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CLOTHING REFASHIONING PRACTICES
AS AN ALTERNATIVE WARDROBE STRATEGY

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I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORK

Relevance

The fashion industry is one of the most polluting sectors in the world, as well as one marked by unfair labor conditions at every stage — from design and production to marketing and sales. At the same time, the lifespan of the end product of this environmentally destructive industry — clothing — is becoming increasingly short, while the volume of discarded garments continues to grow, ending up in landfills across Asia and Africa.

Clothes are often discarded not because they are worn out, but due to rapidly shifting consumer preferences. These changes are driven both by individual tastes and the influence of fashion brand marketing campaigns. The mechanisms of the fashion industry are geared toward constant sales growth, which necessitates continuous investment in the creation of new collections. As a result, production and retail cycles accelerate, and the volume of clothing produced grows so rapidly that garments lose their relevance much faster than they wear out.

With the rise of fast and ultra-fast fashion, new clothing has become accessible to increasingly broad segments of the population, which has contributed to the decline in demand for practices such as sewing and mending clothes — once common in the second half of the 20th century.

In response to the environmental and social issues of the fashion industry, a trend toward “conscious consumption” is gaining momentum — eschewing frequent and impulsive purchases in favor of updating one’s wardrobe only when absolutely necessary. However, identity is shaped and reshaped under the influence of various factors, ranging from personal experience and professional environment to social, economic, and political conditions. In this ongoing process of self-determination, the

desire to renew one's visual self-representation naturally emerges, with clothing acting as a means of keeping one's image relevant — if only temporarily.

The resulting conflict between the desire to update one's wardrobe and the commitment to environmental responsibility gives rise to alternative strategies and tools beyond buying new clothes. The growing resale industry — including second-hand shops, curated archival showrooms, resale platforms, and marketplaces where individuals can sell their own garments — shifts attention away from newly produced clothing and brings existing pieces back into the fashion cycle. However, this does not eliminate the act of consumption: while purchasing second-hand clothing is considered more environmentally friendly than buying new, it does not fundamentally alter the prevailing habit of regularly refreshing one's wardrobe—the habit of consumption. According to *RBC Style*, the founders of the Russian resale platform *The Cultt*, included in the 2025 list of “Visionaries”, were recognized for “seeing in the second-hand fashion market the potential to create a new norm of consumption,” while the slogan on the website of a curated archival showroom explicitly states, “Resales is the new fast fashion.”

Meanwhile, worn clothing can re-enter the fashion cycle as raw material for creating new garments, replacing textile production — one of the most environmentally and socially harmful stages of the clothing lifecycle. The full spectrum of upcycling practices — from mending and tailoring to embellishment and reworking — allows for the creation of new garments and the updating of personal style in accordance with evolving identities, using materials that already exist on the planet: clothing. Following the Belgian designer Martin Margiela, who in the late 1980s was among the first to use second-hand clothing as a basis for his collections, an increasing number of designers are incorporating upcycling into their design-practice.

However, a new trend is emerging: the aestheticization of upcycling. Visual signs of reworking — handcraft imitation, rough seams, patchwork, and other artifacts of transformation — are becoming stylistic codes. Through symbolic appropriation,

mainstream fashion absorbs visual motifs that originated in grassroots initiatives, integrating them into commercial production. This creates a paradox: on the one hand, the aesthetics of upcycling become normalized; on the other, new garments imitate the visual signs of reworking, referencing the idea of ethical consumption only superficially, without abandoning the consumption of new clothes.

In all of this, the consumer's role remains unchanged: whether buying new garments, purchasing from a resale platform, or shopping upcycled fashion, the primary strategy for updating one's look is still the clothing consuming. The loss of sewing skills in the early 21st century — stemming from the alienation from the process of making clothes and the rise of the ready-to-wear market — has led to the spread of passive consumption and a diminished emotional connection to purchased garments compared to clothing made by hand. Restoring the consumer's role as creator in the process of updating their wardrobe can foster a more attentive and emotionally engaged relationship with their clothing, which contributes to longer wear and, in turn, slows down the rate of wardrobe turnover. The longer people wear their clothing, the fewer garments end up in the landfill.

Research Problem

The research problem lies in the fact that, despite the global fashion industry's efforts to implement principles of responsible production — such as circular economy models, supply chain regulation, improved labor conditions, and the promotion of conscious consumption — these measures remain embedded within the capitalist model of expanding production and demand stimulation. This logic does not entail a radical reconsideration of consumer relationships with clothing but rather aims to optimize these relationships without abandoning the fundamental paradigm of renewal through the acquisition of new garments.

