

4

SLOW FASHION AND INVESTMENT CONSUMPTION

A product has the less soul, the more people participate in its manufacture. (Simmel 1957)

As writers such as Simmel, quoted here, have often acknowledged, the spatial division of labor that underpins much of the garment supply chain can result in clothes that lack meaning and history. This chapter focuses on the temporalities and spaces of fashion, looking specifically at models of slow luxury fashion, craft, quality, and knowledge. The conceptual basis for the discussion lies in an industry founded on a lowering of quality and a future based on fast, cheap, throwaway fashion produced under distant, exploitative work conditions (Crewe 2008; Siegle 2011). Although fast fashion has been a key strategy in the industry's attempt to maintain competitive advantage, it is also widely acknowledged to be economically, socially, and environmentally unsustainable (Brooks 2015; Brown 2010; Fletcher and Grose 2012; Hoskins 2014; Minney 2011; Siegle 2011). While the global supply of cheap, fashionable clothes may have been a perfect competitive strategy for fashion retailers, it brings with it set of social, economic, and environmental conditions that are altogether more troubling. While the fashion industry has been remarkably adept at heading off environmental and social censure, it has also enabled the creation of both dirty, ugly business practices and giddily accelerated cycles of consumption with long and often invisible production footprints and short (and equally invisible) consumption lifetimes. The volume of clothing purchases has increased by over a third in the past decade, largely because of the growth in cheap, fast fashion. As a result waste volumes are high and rising (Allwood in Lean 2007: 16). Consumers are buying more than they need and cheap prices are fanning hasty, thoughtless, and at times needless consumption. The faster the fashion moves, the more toxic is its effects, and globalized production systems are threatening a range of geographical spaces, from cotton fields to sweatshops, high streets to landfill

sites—not only are our homes becoming filled with barely worn garments but a volume of clothing and textiles equivalent to approximately three-quarters of purchases is buried in landfill in the UK each year (Cline 2013; Hoskins 2014). The longer term implications of these tendencies are of note both economically and theoretically. Cost, value, and worth of objects have become confused. Why do we buy what we buy? How do we begin to understand object value? Do we care any longer about our clothes? What now informs our consumption practices? How aware are we that the life cycle of garments in terms of production, consumption, and use is being rapidly accelerated, that clothes are shoddily and hastily constructed, their post-purchase lifetime intentionally truncated? Disposable fashion is unsettling, objects become expendable, things feel impermanent, and consumers become restless awaiting the next quick fix, a fix that ultimately rarely satisfies. We are left hungry, wanting, desiring the next purchase. And as long as consumers continue to be seduced by cheap, fast clothing, mass market retailers will continue to tread the path of least resistance and churn out cat-walk copy designs made by the world's poor, for sale on a high street near you within weeks of their runway launch.

In reaction to the increasing unease generated by fast fashion and its outcomes, two dominant responses are identifiable in both theory and practice. First, there has been a growing intellectual and industry-driven focus on sustainable or eco-fashion (Brown 2010; Fletcher and Grose 2012; Minney 2011; Siegle 2011). Second, there has been a more politically and socially driven focus on fashion production through recycling, reuse, crafting, mending, knitting, and repair. Growing discontent among certain groups of consumers with the business operations of some retailers means that alternatives to the harried cycle of fast fashion are increasingly being sought and there is a growing interest in “geographies of making” (Carr and Gibson 2015). The social and economic relevance of the craft renaissance is “far more complex than the cliché of the middle-class mummy hooked on crochet” and “speaks to a more visceral and socially urgent need to reconfigure the nature of work” (Brooks 2009). Knitting, for instance, has been argued to be an effective means to critique capitalism and its exploitative supply chains and labor practices, and as a way to forge alternative identities, communities, and ways of living and doing (Buszek 2011; Greer 2014). While knitting has often been framed as a gentle craft, one intimately connected to the home, domesticity, nurture, and care, it has also been seen as an active craft that knits thought and desire together, telling stories of texture, tactility, and wearing. Knitting is also one means of inserting agency, power, and creativity into the production of clothes as it connects labor, production, product, and consumption in ways that are rarely evident in the contemporary globalized fashion industry (Gauntlett 2011: 245). It “produces the means and conditions through which alternative ways of living can be imagined and shared, and practical examples for change defined and materialised” (Hackney 2013:

