that the contributors include people with professional or academic fashion experience and knowledge, as well as people whose motivation to participate is driven solely by personal interest. In terms of geographical location, over half (64) of the 120 worlds are written by contributors based in the UK, including nine which I have written; seven worlds are from the rest of Europe; 23 are from Asia; 15 are from Australasia; nine are from the USA and Canada and three are from Latin America.

My analysis focused only on the 100-word world descriptions, rather than the supporting information provided by the contributor – unless this information clarified an otherwise ambiguous element of the fiction. Furthermore, I did not analyse parts of the fiction that described the historical juncture or how the world developed, looking only at descriptions of the contemporary situation in the fictional world.

I conducted a content analysis, defined by Krippendorff (2013: 24) as 'a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use.' More specifically, I used what Drisko and Maschi (2015) describe as an interpretive approach to content analysis, which involves 'narratively describing the meaning of communications, in specific contexts'. They explain that interpretive content analysis requires consideration of both manifest content (that which is literally present in the text) and latent content (that which is 'implicit or implied by a communication, often across several sentences or paragraphs') (Drisko and Maschi 2015). While the process used for the analysis will vary from project to project, 'good content analysis must be systematic, methodologically based, and transparently reported' (Drisko and Maschi 2015).

In this case, the content analysis was documented on an Excel spreadsheet, with one world entered per row and topics added in the columns as I identified them in the data. '1' entered in the relevant column indicated that a topic was mentioned in a specific world, enabling automatic tallies per topic and therefore the incorporation of some basic quantitative elements within the primarily qualitative approach. The initial coding generated 215 topics, with some inadvertent duplication. To aid navigation I then reorganised these topics into rough categories and sub-categories, which I term *groups* and *dimensions*, prompting refinement of the topic list. After some time away from the

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[3] https://fashionfictions.org/contribute-a-world/#submit
[4] https://fashionfictions.org/the-worlds/

process, I worked through the full set of worlds again, adding detail to the coding. The generation and sorting of the interim topic list helped to highlight where I had omitted potential coding, particularly on the first worlds I had coded, and many more topics were added.

During this phase I also identified between one and three topics that I considered to be the central ideas that underpinned the fiction. In identifying these central topics, I gave consideration to the notion of the 'imaginary', used by Lockton and Candy (2018: 3) to refer to a variety of ideas that influence our conceptions of the present and the future, including 'societal-level conceptions [and] shared conceptions of issues such as climate change'; 'myths and beliefs which can motivate collaboration'; 'sociotechnical narratives'; and 'individual or small-scale notions … such as mental models … metaphors … and so on'.

I chose to prioritise brevity when settling on the names for the groups and dimensions, aiming for simplicity where possible. For the topics I tried to stay close to the wording used by the participants in their fictions, including terms that would distinguish each topic from others within the same dimension. The group and dimension names are intended as a means of exploring the data rather than a fully considered taxonomy of aspects of a fashion system; further discussion and refinement is anticipated. Where individual topics are referred to in this paper I identify the dimension and group (in the format *Group > Dimension > Topic*) and use the same approach for dimensions (*Group > Dimension*).

The final analysis comprises 632 topics, with a notable 'long tail' distribution: 63% of the topics are only mentioned once; 32% are mentioned 2–5 times; 4% are mentioned 6–10 times and less than 1% are mentioned more than 10 times. These topics are organised into 67 dimensions, which in turn are organised into 15 groups. Both dimensions and groups vary in size: there are between two and 27 topics per dimension and between one and ten dimensions per group. The groups and dimensions are shown in Table 1; this summary highlights the broad span of the fictions, from areas that are clearly closely relevant to fashion systems, relating to the clothes worn, trends and self-expression, to those which are much broader, from gender and time to relationships with nature and geopolitics.

