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Fashionable detachments: wardrobes, bodies and the desire to let go

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ABSTRACT
Consumers are increasingly asked to "empty out their closets," to "de-clutter" or in other ways detach themselves from the textile surplus of their wardrobes. In this article, fashion is examined as a process of detachment. Building on ethnographic wardrobe interviews, wardrobe clearances and group discussions with consumers, detachment is viewed as a fundamental, yet underexamined, process of fashion practices. Drawing on the queer phenomenology of Sarah Ahmed, we observe how the informants express a desire to detach themselves from the fast fashion system and become more sustainable, less dependent on consumption and more oriented toward emotional investment. Being oriented towards specific pieces of clothing allowed for attachment to that which is already here thus opening up for a relationship with clothing based on joy and care, rather than the unsustainable focus on the newly produced.

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Introduction

The consumption of fashion has increasingly become a matter of concern for society, individual consumers, and the fashion industry. Consumers are asked to "empty out their closets," "de-clutter", or in other ways detach themselves from textile surplus in their wardrobes by putting goods back into circulation (Gregson, Metcalfe, and Crewe 2007b; Woodward 2015). NGOs and charity shops offer clothes swapping events in order to make use of existing textile resources. Similarly, many high street fashion stores[1] offer discounts when old garments are traded in, often with the intent of taking garments out of circulation in order to replace them with the store's newly produced goods. This article examines fashion as a process of detachment. We contend that while attachments to new garments, styles, cuts, and fashions are a fundamental part of the understanding of fashion (Aspers 2001; Entwistle 2009; Cochoy, Deville, and McFall 2017), the equally central process of detachment from what is already in possession and use has not been given the same attention (Gregson, Metcalfe, and Crewe 2007a).

Analytical engagement with the meanings of detachment within the cultures of style and consumption can help tackle the challenges of sustainability facing contemporary fashion. Drawing on ethnographic wardrobe interviews, wardrobe clearances, and group discussions with Swedish consumers, we view the process of detachment as a fundamental facet of "the fashion system," but also of consumers' everyday fashion practices. Each day as we dress and undress we attach

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[1]For instance, "Arken" and "Afound," both part of the fast fashion chain H&M, offered discounts in 2019 when old garments were traded in.

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and detach our bodies from clothes, as well as the expectations, dreams, and desires associated with those clothes. Drawing on the queer phenomenology of Sara Ahmed (2006a, 2006b), detachment is analysed as a central process in consumers' relationship with their clothing, as well as in the "fashion system" (Wilson 1985; Crane 2000; Entwistle 2000; Breward 2004).

The purpose of the article is to examine how consumers understand and engage with processes of detachment in relation to the fashion system and their own wardrobes. By examining consumers' relationship with the content of their wardrobe we ask under what circumstances detachment can help create more sustainable relations with the fashion industry's products. Thus, our paper contributes to the understanding of how detachment strategies become qualified as political, and the consequences for matters of sustainability (Hawkins 2013).

Clothing is intensely intimate and thus a consumer good with high potential for emotional attachment. Consumers describe their clothing as "part of me" or "who I am." Consequently, we found that detachment from the unused content of one's wardrobe implicated detachment from much more than just the garments, and that it was intensely related to self-image, body-image, and gender norms (Woodward 2007; Gregson, Metcalfe, and Crewe 2007a). We also noticed that many consumers wanted to distance themselves from fast fashion and develop a more independent way of relating to clothing, detaching themselves both from unnecessary garments and from the desire to buy new fashion goods. Thus, detachment figures in three different ways in our paper:

(1) Detachment from the clothes in one's wardrobe, either as an active process of clearing out undesired garments or as a passive state of disinterest or apathy towards them. Many consumers thought parting from clothing was a difficult process – even garments they had not used in years.
(2) Detachment as the ever-present companion to the objects of attachment, towards which attention and intention are directed. Depending on which direction one faces, some things will fall out of view while others remain in focus. How these patterns are formed through the consumption of clothes is a point of some importance when examining the processes of holding on or letting go.
(3) Detachment as a desirable, yet hard to attain, state of independence from consumption and the logic of fashion, as well as resistance to "the fashion system." In striving for this kind of systematic detachment, new attachments were formed that instead seemingly made the former even harder to achieve.

Fashion as detachment

Fashion builds on the constant tension between surface and depth. It has been theorized through its relation to time or zeitgeist, as well as to cycles (Veblen 1899; Simmel 1904; Wilson 1985; Lipovetsky 1994; Gregson, Brooks, and Crewe 2001). The logic of fashion is change and the constant movement of styles, garments, and seasonal changes leads to speed-related terms such as fast fashion and slow fashion, suggestive of, as Walther Benjamin put it, "a leap into the past to create an ever-changing present" (see Lehmann 2000, 174f). However, embracing the new always involves some form of detachment from the old, be it styles, garments, or even social roles. Central in theorizations of fashion is its relation with social mobility (Wilson 1985; Crane 2000; Entwistle 2000; Breward 2004). Adorning the body and investment in beauty has let, or at least promised, individuals – women in particular – to leave their social background behind (Gundle and Castelli 2006). Thus, movement is fundamental to fashion in several ways, as well as detachment from the old and the existing.

