



# The Three Fashion Times: A multitemporal framework towards a fashion foresight approach<sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing on a reflection-in-action methodological approach, this paper proposes a three-layered temporal framework that transcends the short-termism of fashion trends to embrace a more complex perspective on fashion and futures. The Three Fashion Times comprises distinct yet interconnected temporalities that aim to conceptually inform alternative futures-thinking practices in the fashion field, more closely aligned with foresight and the deep roots of sustainability. Ultimately, this multilayered framework advocates for an expanded understanding of the relationships between fashion and time, suggesting conceptual seeds for illuminating paths for a fashion foresight practice through which fashion can become truly sustainable.

## 1. Introduction: sustainable fashion?

The ecological footprint of the fashion sector is responsible for approximately 10 % of global carbon emissions – more than the combined impact caused by the aviation and shipping industries (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). Organised upon values of fast speed, novelty, search for lower prices and economic growth, the fashion industry produces 100 billion garments globally each year, from which 33 % end up in landfills within the first year of purchase (McCallion et al., 2021). As clothing production and consumption have gained speed and intensity, fashion items have become not only cheaper but underutilised (Kozłowski et al., 2012; Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). For instance, clothing production almost doubled between 2000 and 2015 while clothing utilisation dramatically declined, especially in wealthy countries (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017; Roos et al., 2019).

In the last decade, the fashion industry has been under pressure to transition its current model into a sustainable one by adopting principles and practices that reduce environmental impacts as transitioning to more sustainable and responsible models is not only an ecological need but a business imperative for the industry's long-term success (Forbes, 2019; Friedman, 2022). Industry leaders and governmental bodies have acknowledged that current systems must undergo a radical change to truly operate on a more profound ethical and sustainable basis (Kim et al., 2011; McKinsey, 2020).

In such a pressing context, the fashion industry has implemented a series of sustainability-friendly initiatives aiming to reduce its negative impact. From fast-fashion to luxury brands, eco-conscious products and processes have become part of businesses' strategies in a world threatened by an undeniable climate crisis. For instance, the brand Patagonia relies on recycled and organic materials in its product development (Patagonia, 2023) while Stella McCartney has consistently developed in-house technology to produce high-tech and low-impact materials and artefacts (Stella McCartney, 2023). Even large retailers such as fast-fashion chains have promoted

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initiatives aligned with the circular economy, establishing ambitious targets to reduce carbon emissions and achieve a net-zero impact over the coming decades (for instance, Shein's sustainability plan includes reaching net-zero emissions by 2050) (Shein, 2025).

Despite increasing investments in sustainable fashion, the industry has yet to embrace a more holistic perspective on the dilemma that fashion and sustainability entail, especially in times of overconsumption. Although sustainable initiatives have proliferated, most of them remain focused on short term horizons, as well as on reducing pollution and waste of materials and processes.

While necessary and welcome, this orientation has strong limitations as it is solely based on the promise that technology will solve all our problems, exempting us from the need to question the deeper barriers and contradictions that fashion, as an expression of culture, and as a symbol of a throwaway culture, entail (Ehrenfeld, 2015; Toffler, 1970) and how this divergence sits in the discourse towards sustainability when we consider the triad fashion-nature-future. Therefore, the contradictions between fashion and sustainability should not be limited to its materiality but should include its cultural dimension and the role it symbolically plays in society. To date, this dimension has been consistently neglected in sustainability efforts, although the roots of unsustainability in fashion may lie precisely at a cultural level and in its tight link with consumer culture (Ehrenfeld, 2015).

Since fashion is shaped not only by products but also by the interlacements between cultural beliefs and social norms (Kaiser, 2013), limiting efforts to making products and processes "green" remains a naive and insufficient solution to the magnitude of the problem we face. As Fry (2009) reminds us, "sustain-ability is as much a cultural as a technological project" (p. 199). In practice, even if the fashion industry reduces its carbon emissions to zero, the continuous acceleration of consumption driven by the pursuit of novelty at any cost will still result in vast quantities of underutilised and discarded garments, thus remaining a persistent obstacle to sustainability. In other words, if the cultural narrative "the newer the better" still prevails (Fletcher, 2016; Grose, 2019), the fashion industry will remain irreconcilable with the idea of a sustainable future (Tham, 2008). Limiting efforts to "ecological," "green," or "net-zero emission" products and processes is nothing more than a distraction or a malicious strategy to alleviate the guilt and responsibility of those who perpetuate consumerism as core and structural, allowing fashion market agents to produce and consume at ever-increasing speeds and volumes.