While I endeavoured to conduct this analysis as rigorously as possible, the subjectivities involved in the process must be acknowledged. As explained above, interpretive content analysis involves inferring the implicit meanings within a text – and I may have inferred different meanings to those that the author intended, especially considering that many contributors will have different cultural references to me and that some have written in English as a second language. Furthermore, while I tried to adopt a consistent approach to coding – coding to an existing topic where the meaning was the same or very similar, and generating a new topic where the meaning was different – at some times this decision was less clear-cut than others. Decisions over the placement of topics within the dimensions, and dimensions within groups, similarly presented dilemmas. To share just one example: the *Natural dyes* topic, which I have located within the *Clothes > Colour* dimension, could equally have been placed within *Nature > Processes and approaches*. Another researcher would likely have made different decisions and generated a somewhat different coding and categorisation.

I will also acknowledge the limitations of this data. Considering the comparatively modest number of contributions and given that many of the contributors are drawn from my existing professional and academic networks, we cannot treat the fictions as representing a cross-section of those with interests in fashion and sustainability. Moreover, it is likely that the shared affinities that have shaped the development of my networks, which include domestic making and repair, will be reflected to some extent in the data. Despite these limitations, I am confident that the analysis provided below can offer valuable insights into the variety and complexity of ideas generated by the people who have generously chosen to participate.

Digging into the data

First, I will explore the data in terms of the frequency with which the topics within particular groups and dimensions were mentioned. Table 1 lists the 15 groups (with the component dimensions shown for information); it also provides figures on how many of the 120 worlds mention the topics within each group, and in how many worlds the topics within the group are central. These totals show that topics within the *Fashion, Clothes* and *Spaces* groups are mentioned in the highest numbers of worlds, and that topics within the *Washing* group are mentioned in the smallest number of worlds. Tables 2 and 3 provide more detail on the dimensions and topics that are mentioned frequently and rarely. Table 2 shows the most and least frequently mentioned dimensions (with group shown for context), sorted by the number of worlds that mention a topic within that dimension. Table 3 shifts to the granular level, showing topics that are mentioned in eight or more worlds, plus those that are mentioned fewer times but that are central in at least three worlds.

Group	Dimensions	Number of worlds in which topics within group are mentioned	Number of worlds in which topics within group are central
Clothes	No material clothes; Materials; Types; Standardisation; Personalisation; Characteristics; Design strategies; Colour; Design elements; Markings	75	12
Manufacture	Contexts; Configurations; Processes; Workers; Transparency; Controls, limits	52	14
Consumption	Wearer perspectives; Restrictions; Cost; Wardrobes; Sharing	44	15
Reuse	Secondhand; Repair, alteration	56	14
End of life	Disposal; Beyond disposal	19	4
Washing	Washing	6	3
Spaces	Local-global; Locations; Places; Events; Media	71	21
People	Wearer demographic; Stakeholders; Organisations	60	7
Skills, knowledge	Learning contexts; Extent; Domains	42	10
Embodiment	Bodies; Inclusivity; Senses; Health, well-being	21	10
Cultures	Distinctiveness, heritage; Patterns; Interconnection; Groups; Gender; Time; Real-world specifics	80	29
Fashion	Themes; Communication; Expression; Trends; Dress codes; Diversity; Value; Connections; Visual culture; Marketing	76	16
Nature	Processes, approaches; Relationships	23	8
Economics, law	Finance strategies; Alternative economies; Capitalism, degrowth; Legal strategies	42	3
Global issues	Climate action; Geopolitics; Technology	25	7

Table 1: Groups; their component dimensions; and frequency with which topics within each group are mentioned or central.

Dimension	Group	Number of worlds in which topics within dimension are mentioned	Number of worlds in which topics within dimension are central
Repair, alteration	Reuse	**47**	11
Stakeholders	People	**41**	2
Places	Spaces	**36**	2

Value	Fashion	**33**	1	
Secondhand	Reuse	**30**	4	
Organisations	People	**30**	4	
Learning contexts	Skills, knowledge	**30**	7	
Contexts	Manufacture	**29**	3	
Patterns	Cultures	**29**	9	
Legal strategies	Economics, law	**29**	0	
49 further dimensions				
Standardisation	Clothes	**6**	1	
Cost	Consumption	**6**	0	
Washing	Washing	**6**	3	
Capitalism, degrowth	Economics, law	**5**	1	
Senses	Embodiment	**4**	1	
Technology	Global issues	**4**	1	
Marketing	Fashion	**3**	1	
Health, well-being	Embodiment	**3**	1	

Table 2: Most and least frequently mentioned dimensions, sorted by number of worlds in which the world is mentioned.