The interest in fashion that emerged out of cultural studies in the 1980s aimed to challenge earlier views of fashion as immoral and superficial, or as unworthy of academic attention due to its associations with femininity (Wilson 1985; McRobbie 1989, 1994; Entwistle 2000). Once analysed as a site for pleasure and postmodern forms of resignification (Hall 1997; Nixon 1997), in later years fashion has been targeted as a dirty industry, exploiting its workers, and as a "dead" creative art form (see e.g. *New York Post* January 20, 2018). By its use of natural resources, fashion is among those industries

with the largest impact on the environment. However, and as argued by Entwistle (2015), the critique of fashion within contemporary sustainability debates often chimes with those earlier and challenged views of fashion.

Fletcher (2015; 2016) questions the strong relations between fashion as a cultural expression or phenomenon and the fashion industry. She argues that the idea that fashion is synonymous with newly produced products on sale in stores has become dominant to the extent that neither consumers nor the sustainability lobby are able to see outside it. Fashion is cut from the context of use and reduced to an object for trade, created to be sold rather than used (see also Fletcher 2010, 2015; Reiley and DeLong 2011). Built into this system is the idea that styles and garments age and need to be discarded rather than cared for, adapted, or repaired.

With materials designed to fall apart, break, and lose lustre, styles and colors designed to age and fade, and business models based on the production and sale of more and more garments, detachment is a particularly developed feature of fast fashion design and business (Fletcher and Tham 2015). Consumers are encouraged to detach from the contents of their wardrobes in order to fill them with new garments. The large focus on redesigning, reusing, and recycling textile materials in many sustainability projects has been criticized for not considering that reduced consumption is the most effective way of improving the environmental impact, as the vast majority of textile waste cannot be re-sewn, broken down, or sold (Lane, Horne, and Bicknell 2009; Chico, Aldaya, and Garridoa 2013; Stanes and Gibson 2017).

Although movement is fundamental to fashion, the focus of research has mostly been put on the act of purchase and how consumers attach to fashionable things or styles (Entwistle 2009). The less glamorous aspects of divestment, ageing, and how things are worn out and lose their charm have, as noted by Gregson, Metcalfe, and Crewe (2007b), received far less attention than novelty and the display of status. The separation of people from their things is, however, equally important for understanding cultures of consumption (see also Crewe and Gregson 2003; Gregson, Metcalfe, and Crewe 2007b, 2007a; Ekström 2015; Brembeck and Sörum 2017; Callmer 2019).

Thus, the process of detachment also depends on *consumer practices*. Letting clothes go depends on us, as consumers, detaching ourselves from the styles, cuts, garments, and fashions we like or used to like. However, getting rid of things is not necessarily an expression of the constant search for renewal or the thoughtless discarding of garments that are still functional. Divestment must, according to Gregson, Metcalfe, and Crewe (2007a) be understood as a practice, tightly interwoven with human relations. Things are put into circulation as a reflection of life and lifestyle. People move, bodies change, and family relations transform. Further, the practice of throwing out clothes, giving them away, or keeping them inactive in the closet does not mean they are no longer treasured.

In the last decades the development of consumption research has largely moved toward the study of everyday, mundane forms of consumption, such as the routine and non-representational forms of provisioning and the preparation of food, often inspired by practice theory (cf. Lury 1996; Miller 1998; Shove 2003; Warde 2005; Evans 2019). In fashion, a similar development has been to focus on the material culture of dress, sometimes elucidated by emphasis on separating the process of fashion from the materiality of clothing (Kawamura 2004; Miller and Woodward 2012). We argue, however, that fashion and dress is related and that a separation risks perpetuating ideas of fashion as superficial and commercial, while situating clothing and dress in the lives of "real" people. Instead, we follow Entwistle's (2000) definition of fashion as a "situated bodily practice" (71).

Theoretical framework

In order to frame the processes of detachment and attachment, we will use Sara Ahmed's (2006a; 2006b) queer phenomenology as our point of departure. The phenomenological focus on the sensory experiences situated in everyday life means that the forms of detachment dealt with here primarily stem from the consumers' first-hand experiences, rather than from a systematic analysis of the fashion industry (cf. Candea et al. 2015, 19–22). At the center of this perspective is human

intentionality – directedness – and how it is entwined with the social and material conditions of the worlds we inhabit. The surrounding landscape changes as people move throughout their life-worlds, as do the conditions of intention (Frykman and Gilje 2003, 42; Ahmed 2006b, 543). The phenomenological approach allows for ways of feeling – in both emotional and tactile senses – to be considered when theorizing how forms of detachment emerge from the relationship to material possessions.