187). Fashion craft has a long history of being used as a social and political tool and has an important gendered history as Parker argues “women have sewn a subversive stitch—managed to make meanings of their own in the very medium intended to inculcate self-effacement” (1989: 215). This “new materialism” (Simms and Potts 2012: 1) is characterized by “a more deeply pleasurable, and also respectful relationship with the world of “things” (Simms and Potts 2012: 1). An important body of work is thus emerging that explores the practices, networks, meanings, and values bound up with amateur making with a view to understanding how the “maker-movement” might speak to the interests and priorities of different social groups (Carr and Gibson 2015; Gill and Lopes 2011; Hackney 2013). Gill and Lopes (2011), for example, explore how we might value material things that are “already made” as opposed to the new and novel and thus develop new more economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable consumption models.

In the following discussion I offer a third alternative vision of future fashion based on a rather different set of reflections as to how fashion production and consumption might redress and counter the more deleterious aspects of cheap fast fashion. The argument for durable, crafted fashion is persuasive and engages us, just as the fabrics and clothes about which I speak do. The argument gains added validity as it has, at its heart, a commitment to a return to skilled production, using quality materials to fabricate products that are locally made. On social, environmental, and employment grounds this alternative fashion future based around slow fashion and shorter more transparent systems of supply begins to gain credence. Additionally, the argument offers a new conceptual insight into what fashion value is, where it might lie, and how it might be created and maintained. Given that fashion has for so long been seen as trivial, excessive, hedonistic, and egocentric, it may at first sight appear to be an easy target for critique during critically difficult global economic times. If fashion is seen as an unnecessary luxury, consumers should surely regulate and monitor their consumption, become frugal, discipline their consuming bodies: stop shopping? That is, of course, one possibility. But here I want to argue for a return to a different relationship between fashion and consumption in which we see our clothes as long-term investment pieces that speak of durability, love, attachment, quality, and craft. Under this theorization we shift the locus of fashion value away from notions of “value for money” and toward an understanding of the ecology and material culture of our garments which so often accrue value because of our own personal investments in them, our connections to them, their histories, geographies, and our memories of their wearing. Fashion need not be fast, cheap, and disposable and a more sustainable fashion future is possible if we buy fewer, but higher quality pieces that will endure, garments that we will adore, cherish, will wear for many years, and keep for many more. This vision of future fashion is based around slow pace, craft, quality, reputational

capital, knowledge, and longevity. Significantly in terms of geographical debate, the arguments forwarded here work with a very different set of spatialities and temporalities to those characterizing the fast fashion production model. In the fashion model proposed below, production systems are locally embedded rather than globally footloose and mobile; they are slow rather than fast; materials are traditionally crafted and garments have intentionally long consumption lifetimes rather than being “disposable” quick fashion fixes. These new–old ways of doing fashion are both competitive but also underscore the role of durability, craft, and the management of sustainable and design-led supply chains.

The proposed “slow luxury” model argues that modes of production can act as levers of the imagination: just as the ugly conditions that (usually young, usually female) sweatshop workers labor under in cheap cost locations weigh heavily on consumer’s minds, so too can more equitable and durable visions of production inspire us, connect us to garment creators, makers, and designers. Here I argue for the inestimable value of cultural specificity, history, craft, and skill that globalization and fast fashion will not and cannot erode. Two examples are drawn on to explore the spaces and times that slow fashion inhabits, both with long and fascinating historical and geographical stories to tell: the tailoring cluster of Savile Row, London, and the production of Harris Tweed on the Hebridean Islands of Scotland. Together they reveal how the place of production can be a space of engagement, a space where the mythical alchemy of the product takes place. Good products are worth the wait, they develop slowly and last, weaving together reputation and history, valorized through their cultural, historical, and geographical roots. This, I suggest, offers the potential at least for a reworking of fashion’s times and spaces. It reveals how locally embedded production systems offer a counter to globalized fast fashion systems and explores the significance of place, time, skill, embeddedness, and agglomeration in the generation and survival of successful fashion spaces. The chapter raises a set of broader conceptual questions about how the competitive qualities of tradition, craft, and locality can endure and adapt to a rapidly changing international environment.