In this context, a shift is needed — from adjustments in clothing production processes to a critical redefinition of the very foundations of the relationship between the wearer and

the garment. This study considers the practice of personal clothing refashioning as a potential alternative to normative consumption strategies — not as a forced necessity, but as a bodily and emotionally conscious act aimed at updating one's wardrobe using existing items, whether already owned or sourced from second-hand markets, rather than purchasing new clothing.

A distinctive feature of the Russian post-Soviet context is that practices of repairing and altering clothing were widespread during the Soviet era but were primarily perceived as a response to shortage and a vital necessity under conditions of limited access to new clothing. As a result, such practices often retained negative connotations, associated with poverty and lack of choice. However, the contemporary Russian context — shaped by the legacy of perestroika and the development of a market economy — presents a unique situation. On one hand, there is an inherited culture of thrift and care for clothing and household items; on the other, the emergence of a market economy and the ensuing abundance of mass-produced goods have created a foundation for a hybrid experience. This experience combines the memory of forced care for things, the value of manual labor, and a critical perspective on the ecological consequences of overproduction.

This hybrid experience not only enables the practice of clothing refashioning as a form of sustainable interaction with one's wardrobe but also allows it to be passed down as an alternative strategy to younger generations raised in a culture of consumer abundance. Thus, the study of refashioning practices within the Russian cultural and historical context may offer key insights into possible scenarios for a sustainable future of local fashion.

Research Question:

How does the practice of personal clothing refashioning in Russia redefine the relationship between the consumer and the garment in the context of a culture of overconsumption?

State of Research

The study of clothing refashioning practices as a form of interaction between the consumer and the object cannot be undertaken without addressing the **theoretical foundations of fashion and culture consumption**.

Since the mid-20th century, sociologists and philosophers such as Jean Baudrillard, Thorstein Veblen, and Zygmunt Bauman have analyzed consumption in the context of social and cultural mechanisms. One of the first researchers to link consumption with symbolic status was Thorstein Veblen, who introduced the concept of conspicuous consumption at the end of the 19th century, where items are acquired not for their utility but as signs of social class. In the 20th century, Jean Baudrillard radicalized this line of thought, asserting that in post-industrial society, commodities lose their utilitarian value and become carriers of signs. According to Baudrillard, consumption becomes a system of codes aimed not at fulfilling needs, but at generating distinctions.

Zygmunt Bauman analyzes late capitalism as a "liquid" state of modernity, where consumption is less about possession and more about the ongoing actualization of identity. The modern consumer is compelled to continually "renew" themselves, avoiding stability and durability — qualities once associated with rationality. In this case, fashion consumption becomes a dynamic process of self-representation, in which the loss of relevance and rejection of one item is inevitably accompanied by the appearance of another.

The phenomenon of overconsumption in the fashion industry is seen not only as a cultural issue but also as an **ecological one**. A pivotal moment in the development of ecological awareness came with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, where she was the first to address the persistent environmental harm caused by industrial production, including latent processes with delayed effects on humans and nature. Later critiques of industrial production and approaches to minimizing ecological damage were presented in Michael Braungart and William McDonough's *Cradle to Cradle*, where the authors argue that the logic of harm reduction — eco-efficiency — does not address the problem

systemically. Instead, they propose the concept of “beneficial materials,” where clothing and other products are designed from the outset as resources for reuse.

In the context of fashion, the ecological crisis is particularly acute due to high production rates and increasingly shorter clothing lifecycles. Contemporary fashion researchers explore whether clothing consumption can be made less ecologically harmful in a market economy focused on perpetual production growth. Scholars such as Sandy Black, Otto von Busch, Kate Fletcher, and Mathilda Tham explore ways to rethink systems of fashion production, distribution, and consumption, proposing various strategies for slowing fashion including localized production, the creation of longer-lasting garments, methods of recycling, and the promotion of sustainable consumption concepts.

Research into clothing upcycling — transforming old garments into new ones — has primarily focused on its use in professional design and industrial contexts: on finding design solutions that make upcycling appealing to consumers, studying successful business models and their long-term sustainability, and developing new textile recycling methods. In their paper *Upcycling Design Process and Classification of Upcycling Method as Innovation to Extend Product Lifecycle*, Christobel Parung and Gaimas Enanshemery classify upcycling methods and compare them to traditional design approaches to make them more accessible and reproducible for clothing designers.

A key contribution to the development of sustainable fashion consumption lies in the work of Kate Fletcher, who shifts the focus from production to clothing use. She emphasizes that extending garment life through care and repair can be a more effective strategy for reducing environmental impact than material substitution or technological innovation. In *Craft of Use: Post-growth Fashion*, Fletcher introduces the concept of “the craft of use,” exploring how personal methods of engaging with clothing form sustainable fashion not at the industrial level, but at the level of everyday practice.

