

Echoes of Waste: Eco-Conscious Fashion Expression in the Spirit of Pramoedya Ananta Toer

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ABSTRACT

This work serves as a visual expression rooted in deep concern over environmental exploitation and the ongoing degradation of marine ecosystems. Through a sustainable fashion approach, this couture garment is crafted using post-consumer materials such as discarded denim, damaged compact discs, and plastic bottles, serving as a critical response to the consumerist culture that negatively impacts nature. The research adopts a descriptive qualitative method, utilizing the stages of exploration, experimentation, and formation as outlined by Alma M. Hawkins. It also incorporates the humanistic philosophy of Pramoedya Ananta Toer as a cultural lens to frame the narrative. The creative process reveals that fashion design can be a powerful medium for ecological critique, offering an alternative narrative that fosters collective environmental awareness. This work affirms that fashion is not merely about visual aesthetics, but also a space of resistance—one that advocates for humanity and sustainability.

KEYWORDS

sustainable fashion, fashion waste, ocean, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, ecological critique



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Introduction

In recent decades, the fashion industry has experienced rapid growth; yet behind the glamour of catwalks and seasonal trends lies an undeniable truth: fashion is one of the major contributors to waste and environmental degradation. The practice of fast fashion, which drives mass production at high speed, often neglects sustainability and environmental ethics [1],[2]. On the other hand, the oceans—one of Earth's most vital life systems—continue to suffer degradation caused by plastic pollution and household waste, including textile scraps and synthetic materials that are difficult to decompose [3].

Born from a deep concern over these realities, this fashion piece was created as a creative response to the environmental crisis, particularly the exploitation of nature and the destruction of marine ecosystems. The materials used are not luxurious or new fabrics, but rather discarded denim, broken Compact Disks, and unused plastic bottles. Through a couture design approach, these waste materials are reassembled into an

artistic garment that is not only visually compelling, but also carries a strong message about the importance of ecological awareness [4].

In designing this work, inspiration was also drawn from the thoughts of Pramoedya Ananta Toer—a prominent Indonesian writer who consistently voiced the struggles of the marginalized. While Pramoedya used words to defend the oppressed and confront social injustice [5], this work channels resistance through design and texture. Waste, often discarded and deemed worthless, is elevated into a symbol of resistance against the destructive culture of consumerism.

More than just a garment, this work serves as a visual narrative that refuses to remain silent in the face of ongoing destruction. It invites us to reexamine the relationship between humanity, nature, and fashion—that fashion should not symbolize excess, but instead reflect care and responsibility. Through this creation, the designer aims to demonstrate that sustainability is not a fleeting trend, but a way of life that must be embraced and voiced—beginning, perhaps, with a single piece of clothing [6].

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in several interconnected theoretical foundations: sustainable fashion theory, humanistic aesthetics, and theories of cultural resistance through art and design.

1. Sustainable Fashion Theory

Sustainable fashion is an approach within the fashion industry that considers the social, environmental, and economic impacts of clothing production and consumption [7]. This principle rejects the fast fashion model, which promotes overproduction and disregards environmental responsibility. In this context, the use of waste materials such as discarded denim, broken CDs, and plastic bottles serves as a tangible form of circular economy practice—one that prioritizes recycling, ethical production, and long-term ecological awareness [8].

2. Humanistic Aesthetics in the Spirit of Pramoedya Ananta Toer

The aesthetic vision in Pramoedya's works goes beyond beauty; it reflects a commitment to humanity, particularly toward the oppressed and marginalized. His humanistic perspective positions art and literature as mediums of resistance and awakening. This approach inspires a form of fashion that is not only concerned with surface appearance but also becomes a vessel for voicing broader environmental and humanitarian issues [9].

3. Cultural Resistance through Visual Works

In the realm of art and design, visual creation can serve as a form of resistance against dominant systems, including consumerist culture and ecological destruction. According to Hall [10], representation in popular culture constitutes an ideological space where alternative narratives can emerge. In fashion, design functions as a symbolic medium capable of stirring social awareness and promoting collective transformation.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, utilizing the exploration-experimentation-forming method as popularized by Alma M. Hawkins [11] in the field of creative arts. This approach is chosen for its ability to capture the creative process and symbolic meaning behind fashion design in a more in-depth and reflective manner.

1. Exploration Method

This phase involved gathering data related to fashion waste, marine pollution, and references to existing recycled fashion design practices [12]. The researcher also explored the intellectual discourse of Pramoedya Ananta Toer as a foundational element for the project's humanistic concept.