My argument is that the emergence of a truly sustainable fashion requires an integrated, long-term and transdisciplinary approach that interlaces society, culture, and industry, rather than focusing on isolated perspectives and components that ultimately limit sustainability initiatives to material and technocratic solutions. Instead, the fashion industry must adopt a broader perspective that revises not only its mode of production but its role in culture and society, as well as its relationship with nature. Investing in sustainable products and processes without addressing the logic of the insatiable desire for novelty results in the continuous and rapid creation and destruction of fashion items (Payne, 2021). In this way, the industry will fail in producing a genuinely sustainable model capable of responding to the scale and urgency of the challenges we currently face. Indeed, the path towards a sustainable fashion depends on more radical and integrative forms of futures-thinking that consider the relationships between materiality, culture, and nature as inherently interconnected (Entwistle, 2014).

Therefore, a profound transition towards sustainability requires the integration of material advancements with social values, worldviews, and a long-term perspective that understands nature not as a resource to be exploited, but as an entity to be respected, nurtured, and preserved as a condition for the existence of this industry and of future generations. This shift requires reconfiguring the relationship between fashion and future practices, shifting from forecasting - typically characterised as an isolated, predictive, seasonal, and product-oriented exercise - to a foresight-based approach that prioritises the long-term orientation, comprehensive analysis of possibilities, and systemic thinking.

## 2. Fashion forecasting: an unsustainable futures-thinking practice

The field of futures studies offers a wide range of techniques from short to long-term futures (Poli, 2010). Among these methods, trend forecasting is commonly used to reduce uncertainty and to delineate predictive information at a certain time across a variety of fields, with fashion being one of the most traditional and prominent in this sector (Raymond, 2010; Powers, 2018; 2019; Buehring and Bisho, 2020). Trend forecasting for fashion purposes, or simply fashion forecasting, is currently the prevailing mode of futures thinking in the industry (Garcia, 2023a). It helps to guide and orchestrate an intricate system aimed at reducing the risk of financial loss by producing 'desirable' styles at scale at a given moment in time (Kim et al., 2011; Crane, 2000; Garcia, 2022). As a multimillion-dollar industry that manufactures trends for consumer culture (Powers, 2019), fashion forecasting focuses on the short-term, cadenced rhythms of production and consumption. The forecasting process often commences six months to two years prior to product launch, to anticipate change and supply the industry with inspiration and precise codes of novelty. To define short-term creative directions for product development, marketing campaigns, and brand strategy, fashion forecasting articulates industry needs, consumption patterns, and cultural shifts. This articulation aims to provide a sense of certainty and credibility in the present to persuade and guide the efforts of various stakeholders to make informed and focused business decisions in a fast-paced global industry (Beckert, 2016; Powers, 2019).

Although useful to keep the industry at full speed, this dynamic accelerates a planned obsolescence of styles, leading to the growing disposability of fashion items, even in the face of the climate crisis (Faurshou, 1987; Powers, 2019; Garcia, 2022). By focusing on products and responding to a short-term vision and fixed calendars, fashion forecasting neglects not only the importance of sustainability but also crucial qualities of contemporaneity related to uncertainty and the fragmentation of time (Bauman, 2012; Han, 2017; Garcia, 2023). Therefore, although it operates in a world of uncertainties, it seeks a fabricated certainty that constrains possibilities, providing a clear direction for accelerated cycles of production and consumption. This fabricated and cadenced certainty manifests in reports that establish structured and rhythmic patterns of novelty - neither random nor isolated, but rather reinforced and sustained by recurring and rhythmic established patterns, such as fashion shows and trade fairs. In this way, fashion forecasting aligns itself solely with an industrial conception of time and with the rhetoric of "time as money", as "success in the fashion world is dependent on being

up to date in the present, and on predicting the tastes of the next season” (Rovine, 2020, p. 108). This logic, however has exclusively contributed to increased modes of production and consumption that are incompatible with any sort of environmental and social responsibility.