The relationship between people and clothing has been explored not only in response to ecological concerns but also within broader cultural and social frameworks.

Anthropological research views objects not as final products, but as carriers of connections, stories, and potential actions. In *Theory of Shopping* and subsequent works (*Materiality*, *Home Possessions*), Daniel Miller emphasizes how everyday material practices — including the selection and use of consumer goods — form relationships between people and their environments. For Miller, materiality is important not in itself, but in its capacity to create relations between object and owner. Even when unrecognized by the owner, the materiality of a thing fosters socially acceptable norms of behavior.

This perspective continues in sociological theories that view clothing as a mediator between body and society. Georg Simmel's classic essay *Fashion* sees fashion as a dialectic of individualization and imitation, with clothing serving as a means of self-presentation. Pierre Bourdieu shows how aesthetic preferences, including clothing choices, are shaped by social class, education, and other forms of capital (economic, cultural, symbolic) and are used to express belonging to or distinction from specific social groups. Within the concept of habitus, clothing becomes an expression of social dispositions that reproduce class structures.

Contemporary fashion scholars suggest shifting focus from theory to the empirical study of everyday clothing interactions. One significant direction is the study of wardrobe practices — the everyday ways people interact with clothing. The term “**wardrobe practices**” encompasses activities such as choosing, wearing, storing, repairing, customizing, sorting, repurposing, reselling, or discarding garments. It serves as a tool for analyzing fashion not as an industry but as an essential part of daily life. These practices reflect not only personal style preferences but also broader social, cultural, and material contexts in which clothing decisions are made.

Joanne Entwistle, in *The Fashioned Body*, proposes examining fashion as a “situated bodily practice”, thus placing fashion in direct interaction with the body and enabling the study of how clothing and the body interact in specific spatial and temporal settings. Important contributions to the study of wardrobe practices come from Ingun Klepp, Kate Fletcher, Sophie Woodward, Else Skjold, Ellen Sampson, Joanne Turney, and others, whose empirical research shows that clothing choices, care methods, storage, and disposal are imbued with emotional, ethical, and sensory dimensions. In particular, attention is paid to wardrobe practices that involve garment modification or life extension, such as mending, customizing, and refashioning. Amy Twigger Holroyd focuses on the craft-based interaction with clothing, which is useful for understanding upcycling as a personal, manual technique. Alison Gwilt explores strategies for garment longevity through care and repair, reinforcing the inclusion of upcycling among practices of garment care.

The practice of clothing refashioning in everyday contexts — not as a designer strategy — has until recently remained peripheral in fashion studies. It is often mentioned only within broader themes: textile culture, post-war fashion strategies, or sustainable consumption practices. Studies of Soviet and post-Soviet attitudes toward things emphasize the importance of "modification" as a basic relation to objects — items, including clothing, were rarely seen as final or complete. While the post-revolutionary period was characterized by a critique of pre-revolutionary material attachment — favoring rational possession — in later Soviet life, domestic austerity was combined with commodity shortages. In this context, researchers Alexey Golubev and Olga Smolyak in *Making Selves Through Things*, as well as Ekaterina Gerasimova and Sofya Chuikina in *Repair Society*, note that household items and clothing in late Soviet times were almost always seen as materials for further transformation — even new items were often perceived as unfinished, requiring personal intervention.

In studies of Soviet fashion, clothing refashioning has usually been interpreted as a consequence of scarcity and a necessity for prolonging garment life. In works exploring

official fashion discourse from magazines and household manuals, practices such as alteration, re-cutting, and knitting-on are presented alongside sewing and mending as normative clothing interactions (Tatiana Fetisova, Marina Klinova, Irina Vinichenko, Yulia Papushina).

However, in late Soviet studies, a creative element emerges alongside necessity, influencing the desire to refashion clothing. Linor Goralik¹ in *Shame and Pride: Clothing Refashioning as a “Supersoviet” Practice in the Displaced 1990s* analyzes clothing refashioning as a form of personal creativity, simultaneously tied to feelings of shame and pride inherited from the Soviet experience.

Contemporary Russian research on upcycling mainly focuses on its role as a fashion design method addressing ecological challenges (Mariat Alibekova, N. Shvachka, Alina Solomatina, Tatiana Shcheglova).

Research into personal upcycling practices by foreign scholars focuses on relationships with clothing amid overproduction. In *Redesigning Fashion: An Analysis and Categorization of Women’s Clothing Upcycling Behavior*, Kristi Jaanigo, Juniane Vuu, and Marilyn DeLong propose a typology of upcyclers — from consumers and enthusiasts to professionals — united by sustainable consumption goals, a rejection of fast fashion, interest in vintage, and craft-based clothing approaches.