2. Experimentation Method

This phase consisted of a series of visual and technical experiments using waste materials such as used denim, CDs, and plastic bottles. The process included techniques such as re-stitching, couture silhouette construction, and the creation of new textures from unconventional materials.

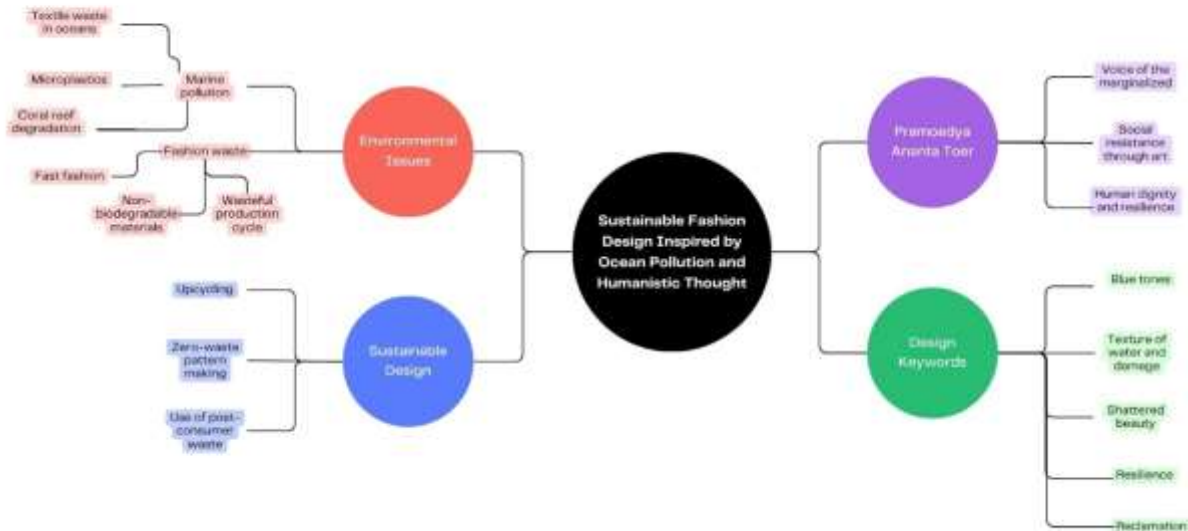
3. Forming Method

The results of the experimentation phase were translated into a couture fashion piece that prioritizes not only aesthetics but also carries a strong ecological narrative. The visual elements of the garment were shaped to represent the wounded oceans and exploited nature, while expressing a spirit of resistance through a sustainable fashion approach.

Discussion

1. Exploration Method

a. Conceptual Mind Mapping:



Picture 1. Mind Mapping

The aim of this stage is to understand the interconnection between the issues of ocean waste, fast fashion, and sustainable design grounded in humanism.

2. Experimental Method

a. Mood Board Creation

The mood board contains visual references of polluted oceans, damaged coral formations, plastic waste on beaches, and avant-garde fashion design imagery that addresses sustainability issues. The dominant use of oceanic blue, plastic gray, and fractured/decayed textures helps establish the intended visual atmosphere.



Picture 2. Moodboard



Figure 3. The Designs

b. Design Alternatives and Final Selection Several sketches were developed using scraps of used denim and textures from damaged Compact Disks.

The final design was selected for its ability to visualize the "wounds of the ocean" through a couture silhouette:



Picture 4. Final & Selected Design

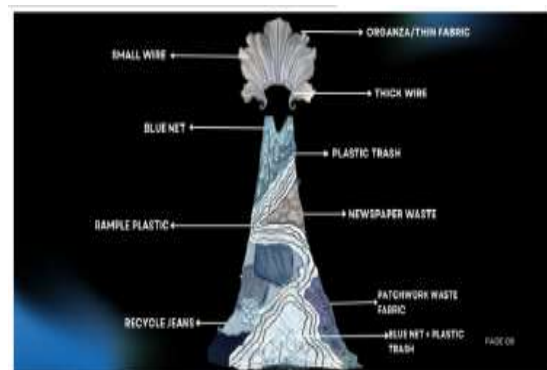
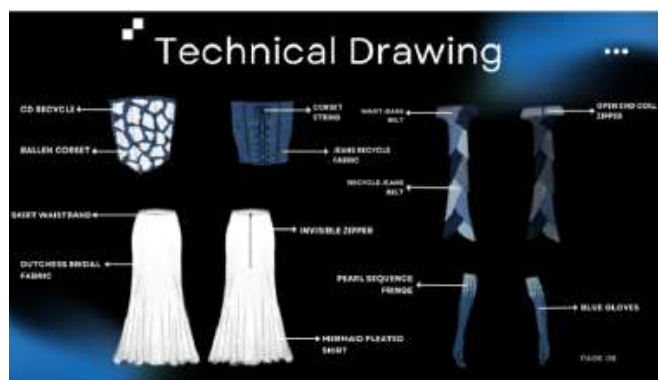
Front View: Waste textile geometry forms shapes reminiscent of fish scales.