Intention, attention, and desire are directed towards objects that appear in our surroundings (Ahmed 2006a, 27). These objects may be material, or they may come in the shape of dreams, moods, or emotions. Among the objects that will be examined are specific pieces of clothing, as well as the content of people's wardrobes as an undifferentiated mass, the logic of fashion as an abstract entity and the state of detachment in itself. No matter their form, objects serve as landmarks that allow for a sense of direction and meaning as one moves forward. Ahmed describes this as being oriented – i.e. knowing one's place in the world – which entails knowing what is here or there, near or far, desirable or to be avoided. Transposing this mode of analysis to the case of detachment, we argue that being oriented towards something is a way of attaching to it. As one turns to face an object, other things are relegated to the background and fade out of view, thus allowing for detachment (cf. Ahmed 2006b, 545f). With this understanding, the processes of attachment and detachment become closely interlinked in the ways people face one way and not another.

However, orienting oneself is hardly an arbitrary undertaking. What is viewed as a desirable object for attachment is often dependent on what has been pointed out to us by others. They are therefore most often shared, shaping collective orientations. The lines formed in the landscape where others have already traveled offer the promise of frictionless passage towards a good life (Ahmed 2006b, 553–555). In departing from the straight lines of orientation that make out norms and expectations, instead opting to follow deviating or *queer* lines, other ways of being in the world become attainable. However, doing so also runs the risk of leading to disorientation and of losing one's sense of place. While queer orientations may be most closely associated with the lines of gender and sexuality, the same process can be traced in deviations from most conventional fantasies of the good life. As people follow and invest in a certain line of orientation and the futures it promises, it becomes harder to change direction due to the fear of losing track of the already invested parts of oneself (Ahmed 2006a, 17–19). Following this line of reasoning, patterns of attachment and detachment are entwined with normative ideas of what is good – or bad – in life. In dealing with sustainability, this becomes a question of examining how orientations towards sustainable lifestyles are formed, as well as shedding light on how these aspirations may clash with the practices of everyday life.

While the entwinement of human subjects with the material world is a central premise within phenomenology, the perspective has been criticized for granting analytical primacy to human intention and action, thus reducing the world to what human cognition or interest is able to perceive (cf. Crease et al. 2003, 16–17; Latour 2005). A straightforward way of reconciling the phenomenological perspective with the study of material agency, as suggested by Andrew Pickering (in Jensen 2003, 88), is to simply treat intentionality and the ability to imagine future events as properties of the human being. Like the qualities of any non-human entity, they allow themselves to be examined and – as we shall see – are properties of some importance when exploring the lines of attachment and detachment that run through the wardrobe.

Methodological considerations

As a concept, a wardrobe may refer to a piece of furniture or to a set of clothes that a person owns (Cwerner 2001; Guy, Green, and Banim 2001; Bye and McKinney 2007; Woodward 2007). Wardrobes have strong symbolic meanings, relating to intimacy and privacy. "Coming out of the closet" is a frequently used term to address the revealing of secrets, particularly concerning (homo)sexuality (Cwerner 2001; Guy, Green, and Banim 2001; Bye and McKinney 2007; Skov 2011; Klepp and Bjerck

2014; Lövgren 2015). As such, the symbolism of the wardrobe relates to change; it is a space a person steps into, only to come out as another, marking the difference between night and day, public and private, indoor and outdoor, work and leisure.

This study draws on the methodological traditions of ethnography and wardrobe studies, employing qualitative methods and an iterative-inductive approach for mapping out how cultural patterns emerge in people's everyday lives (O'Reilly 2005, 3; Ehn, Löfgren, and Wilk 2016; Woodward 2016, 359). This entails a view on the object of knowledge as a matter of composition, where the research participants' experiences, theoretical perspectives, methodological praxis, and the researcher's own predispositions all contribute (cf. Mol and Law 2002, 59). These components do not exist in fixed relationships to one another, but shift and develop as a more in-depth understanding of the phenomena at hand is reached (Pink et al. 2016). Wardrobe studies is a field closely related to fashion studies, but with focus on the intimate and personal relationships people have with their clothes. As argued by Lise Skov (2011), wardrobe studies compensate for the over-reliance on the act of purchase within many studies of consumption and allow for an understanding of how people use and live with goods. The view of fashion as change and novelty are challenged, and the practices surrounding clothing are anchored in personal biographies, as well as in the repetitive, unconscious, and mundane aspects of everyday life (Douglas and Isherwood 1996; Skov 2011; Klepp and Bjerck 2014; Woodward 2016; Stanes and Gibson 2017). Practices of fashion do not only manifest the importance put on the body's appearance in the construction of self, they are also the slow, constant repetitions of daily rhythmic social life (see also Woodward 2007).

