

LAYERS OF SPEED

HOW FAST FASHION REWRITES TIME, MEMORY AND MATTER

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Abstract

This article examines the mythology of speed underpinning contemporary fast fashion through the performative artistic project *Kapadocia*, developed in dialogue with the artistic group multidisciplinary Kol·lect-if. Drawing on artistic practice as a methodological framework, it argues that fast fashion not only accelerates garment circulation but also transforms the temporal, symbolic, and affective conditions through which clothing acquires meaning. Through accumulations of used garments and hybrid textile bodies, *Kapadocia* exposes the hidden labour, environmental degradation, waste displacement, and culture of obsolescence embedded within global fashion systems. The study critically contrasts fast fashion with circular economy narratives, highlighting their conflicting temporal logics: acceleration versus duration, forgetting versus memory. By reactivating clothing as a material and emotional archive, the project proposes a counter-temporal perspective that challenges disposability and reimagines fashion through care, remembrance, and material responsibility.

Keywords: *Fast fashion; Performative art; Circular economy; Clothing memory; Socio-ecological crisis.*

FIRST FOLD

The following mythology emerges from a shared process of artistic and academic research developed within the Kapadocia project¹, in dialogue with

the Spanish artistic collective Kol·lect-if².

The reflections developed here emerge from direct involvement in the artistic processes that constitute the project itself.

Kapadocia is a performative artistic project that transforms accumulated garments into sculptural layers covering performers' bodies, generating hybrid figures suspended between recognition

¹ Kapadocia is a performative action that turns used clothing into poetic language and denunciation. The performers' bodies are covered with layer upon layer of fabric until hybrid figures emerge, hovering at the threshold between recognition and excess. A living metaphor for everything we carry as a society—identities, memories, residues, collapsed systems. Kapadocia transforms each layer of clothing into a symbol of what conceals us, defines us, and weighs upon us. The project was the recipient of a Creative Research Grant in Visual Arts awarded by the Catalonia Autonomous Government, Spain (7495 D/480000103/4411/0000), and was initially presented at the Nit de l'Art de Campos (Mallorca, Spain) in August 2025. A preview video is presented here: <https://vimeo.com/1120775625>.

² Kol·lect-if (<https://kollectif-2a8dfc.webflow.io/>) is a collective founded with the aim of creating spaces for artistic production, fostering interdisciplinary intersections and innovation within the field of contemporary artistic expression. We are a multidisciplinary artistic collective based in Mallorca (Spain), established in 2023, composed of artists with diverse experiences and trajectories in visual and sound arts, performance, theatre, dance, pedagogy, and cultural research.

and excess. *Working with archives of used clothing and collective performative actions, the project explores how garments carry memory, labor, and residue.*

Within this research context, *Kapadocia* and Kol·lect·if function as concrete cultural objects through which a critical mythology can be articulated. The performances operate as material investigations of clothing, time, and accumulation, allowing theoretical reflection to emerge directly from artistic practice.

In this sense, *Kapadocia* functions not only as an artistic project but also as a methodological device through which the temporal, material, and symbolic dimensions of clothing can be critically examined. The myth addressed here concerns the contemporary cultural belief in speed, disposability, and the naturalized expiration of clothing. In this sense, the text follows Roland Barthes' understanding of mythology as a cultural mechanism that transforms historically produced conditions into forms of naturalized common sense (Barthes, 1957).

Through the performative accumulations of *Kapadocia*, this article argues that fast fashion does not merely accelerate the circulation of garments but fundamentally alters the temporal and symbolic conditions through which clothing acquires meaning. Clothing often arrives before reflection.

It settles onto the body as an apparently automatic response to a question that is rarely articulated. Dressing today is less an act of warmth or expression than a gesture of synchronization: staying current, not falling behind, remaining in circulation. Fast fashion has turned dressing into an accelerated choreography in which novelty is desired not for its difference but for its brevity (Cline, 2012; Joy et al., 2012).