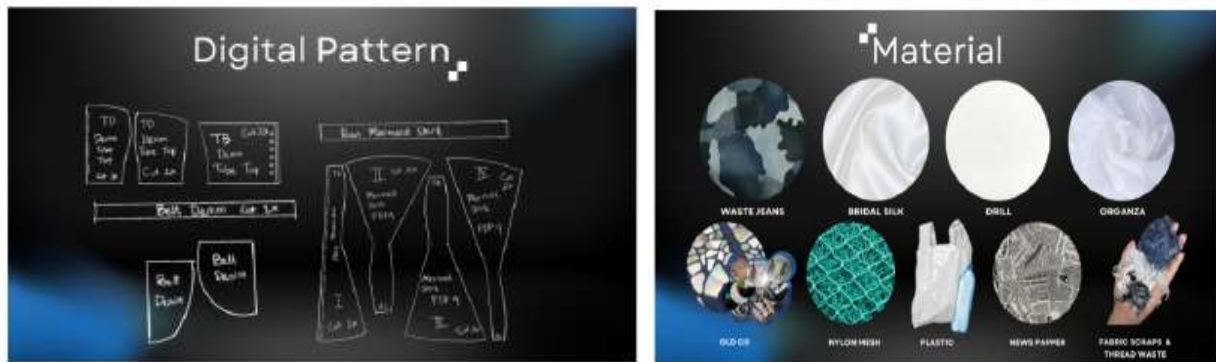
Back View: Nets and textures resemble a map of oceanic damage, accompanied by fading sea flora accents.

3. Form Development Method

a. Technical Process

Pattern Making: The patterns were arranged modularly to maximize the use of irregular denim scraps.





Picture 5. Technical Drawing, Digital Patter and Material

Sewing Techniques: Re-stitching and quilting were applied using unconventional materials such as compact discs and plastic. The fragility of the broken compact disks was deliberately exposed to evoke a sense of wounds and damage.



Picture 6. Sewing Progress

Details: Layering of net textures and plastic sequins was used to depict the dynamics of a polluted yet still living ocean.

b. Final Work and Meaning Description

This garment combines a haute couture silhouette with waste materials, resulting in a gown that challenges conventional notions of beauty. The gown “speaks” through its textures and layers, reflecting the suffering of the ocean. The design resonates with the humanistic thought of Pramoedya Ananta Toer, in which the voice of the silenced emerges not through verbal narration, but through visual storytelling. Just as

Pramoedya wielded his pen as a form of resistance, this work uses needle and waste to voice an ecological tragedy.



Picture 7. The Result

“You may advance in your studies, but remember, your responsibility is not only to yourself, but also to society.”

— Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *This Earth of Mankind*

Conclusion

This fashion piece was born out of concern for two closely interconnected issues: the destructive impact of the fashion industry on the environment and the degradation of marine ecosystems caused by human waste. By using textile waste, plastic, and damaged compact discs as primary materials, this work is not merely an aesthetic experiment but a symbolic statement of the urgent need for a paradigm shift in fashion design practices.

Through the exploratory, experimental, and form-building approach outlined by Alma M. Hawkins, this creative process demonstrates how materials often dismissed as worthless can be transformed into a form of art that is both communicative and reflective. The exploration phase generated a conceptual understanding of the ocean crisis, fast fashion, and the importance of ethical consciousness in the creative process. The mood board and design alternatives shaped the visual direction of the intended narrative, while the experimental phase opened space for innovation through the use of unconventional materials.

Inspiration drawn from the humanistic thought of Pramoedya Ananta Toer adds a deeper dimension: that creative work can serve as a tool of resistance against injustice—both social and ecological. Just as Pramoedya gave voice to the silenced through literature, this piece carries a message of resistance through fashion. The gown becomes a metaphor for the wounds of the ocean and the exploited body of the Earth. The re-stitched fragments of waste stand as a symbol of defiance against consumerist culture and environmental indifference.

Overall, this work affirms that fashion can serve as a reflective and transformative medium. Fashion design is not solely about trends and aesthetics—it holds the potential to be a medium of ecological and humanistic communication. Through “Speaking Waste,” fashion is not only about appearing beautiful, but also about having the courage to speak out, take a stand, and be responsible. Ecological awareness is not an accessory element in design, but rather the foundational value that breathes meaning into every stitch.

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