Handmade, hand-touched: The evocative geographies of crafted fashion

Slow luxury fashion reveals a very different way of understanding the customer and managing a business based on decreasing the physical and social distance between fashion producers and consumers. It enables a greater awareness of the real cost—and value—of clothes. The consumption of crafted garments places crucial importance on the precise materials from which they are made, their social, economic, and historic reasons for being, and the way that we interact with them through our senses (Aynsley et al. 1999). Crafted, quality systems of

supply offer both creative and economic power and acknowledge that much of the value of the garment is linked to territory, history, cultural specificity, and the places of its production. While the UK may have lost the global battle for cheap clothing supply, we have demonstrated that “we can win the battle of quality, credibility, and ideas” (Hieatt 2013: 12). Rather than cutting costs by outsourcing production and severing the ties between producer and consumer, slow fashion actively pursues non-exploitative and sustainable supply chains that reconnect the consumer with where their clothes originate and enroll the consumer in the production process and the knowledge systems that underpin it. Clothes that are beautifully made with care, sensitivity, and skill are special, precious, valuable. Special garments have a soul, a meaning and an authenticity. They generate deep desire based on knowledge and aesthetics rather than price, saturation, and duplication. Fashion value originates in part from our knowledge about the hands that crafted it and the memories ingrained within it from use, wear, love, and emotional attachment (Crewe 2011). In turn, evocative objects have the potential to invert the economics of value and price, supply and demand by decoupling a growth in profit from increased material flow. Extending the life of clothing builds symbolic worth into systems of value determination. An increased emphasis and active promotion of durable style and design classics encourage consumers to consider moving toward the purchase of fewer, higher quality, seasonless pieces that are crafted to last: “Slow burners work harder for your money than frivolous fashion and allow for a more conscientious kind of consumption” (Fletcher in Britten 2008: 16).

Fashion-conscious consumers are increasingly aware that their purchasing decisions can have a dramatic impact on employment, industry, and economy in the UK and are prepared to pay higher price points for garments that are crafted to last, using short, transparent supply chains and locally sourced materials and are designed and produced domestically by some of the most skilled craftspeople in the world. Further, through such considered consumption, they are actively supporting domestic garment production and world-class training provision that the UK offers for designers and makers that will help to ensure the reproduction and transmission of this vital skills base. Such consumption practices empower consumers and provide them with a real sense of agency to effect change through what they buy and from where, on the basis of their knowledge about supply, production, use, and value. In short, slow fashion offers the potential at least for the formulation of radical new perspectives on the production and consumption of fashion. It reveals that fashion can and is being done differently. “If fashion is about ingenuity and innovation, this is a good time for the industry to draw on these qualities and return to measuring fashion in terms of something other than quantity” (Siegle 2008). The quality, frequency of wear, and length of use thus transform both the economics and value of clothing. The close relationship between fabric, creation, crafter, and customer is central

to the generation of quality clothing. Crafted garments are non-anonymous, they are authenticated and reveal the value of slow clocktimes and long lifespans. In this context luxury can be redefined and seen less in terms of excess and the needless and more in terms of thoughtful, quality consumption. Luxury can be “refinement not ostentation, communication not proclamation” (Kapferer and Bastien 2009). The connection of craft to time is one of its essential elements. Slow garments are both of the moment and design classics—timely and timeless, carefully crafted through painstaking design, beautiful materials, and personal connection. Evocative garments are worth the wait and reveal above all that the material pleasure and symbolic expression of identity through fashion can be compatible with a more politicized, socially conscious consumption ethos (Pietrykowski 2004: 309).