A garment matters precisely because it does not last. Its promise is not to accompany the body, but to disappear.

Within this economy of constant replacement, time flattens, producing a continuous present where memory cannot sediment.

This condition resonates with what Zygmunt Bauman describes as the temporality of liquid modernity: a cultural experience of time organized around perpetual circulation and the erosion of durable forms (Bauman, 2000).

The past becomes an obstacle, and the future is reduced to the next collection. Fashion, which

historically articulated social, seasonal, and symbolic rhythms, has become a permanent updating machine. The garment no longer ages; it expires. This naturalization of expiry constitutes a contemporary mythology. It does not present itself as ideology but as common sense.

Buying cheaply, wearing briefly, and discarding quickly appear as individual choices when in fact they are effects of a deeply structured system. The system becomes invisible precisely because it functions efficiently.

In this landscape, the circular economy appears as a narrative of reconciliation, widely promoted within institutional and corporate sustainability discourse (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017; Das et al., 2025). It promises to close cycles, repair damage, and restore balance to a system that increasingly acknowledges its environmental and social excesses.

Yet between fast fashion and circularity there is no continuity, only friction. One feeds on acceleration; the other requires deceleration. One depends on forgetting; the other requires memory. *Kapadocia* allows us to make these tensions visible by materializing accumulation, obsolescence, and the passage of time through performative layering.

To imagine that both can coexist without conflict is to sustain a comfortable fiction.

THE SIGN THAT CONSUMES ITSELF

Fashion has long functioned as a system of signs, organizing hierarchies, belongings, and desires (Barthes, 1967; Lipovetsky, 1987).

Clothing communicates social positions, affiliations, and aspirations through symbolic codes that circulate within specific historical contexts. Fast fashion, however, has pushed this language toward saturation—a condition that becomes materially legible in *Kapadocia*'s accumulation of garments. Signs repeat themselves until they lose density, circulating at a speed that erodes their symbolic weight (Cline, 2012; Joy et al., 2012). Garments no longer signify in stable ways; they circulate as commodities within global regimes of exchange where objects acquire meaning through their trajectories rather than through fixed symbolic codes (Appadurai, 1986).

Their value lies less in what they express than in how quickly they can be replaced by nearly identical ones.

In this regime, the garment ceases to mediate between body and world and instead becomes an interface between subject and image. Dressing is less about inhabiting social space than about appearing correctly within it. The mirror has been displaced by the screen; lived experience by its representation. We inhabit environments saturated with simulations that do not hide their artificiality but celebrate it, echoing what Umberto Eco described as the cultural logic of hyperreality (Eco, 1986). The copy does not aspire to resemble the original; it aims to function more efficiently than reality.

The industry accompanies this symbolic acceleration with unprecedented production volume. *Kapadocia* makes these processes perceptible by slowing down circulation, making visible the hidden labor and material traces embedded in each garment.

Reports on the global fashion market indicate a constant growth in the speed of production cycles and collection turnover (McKinsey & Company & The Business of Fashion, 2024).

More clothing is manufactured than the planet—and human bodies—can absorb (Niinimäki et al., 2020; Thomas, 2019).

THE WORK THAT REMAINS UNSEEN

Every garment has an origin, even if the system works to erase it. Behind each T-shirt lie hours of repetitive labor, exhausted bodies, and mechanical gestures. Alienation has not disappeared; it has become refined.

The textile worker rarely recognizes themselves in the finished object. The garment circulates globally while its maker remains immobilized within localized conditions of labor.

Textile factories in the Global South frequently operate as spaces of normalized exception, characterized by long working hours, minimal wages, and limited labor protections.

These environments operate through regimes of discipline and surveillance that recall the industrial dispositifs analyzed by Michel Foucault (1975). Such conditions are not anomalies but structural requirements for maintaining high speed and low cost within global supply chains.