The study comprised two groups of informants.[2] The first consisted of ten persons – men and women – who participated in a semi-structured "wardrobe interview" during which their relationship to clothes and consumption was discussed while the contents of their wardrobe were reviewed (cf. Klepp and Bjerck 2014; Fletcher and Klepp 2018). All were recruited through open calls for interviewees posted through social media, on the university's webpage, and on physical noticeboards. As a result, most claimed to have a special interest in fashion, sustainability, or both, and that they chose to participate in order to further reflect on these issues. The majority of the informants were in their 30 and 40s, with children still living at home, and thus they regularly bought clothes for others as well as themselves. Much research conscerning sustainability and fashion is geared towards younger adults. However, we found that focusing on consumers who've also had more time to accumulate a collection of clothes afforded us with a long-term perspective on procuring, using and divesting garments. With more or less established lives, careers and homes, the informants gave us a perspective on how the relationship to clothing and fashion became a habitual component in everyday life over time.

The interviews were performed in the informants' homes, typically starting out with questions about the interviewee's personal background and their views on style, fashion, consumption, and sustainability. This was followed by a literal move to the wardrobe, where the informants were asked to show and talk about certain categories of garments, such as what they typically wore to work or to school, what they put on in order to feel comfortable or to look good, what they never used, what they regretted buying, or what they planned to use in the future. The informants were prompted to elaborate on their choices, in order to further address the tactile or bodily dimensions that influenced what they did or did not use. While not all garments were discussed in detail, the informants were continuously encouraged to comment on the contents of shelves and hangers they left out when asked to show categories of clothes.

Ethnographic interviews were chosen as the primary method because of their ability to address that which is not present – such as past or future events – allowing for the moments that constitute everyday life to be viewed in relation to the longer lines of orientation that permeate the informants' lives (Gray 2003, 71). The biographical details told through an interview risk becoming skewed

[2]All informants quoted in the article were given pseudonyms in order to protect their identities. All quotes were translated from Swedish to English by the authors.

towards general notions of causality and rationality, often hiding emotional or corporeal experience (Gray 2003, 46; Kusenbach 2003, 462). However, as Skov (2011) points out, the emotional and spatial closeness of the wardrobe and the clothes within allows the intimate and bodily dimensions of the owners' everyday lives to come to the surface. Reflexive accounts were attained by turning to the clothes during the interviews, as the informants re-evaluated and developed previous statements when faced with the actual contents of their wardrobes, compared to the more idealized narratives initially given in our conversations (cf. Klepp and Bjerck 2014; Woodward 2016, 362).

The second group was the ten participants – all women, between 20 and 40 years old – of a monthly recurring series of workshops on sustainability and fashion, held during the spring of 2019. As part of the workshops the participants received lectures on topics such as the environmental impact of the textile industry and how to mend or redesign clothes. They also committed to not buying any new garments for the duration of the workshop series and had to perform a thorough review of their own wardrobes, removing clothes no longer in use. The workshops functioned as a testbed for a number of research projects, including prototype digital tagging of garments and the development of the workshop format. We attended the workshops and while the participants were not interviewed on a person-to-person basis, we listened to their conversations and analysed recordings of group conversations held by the workshop leader, wherein the participants' personal experiences were shared. Three participants also wrote for us their experiences of clearing out their wardrobes, focusing on the emotional aspects present in the process of detaching from garments (cf. Czarniawska 2007, 90).

Wardrobe matters

As noted above, a majority of the interviewees and all of the workshop participants expressed an interest in clothes and fashion, but their relationship with the contents of their wardrobes was not always entirely joyous (Petersson McIntyre 2019). With few exceptions, there were rows, shelves, or boxes of clothing in their homes that were rarely or never worn. A recurring explanation for this was that clothes were bought because they were on sale, and not because the interviewees felt any strong attachment to the style or garment. Therefore, they often ended up being "not quite right" and were left hanging. Mary, one of the workshop participants, reported that one thing that struck her when going through her wardrobe was how many "wrong-buys" she had made – buying garments because she wanted to buy *something*, but not necessarily *that thing*.

Ambivalence and anxiousness tend to stick to that which one has close at hand, is continuously reminded of or attached to (Ahmed 2011, 181). Seeing these pieces of clothing as the wardrobe is opened and closed on a daily basis, there is little wonder they can become a source of uneasy feelings. In particular, guilt stemming from making the wrong investments was ever-present; a suede jacket, unfit for rainy weather; an easily stained white shirt; garments that magically "shrunk in the wardrobe" (Gregson, Metcalfe, and Crewe 2007b). Stephen, having bought a shirt at a seventy percent discount that he just "had to go for" because it was a "great deal," found that when he got home both the color and the cut did not suit him. While he has used it sparingly, he still resisted "getting rid of it," saying that he "hasn't given up hope" yet. Detaching from something that has not been used simply "feels wrong" and Stephen reasons that he will "have to wait a couple of years and then throw it out." First, it has to let go of its "newness." This shows the complexities of getting rid of things and the importance of considering the emotional investments consumers put into their belongings (Gregson, Metcalfe, and Crewe 2007a, 2007b). In this sense detachment relates to divestment and the counterpart to appropriation or the undoing of personalization and domestication of goods, but here Stephen talks of this process as the capacity of an object. It is the object that has to "let go" – detach.