Appreciative consumption: The spaces and times of crafted clothing on Savile Row

London's Savile Row is a short street in Mayfair with a long history of bespoke tailoring and quality craft. While Savile Row has been the subject of journalistic and historical attention (BBC 2009) there has been little critical geographical research to date on this iconic center of British tailoring (although see Breward 2003). Yet “From Savile Row to Shoreditch, from Bond Street to Brick Lane, British menswear has never been more dynamic or indeed more successful” (Jones 2013). Savile Row has faced a number of challenges in recent decades that chime perfectly with the broader trajectory that the global fashion industry, discussed in the introduction, has followed. At various points in time it appeared that this industrial quarter almost disappeared from view and vocabulary. The specific threats to this mode of production include the rise of the ready-to-wear casual market in the 1970s, a relaxing of formal dress codes in the corporate workplace through the 1980s, and most particularly in the fashion-forward creative industries, the emergence of looser tailoring pioneered by Italian companies such as Armani, and more recently the global recession and falling consumer spending. The sustainability of their market has also been called into question as both the traditional customer base and the skilled workforce of Savile Row are aging. The Row faces difficulties recruiting and retaining apprentices to maintain and continue its bespoke tailoring skills base and has struggled to compete for young workers who—at least until the latest recessionary crisis—favored the city over the clothing industry as a career option. In addition, Savile Row is facing a number of broader global threats and several of the firms have been taken over by large multinational investment businesses that bring a very different set

of knowledges and expectations about fashion futures and their spatial depth and reach. Finally, the space of Savile Row is also being challenged by a range of new entrants including ready-to-wear suit retailers, “celebrity tailors” such as Ozwald Boateng and the highly contentious arrival of the American casual youth-wear brand Abercrombie & Fitch in 2008, all of whom may shift or dilute the profile and long-standing reputation of the Row. And yet in spite of these very real threats and pressures, Savile Row continues to be a center for crafted, high-quality garment production and customization.

The endurance of the fashion model that characterizes Savile Row, in spite of seemingly insurmountable economic, cultural, and social pressures that it faces, suggests that quality, luxury consumption, and high value-added competition continue to be important components in certain spaces for particular groups of consumers. This section of the chapter explores how this locally embedded production system is responding to the broader socioeconomic threats outlined above and evaluates the key factors that begin to explain the enduring—and increasing—appeal and success of a fashion agglomeration that is committed to an economy of regard that places slow production, domestic sourcing policies, consumer relationships, and the life of clothes at its heart. It is argued that the development and survival of competitive fashion spaces may be explained, at least in part, through an appreciation of the importance of place, time, identity, skill, reputational capital, agglomeration, and particular sets of knowledge-based consumption practice. The particular example of Savile Row raises broader conceptual insights into how the competitive qualities of the “Made in England” brand, with its long and credible history of skilled, high-quality production of crafted garments, rich in symbolic value and with global consumption appeal, can offer a very real alternative to the outsourced production of cheap, disposable fast fashion garments. After many years of falling employment, margins, prices, and sales in the British fashion industry, there are emergent signs that “Made in Britain” may be regaining the kudos and respect it endured for much of the early post-war period. Long associated with a certain kind of quality, design, and luxury, British fashion is estimated to employ almost 70,000 people (BFC 2014). London fashion and design in particular has a long history, from the swinging sixties, punk and Cool Britannia through to its renewed status as the leading international center for the global fashion industry. London is a world center of creativity and design talent and has some of the most renowned fashion educational institutions in the world with unrivalled reputations. There is a renewed interest from industry, governments, policy-makers, and publics to manufacture high-quality garments in the UK and a clear vision that the future for British fashion production must be to compete on quality, design, and specialization rather than price. This is the UK’s comparative, competitive, and long-established advantage. London Fashion Week is one route through which emerging British fashion talent is taken to market. It attracts in excess of £100

million of media coverage and showcases some of the most forward-facing, design-led talent that has emerged and continues to emerge from UK Fashion Schools and educational establishments. The London Collections: Men in 2013 included the highly respected and widely reported Savile Row collective that showed in Spencer House and confirmed both the iconic status of Savile Row and key role that London plays in incubating and developing new fashion skill and talent. More overtly, perhaps, the reintroduction of the Wool Awards and Wool Week at London Fashion Week brought the crofters and weavers of the Scottish Hebrides, the tailors of Savile Row, consumers, and the global media together in a live spectacle during which Savile Row was grassed over so that flocks could safely graze—a literal juxtaposition and clear spatial manifestation of the transparency of supply chains at work.