Topic	Dimension	Group	Number of worlds in which topic is mentioned	Number of worlds in which topic is central
Repair, mending	Repair, alteration	Reuse	27	4
Laws, bans, regulations	Legal strategies	Economics, law	21	0
Upcycling, repurposing	Repair, alteration	Reuse	19	3
Domestic making, homemade, DIY	Contexts	Manufacture	17	1
Creativity, imagination, play, fun	Patterns	Cultures	12	1
Celebrities, influencers	Stakeholders	People	10	2
Durability, longevity	Characteristics	Clothes	10	1
Valuing, respecting garments	Value	Fashion	10	0
Swapping/trading/exchanging clothes	Secondhand	Reuse	9	1
Spaces for sewing/mending/washing	Places	Spaces	9	0
Craft/making skill	Domains	Skills, knowledge	9	0
Cultural heritage/identity	Distinctiveness, heritage	Cultures	9	0
Circular system, closed loop	Beyond disposal	End of life	8	2
Secondhand, reuse	Secondhand	Reuse	8	1
Using plants	Processes, approaches	Nature	8	1
Schools	Places	Spaces	8	0
Local production	Local-global	Spaces	7	3
Transparency, labelling, metrics	Transparency	Manufacture	6	4
Androgyny, unisex	Gender	Cultures	6	3
Local fibre production	Local-global	Spaces	5	3
Subcultures, counter-culture, periphery	Groups	Cultures	5	3
Clothes library	Wardrobes	Consumption	4	3

The tables also provide insights into the groups and dimensions that the analysis identified as being more or less significant, via the figures showing the number of worlds in which they are central. Some dimensions and groups are mentioned frequently but are central in relatively few worlds, suggesting that these areas are included within the fictions for context rather than being the crux of the story. For example, while 75 of the worlds mention topics in the *Clothes* group, which describe physical aspects of the clothes worn in the fictional world, topics in the group are central in only 12 worlds. A similar pattern can be observed for the *Fashion* group, and particularly the *Fashion > Value* dimension, which is mentioned in 33 worlds but is central in only one world. In contrast, the *Spaces > Local-global* dimension is central in more than half of the worlds in which it is mentioned, suggesting that when this aspect of a fashion system is incorporated within a fiction it often acts as an underpinning imaginary.

An important aspect of the content analysis not revealed by the tables is the range of ideas about a particular dimension that have been generated by the project contributors. Figure 1 presents an example of this, showing the variety of topics within the *Skill, knowledge > Domains* dimension. This crowdsourced list of knowledge and skills that could be relevant to a sustainable fashion system makes fascinating reading, ranging from the practical to the cultural and stepping into less conventional fields such as body flora, agricultural practices and theatre.

Figure 1: Topics within the Skills, knowledge > Domains dimension, with text size reflecting topic frequency.

Consideration of both frequency and variety can bring to light less obvious aspects of the data. For example, a quarter of the worlds mention topics within the *People > Organisations* dimension, which identify the organisations that are involved in the fictional worlds' fashion systems. Examination of the topics that are frequently mentioned within this dimension (each appearing in five or more worlds) reveals contrasting ideas about who the central players in the fictional fashion worlds are,

which mirror wider debates: from the private sector (*High street/fashion brands*) to the community (*Community-led)* and the state (*Local authority as coordinator; State as coordinator*).

Further contrasts can be identified in the data; a clear example would be the tension between the seven worlds that mention trends or fashions and the four that describe a lack of trends. Reflection on the implications of the ideas being proposed, and particularly on the imaginaries that the ideas evoke, point to deeper tensions. A proportion of the worlds align with what Payne (2019) describes as a 'Promethean' or 'techno-optimist' mindset, which 'propose[s] a future in which cleaner technologies can lead to the gradual evolution of a better industry' while others align, whether explicitly or implicitly, with a 'Soterian' approach, which 'seek[s] to unbind fashion from the unsustainable growth imperative of capitalism itself' (Payne 2019: 6). As Payne (2019: 18) explains, these two positions 'represent not only different perspectives on sustainable fashion, but also two (of many) different perspectives on the way forward for the human enterprise in the Anthropocene.'