In this context, critiques of economies sustained by disposable bodies acquire a concrete material dimension (Davis, 2003).

Kapadocia intervenes here performatively, making

visible both labor and accumulation, connecting the abstract system of fashion to tangible human experience through the physical weight and density of layered garments worn by performers.

Textile supply chains reproduce logics of discipline, confinement, and replacement. There are no visible walls, yet economic infrastructures restrict the possibilities of the future.

The worker's body is valued only as long as it continues producing; once exhausted, it is replaced.

LIQUID WASTE, COLONIAL DESTINATIONS

The garment's journey rarely ends in the closet. Containers of "used clothing," donation systems, and secondary markets symbolically extend the life of garments while effectively displacing the problem. Large quantities of clothing eventually accumulate in landfills located in countries that neither produced nor originally consumed them (Ritch & Siddiqui, 2023). From this perspective, garments acquire meaning through their global trajectories rather than through stable cultural contexts, reflecting what Arjun Appadurai describes as the "social life of things" within complex systems of circulation (1986).

These landscapes—mountains of T-shirts, jeans, and synthetic fibers—offer one of the most revealing images of fast fashion.

What initially appears as accessibility ultimately manifests as material dumping. Clothing becomes a colonial residue, as the surplus of western consumption is deposited in territories already marked by economic inequality.

In these environments, the dynamics of liquid modernity become tangible (Bauman, 2000).

Kapadocia mediates performatively to render these flows perceptible, showing how garments move from bodies to landscapes as material traces of excess through staged accumulations that echo the visual logic of textile landfills.

Objects and people share a similar logic: they are useful only while circulating. Once circulation stops, they become obstacles. Waste is not an accident but an inevitable outcome of a system that produces more than it can sustain.

CIRCULARITY AS A SOOTHING AESTHETIC

Faced with such disturbing realities, the circular economy offers a reassuring narrative of order. Within contemporary fashion discourse, circularity is increasingly framed as the primary pathway toward sustainability (Papamichael *et al.*, 2023). Yet a closer look reveals a fundamental paradox: circular initiatives are implemented without questioning overall production volume (Hugo *et al.*, 2021). Industry reports repeatedly indicate that sustainability strategies are frequently implemented alongside continued growth in production output, rather than replacing it. Recycling occurs without producing less. Waste is optimized without slowing acceleration. Sustainable garments coexist with twenty new collections per year. Within this context, sustainability often functions as another sign within the spectacle (Debord, 1967). Rather than transforming the structure of the system, it polishes its surface, enabling consumption to continue with a relatively calm conscience. Circularity increasingly operates as a visually persuasive brand narrative whose promise rarely reaches the structural core of the industry. The problem is not merely technical but temporal. Circularity requires duration, care, and repair. Fast fashion requires obsolescence. As long as desire remains organized around urgency and novelty, circularity risks remaining a simulacrum. *Kapadocia* models a counter-tempo, slowing down the cycle of acquisition to reveal the temporal depth and memory of clothing.

THE BODY AS TEXTILE ARCHIVE

At this point, it becomes important to distinguish between fashion and clothing. Fashion refers primarily to the industrial system of accelerated production and symbolic circulation that characterizes fast fashion. Clothing, by contrast, emphasizes the material, affective, and experiential dimension of garments in relation to bodies and memory. Clothing is not only merchandise. It is also memory. Garments retain traces of bodies, gestures, and events: a scent, a distortion of fabric, a repaired seam. Dressing becomes a form of bodily writing, an inscription that occurs through contact with skin rather than through verbal language, recalling feminist reflections on embodied writing in which the body itself becomes a site of inscription (Cixous, 1975).

