

Do Not Remove This Tag

Archival Poetics of Fashion Labels

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Fashion – I use the term “fashion” in a broader sense, as the total arsenal of expressions of human appearance and external identity. My focus lies in the waste products of the fashion industry: what remains after the body's interaction with clothing. These remnants become the basis of my artistic research. Through methods such as the ready-made, objet trouvé, and assemblage, I select and transform these discarded artefacts into art objects, reactivating their material and conceptual potential.

Fashion artist – creates wearable art or adopts fashion (comprising clothing items, fashion artefacts, or components thereof) as a medium for conceptual art. In this creative practice, fashion transcends its established commercial, industrial and utilitarian purposes, thereby exceeding the conventional boundaries of design to become a medium for conceptual artistic expression.

Poiesis – is defined as the creative act of bringing something into being, and is characterised as a process of revealing or unfolding meaning through making. In critical or artistic contexts (Athanasiou; Ahmed), it has been theorised that this process can be conceptualised as a form of imaginative resistance: a method of reenvisioning the world through the reconfiguration of language, materials, or experience.

Labeltry – artistic concept built around fashion labels—how they signify, seduce, categorise, and “control.” I introduce this term to describe the creative and critical practice of turning consumer labels into poetic microtexts. This neologism combines the words ‘label’ and ‘poetry’ and refers to the aesthetic and discursive practice of cutting, recontextualising and re-poetising fashion labels to reveal their affective and semiotic functions.

My relationship with poetry has always felt complicated, ambiguous, uneasy—yet undeniably inherited, embedded in my bloodline through a father and a grandfather (a famous, yet controversial figure) who both wrote in verse. I never quite found a form that fit: poetry felt either too raw, too fragile, too exposed, or else too adorned—lipping too easily into sentiment or cliché. Fashion, as well, has been a similarly entangled companion—like a long, haunted marriage with closets full of skeletons. **Labeltry—an artistic practice and method I will discuss in this text—emerged as a way to navigate both tensions: a quiet form of correspondence within a field I have worked in for over twenty years.** I’ve always resisted fashion as an industry; its seductive

machinery, its relentless churn. Yet, I remain drawn to fashion as our shared “epidermis”—a second skin that choreographs identity, gestures, and social fictions.



All included cut-off labels are from the Labeltry vocabulary kit.

Amid the vast, ever-shifting tides of fashion, where unknown brands drift like a plankton—fleeting, innumerable, and largely overlooked by critical gaze—I found myself drawn to their silent murmurs. In this ocean of rapid, disposable attire, something stirred; a tremor, a whisper, as though fashion bore a body of its own, a murmuring subconscious seeking connection, articulation, presence. I remember it vividly: wandering through “Humana” (a second-hand clothing store chain), lost in everyday contemplations, my gaze unconsciously tracing the labels rather than the clothes themselves. Words from brand names began to uncannily echo the questions occupying my mind, creating a surreal sense of dialogue, the latent voice of fashion. That mysterious “voice” had me hooked, and I started putting together an archive of those labels—not only as mere remnants of consumer goods, but as fragments of a deeper semiotic landscape. In this quiet, tactile ritual, a new kind of “fashion collection” emerged that led to a practice of “listening” through material. So far, I’ve collected over 200 pieces as separate words or phrases that serve to create intuitive verses—**Labeltry**. Some of them, detached from the garment, become autonomous manifestations. Others, like intricately woven identity marks, unveiled the disquieting genealogies of Western fashion—made in China, made in Bangladesh, made in Pakistan—tags as quiet artefacts of global asymmetry, stitched into garments once touched by the invisible labour of fashions exploited. The label, an eloquent testimony, remained within the second-hand garment, already saturated with the memories and histories of its former wearers.

In these residual markers, overlooked and intimate, the garment began to “speak”—of ethics, of toxic stereotypes and internalised

attitudes—veiled beneath the polished skin of the commodity. Figuratively, labels assume social significance, serving to marginalise, stigmatise and stereotype those who are perceived as 'other'. Labelling is a reflection of the character of consumer society and culture, closely linked to the concept of the standardised, serial, ready-made product. Quoting Zygmund Bauman (2007), *"in a consumer society, no one can become a subject without first becoming a commodity. Becoming a commodity is the stuff that dreams and fairy tales are made of."*

Speaking in Bruno Latour's terms (actor-network theory or ANT), fashion objects are not passive, but rather active mediators in the process of meaning-making. That's why a clothing label is more



Labeltry archive.

than just a piece of clothing. It's part of a bigger network that connects production, geography, social expectations and identity. In the process of labeltry, the term 'label' is repositioned not as inert residues of

consumption, but as a semiotic agent that carries and rearticulates the complex operations of global capitalism, identity production and affective politics. This performative archive becomes not only a fashion vocabulary kit, but a method as well, metamorphosing ready-made clothing tags into poetic microtexts, remnant haikus.