In *Individual Upcycling Practice: Exploring the Possible Determinants of Upcycling Based on a Literature Review*, Kyung Eun Sung and Tim Cooper explore the social and emotional attitudes that facilitate household-level upcycling adoption.

Recent fashion studies have embraced strategies combining artistic methods, embodied interaction, and autoethnography. This *practice-as-research* approach treats sewing, alteration, and wearing clothing as not only material but also cognitive and affective inquiry — ways of "thinking through making" in Tim Ingold’s terms.

In *Worn*, Ellen Sampson explores shoes as everyday objects and shows how wear,

¹ The author is included in the register of foreign agents maintained by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation (status as of April 2025).

touch, and prolonged use turn garments into repositories of bodily memory and interaction. Her approach, based on documenting and reflecting on the processes of making and wearing rather than user narratives, treats clothing as an active agent in daily life.

A similar method is used by Rachel Kassir in *Overlooked Materiality: Fashion's Unintentional Monuments* (2024), where upcycling is examined beyond utility or commercial motives. Kassir views refashioning as a material interaction that reveals traces of time and bodily memory. Working with garments from a personal archive (1870s–1930s), she shows how meanings emerge through bodily engagement — via signs of wear, aging, and the human presence embedded in fabric. Upcycling thus becomes not only a recycling technique but also a way of reinterpreting the past, where refashioned items retain traces of previous lives and enter into dialogue with the present. This perspective is essential for the current study, which focuses not on the final design product but on the processes and meanings emerging from interaction with garments. These practices expand the notion of sustainable fashion to include not only ecological and economic, but also symbolic and embodied dimensions.

Thus, despite the widespread practice of clothing alteration and repair in the Soviet period and growing interest in upcycling within sustainable fashion and circular economy research, clothing refashioning as a wardrobe strategy in post-Soviet Russia remains underexplored. Existing scholarship predominantly focuses on professional fashion design, where upcycling is treated as a production method. Consequently, the academic literature lacks attention to non-industrial forms of upcycling and their connection to everyday consumer experiences, particularly against the backdrop of Soviet-era scarcity followed by post-Soviet overproduction and overconsumption.

This study fills that gap by proposing to view clothing refashioning as a personalized, embodied, and culturally embedded practice — as an alternative to the fashion norm.

The chronological scope of the study spans from the early 1990s — when the culture of clothing consumption began to develop in Russia — up to the present day, since this

period marks a shift in motivations for altering purchased garments, which in Soviet times were primarily driven by necessity.

The object of this study is the wardrobe practices of Russian clothing consumers.

The subject is the wardrobe practice of personal clothing refashioning among Russian consumers.

The aim of the research is to identify the significance and transformative potential of clothing refashioning, as a wardrobe practice of Russian consumers in the post-Soviet period, for reshaping the relationship between people and clothing.

Research Objectives

- To describe theoretical approaches to the concept of wardrobe practice, including structuralist and phenomenological perspectives, critiques of consumption, and the concept of sustainable fashion.
- To identify the prerequisites for the emergence and development of clothing refashioning practices in the context of normative models of fashion consumption.
- To analyse representations of clothing refashioning in Russian media discourse from the 1990s to the late 2010s and to trace the transformation of its cultural status.
- To study subjective narratives of individuals engaged in clothing refashioning, identifying their motivations, values, and barriers based on the analysis of in-depth interviews.
- To describe and analyse the author's own practice-based artistic research in clothing refashioning, documenting the bodily, emotional, and cognitive aspects of interaction with garments, as well as identifying the stages and challenges that accompany this process.

Research Hypothesis

The practice of self-initiated clothing refashioning in the post-Soviet context can be regarded as the foundation of an alternative wardrobe strategy, in which bodily,

material, and cultural interactions with garments intersect. The legacy of Soviet-era scarcity, in which clothing refashioning functioned as a forced form of consumption, continues to influence attitudes toward clothing, fostering an attentive, empathetic gaze and a particular mode of working with garments. Under these conditions, refashioning becomes not merely a means of extending a garment's life, but a distinctive process that takes into account its material vulnerability, biography, and traces of past use.

Research Methods

The study of clothing refashioning practices as an alternative wardrobe strategy required a comprehensive methodological approach that combined theoretical, empirical, and artistic-research methods. Clothing refashioning was considered as a phenomenon situated at the intersection of everyday, embodied, material, and symbolic interactions with garments.