Resonances with the wider field
Another way of exploring this data is to consider how the topics discussed correspond with activity within the wider field of fashion and sustainability. With this in mind, I will first examine ideas that are readily apparent both in the fiction data and in contemporary activity.

Reuse > Repair, alteration is the most frequently mentioned dimension, appearing in 47 worlds; the dimension is central in 11 worlds. *Repair, mending*, a topic within this dimension, is the most frequently mentioned topic overall (27 worlds), with other topics in the dimension also frequently mentioned (*Upcycling, repurposing*: 19 worlds; *Altering, adapting*: five worlds). This interest in repair activities tallies with a rise of interest in textile mending in recent years, as evidenced by a slew of new books on the subject (e.g. Rodabaugh 2018; Sekules 2020; Lewis-Fitzgerald 2021). Evidence of interest in respect for garments, which connects with this emphasis on repair, comes through in further areas of the dataset. *Clothes > Characteristics > Durability, longevity* is a frequently mentioned topic, appearing in ten worlds. Within the *Fashion > Value* dimension, two topics – *Valuing, respecting garments* and *Valuing aged garments, textile histories* – are mentioned in ten and six worlds respectively. Longevity and durability are major themes in the sustainable fashion discourse, from WRAP's 'Love Your Clothes' campaign launched in 2014 (Love Your Clothes, undated) to Vollebak's 100-year Hoodie, designed 'to combat every element on Earth … to last for the rest of your life' (Vollebak 2021).

Further ideas within the data clearly connect with the wider fashion and sustainability field. The dataset reveals solid interest in the *Reuse > Secondhand* dimension*,* which is mentioned in 30 worlds. *Swapping/trading/exchanging clothes* and the more general *Secondhand, reuse* are the most mentioned topics in this dimension, mentioned in nine worlds and eight worlds respectively. This interest corresponds with a recent increase in the social acceptability of secondhand: research in the US in 2019 found that 70% of women were prepared to buy secondhand clothes, compared with 45% in 2015 (Butler 2021). Turning to localism, 24 worlds mention the *Spaces > Local-global* dimension, which articulates various connections between local systems and the global context, with the majority describing restricted movement of materials and/or waste. The most frequently mentioned topic in this dimension is *Local production*, mentioned in seven worlds. This focus on localism resonates with the growing Fibershed movement, which works to develop regional 'soil-to-skin' textile economies (Fibershed 2021). The dataset also indicates a desire among contributors for greater valuing of cultural heritage, with the *Cultures > Distinctiveness, heritage* dimension mentioned in 17 worlds. A panoply of initiatives, including UNESCO's work in the sphere of intangible cultural heritage, point to the importance of this theme in real-world discourse.

I will now turn to ideas that are dominant in the fashion and sustainability field but, perhaps surprisingly, do not come through strongly in the fiction data. For many years the expense of

sustainable clothing options has been mentioned in media discussions, yet only six worlds mention the *Consumption > Cost* dimension. Organic materials, which have a similarly enduring presence in the sustainable fashion discourse, are explicitly mentioned in only one world. Despite excitement about the possibilities of digital fashion to address problems of sustainability (Pitcher 2021), only three worlds mention the *Clothes > No material clothes > Digital clothing, avatars* topic. The circular economy and closed-loop systems are perhaps the most dominant ideas in the field today, as promoted by influential organisations including the Ellen MacArthur Foundation. However, these terms are only explicitly mentioned – as noted by the *End of life > Beyond disposal > Circular system, closed loop* topic – in eight worlds. (Ideas about circularity may of course be represented to some extent via other terms, such as repair and reuse.) Likewise, although transparency is commonly discussed as a priority for sustainable fashion, highlighted by Fashion Revolution's Fashion Transparency Index (Fashion Revolution 2021) and technology-enabled initiatives to share full details of production (Arthur 2017), only seven worlds mention topics within the *Manufacture > Transparency* dimension. These imbalances suggest an appetite among contributors in thinking beyond some of the more widespread tropes in the sustainable fashion field.