Nevertheless, a recurring narrative theme was the yearning to detach; to no longer be burdened by the overabundance of clothes and to not feel the desire to buy new things. In this sense, detachment appeared to be an object of attachment, carrying with it the promise of a simpler and more

sustainable life. Ironically, for many of the informants the imagined path to a life free from consumption and the burden of choice went by way of more consumption (cf. Fuentes 2011). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the fantasy of the perfect wardrobe; a wardrobe in which everything fits the personal style, it is easy to find a matching outfit, and all garments that serve as a reminder of poor investments are cleared out. When imagining her perfect wardrobe, the clothes that Ingrid sees are not the ones she already owns, but something simpler, something scaled down, which would make it easier for her to navigate the clutter that she faces every morning.

Ingrid:	I saw a woman who had decided she would wear some kind of suit, she was envious of the men that could just wear a jacket – it was really easy for them to choose. So, she made up her own outfit that she could wear every day. White shirt or blouse with a black bow and some good-looking black pants. I thought that seemed great.
Was that an appealing idea?	
Ingrid:	Yes, it was an appealing. To just … well, partly it looked really good. And then, well, it felt sensible. This is my working outfit. To know that one always looks nice and proper. To not need to reinvent the wheel, or what I should call it. To not need to search for neat job clothes.

The attachment to the imaginary, perfect wardrobe – that in theory would be the end-all of consumption, since all needs would be met – makes detachment from the logic of consumption in the here-and-now hard to achieve. There is a gap between what is already here and what potentially could be, and the only way to bridge it is to add garments to the wardrobe that are a closer match to the perfect ideal (Petersson McIntyre 2019). While this line of orientation is optimistic and future-facing, it also appears cruel, as Lauren Berlant (2011) puts it, in that the object of attachment – the perfect garment or wardrobe – continuously looms just behind the horizon, out of reach. The straightest perceivable line towards it passes through investments in things that expand the content of the wardrobe, in practice putting "perfection" further out of reach.

For future use

The things the informants are oriented towards are not always what they appear to be at first glance. While it is clear there are many ways in which they are attached to the clothes – enjoying the feel of a sweater's thick, wool fabric or the perfect fit of a pair of worn-in jeans – many objects of attachment that aren't readily "at hand" appear as well (cf. Woodward 2015; Stanes and Gibson 2017). These attachments stretch both backwards and forwards in time.

Examples of garments that are kept because of their nostalgic value are plentiful among the informants, such as home-knitted cardigans, a t-shirt inherited from a relative who passed away, or a pair of well-loved jeans that barely hold together. While they might physically occupy the wardrobe, they are in practice "memorabilia," as the interviewee George puts it. They serve as reminders of things past, having lost some or all of their "clothiness," either because of their state of disrepair or by virtue of the emotional values attached to them. In accordance with Skov (2011), we view the wardrobe and the clothing within as a material biography of its owner (cf. Woodward 2007, 2015). The capacity of clothing to bring nostalgic or intimate memories to life serves as one explanation as to why garments are retained, even though they are no longer in use. Clothes linger in wardrobes for many different reasons, such as care, memories, and the maintenance of social relations (cf. Cwerner 2001; Gregson, Brooks, and Crewe 2001; Woodward 2007, 2015; Gregson, Metcalfe, and Crewe 2007a, 2007b; Gibson 2015; Jenss 2015; Brembeck and Sörum 2017; Collins 2020).

Other garments manifested future-facing, optimistic lines of orientation. Optimism, as Berlant points out (2011), is not necessarily a condition devoid of negative emotion – it can be longing, yearning, needing – but above all, it is a state of anticipation for what is yet to be realized. When talking about clothes that hang unused on the hanger, imagined future scenarios frequently served as an explanation as to why they had not become objects for detachment. Some of these scenarios

were grounded in expectation. A suit or particularly nice dress that was not for everyday use might hang in there in-case-of a/an: office party, wedding, or formal event. As such, they enable attachment to social norms of respectability and style, allowing their owners to become prim and proper when the situation calls for it (Petersson McIntyre 2019). Other garments hang in anticipation for the burst of energy needed for reattaching a loose button or mending a tear in the fabric. These garments nevertheless have a history of use – having been bought for a certain occasion or having been worn until worn-out. Other anticipatory objects of attachment are more transient, associated with imagining the kinds of futures one wants to be part of and, by extension, the kind of person one wants to become (cf. Ahmed 2006b, 554; Gregson, Metcalfe, and Crewe 2007b). These kinds of forward-facing attachments can be traced in George's telling of how he and his wife intended to adopt a more active lifestyle.