In this context, rethinking fashion forecasting towards foresight is paramount if we want to commit to a deep transformation of current systems. Foresight can be a major tool in pursuing sustainability as it helps stakeholders formulate sustainable strategies and policies in a more systemic and holistic approach for the long-term (Destatte, 2010). By proposing a multitemporal framework, this article aims to offer conceptual foundations for a fashion foresight practice - that is, a practice that considers complexity rather than silos, possibilities rather than predictions, long-term thinking rather than immediacy, and the future of humanity rather than the future of new styles and products. It does not aim, however, to provide a full answer to the posed question but to illuminate new possibilities for those working at the intersections of fashion and futures who wish to contribute to a profound shift in the current fashion paradigm towards sustainability.

Driven by the need for fashion systems to transition to a sustainability paradigm, this article proposes a three-layered temporal structure for fashion that goes beyond clockwise patterns tied to cyclical rhythms and Western calendars. The discussions presented here aim to contribute to the expansion of future-oriented practices in the field of fashion, going beyond mere prediction and opening space for a foresight approach in fashion.

### 3. Methodology

This work emerged from a reflection on my practice as a trend forecaster and, specifically, on practice-based doctoral research that took place between 2019 and 2023 (Garcia, 2023). This type of research draws on Schön's (1983) concept of reflection-in-action, where the practitioners' knowledge is not confined to technical rationality but expands to the spheres of intuition and spontaneity pointing to a trajectory of learning by doing. Reflection-in-action presupposes a view 'from the inside' (Candy, 2019), in which a practitioner's creative production works as the more valuable foundation for new insights about former, existing, and potential paths for the field in which they are immersed. Therefore, insights for this work have emerged from years of practice in the space where futures-thinking, fashion, and material culture collide.

Reflections on my practice prompted me to interrogate the relationships between time and fashion, and expanding on their interdependence could become a fruitful way to provide alternative futures-thinking paths to practitioners looking for sustainability-driven approaches to fashion and futures. I have found that a more comprehensive understanding of time could have a strong impact on how we practice futures studies (Dator, 2017; Fitzpatrick, 2004), in particular in a field where the future as a concept is framed by short-term and directive perspectives.

### 4. The three fashion times: a multi-layered temporal approach for fashion and futures

The Three Fashion Times is a three-layered temporal framework that emerged from the acknowledgment that time in fashion is generally understood from a single industrial perspective, guided by pre-defined cycles, seasonal calendars and binary contrasts (short/long cycles). However, as the notion of time is not only chronological but also socially constructed (Nowotny, 1992) and has become less linear and more fragmented (Han, 2017), expanding temporal understandings beyond chronological and industrial perspectives can offer fashion forecasting professionals a new path for reflection and action, aiming to direct their practices towards a more long-term, intentional, responsible, and sustainable approach. The following subsections describe the three temporal levels proposed and suggest how this conceptual contribution can be adopted in practice by futures-thinking professionals working in the fashion field.

#### 4.1. Material time: a matter of industrial dynamics

The first temporal level refers to a logic where the production and consumption of goods are governed by fixed rhythms and Westernised seasonal calendars.<sup>1</sup> Here, time is marked by a clock-time dynamic that regulates an intricate system grounded in principles of rationality, efficiency, and economy. Material Time relates to the linearity imposed by a structured industry that relies on expected efficiencies of producing apparel items at accelerated speed and in streamlined processes.

In fashion history, Material Time becomes more evident with the evolution of haute couture in France at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the modern fashion calendar was initiated due to the launch of seasonal collections in Paris that began to be held on fixed dates (Evans & Vaccari, 2020). After the Second World War, a preoccupation with time and seasonality was strongly intertwined with industrial and commercial systems and rhythms, particularly in the United States due to a scaled-up production enabled by the emergence of a ready-to wear system (Crane, 2000; Nudell, 2023). At that time, advances in manufacturing, distribution, merchandise turnover, and communication enabled a more intricate and precise orchestration between creativity and commerce. Such industrial developments were crucial to institutionalise fashion calendars in the name of acceleration, immediacy,

<sup>1</sup> While Western seasonal calendars typically recognise four seasons, other cultures suggest that understandings of seasonality can extend beyond Winter, Summer, Spring, and Autumn. For instance, Aboriginal peoples identify seasonal changes through environmental indicators such as wind direction, rainfall, celestial movements, animal behaviour, and the flowering of plants. These indicators are used to divide the year into five to nine distinct seasons (Clarke, 2009).

efficiency and profit (Reinach, 2005; Mackinney-Valentin, 2017; Rocamora, 2013).