From this perspective, clothing functions as an affective archive (Ingold, 2013). It accompanies mourning, celebrations, routines. To keep a garment is often to keep a fragment of lived experience. Fast fashion interrupts this relationship by accelerating the cycle of acquisition and disposal to the point where attachment becomes difficult. Fast fashion garments do not become memories; they become noise. Within the performative context of *Kapadocia*, this interruption of memory becomes materially visible: the accumulation of garments transforms clothing from personal archive into anonymous mass. Identity in this context is constructed through accumulation and discard. It is performative rather than stable, rehearsed through layers that overlap, replace, and abandon one another (Butler, 1993). Each garment acts as a social interface between the self and the world. Speed renders this performance fragile: identities become as replaceable as the garments that sustain them.

ACTIVE MATTER, HYBRID BODIES

Clothing is not passive. It shapes posture, restricts movement, and regulates temperature. Garments act upon bodies and with bodies, participating in the construction of human experience. Textiles have historically functioned as spaces of thought. As Anni Albers emphasized, weaving intertwines technique and sensitivity, time and matter (Albers, 1965). The textile is both material practice and conceptual structure. Within the performances of *Kapadocia*, the accumulation of garments produces hybrid bodies. Layers obscure the boundaries between subject and object, revealing clothing as an active material agent. The body becomes partially buried under textile layers, transforming into a sculptural mass where identity dissolves into accumulation. In this sense, the work resonates with broader artistic conceptions of material agency, recalling Joseph Beuys's understanding of artistic practice as a process through which matter itself participates in transformation (Beuys, 1973). In these moments, the garment ceases to serve the body and begins to dominate it. The image exposes the structural excess of the fashion system: accumulation becomes visible as weight.

CARNIVAL, EXCESS, AND COLLAPSE

This inversion—clothing overwhelming the body—contains a carnivalesque dimension.

Hierarchies are reversed, order collapses, and excess becomes a form of critique (Bakhtin, 1965). The grotesque exaggeration of garments piled upon bodies reveals the underlying logic of overproduction.

The image disturbs precisely because it makes visible what the system normally conceals: fashion no longer dresses bodies; it risks burying them beneath its own surplus. *Kapadocia* enacts this inversion physically, making the grotesque visible and experiential.

Here, categories of clean and dirty, own and foreign begin to collapse, destabilizing symbolic boundaries. The accumulation of discarded garments blurs symbolic boundaries between value and waste, echoing anthropological analyses of how societies construct categories of purity and contamination (Douglas, 1966).

Clothing, once intended to mark social distinctions, becomes an indistinct mass. The body itself turns into a symbolic landfill where the residues of production accumulate.

EXHAUSTED NATURE, PROFANED MATTER

The textile industry is one of the arenas where the modern rupture between humanity and nature becomes particularly visible: polluted waters, degraded soils, and synthetic fibers that resist decomposition (Merchant, 1980).

Fast fashion treats matter as an infinite resource, stripped of symbolic meaning.

Recovering a different relationship with clothing would require reintroducing a ritual dimension to dressing—recognizing garments as relations between bodies, materials, and time.

As Mircea Eliade argued in his reflections on the sacred and the profane, rituals historically structured the symbolic relationship between human communities and material objects (Eliade, 1956). *Kapadocia* interposes as a ritualized enactment, giving garments and bodies a temporal and material depth absent in mass production. Without this transformation in symbolic perception, attempts at circularity remain largely superficial.

DISMANTLING THE MYTH (LAST REMARKS)

The conflict between fast fashion and the circular economy is not simply a question of technological efficiency. It is fundamentally a conflict of meanings and temporalities.

Fast fashion is sustained by speed and forgetting. Circularity requires slowness and memory.

As long as desire remains organized around the constant production of novelty, circularity will function primarily as a comforting promise rather than a structural transformation.

To dismantle this mythology requires slowing down—listening to objects, acknowledging the material, emotional, and political weight of clothing, as the performative accumulations of *Kapadocia* attempt to do.

Only then might it become possible to imagine a fashion system that does not merely recycle waste but reduces the need to produce it.

Kapadocia envisions such a system, making tangible the possibility of fashion that remembers, respects, and materially enacts care.

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