> George: Okay, we are talking about purchases that I regret. I can't throw away … Alright, running is a really nice way of exercising, so my wife and I each bought a pair of running shoes. Sadly, things haven't worked out so that we can run on a regular basis, so we're actually using them far too rarely. So, I feel that sometimes … that I have some regret over not being more forward-looking and not buying expensive running shoes that I never use.

As for so many others, this scenario still remains in the future, having yet to materialize. Despite what George says, the point of contention here does not seem to be his ability to look forward, but the ways in which the events of everyday life set one on a different path than imagined.

Dresses bought *for* wearing at home parties. A cosy cardigan *for* summer nights, sitting on the veranda. A pair of boots *for* hiking in the mountains. Here, the object of attachment is not something that is, but which – potentially – can be. However, the garments, seen as necessary building blocks for reaching desired futures, might not be able to carry the weight of expectation, and it is quite possible they do not "add up to something" (cf. Berlant 2011, 2). Since the attachment to these potential versions of the self pass through the wardrobe, detachment from garments as well as from the logic of fashion consumption becomes harder to attain. The number of future objects of attachment can always grow and multiply, and with them the perceived need for things, helping to bring them into being. Letting go of these materials – i.e. clothes – becomes a way of detaching from one's dreams and hopes for the future self.

Letting oneself go?

Another reason for holding on to garments was how they made the informants feel when wearing them, making them aware of their own bodies. When showing a skirt she bought a couple of years ago but rarely uses, Catherine concluded that she must have bought it on a "thin day," since she has never been able to sit in it without first unbuttoning the top button. "I still like it. The colour is great, I love the colour. If I have a morning class, I can wear it. Take it off after lunch. Like that," she explained when asked why it remained in her wardrobe.

Often, clothing was referred to as a form of mediator between a perceived interior body and the ideals perceived to be promoted by the fashion industry. These ideals were experienced, physically and materially, in the form of fabric on the skin, or of discomfort and exposure in certain cuts and styles (cf. Stanes and Gibson 2017). Other reasons were the ability of clothing to conceal parts of the body with which the interviewees felt uncomfortable, allowing freedom from exposure to the gazes of others or simply freedom of movement (Entwistle and Wilson 2001). During the interview, Stephen showed a sweater he liked "because it is comfortable and has a good size," unlike many other sweaters. It is "shapeless" and "works in most situations," even if it is not, as he says, "very stylish." Anna, on the other hand, answered the question of what is left unused in her wardrobe with "High heels – that is something a woman is supposed to have, but I can't walk in them," indicating how shoes make bodies intelligible, when following the lines of gender normality. She continued by bringing up tight dresses in a similar manner, saying she felt she needed them, but that she

never wore them because "oh you can see how my body looks." Orientation is about bodies in space, a question of belonging associated with comfort (Ahmed 2007, 158). Anna often bought things she had seen others wear, but then they did not feel comfortable on her and were left hanging. "Things I thought were my style, or could become my style – but no!" Similarly, Catherine said, "I cleared out a lot of 'girly things'. I don't like tight clothes; they make me feel like a stuffed sausage."

The informants talked about how they had an idea of what they wanted in relation to their bodies, i.e. that it should cover the knees or the belly. "It is difficult. I try to hide [my belly] and that makes me look even more 'pregnant.' It is an impossible equation, but I desperately need it," Ingrid complained. Often, such aspirations were tied to feminized garments such as tight-fitting dresses. To be comfortable is, according to Ahmed (2007), to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins. One fits and, by fitting the surface of bodies, disappear from view (Ahmed 2007). Skirts and dresses were often pointed out during interviews as clothing rarely, or never, used but nonetheless kept. Detachment from clothes thus involves detachment from the gendered ideals; for example, pertaining to what a woman "should have" in her closet. Similarly, holding on to a rarely used suit is no doubt closely tied to expectations of performing respectable masculinity when the situation calls for it.

In this way, many talked about their relationship/orientation to their body, rather than their relationship with their clothes or with consumption. The question of detaching from clothing that was not in use often related closely to how the informants oriented themselves toward gendered body ideals. Clothes, especially suits or uniforms, work to conceal individual variation and present the body as part of a community (Craik 2005). In a similar manner, they allow the body to attach to gender norms. Conversely, detachment from gendered clothes risks disorientation. The effect of clothes on the presentation of the body and self, appeared as a far more prevalent object of attachment than garments or styles as such, as when Ingrid showed a box of clothes she plans to wear "when she gets thin." "I have seen pictures of my mom wearing similar garments. Really beautiful. She is very thin."