After the introduction of ready-to-wear in the 1960s, the need to keep the time between creation, production, and consumption under control increased, pushing the industry to accelerate the time spent between producers and retailers (Lascity, 2021; Evans & Vaccari, 2020). Seasonal fashion weeks and trade fairs became the pinnacle of the intricacies of fashion systems that go from labour and raw materials to finished garments generally made to meet fixed dates and pre-stipulated fashion calendars (Payne, 2021). However, the highest expression of Material Time emerged in the 2000s with just-in-time textile and clothing technologies that made it possible to deliver entire new collections in stores within two to three week-time (Fletcher & Grose, 2012) and the widespread of information through social media. From then, fast fashion companies such as Zara and H&M revolutionised the market by offering hundreds of new items a week, not only as merely available products on the shelves but as cultural artefacts capable of shaping and triggering an avid desire for novelty rooted in consumption culture.<sup>2</sup>

The acceleration of Material Time can also be perceived in the new modes of communication utilised by the fashion industry. The time-space compression reshaped how people experience time in postmodern societies (Harvey, 1989), whilst media evolved from printed magazines to digital platforms inaugurating new and unpredictable circles of influence and a new stage in the history of fashion. Within the "information society",<sup>3</sup> consumers have become directly linked to the creation, production and distribution of fashion trends, bypassing traditional mediation previously done by experts. In doing so, fashion trends that once took a month or more to reach consumers via magazines and specialised editorials gave space to the proliferation of clothing and style possibilities that became quickly widespread over social media at any time, any place and by anyone. This spatial-temporal compression made it more important than ever to establish clear measures and faster rhythms linked to efficiency to guarantee larger profit margins and the outflow of consumer goods.

Material Time is marked by precise chronological rhythms that articulate production, distribution, decision-making, marketing, and commerce to feed the masses with novelty and 'desirable' fashion artefacts. Therefore, this temporal level is manifested by visible and graspable cadences of change, materialised by fashion artefacts that comprise not only clothes and accessories but also events, trades, trend reports, social media posts, and marketing campaigns.

Fashion trend forecasting is a product of this temporality, as its objective is to expedite the dissemination of information to accelerate the production of novelty. It generates reports that, ultimately, make changes in fashion visible, non-contradictory, and rhythmic. Clear evidence of this logic is found in reports that are generally seasonal and numeric (e.g., spring/summer 2026), which come to market two years in advance of the product launch, although today, ultra-fast fashion chains no longer seem to follow such a cadence. Therefore, from a futures-thinking perspective, fashion forecasting is exclusively linked to responding to the demands of Material Time, manufacturing certainties and restricting future possibilities to better meet the measurable results given by sales metrics (Garcia, 2023b). Although essential to keep the fashion industry working full steam, this logic is counterproductive in showing us ways to be truly sustainable triggers excessive consumption despite the climate crisis (Faursschou, 1987; Fletcher & Grose, 2012; Mackinney-Valentin, 2017).

However useful for profit and economic growth, Material Time poses challenges for futures-thinking and imagination of alternative practices at the intersections of fashion and futures. Since futures can be imagined but not predicted (Bell, 1997), expanding this prevailing temporal framework for fashion beyond a strictly capitalist and market-driven agenda may enable forecasting professionals to envision long-term and alternative futures, not for products, but for a system to be more aligned with sustainability parameters

#### 4.2. Symbolic time: a matter of cultural narratives

Scholars have advocated for the importance of narratives that permeate collective imaginaries in guiding change and shaping desirable futures (Levy & Spicer, 2013; Milojević & Inayatullah, 2015; Manjana, 2017). By stimulating imagination, stories play a central role in shaping behaviours and establishing shared understandings of what is possible and normal (Riedy, 2020). This line of thought can be transposed to fashion if we recognise that the stories we tell about and through fashion evolve over time and influence the relationship between the self and the collective, directly affecting how we consume.