London has arguably always been the spiritual home of the sartorial man: its menswear has been seen as both innovative and timeless; it is both understated and yet unrivalled in its attention to detail. In recent years London has enjoyed renewed levels of international success and is very much setting the pace in terms of emerging talent that is both design-led and commercial, producing garments that are ageless and work well on men of all ages. A Savile Row suit has retained a traditional understanding about quintessential fabrics and cuts that are read as a distinctively British version of style that really works: “The suit is the default wardrobe setting; the most successful garment in the history of fashion and is wholly and indivisibly a British invention... A suit says authority, learning, expertise, manners, probity, efficiency, trust and a certain formality; all attributes traditionally thought of as British” (Schofield 2011). The Savile Row suit has successfully maintained a powerful grip on definitions of Britishness in the postwar era. Tailors on the Row work with clearly identifiable aesthetic, beautiful fabrics and with domestic sourcing policies and short supply chains. Savile Row is gaining in vision and visibility, its tailors are supremely competent in construction and with a new confidence and directional sense of design. In a global marketplace, a Savile Row suit can be Englishness personified. The new generation of designers are revealing a convergence between the long-held quirky, fashion-forward, edgy London style and the more Savile Row—establishment sartorial reading of fashion. London has a classiness and a quality but with none of the bland corporate styling that typifies Italy, for example, with suits that could have rolled off a machine (Grant 2010). There is a depth and maturity to London menswear that can only come through time.

The point about Savile Row tailoring is that it takes a long time and you build on it and you develop your skills over years and years and years and you don't jump from one season to the next. That's why people like McQueen are so fabulous because he trained on Savile Row. And then went to Givenchy.

It's those sorts of journeys that produced the sort of magic that they did. And John Galiano similarly. That's the pleasure of London as a city in that side-by-side we have that tradition of tailoring and we have that bright street style too. (Grant 2010)

That many of the UK's most successful designers began their careers on Savile Row is testament to the key role of the apprenticeship schemes and training associations in attracting new entrants into the fashion sector and developing their skills bases. After seeing an advertisement on television highlighting the shortage of apprentices in the tailoring business, Alexander McQueen told how he walked into Anderson and Sheppard on Savile Row and was hired on the spot (Knox 2010: 7). His natural talent with chalk and scissors allowed him to quickly conquer classic cuts and shapes and develop his personal style, eventually moving further down Savile Row to work at Gieves and Hawkes.

The micro-geographies of the tailoring houses along Savile Row also hint at reasons for their longevity and ongoing patronage. They are both, and at the same time, retail spaces, design studios, training sites, and micro factories. The exterior architecture of the tailors' stores along the Row is grand, imposing and hints at its patriarchal and colonial history of privilege and secrecy. The uses of the row are protected by restrictive covenants that have ensured a long history of conservatism, discretion, and mystery. A quiet rumpus followed the introduction of the first see-through shop windows on the Row in the 1970s, and in the 1990s the introduction of an elegant flower box outside the store caused a scandal. It wasn't until 1992 that Saturday opening was first introduced by Richard James, revealing how the street, its appearance, and covert regulations formed part of the tailor's identity. Beneath this external architectural façade of conservatism and respectability lie the complex geographies of craft, design, and fabrication. Given that the cheapest space on the Row is on the lower floors, it is not surprising that the pressers, steamers, cutters, finishers, and tailors are going underground, living a below-stairs existence. The warren-like spaces below street level are hives of activity comprising workrooms and studios whose tools remain the same as they have done for decades: scissors, needles, chalk, shears, fingers. The teaching of tailoring is intimate and organic, a craft passed on without books or manuals, almost by osmosis, although the investment required to sustain the apprenticeship system is considerable: it requires a minimum of five years for a junior tailor to acquire the basic skills of the trade, and many more to reach the exacting standards required by the slow and precise rhythms of work and the meticulous coordination of hand and fiber. Other hidden spaces include rooms of archived fabrics, bespoke samples, and the marked-up patterns of Savile Row's customers over many decades: Fred Astaire, Cary Grant, Jude Law, Daniel Craig, David Beckham, and Michael Gambon, the labels identifying their individual identities carefully hidden from public view.