The first chapter outlined and analyzed theoretical approaches to the concept of wardrobe practice and alternative fashion consumption. It drew on Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and the fashion field, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body schema, and Joanne Entwistle's theory of situational embodied practice. Kate Fletcher's interpretation of sustainable fashion also played a significant role. Special attention was paid to the concept of the empathetic gaze as a mode of engaging with clothing, in which bodily attentiveness, tactility, and decelerated perception make it possible to rethink clothing not merely as a resource but as a carrier of traces, memories, and vulnerabilities. Through the juxtaposition of these approaches, clothing refashioning was interpreted not only as a practical but also as a symbolic act, establishing new forms of relationships between the body, clothing, and fashion.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the second chapter analyzed representations of clothing refashioning practices in both public and personal discourse. This shift from conceptual analysis to the study of cultural narratives made it possible to trace connections between theoretical premises and the ways in which refashioning is positioned, marked, and interpreted in Russian media and in the everyday accounts of

practitioners. To examine media discourse, qualitative content analysis was employed, supplemented by elements of critical discourse analysis. The corpus consisted of Russian youth and lifestyle magazines from the 1990s through the late 2010s.

The second part of the chapter was based on thematic analysis of nine in-depth interviews conducted with individuals who independently refashion their clothing. This allowed for the identification of contrasts between media representations and personal perceptions of the practice, as well as an exploration of subjective motivations, values, and constraints.

The final stage of the study is presented in the third chapter, where the research shifts into an artistic-research domain. This move from analyzing external discourses to engaging with the bodily and material experience of the researcher enabled clothing refashioning to be not only interpreted but also lived as a method of inquiry. Eight garments were altered in the course of this chapter. The process was analyzed through the object-based approach to clothing description developed by Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim, and through an autoethnographic method that captured the bodily, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of engaging with garments.

An accompanying photo project provided an additional visual layer to the artistic-research practice. It complements the analytical component by visualizing the empathetic and attentive gaze that underpins the proposed research perspective.

The research position adopted here combines reflexive distance with embodied engagement in the practice, allowing not only for analytical insight into the process of refashioning but also for an experiential understanding of it as a form of interaction with clothing. This approach makes it possible to observe not an abstract model but the real bodily and material expressions of an alternative wardrobe strategy.

Scientific Novelty of the Research

This study contributes to the advancement of scholarly understanding of wardrobe practices within a culture of overconsumption by conceptualizing clothing refashioning

as a meaningful alternative to normative fashion strategies focused on constant wardrobe renewal. The scientific novelty of the work lies in the following aspects:

1. For the first time in Russian humanities, clothing refashioning is analyzed as a complex wardrobe practice combining bodily, material, cultural, and affective dimensions. The study goes beyond viewing refashioning solely as a forced strategy or design method and proposes to consider it as a sustainable form of interaction with things, based on attention, care, and the rethinking of fashion norms.
2. The study identifies and generalizes the cultural and professional prerequisites for the spread of clothing refashioning practices. It demonstrates that the formation of refashioning as a meaningful alternative strategy is linked to phenomena such as deconstruction in fashion, the redefinition of the roles of designer and consumer, craftivism practices, subcultures, and the archival turn. These directions create a framework in which clothing refashioning acquires new meanings — from a form of resistance to consumer logic to a way of preserving and actualizing material and personal experience.
3. For the first time, archives of Russian media and periodicals from the 1990s to the late 2010s were studied for interest in second-hand and clothing refashioning, allowing for the reconstruction of changes in the official discourse on alternative fashion practices.
4. The analysis of semi-structured interviews captured motivations, barriers, and bodily aspects of clothing refashioning as a practice rooted in everyday experience. Special attention was given to how the experience of scarcity and intergenerational transmission of skills shape attitudes toward clothing as a resource that preserves memory and dignity.
5. Based on autoethnographic analysis of the artistic-research experience, an original structure describing the refashioning process — "co-refashioning" — was developed, including the stages: decision to remake (1), search for direction (2), fitting (3), unpicking (4), refashioning (5), wearing (6), and pause in the process (7). This

approach allows viewing refashioning not as a single practical act but as a multi-level process involving bodily reflection and emotional experience.

6. The concept of the empathetic gaze is used in the study to conceptualize the practice of clothing refashioning in the Russian context. Based on theoretical, discursive, empirical, and artistic-research analysis, the empathetic gaze is understood as a way of bodily and visual interaction with an object, grounded in tactile attention, slowness, care, and respect for traces of the past. This perspective enables a new interpretation of refashioning not only as material work but also as a form of sustainable, ethical, and attentive relation to clothing.