Some areas are arguably underexplored in both the wider field and in the fictions – most notably the theme of washing clothes. As Rigby (2016: 131) explains, laundry is a resource intensive and highly polluting practice, yet 'in the field of fashion and textiles design research, [it] remains a largely underexplored area'. It is also underexplored in the wider sustainable fashion field, with discussion – in my experience – limited to campaigns to promote lower washing temperatures and concern over microfibres. There is little discussion that explores 'the nuanced details of human behaviour and the reasons why laundry routines evolve in environmentally significant directions' (Rigby 2016: 137). This absence is reflected in the fictions, with just six of the worlds mentioning topics within the *Washing* group. Marketing – particularly advertising – could also potentially be identified as an influential element of fashion culture, which drives desire and consequently consumption. Yet I would not consider marketing to be one of the central targets of sustainable fashion activism, and nor does it appear frequently in the fictions: topics in the *Fashion > Marketing* dimension appear in only three worlds. These shared gaps suggest that even when trying to imagine freely, it may be difficult to notice and address longstanding blind spots in the wider discourse.

Looking beyond the fashion sphere, there are some aspects of contemporary culture that are surprisingly underrepresented in the fictions. For example, despite a notable increase in interest in mental health and well-being in recent years, just three worlds mention topics in the *Embodiment > Health, well-being* dimension. Decolonisation is a further area of societal debate which, while appearing in four worlds via topics within the *Global issues > Geopolitics* dimension, is underrepresented in relation to its contemporary profile. Considering the ongoing relevance of gender-based issues in wider society, it is perhaps surprising that topics within the *Cultures > Gender* dimension, while appearing in 11 worlds, are not addressed more frequently. These collective oversights may be due, at least to some extent, to the way in which the project is framed. Although I have tried to encourage contributors to think openly about their frustrations with the fashion system, and in terms of personal satisfaction and social justice as well as issues that are more typically associated with sustainability, it is likely that preconceptions of the project have shaped the contributions. In any case, there is great potential for speculation in these underexplored realms.

Perhaps the most exciting use of the data is to look for ideas that are less dominant within the fashion and sustainability field, or that push into different conceptual spaces and thereby tap into different imaginaries. The dataset, for example, demonstrates a surprisingly strong interest in domestic making. *Manufacture > Contexts > Domestic making, homemade, DIY* is the fourth most mentioned topic overall, appearing in 17 worlds. Tallying with this, *Skills, knowledge > Domains > Craft/making skill* is the most frequently mentioned topic in the *Skills, knowledge* group, appearing in nine worlds. Interestingly, the fictions show a particular desire for user-led making – and clothing

maintenance practices – taking place in shared spaces outside the home: the most frequently mentioned topic in the *Spaces > Places* dimension is *Spaces for sewing/mending/washing* (nine worlds). Other popular topics in this dimension are *Salons, studios, making-based shops* (six worlds), reflecting a desire for small-scale production and personal service, and *Schools* (six worlds), reflecting an emphasis on learning. This emphasis is also evident in the 30 worlds that mention topics in the *Skills, knowledge > Learning contexts* dimension. While all these ideas are present in the wider fashion and sustainability discourse, in my experience they are not as prominent as they are within the fiction data. Furthermore, as Figure 1 shows, the fictions offer great variety in terms of the ways these concepts might be manifested.

Given that the project invites people to think openly, imagining worlds beyond the constraints of the status quo, it is pleasing to see radical suggestions being explored – from fictions in which people wear no clothes at all (five worlds) to fictions in which standardised garments such as uniforms are the norm (six worlds). Some radical ideas – such as a world in which paid labour is abolished, or those which are built upon alternative histories of civilisation – apply to wider society, rather than just the fashion domain. The dataset reveals a notable interest in economic and legal strategies, particularly via the *Economics, law > Legal strategies > Laws, bans, regulations* topic (21 worlds). While a legal imperative is a convenient fictional device to explain a rapid shift in fashion culture (and indeed a device that I mention within the world-writing guidance as a possible juncture), the prevalence of such regulations within the fictions suggests a genuine appetite for stronger governance in the fashion system. This appetite tallies with ideas in the *People > Organisations* dimension about the role of the state, whether at national, regional or local level, in coordinating practical initiatives.

