# Fast Fashion: Carless Production And Endless Consumption

'Fast fashion is a model build on carless production and endless consumption" (The True Cost, 2015).

Cheap, trendy, and disposable, are the defining descriptors for the multibillion dollar enterprise of Fast Fashion. Fast Fashion is a trend that uses garment ideas sampled from celebrity culture, or the catwalk, that are turned into affordable items of clothing for a multitude of retailers at unbelievably rapid speed.

Today, fast fashion brands hold the main characteristics of,

- Utilising offshore production: This is most commonly where labour is cheapest, worker safety rights are inadequate, and there is poor visibility due to complex supply chains. This tactic allows less liability for the companies, and complex supply chains make them less visible to the damage they are inflicting on communities and individuals.
- A multitude of styles, which incorporate up and coming trends
- Breakneck turnaround time: Turnaround time, is the time within in which the style or trend is transferred from the catwalk, or celebrity media, and made available to the public. Within the fast fashion industry, this process in incredibly speedy, one of the main contributors to the intense strain of production.
- Specific amounts of each garment: This promotes the consumer to purchase the product upon finding it, instilling the fear that they will miss out on the product. This is maintained by the continual replacement of products in stores, which in turn creates a sense of disposability within the products.
- Materials of a low quality, that are cheap to obtain: Clothing made of cheap and poorly made materials mean that the products do not last very long, and degrade after a short period of time. This particular characteristic, in conjunction to the continual replacement of stock in stores, has greatly aided the creation of the terminology 'disposable fashion' used widely to describe fast fashion garments, as the clothing is not of a good quality, and is most frequently disposed of.

Examples of some of the most notorious fast fashion labels include; H&M, Zara, TopShop, and GAP. The main means of production these companies utilise, is sweatshop labour. This form of labour generally refers to a place of production where primarily unskilled workers, produce goods in unsafe and unhealthy conditions under extremely low pay, working for excessively long hours. The term sweatshop exists in other industries, and produces other products like technology, but is most rigorously used in the fashion industry.

## What are the origins of Fast Fashion?

One of the more influential factors that shaped the development, and overall history of fast fashion, was the time period in which it emerged in, and the occurrence of WWII. In this time, individualised garments became extremely strenuous and difficult to produce, due to the war

time commodity constraints, and consequent rationing of clothing materials. Particularly in the United Kingdom, imports, along with many raw materials, were vastly consumed by the war, many of which were crucial to the production of clothing. On top of this strain, supply imports were also very cramped, due to the blockages of vital shipping routes, caused by naval blockades, and attacks on merchant convoys. Additionally, due to the difficulties surrounding the scarcity of clothing, the available clothing had seen a fluctuation in cost, sending prices soaring. This financial blockade was not only problematic towards the general public, but to those producing and distributing the clothing.

The lagging resources soon became a looming worry to the public, and even as coupons were issued to every member of the general public, the Board of Trade soon realised this solution was no match against the heavily strained commodities. During the bombings of London and Manchester, vital manufacturing facilities were taken out by the Nazi air force, or Luftwaffe. Tens of millions of army, navy, air force, auxiliary corps, and women's services, uniforms were sent into vigorous production within nearly half of those factories remaining, as the war efforts also consumed the means of production. The Author of 2014's CC41 Utility Clothing: The Label That Transformed Fashion, Mike Brown, told Racked, "The amount of cloth [manufacturers] got was really hugely down on what it had been pre-war, and if you're only going to get a certain amount of cloth in, then the natural tendency is to make it into expensive garments with a large profit margin." "This was the problem that the government had: Under these problems of constraints of supply, how do you keep prices down?"

In an effort to make the sale of clothes more affordable to working-class citizens once again, Metford Watkins introduced a new type of clothing known formally as CC41, or "General Utility". This change took place in the July of 1941, and prior to the revolutionary fulfilment of these plans, Watkins was part of the Freshly Minted Directorate of Civilian Clothing, as the director general. Aside from the overall success in producing the garments, there were some apparent differences in style due to scarcity of materials, and budgeting cuts. For example, there were to be no more than four pleats in women's dresses, no tiered skirts, and imitation pockets were used in place of real ones. Men's suits had buttons on the cuffs, and had to dispense with double breasts. Infant fashion, also adopted a lack of embroidery and lace within its styles. Although these material constraints were implemented, there were no restrictions regarding the colour. This can be greatly contrasted to the quality difference seen in cheap, wholesale, fast fashion garments we see today, which are quite visibly less well made due to the same approaches to cutting costs that was utilised to cater to the wartime budget cuts, and overall scarcity of money.

With time, the general public expressed great displays of enthusiasm and acceptance for the Utility brand, and it was soon integrated as a normality. An article from the daily mail during this period, boasted that Utility promised that "suburban wives and factory girls will soon be able to wear clothes designed by the Queen's dressmaker". One factor that contributed to the widespread acceptance of this brand, was the collaboration with widely recognised designers, which added an element of desire and credibility to the brand. This same effect can compared to the marketing schemes of stores such as GAP, Target, and H&M, who actively provide the public with versions of designer label clothing, that are subsequently more cost friendly and affordable for the average buyer. Although this concept is no new revelation to the everyday consumer in today's society, in the context of World War II, the idea of incorporating high street with high fashion, was a daring and audacious revelation.

These dire circumstances of war and commodity strain, served as an equaliser between consumers, in a country still divided by wealth and class, which in turn, caused the widespread democratization of fashion. After conducting an interview with a representative from MNML fashion (an Australian Ethically produced fashion label), it was stated that “[their company loves] that fashion has become more democratic and egalitarian, but our expectations have been unnecessarily skewed by these fashion conglomerates that pump out crappy clothes to adoring mases, only to turn around and burn what doesn’t sell”. This highlights how this democratization has been effective in providing equal opportunities to consumers, although we have been somewhat brainwashed against contemplating the consequences of our actions, and how they promote the disastrous fast fashion industry.

The popularity of the Utility brand clothing can not only be attributed to the general quality of the clothing, and so causing a lack of need for replacement, but the way in which it catered to a vast variety of incomes and budgets. Utility clothing was more often than not, cheaper than a non-utility clothing item. Prices were fixed under the utility scheme, and wholesaler margins were to stay within 20% of the manufacturer’s price, and profits of the manufacturer could not surpass 4% of the sales and production expenses. 33% of the manufacturer or wholesaler’s price were paid to the retailer. Better value for money was represented within the better quality clothing that soon arrived in the market, and with time these price differences saw more fluctuation and difference, and so, the choice was clear for those with a more fixed income and budget. This idea has been greatly influential in the ethos used today within the fashion industry with the term, ‘fashion for all’.