Thus, the study proposes a new research perspective for examining alternative forms of interaction with clothing — as a means of symbolic engagement with memory and materiality, a practice of sustainability, and a careful approach to the wardrobe amid the crisis of the fashion industry.

Key Findings and Propositions for Defense

1. Clothing refashioning is considered as a form of bodily, tactile, and attentive interaction with a garment, extending beyond the normative model of consumption. It provides the foundation for an alternative fashion strategy in which the materiality of clothing, the slowing down of perception, and a critical attitude towards the regular renewal of the wardrobe through purchasing new garments — as prescribed by the fashion industry — become central.
2. The cultural and professional prerequisites for the spread of refashioning include phenomena such as deconstruction in fashion, the rethinking of designer and consumer roles, the development of DIY culture, craftivist practices, the influence of subcultures, and the archival turn. These factors shape the cultural framework within which refashioning becomes not only a means of sustainable engagement with clothing but also a way of working with memory and the biography of the garment.

3. The official discourse on clothing refashioning in Russian media (1990s – late 2010s) evolved from stigmatisation and association with scarcity to recognition of refashioning as a meaningful fashion practice within the context of environmental concerns. However, it has not become dominant, as the persistent view of purchasing as the primary means of updating the wardrobe remains prevalent.
4. The analysis of subjective narratives obtained through in-depth interviews revealed that clothing refashioning is perceived as a practice connected to care, manual labour, memory, and material continuity. Special attention is given to the role of intergenerational skill transfer, attentive treatment of garments, and creative self-realisation in motivating refashioning practices.
5. The practice-based artistic research involving the refashioning of eight garments made it possible to describe refashioning as a step-by-step process, including the decision to intervene, the search for an idea, fittings, unpicking, refashioning, pauses in the process, and wearing the finished garment. This structure allows refashioning to be seen as a sequential bodily and cognitive interaction with a garment.
6. The research applies the concept of the empathetic gaze to conceptualise refashioning as a practice grounded in slowness, tactile attentiveness, and respect for traces of the past. The empathetic gaze enables interpretation of refashioning not as redesign but as a way of establishing an ethical and attentive relationship with clothing, one that values not only the visual outcome but also the embodied experience of interacting with the garment.
7. Clothing refashioning emerges as a foundational practice upon which a broader alternative model of wardrobe engagement can be built. Within this model, such actions as purchasing second-hand clothing, exchanging, repairing, storing, and caring for garments come to the forefront, united by a focus on care, longevity of wear, and the significance of personal experience.

Theoretical and Practical Significance of the Research

The theoretical significance of the study lies in the development of a scientific approach to analyzing alternative wardrobe practices within a culture of overconsumption. The work expands the conceptual framework of fashion research, sustainable consumption, and embodied interactions with clothing by proposing an interdisciplinary framework in which refashioning is understood as a bodily, symbolic, and ethically motivated practice. The study demonstrates how attention to the process of interacting with an object can form the basis for rethinking fashion norms and practices, with the wearer being reimagined as a creator of clothing. Another important contribution is the conceptualization of the stages of clothing refashioning and their description as a form of bodily and cognitive work that goes beyond design or utilitarian action.

The findings obtained in this research have applied potential and can be relevant in various professional and academic contexts. They are of interest to:

- **For designers and theorists of sustainable fashion** — as guidelines for developing empathy-driven design approaches;
- **For educators and curators** — in creating educational courses and exhibition formats that promote critical reflection on consumption and attitudes toward clothing;
- **For professionals working in fashion journalism and visual culture** — as a basis for critical analysis of wardrobe strategies grounded in sustainability, care, and attention to materiality;
- **For a broad audience** interested in fostering sustainable and ethical relationships with their wardrobe — as inspiration for refashioning practices and other forms of interaction with clothing;
- **For institutions** engaged in sustainable development and cultural policy — to help develop programs that support local initiatives related to extending the life of items and thoughtful engagement with the material environment.

Thus, the study highlights clothing refashioning as an important cultural, social, and practical resource in the context of the ecological, ethical, and aesthetic challenges of contemporary fashion.

Dissemination and Validation of Research Findings

The main arguments and conclusions of the dissertation were presented at both Russian and international academic conferences². The research findings have been published in a number of peer-reviewed Russian journals³ included in the list of journals recommended by the Higher Attestation Commission (VAK), as well as in the list of recommended journals of the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE).

² **International Conference “Theories and Practices of Art and Design”**, Roundtable discussion “*The Potential of Practice-Based Research in the Context of the Humanities*”, presentation: “*Co-sewing: Upcycling as Artistic Research*”, April 10–12, 2025.