The symbolic dimension of fashion has been exhaustively discussed from a material culture perspective, where clothing carry values, meanings and beliefs assuming value and collective significance from social interactions (Appadurai, 1986; Entwistle, 2000; Crane, 2000; Barnard, 2002). The expression of values and meanings expressed through material culture cannot be dissociated from the role objects play in culture (Crane & Bovone, 2006; Woodward, 2005; Entwistle, 2014) nor from social agreements and ideals we establish in society (Blumer, 1969; Sapir, [1931] 2020). While fashion items communicate stories about social groups and individuals, the symbolic dimension of fashion is taken from the perspective of cultural production, in which fashion assumes different roles and significance in society as a response to social, political, cultural, environmental and economic dimensions. For instance, in the threshold between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Veblen (2013) and Simmel (1904) explained fashion as a mechanism for

<sup>2</sup> Fast fashion can be conceptualized as "the retail strategy of adapting merchandise assortments to current and emerging trends as quickly and effectively as possible" (Sull and Turconi, 2008, p. 5). This accelerated model has continued to evolve by today, resulting in ultra-fast fashion models, where retailers such as Shein and Asos produce thousands of items per week - instead of hundreds - drastically reducing the gap between production and consumption from weeks to days (Monroe, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> In his book *The Information Society: A New Dimension of the Modern World* (1980) Masuda proposed that society was transitioning from an industrial-based economy to one centred around information and knowledge, where the circulation of information became a primary resource potentialised by globalisation and technology.

social differentiation in a time when social mobility was unlikely and clothing operated as a stamp to mark the differentiation between the upper and lower strata of society. More recently, Lipovetsky (1994) discussed the ephemeral as a core value of fashion dynamics, arguing that contemporary fashion reflects values of consumer culture, such as individualism, and the search for novelty for identity purposes and self-expression. Similarly, Barnard (2014) argued that fashion is intrinsically valued by its association with the idea of speed and novelty, inaugurating a time where the consumption of fashion became more associated with discourses of volatile identities through the overconsumption of fashion artefacts at high speed and large scale (Crane, 2000; Davis, 1992).

Symbolic Time refers thus to a discursive level that fashion assumes when it speaks to its symbolic role in society. Symbolic Time refers to collective imaginaries and the production of significance through artefacts within an immaterial realm (Payne, 2021). Manifested in beliefs, worldviews and meanings in culture being "culture [is] the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action" (Geertz, 1973, p. 145). As Symbolic Time encapsulates sentiments and beliefs circulating in society at a discursive level, media and communication play a crucial role in shaping this temporality while disseminating stories and values about fashion.

In the light of sustainability transitions, Symbolic time sits at the interplay between society, culture and the environment. This temporal level emerges from the observation that profound transitions towards novel paradigms of sustainability require the inclusion of cultural shifts and collective narratives in the formulation of strategies and policies for sustainability (Fletcher, 2008; Mora et al., 2014; Wahl, 2016; Payne, 2021). Symbolic Time is thus directly related to worldviews and imaginaries that fashion assumes at a cultural level at a time when climate change becomes an undeniable threat to humanity.

The challenge regarding Symbolic Time lies in the prevalence of a "tyranny of the moment" (Eriksen, 2001), where instant time becomes a dominant social structure (Hassan, 2003; Rosa, 2013). This acceleration may lead us to consider that cultural changes are now more fragmented, fluid, and contradictory than ever before. As the circulation of information has become more democratic, infectious, and diffuse, a variety of narratives collide and intersect, reshuffle or subtract from one another, revealing that the nature of Symbolic Time has become extremely fractured, unpredictable and unprecedentedly subjected to rapid change. For instance, we are far from a consensus on what sustainable fashion means and where desirable new visions of the future in this field might lead us. For example, research with young consumers has shown that 62 % of young adults admitted to shopping at fast fashion stores monthly, while 94 % of them claim to be in favour of sustainability actions (University of Sheffield Hallam, 2022). Therefore, from a symbolic perspective, discourses on fashion can be used simultaneously as villains of sustainability or as heroes in the name of self-expression. Another example is that the overproduction of goods has normalised overconsumption as a symbol of success and status for the sake of self-expression despite the climate crisis. What we testimony today is the emergence of cultural narratives related to overconsumption being spread out while slow fashion, an ethical alternative to large-scale and mass-production models (Fletcher, 2008; 2010), still struggles to gain traction amid a culture of acceleration. The paradox between fast and slow fashion illustrates how collective values can differ and how fashion can be discursively placed within the heart of culture, which, depending on how it is seen and by whom, may lead consumers to adopt a more or less sustainable behaviour. An explanation for failing a transition towards sustainable fashion may reside in the fact that unsustainability has become embedded in culture, having been systematised and normalised within collective imaginaries. As Fry (2011) argues,

"Unsustainability is not merely a quality and consequence of a modern economy. It became an inherent feature of our collective being which became amplified and made visible by modern modes of resource extraction, production, exchange, industrial and domestic utilisation." (Fry, 2011, p. 433).