Perhaps the most unexpected ideas explored in the fictions are those in the *Cultures* group. Within this group are dimensions relating to various cultural aspects that are not specific to fashion, including *Distinctiveness, heritage; Patterns* (comprising topics about common characteristics of diverse cultures); *Interconnection* (describing various ways in which people connect to one another); *Groups* (detailing both types of cultural group, such as *Subcultures*, and specific interests which people cluster around, such as *Veganism*); *Gender; Time;* and *Real-world specifics* (which documents mentions of specific organisations, books, campaigns and individuals, from the National Health Service to Kim Kardashian, and *The Emperor's New Clothes* to Steiner schools). This is an important group in the dataset: two thirds of all worlds mention topics in the group, and topics in the group are central in 29 worlds. *Cultures > Patterns* is the most frequently mentioned dimension in the group (29 worlds). The most frequently mentioned topics in this dimension are *Creativity, imagination, play, fun* (12 worlds) and *Storytelling, stories* (seven worlds), indicating a clear desire for ways of exploring sustainability in fashion that operate on a different register to the dominant debates around metrics and material impacts.

The cultural aspects represented by less frequently mentioned topics in the *Cultures > Patterns* dimension suggest intriguing and unconventional approaches to sustainability in fashion: *Rite of passage, coming of age; Ritual; Spirituality, religion; Common belief; Superstition; Taboos; Rebellion; Commoning; Sharing food, tools; Conviviality; Ethics – do no harm.* A topic within the *Spaces > Events* dimension – *Festivals, celebrations, festive events, parties* (six worlds) – carries a sense of cultural playfulness and significance that resonates with many of the *Patterns* topics. Further less familiar ideas which feel full of potential include topics within the *Embodiment > Senses* dimension (four worlds) and the topics within the *Nature* group (23 worlds). Topics within the latter group include a range of fascinating ideas for ways in which we might use or work with plants, along with ideas that suggest deep consideration of our relationships with the more-than-human. Exploration of such ideas, while niche within popular sustainable fashion debates, will be crucial if we are to develop ways of fashioning our identities that respect the capacity of the Earth to sustain life.

Conclusion

In this paper I have presented an interpretive content analysis of 120 fictional parallel worlds, written by contributors around the world to portray a diverse array of alternative fashion cultures and systems. The analysis has considered both how frequently topics are mentioned and the variety of ideas present within the fictions. Contrasting ideas are evident in the data, from specific aspects of fashion systems to underlying paradigms. By comparing the ideas found within the fictions with the wider field of fashion and sustainability, I have highlighted aspects that are surprisingly underexplored in the fictions along with those which are notably prevalent, radical or varied. The content analysis process has helped to draw out the more unconventional concepts embedded within the collection of fictions, such as those connected to cultural playfulness and significance.

The analysis provides novel insights into the desires and daydreams of those who have contributed to Fashion Fictions. These insights could be used by future project contributors – or, beyond the project, by sustainable fashion activists – wishing to explore fresh territory. The analysis will certainly inform the next phase of the Fashion Fictions project, guiding the selection of Stage 1 fictions that will be explored in greater depth through the creation of visual and material prototypes at forthcoming Stage 2 workshops. For this selection I will particularly focus on the ideas that I have identified as being central to each fiction, and the imaginaries that these ideas invoke; I will endeavour to choose worlds for further investigation that represent a variety of perspectives, while keeping in mind the project's aim of contributing to Fletcher and Tham's (2019) 'Earth logic' scholarship and activism.

The positive response that this project has received to date provides evidence of a latent desire for imagination, speculation and playfulness in the sphere of fashion and sustainability. I look forward to seeing this work grow and mature via the Fashion Fictions project and other initiatives that dare to ask a simple but transgressive question: what if?

Acknowledgements

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