The Row reveals a long and rich tradition of quiet understatement and self-effacement that belies exquisite materials, faultless craft, and flawless finishing. A Savile Row suit is assembled using thousands of hand stitches that join cloth to linen and cotton interlinings and linings, with edges and button holes all finished by hand too. It is hardly surprising, then, that a Savile Row suit is in every respect a slow garment. Once the body has been measured and the customer has selected a bolt of cloth, the pattern is “bespoken” for and the fabric theirs. Aware of the value of provenance, customers can select a suit made with “record bale” wool whereby they know who owns the individual sheep that provided the wool for the suit. Each suit requires between 35 and 40 individual body measurements before the pattern is drawn up to make a blueprint of the customer’s body that is uniquely theirs. A suit is made specifically for an individual and is cut and stitched by hand. The tailor–client relationship is built up over time and is based on trust, discretion, and confidentiality—customers develop personal relationships with their tailors. The suit will take up to three months to create and will require at least half a dozen fittings. There is certainly no instant gratification involved, but the quality and craft of the suit is worth waiting for. In a world so dominated by faceless mass production, the tailors of Savile Row recognize that handmade, craft, tradition, and individualization can be powerful counters to cheap disposable imports. These are garments that will be loved, cherished, and will last many lifetimes: “It is your labour inside a suit. It’s in your heart” (Everest 2008). A Savile Row suit is created slowly and without damage to the planet, it weaves social relations through time and space and through the generations: “When Henry Stanley finally tracked down Livingstone in the heart of Africa, the good doctor was still wearing the tweed trousers he set off in from London some four years before” (Norton & Sons). One suspects that these clothes will never be landfill. As Patrick Grant of Norton & Sons argues “We just make beautiful, simple men’s clothing that lasts for years. I’m fed up of disposable clothing. People buy too many clothes—we should buy fewer things, but better things ... there are easy ways to buy cloth but no easy ways to produce beautiful and unique cloth” (Grant 2010). Grant insists on using only the best British materials and craftspeople and personally sources his fabrics, including Harris Tweed, on his frequent sourcing trips to Scotland. Savile Row tailoring is fashion as both product and process, a blending of time, skill, precision, and place. It uses highly specific techniques of salesmanship and selling, careful and understated forms of visual display and product design that avoid overt marketing, labeling, or policies. This is a fashion system where you won’t find discount deals, logos, or sales; it is careful, considered local production for extensive and discerning global markets built on repute and reputation. It is in such spaces that the “mythical overlap of styles forged new and challenging identities” (Breward 2003: 580).

Capturing land and life in cloth: Crofting, crafting, and the making of Harris Tweed

There is probably no other British cloth with as rich a fashion history as tweed, and Harris Tweed sits at the pinnacle of this heritage. (Hills 2011)

Harris Tweed is like no other fabric on earth, as Hills argues above. It is borne of its environment, is organic, hand-crafted, and defined by time. Tweed is a place, an imaginary as much as a fabric. It is also undeniably British:

Tweed is a parable. A stereotype of Britishness. We are tweedy. Tweed is taciturn and hardworking, sturdy, dependable, loyal. Tweed doesn't get sappy or go limp... I have a bit of a thing for tweed. I love its feel and its smell. I love that it's rough but homely, that it has the ability to deflect the elements with a jaunty nonchalance. Tweed is like a game terrier; always pleased to see you, always wants to go out, always optimistic... It is the perfect balance of utility and panache, and it is my secret vice. (Gill 2011)

It is also the only fabric that has its own legislation. Eight thousand patterns are patented and protected by the Harris Tweed Act of Parliament. The Act allows the authority to promote and maintain the authenticity, standard, and reputation of Harris Tweed and includes final quality inspectors who check that the cloth is perfect with no snags, uneven surfaces, or wool discoloration. Each piece of cloth is labeled with the trademark orb logo and a series number and each meterage of fabric has uniquely identifying "passport information" on it (Platman 2011) that encodes who has woven the cloth, the pattern used, and the date it was produced. Harris Tweed cloth can only be produced by weavers who live on the Hebridean Islands, and as consumers are increasingly wanting to know who made their fabrics and garments, where, how, under what conditions, the Tweed provides no finer confirmation of the virtues of local production for global markets. Unlike a number of other "luxury" products that are increasingly made under brutal working conditions paying poverty wages,¹ Harris Tweed retains its entirely local production base and the island crofters here are quite literally weaving the fabric of emotional connection: "The long, barren archipelago on the far north west tip of Europe is home to every dyer, blender, carder, spinner, warper, weaver, finisher and inspector of Harris Tweed" (Harris Tweed Authority 2012). The Harris Tweed archive dates back well over 100 years and is a timely reminder that, in spite of increasingly long, distant, and unknown supply chains across much of the fashion industry, Harris Tweed retains its strong sense of provenance and bears the personality of the weaver and the croft in which it was