Conference “Secrets of Fashion: Wardrobes, Bodies, Spaces”, presentation: “*What Lies Beneath the New Seams: Remade Clothing and the Secrets of Its Creation*”, March 20, 2025.

International Conference “Theories and Practices of Art and Design”, presentation: “*Wear Longer to Sell More: Clothing Mending and Cleaning Tips as a New Format of Fashion Brand Communication*”, April 10–12, 2023.

International Conference “Theories and Practices of Art and Design”, presentation: “*Mending the Mood: The Interrelation Between Emotional States and the Process of Repair*”, April 5–7, 2023.

International Conference “Theories and Practices of Art and Design”, presentation: “*Practices of Representing the Dressed Body: From Display to the Diversity of Embodied Approaches*”, April 6–8, 2022.

7th Scientific Conference with International Participation “Cultural Contexts of Fashion: Ideological Perspectives of Fashion – Norms and Resistance”, presentation: “*“Second-Hand is Absolute Exclusivity”: Alternative Wardrobe Practices in the Discourse of Russian Youth Magazines (1990s–2020s)*”, May 14, 2025.

³ Salnikova, S. *What Lies Beneath the New Seams: Remade Clothing and the Secrets of Its Creation*. // *Fashion Theory: Dress, Body, Culture*, 2024, No. 4(74), pp. 413–428. ; Salnikova, S. O., Nikiforova, V. I., Turman, R. L., Veresova, N. M. *Methods of NIIHP for Adapting Folk Crafts: Theory and Practice Based on Finno-Ugric Handicrafts*. // *Bulletin of Ugric Studies*; Salnikova, S. O. *The Phenomenon of “One’s Own Garment”: Practices of Developing Emotional Attachment to Clothing*. // *Articult*, 2023, No. 3(51), pp. 104–114.

Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, and four appendices. Appendix 1 presents the results of the content analysis of magazines on the topic of clothing refashioning and second-hand clothing; Appendix 2 contains selected quotes from in-depth interviews about clothing refashioning; Appendix 3 includes the object analysis of eight garments examined during the practical research; Appendix 4 features the photo project “Co-refashioning”.

The total length of the dissertation is 313 pages, including 24 illustrations and four appendices.

II. MAIN CONTENT OF THE WORK

Chapter 1 conceptualized the practice of clothing refashioning as an alternative wardrobe strategy.

To this end, the concept of fashion strategy was first analysed on the basis of works by scholars developing approaches to fashion at the intersection of structuralism, phenomenology, and critiques of consumption (J. Baudrillard, P. Bourdieu, M. Merleau-Ponty, M. Foucault, J. Entwistle, M. de Certeau, A. Reckwitz). This made it possible to consider strategy in fashion as an individual mode of engagement with clothing that exists within a normative system while simultaneously allowing for variability: through bodily and social practices, a person can both reproduce fashion’s prescribed norms and revise them. The normative fashion strategy is shaped by socio-economic and cultural contexts; however, due to fashion’s constant shifting of the boundaries of the norm, the performative nature of practices driven by the body’s response to changing conditions, and the wearer’s attention to the “co-relations” between body and clothing, the potential for alternative forms of fashion behaviour is preserved.

To analyze the differences between upcycling as a design strategy and clothing refashioning as a personal wardrobe practice, works by researchers of wardrobe practices (E. Skjold, D. Middleton, K. Gibson, A. König, E. Gwilt, E. Meissner), sustainability in general (V. Glaveanu, D. Pauli, M. Braungart), and sustainable fashion (A. Hakkarainen, K. Fletcher, K. Niinimäki, P. dos Santos), as well as texts dedicated to the development of upcycling in the fashion industry (K. Sang, S. Wegener, L. Lindström, M. Dan, A. Kozlowski, A. de Raeve, A. Fiore), were examined, along with the lexicographic foundations of the word “refashioning”. This enabled describing refashioning as any form of modifying clothing for personal use, regardless of the degree of transformation — from minor customization to complete deconstruction. Unlike upcycling, which is used as a method by clothing brands, refashioning emphasizes handcraft and individual bodily experience, combining utilitarian, emotional, aesthetic, and cultural motivations. At the methodological level, there is cross-borrowing: personal refashioning includes adapted forms of design techniques from upcycling, such as adding and removing details, fragmentary joining (patchwork), deconstruction, and function alteration, allowing unique strategies for interacting with the wardrobe where attention to material, the biography of the item, and its potential for extended use matter more than trends.