These stories show how complex "letting go" can be and how shifting directedness involves memories of a lost, or never achieved, body. Garments and accessories served as a link for attachment to an ideal gendered body, being described as motivators or visualizations of what is to come. Letting them go was not only a question of discarding things, but of letting oneself go – or as Stephen puts it:

> Stephen: Yeah, it is a special category of clothes – the ones that have become too small, but that I have used a lot before. And then all of a sudden, they become too small. If I was to get rid of them, it would be like telling myself that I'm never going to lose those kilos that I've gained.

At the same time, these clothes could become a source of stress and anxiety, as they actualized the body's (in)ability to meet expectations and ideals, from oneself as well as from the desired paths of perceived normality (cf. Clarke and Miller 2003; Miller and Woodward 2012). The difficulty of detaching from norms pertaining foremost to gender and body made the detachment from actual garments and from the consumption of new clothes hard to achieve. By extension, this implies that a shift towards sustainable fashion not only needs to take environmental factors into account, but also that clothes are made to fit living bodies.

Cleaning out the closet

As shown above, the management of the wardrobe and its content regularly turns into a management of emotions. While there are several examples of objects of attachment in the past or future that are maintained through holding on to specific garments, there are also numerous examples of the informants engaging in detachment more directly in order to manage their overflowing wardrobe. Catherine, for example, committed to not buying any new clothes in 2019 because of the feeling of being overwhelmed by her possessions and the subsequent unease she felt. While Catherine's decision put a temporary end to the formation of new attachments, for most of the informants

there were already plenty of clothes to which they were attached. These relations needed tending to, lest they too become overwhelming. Consequently, cleaning out the closet was an activity where these attachments came to the forefront.

A recurring point of reference when talking about wardrobe cleaning was the Japanese organizing consultant Marie Kondo, who's book *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* (2011) and Netflix series *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo* (2019) had been extensively covered in Swedish as well as international media, in the period leading up to the fieldwork. Kondo promotes a specific method – "KonMari" – of tidying and organizing one's possessions, making them easier to survey. Decluttering is not only a way to getting a tidier home according to Kondo, but also a way to a less stressful life and to making better decisions. In following the method, one should do a thorough inventory of every single possession in the household and ask the simple question "Does it spark joy?." If the answer is no, the thing should go (cf. Fredriksson 2016; Callmer 2019).

At the time of the interview, George was in the process of "KonMari-ing" his home. Living in a three-room apartment with two small children – one of them using a wheelchair – he and his wife found good reason to reduce the number of things taking up space in their home. Emptying the wardrobes into a big pile was the first step they undertook, discarding or donating anything that was worn out or they were "done with." The rest was folded neatly and put back into drawers and onto shelves, ready for use. While there were still other things waiting to be sorted, George expressed satisfaction with how the culling of clothes turned out: "It forced me to think about what I wear, and how I wear it / … / I'm more satisfied with what's in my wardrobe. I'm very happy with having an overview of everything."

While George was the only informant who had fully committed to the KonMari method, most had at some time or another cleared out their wardrobes – the workshop participants in particular, as this was a condition for participating in the project. The feelings expressed in relation to this undertaking were often ambivalent. "There was an unpleasant amount of clothes," Amanda wrote, admitting that she was filled with dread when she started the process. Going through the wardrobe's content actualized all the time and money she had invested in clothes that were rarely – if ever – used, and that meant little to her only a short time after they were purchased. Bringing attention to all the investments – emotional and monetary – in dead-end objects can be demoralizing and disorienting. Sensitive moments like these offer opportunities for taking a new direction (Ahmed 2004, 5–7). Afterwards, when the unused garments were left in the clothes collection and her old mommy clothes found a new home with a pregnant neighbor, there was a sense of relief.

> Amanda: I would really like to encourage myself and others to clear out their closets more often. More than two times a year, when you do a seasonal change of the wardrobe. Don't let clothes stay in the wardrobe that you don't use and that only give you a guilty conscience. Give your wardrobe time. It is so good to take inventory. To dig things out and try together with other garments in order to find new ways to use them. I realize that stress is often the reason for an unsustainable wardrobe. It is the stress that makes me buy more than I need, because I panic before a party when I haven't taken inventory properly or I don't have time to ask a friend if I can borrow something. It's also stress that makes me stick to using the same garments the whole time, because I didn't have time to try out more outfits when the bus is about to leave and I stand there with toothbrush in one hand and mascara in the other.