fabricated, acting as a powerful repository of information for tailors and customers alike who are increasingly concerned about the origins of the garments they buy. Like the skills base that remains along Savile Row, the fabrication of Harris Tweed is a skill that takes many years, if not generations, to hone: the grading and sorting of wool into different quality levels is a highly skilled activity that is still done by hand and eye; shearing is still a bodily encounter between farmer and animal.

Like Savile Row, Harris Tweed has a long and rich history. In its earliest days it was dyed using lichen and woven by hand. It was adopted during the reign of Queen Victoria for its seeming indestructibility in the wild (Brown 2009: 15) and became a staple fabric for the production of robust and hard-wearing jackets for many years. “Britain’s story, its image, is wrapped and warped in wool. Wool can be woven into a gallimaufry of cloths ... but the greatest of all, for which the grandest sheep can aspire to give the coat off its back, is tweed” (Schofield 2011). Harris Tweed has successfully steered a long symbolic history that speaks of both the establishment and its alter-ego: anti-fashion. One of the earliest pioneers to subvert the traditional, class-bound, and patriarchal associations of Harris Tweed was Vivienne Westwood who spearheaded the use of the cloth by the punk movement in the 1970s. Westwood dressed the Sex Pistols in Harris Tweed, has used it across a number of collections including the AW 2010/11 Prince Charming range, and adopted a motif very similar to the orb as her corporate logo. A number of iconic British designers have worked with the fabric as a central component in their tailored collections. Margaret Howell recently argued that

weaving on hand looms creates a depth and complexity of texture that can’t be imitated by a mechanical process. Its very nature—the resilient wool, the flecks and herringbones in earthy colours—reflects the landscape, climate and skills of the people that produce it. I’ve always been attracted by its authenticity and chose Harris Tweed when designing my first winter jacket and overcoat. I’ve used it ever since. (Howell 2012: 124)

Harris Tweed is, argues the Savile Row Tailor Timothy Everest, “an amazing institution” (2009: 14); “No-one can match it anywhere in the world” (Wylie 2009: 14). The relaunching of Woolmark Prize, originally awarded to Karl Lagerfeld and Yves Saint Laurent in the 1950s, is testament to the industrial, policy, and design status again afforded to wool, and mill production increased by 12 percent in 2011 (Fisher 2012).

Although the industry was in a precarious position during the 1980s and 1990s, due to a lack of investment, a shortage of skilled workers who wanted to enter the industry, and shifts in fashion and taste, the handwoven fabric is

currently enjoying a surge in production and sales and is now the Western Isles' largest private-sector employer and generates approximately £10 million for the local economy per year (Carrell 2012). In part this resurgence has been the result of an initiative headed by a former Labour Energy Minister Brian Wilson who explains how "The objective was to create a new generation interested in it. The great thing is you're selling something which is truly genuine. It's not like spinning a story around something that doesn't exist. It's completely genuine: the distinguishing features of Harris Tweed are both quality and heritage" (Wilson 2012). One of the greatest successes in recent years has been the transformation of the image of the brand Harris Tweed into a young fabric that appeals to a new generation of consumers. Harris Tweed's client list now includes "just about every serious designer. Every fashionable designer is now working with Harris Tweed" (Wilson 2012). Jaggy Nettle, for example, has produced a range of hi-top trainers in Harris Tweed that are stocked alongside Prada and Louis Vuitton in boutiques in New York, Tokyo, and Milan: "I chose Harris Tweed because their clothes are not designed for one season or one trend, but to last" (Lee 2012 in Carrell 2012).