At its core, the project treats the brand as a cultural fragment that, once removed from its original purpose, begins to speak in new, poetic ways, where meaning and aesthetics meet critique. A small scrap of fabric, once tucked quietly beneath the seams, now steps forward, out-speaking the garment itself. It murmurs the encoded attitudes of Western culture, where identity, value, and desire are so fluently stitched into the smooth surface of a brand name. What quietly stands out in the



Labeltry artefacts.

Labeltry archive is how many of the collected labels originate from the womenswear department. In contrast, menswear often opts for a more abstract language—cryptic letter clusters, muted symbols, pseudonyms, brand names that withhold identity rather than proclaim it. It is as if femininity must always explain itself, while masculinity is allowed to remain silent, coded, and unspoken.

As Roland Barthes argues in "The Fashion System" (1967), fashion functions as a semiological structure—a language of signs that constructs meaning through surface and code rather than substance. Labels, in this sense, can be considered as "floating signifiers," detached from the materiality of garments, yet overloaded with ideological resonance. In Labeltry, these fragments are reactivated as poetic devices, exposing the mythologies that fashion continuously (re) produces – of gender, desirability, identity, and moral virtue. The verses



Labeltry, 2025.

born from clothing labels in my artistic project exist on the threshold between simulacrum and its deconstruction. As signs of signs, they no longer reflect the reality of the product, yet through their poetic rewriting, they expose the mechanisms by which contemporary fashion constructs illusions of value, identity, and morality. Not to mention, that brands tend to personify their names, giving them human-like qualities. That's how they become more than just a catchy name, they "speak" about an allegory of contemporary consumer life, manifesting social values, norms and lifestyles. I seek to create a space for unfolding narratives—an invitation to enter into a quiet dialogue with fashion itself, as a living skin stretched across human experience. Through this artistic project, the consumer is invited to hear the soft echoes left behind by their own appearance—the aftersound of what they once wore.

Drawing on Sara Ahmed's concept of the "affective economy" (2004), where emotions "stick" to signs, surfaces, and bodies, Labeltry uncovers how fashion labels are not neutral but emotionally charged. These fragments of apparel encode normative messages of gender, success, whiteness and coolness, guiding how bodies "should" appear and feel. This project reassembles these fragments to question who these labels are made for and at what cost? It reveals how language (often unnoticed in its marketing function) is saturated with emotional cues, ideological assumptions, and gendered scripts. My artistic practice embodies what Athena Athanasiou calls a "poiesis" (Athanasiou and Butler 2013)—a mode of creative intervention that doesn't seek grand gestures or totalising critique, but instead performs subtle, insistent re-articulations of meaning from within the overlooked, the discarded, and the peripheral.

As a fashion artist, I stand at a vivid crossroads, considering whether I should pursue the creation of something conceptually and/or aesthetically "new"—perhaps a piece of wearable art—or rework and breathe new life into what already exists. In a world drowning in stuff, a natural and pressing question arises: Does the making of yet another utilitarian garment still carry meaning? We need to be aware of moderation in everything we do, in terms of both material things and our emotions. Considering the impending ecological collapse, this is not just sensible, it's vital. In a culture where we always want more, new fashion innovations disappear very quickly. They are swallowed up by screens and displays. The rapid expansion of the global economy



has only sharpened conversations around the “end” or “death” of fashion. Yet within this moment of uncertainty lies an invitation: to see fashion not merely as commercial production, but as a conceptual and artistic practice—a living space for critical reflection, reinvention, and imagination.

And so, I continue stitching—between disciplines, between selves, through fragments, labels, and verse-like gestures. What began as hesitation transformed into a quiet methodology: collecting, listening, (un)sewing the seams of fashion’s subconscious. In the overlooked and discarded, I found a language that resists closure – a poetics not of perfection, but of persistence. This is not about resolution, but resonance. A way to remain inside the folds of contradiction, to write not just about fashion, but with it. To let the garment speak and perhaps, in its whisper, find a place where poetry and practice, text and texture, can finally share a skin.¹



¹ Parts of this text were translated and edited with the help of OpenAI’s ChatGPT-5 and DeepL.



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