Having a "no-buy 2019," participating in sustainability workshops, performing intermediate wardrobe clean-outs, or going full KonMari can all be understood as that which Åsa Callmer (2019) calls "sufficiency-related practices," where the overflowing wardrobe is brought down to size and into view (Callmer 2019). Callmer (2019, 141) concludes that these practices have the potential for creating a long-term decrease in the desire for consuming new products (Callmer 2019, 203). Practices of detachment and divestment can thus lead towards more sustainable patterns of consumption, although this is naturally not a guaranteed outcome when cleaning out the closet. The emotional needs fulfilled through the consumption of material goods are many and varied (Pieters 2013, 628). If divestment justifies the acquisition of new garments, little is gained in terms of sustainability

We argue that it is not the act of clearing out in itself that carries the promise of sustainable orientations, but how it brings engagement with materiality to the fore and how this apparently establishes direction within the landscapes of consumption (cf. Callmer 2019).

That a sense of directedness springs up through these processes is no wonder, since it is a way of clarifying which attachments give meaning and what objects are deserving of detachment (cf. Ahmed 2006a, 13). Returning to Kondo's (2014) argument that the process of decluttering is a way to a more stress-free life, the informants' statements seem to be in agreement. However, it is not an issue of becoming less materialistic, but rather the inverse: it is by turning one's attention towards material things, conversing with them, feeling them, and acknowledging their influence that better relations with them can be established (cf. Pieters 2013). By staying with the things, exploring one's appreciation or disinterest in them, meaningful attachments grow stronger, while at the same time allowing detachment from that which weighs one down.

Conclusion

In following the orientations that pass through the wardrobe, we have shown that patterns of attachment and detachment emerge, influencing how consumers relate to and live with clothes and fashion. Frequently, the objects of attachment that dictate why garments that are not in use remain in the wardrobe, are not the clothes themselves but instead things located beyond the sensory horizon of the present (cf. Ahmed 2006a, 2006b). In short, we found that the management of the wardrobe and its contents coincided with the management of emotions.

Clothes enable memories of the past and dreams for the future, which complicates the matter of "letting go" (Gregson, Metcalfe, and Crewe 2007a; 2007b). Norms of gender, bodies, and social life played a significant role for whether or not the informants' saw themselves as able to detach from things and from unsustainable consumption practices. While individual garments could be described with positive emotions, due to their material qualities or the emotional values invested in them, the content of the wardrobe as an undifferentiated mass was often a source of uneasy or guilty feelings, due to serving as a reminder of poor choices and investments in the past. In the same vein, garments that were kept as ambiguous steppingstones towards that which is not-yet-here – ideal bodies, identities, or scenarios – tended to serve as reminders of the failure to reach these anticipated objects (cf. Berlant 2011). Yet, letting go of the objects would, in a way, be letting go of the dreams and aspirations of one's future self and life.

Among the informants there was an expressed desire to detach, which can be understood as part of the zeitgeist; to become more sustainable, less dependent on consumption. In practice, the path towards this goal often went by the way of more consumption – I'll just buy this one, perfect thing and I will never have to consume again! This makes detachment as an object of attachment in its own right precarious, since it turns away from detachment-as-practice. Through the failure of possessions living up to these expectations, changes of the body and in the conditions of everyday life, as well as through the promotion of new wares by the fashion industry, the location of "the perfect" will probably continuously be further removed (cf. Gregson, Metcalfe, and Crewe 2007a). Looking to how the informants orient themselves along normative lines, as those mentioned above, illustrates how analytical attention must be brought to the "actual" objects of attachment that motivate consumer behavior in order to reach an understanding for the failure to achieve a sustainable lifestyle, despite the best of intentions.

In contrast, new ways of attaching "joy" to garments emerged among the informants through engaging in more active forms of detachment, involving abstaining from new purchases or surveying what was already owned. We interpreted such practices as a way to explore and gain a better understanding of the attachments and orientations that shape the relationships with clothes in everyday life. Engaging in practices like these also led to the informants reporting a greater deal of satisfaction with the contents of their wardrobes. As such, they can serve as a foundation for what Fletcher (2015; 2016) calls a "craft of use," shifting the attention from the moment of purchase towards how

garments are used, lived with, and cared for. With this understanding, the imperative for researchers to "turn to materiality" goes double for consumers, as it puts focus on present needs and practices, inversing the patterns of attachment/detachment traditionally associated with fast fashion consumption.

It becomes easy to moralize claiming the importance of focusing on the here and now and its implications for positive emotions and a clearer understanding of what function garments have in everyday-life, forgetting all the other emotional values manifested through clothes (cf. Pieters 2013). After all, from the perspective of sustainability, detachment from the old is a far less critical issue than the purchase of the new (Lane, Horne, and Bicknell 2009; Stanes and Gibson 2017). However, as suggested by Callmer (2019), finding ways that allow for consumers to explore their relationships with their possessions has the potential of creating a more long-term shift – a re-orientation – in patterns of consumption. The conditions for achieving a sense of sufficiency in affluent societies is a research topic of future import, in order to shed further light on how to reach *detachment from* constant turnover and renewal, as well as *attachment to* clothing practices based in care for the garments already in possession.

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