The significant value of Symbolic Time is related to the influence that meanings and narratives have on decision-making and promoting change in behaviour (Light et al., 2018). Speculating on future meanings that fashion may assume in culture and society can be useful for redirecting the entire system (instead of just products) towards sustainability by utilising these narratives to shift mindsets, particularly of those in leadership positions, and inform a new course of action for this industry.

In short, Symbolic Time reminds us that cultural and discursive transformations are essential for a more holistic futures-thinking approach to fashion, one that addresses sustainability not only from an environmental perspective but from a social and cultural one.

#### 4.3. Planetary time: a matter of planetary responsibility

As the climate crisis escalates to unprecedented levels, the fashion industry faces increasing pressure to adopt more effective and comprehensive sustainable models. The current situation indicates the need to consider a planetary dimension in futures-thinking to achieve more effective and responsible practices. However, if fashion is characterised by its speed and ephemerality on the one hand, its systems show strong resistance to transition to deeply rooted sustainable practices. A notable example of this reluctance is in the adoption of digital catwalks during the COVID-19 pandemic, which reverted to traditional models once the crisis ended. It shows that, despite the pressing need to adapt and transform existing systems, the cultural and contradictions between fashion and sustainability remain unresolved. While productive systems have quickly adapted to avid consumption patterns in contemporary societies, the need to slow down and implement profound change towards sustainability remains incognito. What we have witnessed in the fashion industry is a contradiction between what we need to do versus what we have been doing, between the urgency for action and the hesitation in recognising that the Earth is changing more rapidly than we expected, and for the worse.

Therefore, the crucial point of this logic lies in how we perceive the passage of time in a sort of Earth-industry relationship. While changes in fashion are clearly perceived through the renewal of products and styles in a matter of weeks or months, the same cannot be said in relation to a planetary dimension. In fact, it may take years, perhaps decades, for the signs of climate change to become obvious to people. This circumstance may stem from our misunderstanding of the passage of time in its abstraction and in relation to events and evidence that we may not witness during our own lifetime. As Fry (2011) argues,

“Time is predominantly viewed as a measure of duration refracted through the length of a human life. We can contemplate time as an abstraction, as a relativistic construct – and science has conspired with such a perception – but we live by experiential time” (Fry, 2011, p.432).

Planetary Time cannot be limited to climate or environmental issues as isolated entities. Instead, it implies a dialogue between (‘hard to see’) environmental changes and a collective sense of responsibility regarding the production and consumption of goods in the light of desirable and sustainable futures. The tensions between Material and Planetary times in fashion become evident in the way that updates in fashion items are salient, visible, immediate, and easy to understand whereas planetary shifts remain in an abstract realm despite clear and objective scientific indicators. Ordinary people can easily identify new fashion trends while uprisings sea levels or carbon emissions are far less perceptible through human senses. In this manner, the fashion/sustainability dilemma goes beyond the speed of fashion trends or a binary idea that fashion changes fast and the Earth changes slowly. What Planetary Time brings to light is a kind of human resistance to deal with abstraction and a collective tendency to perceive climate change as a distant phenomenon that often led us to inaction (van der Linden et al., 2015). Therefore, Planetary Time functions both as a call to awareness to do things differently and quickly, and as a counterpoint to the logic of an increasingly accelerated fashion system, based on economic growth and fuelled by cultural narratives rooted in consumerism as the only available option.