Like Savile Row, the production system that underpins the creation of Harris Tweed has a long and revered history, one that is again rooted in the specificity of place and the skills of people. The isolated crofting communities who produce Harris Tweed are embedded in the islands, and see themselves as "all one family, all working as a team, everyone helping each other" (Mary Ann Macleod in Platman 2011). The crofting communities that tend sheep and weave are an integral part of this landscape that provides much of the inspiration for the color and texture of the cloth. The purple and lavender hues of heather on moors and braes, the purple and green moss in springtime, the clear blue northern skies and bright blue seas and lochs form the very basis of the fabric, cloth, and land woven together. The colors and qualities of Harris Tweed are unparalleled by any other fabric through a combination of the inspirational landscape in which it is crafted, the ability for the wool to adopt a dazzling array of dyes, and the blending, spinning, and juxtaposition of yarns during the weaving process (Hills 2011: 123). The designs woven on the islands are carefully blended to the changing needs of fashion and style direction in terms of color, density, and weight but the colors of the landscape are always intertwined, an ever-present constant motif. This is a fabric that has gained its legitimacy through quality production nurtured from heritage, skill, and craft. Harris Tweed speaks of landscape, place, and origins; the cloth evokes heather-colored heaths and glens, mountains, rocks, sky, water, shoreline, pebbles, moors. Its colors and textures speak of its place of fabrication, not in laboratories or dyeing factories but in crofts and farms and rural mills. It looks and smells like the land. It captures land and life in a fabric.

Reflections

This chapter has revealed that fashion can and is being done differently. Buying without regard makes little sense, and the model of cheap, fast production via the off-shoring of production and the race to the bottom of the market is becoming less convincing economically, environmentally, and socially. The fashion system outlined here is based on appreciative consumption and embedded, active networks of supply and production. It offers a counter to the dominant narratives that suggest the inevitability of a low-cost global fast fashion industry and offers the potential at least for the formulation of radical new perspectives on the production and consumption of fashion. By focusing on time, place, skill, and quality, the examples drawn on here reveal the very real possibility of growing a slow, design-led, domestic fashion system that has global reach and highly visible and transparent supply relations. Most significantly, the arguments forwarded here have important implications for existing debates about designing for durability in which, to date, product longevity has been considered solely in terms of an object's physical endurance.

The concept of slow fashion developed in this chapter extends the notion of durability beyond its conventional interpretation to a consideration of fashion value as created through history and place, skill and craft, object quality, memory, and attachment. Our clothes "speak" to us through the memories that we associate with them. Instead of viewing the meaning of particular designs as fixed and given, by looking at the process of evocation it finds an open and continuing dialogue between things, their makers, and their consumers.

This approach argues for a revaluing of materials and materiality in the determination of quality and for appreciative consumption of products that we love, that engage our hearts and minds as well as our bodies and flesh. The importance of the materiality, surface, depth, construction tactility, and fit of garments has been very much ignored. This chapter foregrounds these effective qualities of clothes and directly engages with the clothes that are the material subject of study. In short, durability and the long biographies of garments are just as much about our connections to our things, desire, love, attachment, and memories woven into the very fiber and fabric of our clothes as it is about their physical durability. Fast fashion is widely acknowledged to be economically, socially, and environmentally unsustainable. One response that is considered here is the growing intellectual and industry-driven focus on sustainable, eco-fashion or crafting and knitting as new forms of activism and resistance. The chapter also consider a rather different set of reflections on how the fashion industry might redress and counter the more deleterious aspects of cheap fast fashion. It considers a very different model of fashion production and consumption based around slow pace, craft, service, reputational capital, knowledge, and longevity. Significantly in terms of geographical debate, these arguments work

with a very different set of spatialities and temporalities to those characterizing the fast fashion production model. In this alternative business model production systems are locally embedded rather than globally footloose and mobile; they are slow rather than fast; materials are traditionally crafted and garments have long lifetimes and provenance rather than being “disposable” quick fashion fixes. The chapter evaluates the role of identity, image, skill, reputational capital, and agglomeration in the development and survival of successful fashion spaces. The chapter raises broader conceptual questions about how brand value can be created and maintained under conditions of economic austerity and rapid globalization.

Note

- 1 See, for example, the documentary *Schiavi de Lusso (Luxury Slaves)* about the 2,500 predominantly Chinese fashion workers in the Tuscan town of Prato, Italy.

