

Connecting transition design and everyday fashion practices: a case of body change and the wardrobe.

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Introduction

Garments and fashion items are part of everyday life, and they are objects that accompany people through small and big moments of transition: between contexts, life phases and body changes.

In this work I introduce a connection between phases of the transition process and everyday fashion practices through describing a moment of body change from the perspective of dressing, aiming to offer a foundational reflection towards further empirical and theoretical research.

Transition design

Transition design is a contemporary method elaborated on a framework that incorporates the complexity of the process of change into design methodology, recognizing an active, catalysing role of design in it (Ceschin & Gaziulusoy, 2020). In the words of the founders, it was “inspired by the need for design to be more reliable in the face of increasingly complex problems” (Irwin, Kossoff, & Tonkinwise, 2015, p. 3). Transition design can act as a complementary strategy of any existing design method.

In 2022, an actionable model of transition design was presented (Figure 1), based on change theories and long-term past societal transitions, mainly based on destabilizing environmental events (Hebinck et al., 2022; Loorbach et al. 2017).

The figure represents the encounter of two opposing processes that configure any process of change: one line is composed of the phases that build up to the arrival and stabilization of new elements, and another stream captures steps of the process of phasing the old elements out. These two crossing paths, the build-up and the breakdown processes, cross each other in a moment of stability.

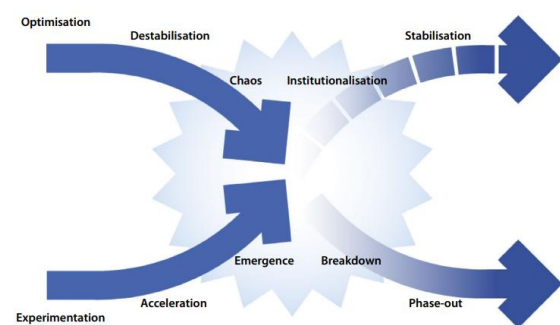


Figure 1. The X-curve model of transitions.
(Source: Hebinck et al., 2022, p. 1009.)

While the framework of transition design is more commonly applied to social or institutional design, it is also an informative framework in the case of products such as fashion items.

From a systemic perspective fashion production and transition design have already been connected (Odabasi et al., 2022) and there are examples from the field of fashion that address transitory moments: the Dutch brand Vigma (Petersen, 2019) offers a rental possibility of childrenswear with a subscription package, or the project of Rebecca Early, periodically renews prints on shirts transforming the garments (Early, 2019). However, an analysis of the X-curve model within everyday fashion practice, and a focus on the object level offer further areas to explore.

Pregnancy: Fashion practices

The body changes throughout life, and the garments in the wardrobe follow these changes navigating transitory phases. Fashion offers a dedicated range of products to different ages, body types and activities.

Selecting one example of change, in this work I focus on pregnancy, as a life moment of temporary body transformation, and I reflect on each stage of the X-curve model (Hebinck et al.,

2022). In the example a woman is considered, in young adulthood between the age of 18-29 (Erikson 1993), with a stable body shape. After the first trimester of pregnancy the body of a woman begins to transform not only internally, but externally as well. The transitory moment includes the period until a new stability begins, expanding to a period after giving birth.

Transitioning wardrobe

Following the phases of the X-curve model (Hebinck et al., 2022), it is possible to reflect on the approach towards the wardrobe when the body changes, and different needs emerge. Reflecting on the patterns of breakdown, a synthesis of key concepts of the process are listed in Table 1.

Pattern of breakdown	The wardrobe: practices and approach
Optimisation - improving the existing	Curated wardrobe - multipurpose pieces - adding items occasionally
Destabilisation - a sense of urgency for change	Fitting issues - new criteria for garment selection
Chaos - conflict, uncertainties	Disordered wardrobe - new, old, fitting and not fitting garments
Experimentation - radical new practices	Looking for alternatives - crafting, swapping, shopping, combining
Acceleration - alternatives are visible	Upcoming event - urgent need covered relying on new practice
Emergence - new structures become visible	Transforming wardrobe - embedding new basic pieces

Table 1. Transition phases explored through notes on dressing practice. (based on: Hebinck et al., 2022)

The process of transition continues after a short moment of stability, following a pattern of build-up (Table 2.). On system-level transitions, in this part of the process of transition breakdown and phasing out are the least considered stages in the context of introducing innovative solutions (Hebinck et al., 2022).

Pattern of build-up	The wardrobe: practices and approach
Breakdown - repelling and releasing former established order	Rearranged wardrobe - relocating, putting away garments, towards a new medium-term order
Phase out - dealing with loss	Refreshed wardrobe - getting rid of garments
Institutionalisation - the new normal	Changed wardrobe - organised spaces - multipurpose pieces
Stabilisation - optimising	Effortless use - maintaining the new wardrobe (optimisation)

Table 2. Transition phases explored through notes on dressing practice. (based on: Hebinck et al., 2022)

Body change occurs in life between psychosocial development phases (Erikson, 1997), and for other reasons such as sport, or health issues. In this perspective, the wardrobe is approached shifting between transitory phases, with a shorter or longer duration of each pattern or phase.

Applying the X-curve model (Hebinck et al., 2022) to dress culture reveals adaptation strategies in the context everyday fashion practices. Such perspective is relevant to optimise and evaluate innovation on the level of fashion items, offering valuable insights on larger systemic levels as well.

Further research

This work offers itself as a starting point for future investigations in particular with an empirical focus, that could contribute to a more detailed understanding of implications of adaptive fashion practices.

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