The answer to grounding sustainability concerns in the present and towards the future, as well as to connecting Material and Planetary Times, reside in Symbolic Time. Rather than positioning sustainability issues as a matter to be solved only “in the future” and through material or technology-oriented innovation, placing Symbolic Time as a bridge between production/consumption and environmental issues can shed light on the role that cultural narratives play in transitioning this industry. Since cultural narratives and beliefs cannot be dissociated from action, the bridge between present and future values, as well as technological advancements and narratives ingrained in collective social imaginaries, is indispensable for promoting a paradigmatic change in the conventional ways we see, value, consume and operate fashion. Therefore, Planetary Time should be examined in relation to Material and Symbolic Times, as an exercise in approaching fashion and sustainability from a long-term perspective that remains connected to industry developments, societal changes, environmental issues and collective beliefs. If we aim to place the Earth before profit, we cannot disregard the fact that collective value systems have a profound impact on consumption patterns, productive directions, and decision-making. Planetary Time serves thus as a transdisciplinary anchor for our sense of collective responsibility. It reminds us that systemic change requires efforts from multiple sectors, scales, and actors by juxtaposing systems of production and consumption, environmental scientific data, societal values and beliefs, and a collective willingness to act.

In terms of futures thinking, Planetary Time is an invitation for fashion forecasters to understand the effects of climate change in relation to their beliefs and industry needs. It encourages all practitioners to connect perceptions of time across material and immaterial worlds, individual and collective scales, and natural and social sciences, as well as to consider the more intricate, non-linear relationships between pasts, presents, and futures. Planetary Time can manifest only as a combination of Material and Symbolic times, being guided by environmental consciousness, which, if approached in good faith, may influence our willingness to transition toward new models of sustainability.

## 5. The Three Fashion Times framework

Although separated for the sake of clarity, the temporal levels here described are intersectional and multidirectional. The Three Fashion Times framework suggests that fashion temporalities are not exclusive, subsequent or precisely separated, but overlap and influence one another even if they occur at different scales and dimensions and move at distinct paces of change. The intercorrelation

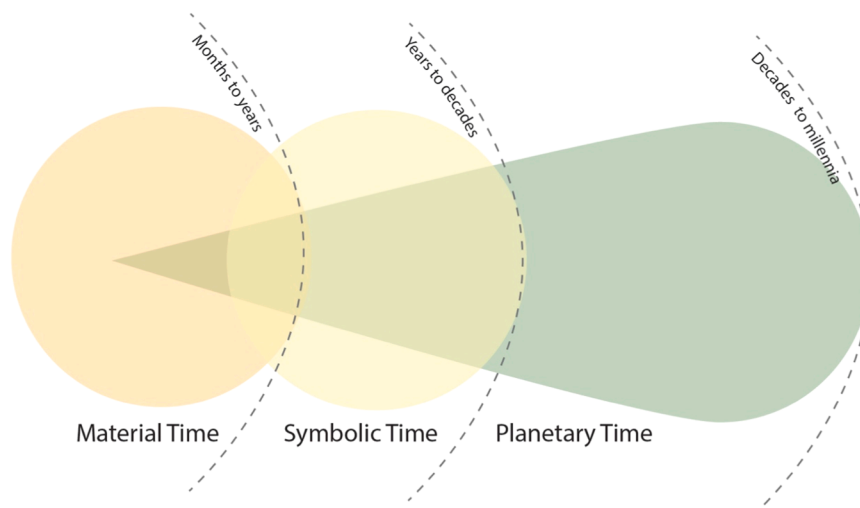


Fig. 1. Interlacement between the three fashion times.

of the Three Fashion Times is anchored in the pace layering model proposed by Stewart Brand (2018). In Brand’s work, various components of a complex system (namely, Fashion/art, Commerce Infrastructure, Governance, Culture, and Nature) move at their own pace but in a way that each layer influences and responds to the closest layers shaping a cohesive and resilient system. Tracing correspondence to Brand’s (2018) model, the Three Fashion Times shows that goods are not detached from cultural narratives and environmental concerns. This model suggests that changes at an environmental level can influence cultural and industry temporalities and contribute to provoking a structural change. So, the environmental level is not only adjacent to the others but interpenetrates them as a force for transformation.

The model and table below (Fig. 1 and Table 1) illustrate the interdependence of the temporal dimensions to promote advances towards sustainability. As seen in Fig. 1, Planetary Time is not an isolated dimension but an intersectional force that traverses the other temporalities. Conversely, if Planetary Time remains disconnected from cultural and industrial processes, dissonances and contradictions between environmental consciousness and consumption patterns are likely to persist, hindering transitions towards a sustainability-driven direction.

**6. Conclusion**

Despite the importance of achieving a sustainable fashion model, to date, there has been limited critical reflection on the types of futures-thinking practices deployed in the field and the implications of them in shaping better or worse futures. In a time where transitioning towards a radical sustainability is paramount, the Three Fashion Times encourages fashion forecasters to challenge and rethink their own practice from within. The Three Fashion Times reminds us that practices oriented to futures making are part of a political act (Knappe et al., 2019), and dominant forms of doing so can obscure other many ways of viewing and building the future. While current fashion forecasting practices are adequate for providing guiding information to increase industrial efficiency and profit, the Three Fashion Times might illuminate ways for the emergence of a fashion foresight practice, designed to fulfil interests that emerge from collective and environmental needs. A continued ignorance about these temporal interconnections may keep fashion forecasters as major contributors for unsustainable futures, as cultural narratives are also shaped by forecasters’ work in the form of trend reports and become an incontestable influence on immediacy. Therefore, fashion forecasters concerned with the state of fashion in relation to the conditions of the Earth and the future of humanity need to acknowledge that including “green products” or sustainability-related themes in forecasting reports does not prompt relevant transformations and may serve as an excuse for further delay in implementing impactful actions for transition.

The Three Fashion Times framework indicates a conceptual possibility for reorienting practitioners’ relationship to time, moving their approach to futures from short to long-term, and from products to an articulation between industry needs, ecological systems, and cultural worldviews. By exploring these interconnections, fashion forecasters might be able to see futures not as a tool for fuelling capital dynamics but as a crucial principle to shape present action (Slaughter, 1996). In other words, by expanding the notions of fashion temporalities from clock-time to an intricate three-level approach, fashion forecasters could wave more systemic and complex views into their practices and connect what has been produced and consumed with cultural discourses and planetary boundaries, the latter undeniably at risk.

The Three Fashion Times poses seeds for nurturing a foresight approach to fashion, where change is not punctual but considered from a systemic and transdisciplinary perspective. It is not just about adopting a long-term vision but exercising the capacity of finding new routes for solving the dilemma between the fashion industry and sustainability from a standpoint that is intrinsically rooted in the fashion forecasting domain, that is, a cultural one.

Fashion forecasters have already the expertise to approach this temporal framework. In practical terms, they can incorporate foresight tools into their daily practices as a way to push leaders to think futures beyond next seasons. To do so, fashion forecasters could benefit, for example, from incorporating a Casual Layered Analysis framework (Inayatullah, 2004) into their practice to gain a more holistic view of fashion narratives and their implications in current and future systems. They could also explore and build on emerging tools and approaches tailored for the fashion field, such as Fashion Futuring (Garcia, 2023), Fashion Fictions (Holroyd, 2025), and Fashion Futures 2023 (Centre For Sustainable fashion, 2019).

This multitemporal perspective calls on forecasters seeking to contribute to sustainable futures to weave together industry needs, planetary boundaries, and cultural discourses, in order to help fashion leaders transition their businesses towards truly sustainable models and to ensure both a better, more hopeful present and the right of future generations to a flourishing future.

**Table 1**  
Aspects of the Three Fashion Times.

	Material Time	Symbolic Time	Planetary Time
Dimension	Industrial	Sociocultural	Environmental
Speed of Change	weeks to months	years to decades	decades to millennia
Influences of Change	technological and information developments - manifested in fast-fashion dynamics and social media.	Cultural narratives that both influence and are influenced by the circulation of goods in society, communication, and planetary changes.	changes in the environment and our sense of urgency and responsibility in acting.
Perceived by	Artefacts and industrial processes in multiple forms - products, styles, events, trade fairs, marketing campaigns, media communication.	intangible aspects located at a discursive level - narratives, worldviews, values and beliefs.	intersections between materiality, culture and nature.

## Limitations and future research

This contribution is an attempt, from a practitioner's perspective, to address temporal considerations for fashion and illuminate first steps in transitioning fashion forecasting to a fashion foresight approach. Further research could build on this conceptual framework to suggest novel methods and practices for the field of fashion and futures. Future research could, therefore, explore how the interconnection between the three temporalities is mobilised to challenge the status quo and produce visible and practical implications in transforming an industry that has demonstrated resistance to profound changes.

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## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Garcia clarice carvalho:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Conceptualization.

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The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests: Clarice Carvalho Garcia reports initial financial support for this was provided by RMIT University as part of a PhD scholarship. The work has been resumed and supported by University of Technology Sydney since October 2024. If there are other authors, they declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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## Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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