To identify cultural prerequisites for the practice of clothing refashioning, the dissertation analyzed works related to deconstructivism in fashion (F. Granata, E. Jill, E. Vasilieva); the connection between DIY practices and craftivism (D. McKay, R. Sennett, B. Guzzetti, S. Luckman), subcultures (D. Chaney), and design theory (T. Ingold, V. Papanek); the Soviet history of craft development (V. Voronov, P. Utkin) to conceptualize clothing as a resource for postindustrial craft production; the redistribution of roles between designer and consumer under the influence of the decolonial turn in fashion (A. Jansen, T. Akhmet, T. Slade, S. Cheng, A. Sandhu); as well as the archive turn in fashion (A. Pearson-Smith, K. Almond, F. Vacca).

The conducted analysis showed that clothing refashioning, beyond individual creativity, becomes part of a broader movement toward seeking alternatives to mass production and consumption. Its development is connected to the deconstructivist view of fashion, subcultural practices of clothing transformation, a new wave of DIY culture against the backdrop of global political and economic crises and fatigue with digitalization, a reconsideration of the designer and consumer roles within the decolonial turn, and the archive turn. Simultaneously, the volume of accumulated secondary textiles worldwide allows clothing to be seen as a material suitable for developing a new form of craft — both commercial and personal — practice of clothing refashioning. While mass fashion offers standardized, rapidly changing products, clothing refashioning fits into an alternative logic of mindful interaction with clothing, implying not only less frequent acquisition but also acceptance of its change both through wear and time and through explicit transformation. This practice requires physical interaction with the material, practical sensibility, and a special mode of seeing — attention, focus, and empathetic attitude. In this context, the wearer who engages in the process of refashioning assumes a position analogous to what Roland Barthes described as the “reader awakened”: not a passive recipient of externally imposed meaning but an active co-creator capable of discovering and generating new meanings through interaction with the material text. Clothing refashioning transcends utilitarian action and becomes a means of cognition, creativity, and critique of the fashion system.

To describe the special mode of perceiving clothing during refashioning, the concept of an empathetic gaze was introduced, based on an analysis of Sara Chon Kwan’s work, who develops the notion of the ambient gaze drawing on Iris Marion Young’s ideas, as well as James Thompson’s research on the aesthetics of care, and the works of Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim on slow clothing observing. These texts enabled conceptualizing a careful, non-violent, bodily engaged way of interacting with clothing as a form of empathetic relation to a changing material object.

Chapter 2 of the dissertation aimed to analyze the transformation of the official fashion discourse in Russia from the 1990s through the late 2010s regarding clothing refashioning and related alternative wardrobe practices. A qualitative content analysis with elements of critical discourse analysis was employed, which made it possible to identify not only the frequency and contexts of mentions of practices associated with clothing refashioning and second-hand clothing acquisition but also to trace their symbolic reinterpretation in the media field. The analysis of over 600 issues from six print and one online publication (“Ptuch”, “OM”, “Afisha”, “Bolshoy Gorod”, *Jalouse*, *Elle Girl*, *The Village*) showed that mentions of refashioning practices in the 1990s were episodic and subcultural, while from the 2000s onwards there was a shift toward their aestheticization, normalization, and legitimization as expressions of individuality, creativity, and ecological awareness.

Against this background, the conceptualization of second-hand as a practice connected to a creative approach to personal style, promoted in alternative magazines of the 1990s, can be viewed as a foundation for the further legitimization of transformation of worn clothing. Key in this process were statements from opinion leaders and readers whose interviews and letters demonstrated lively interest in refashioning and second-hand as personal practices reflecting alternative attitudes toward fashion and consumption. Thus, the discourse of alternative wardrobe practices in youth media was shaped not only by editorial agendas but also through horizontal communication with the audience, and the representation of these practices traveled from a peripheral phenomenon to a recognized element of fashion culture in the media.

In the second section of Chapter Two, attention was focused on the analysis of unofficial fashion discourse, reconstructed on the basis of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with women who engage in self-initiated clothing refashioning. This stage of the research was prompted by the results of the media source analysis, which revealed the significant role of readers’ statements and personal stories in representing

refashioning practices. These findings indicated the need to examine subjective experience and everyday fashion practice in direct interaction with garments.

The methodological foundation was the thematic analysis of transcripts from semi-structured, in-depth interviews, which made it possible to identify recurring motifs as well as unique aspects of the bodily, affective, and ethical relationship with clothing. The analysis revealed refashioning as a bodily and emotionally rich activity, embedded in everyday life — careful yet creative — linked to family memory, aesthetic choice, and the aspiration toward sustainable relationships with garments. Participants perceive this practice as an integral part of their wardrobe strategy, reflecting values of individuality, creativity, and care.

A key finding is that for most participants, refashioning is not directly associated with environmental discourse; instead, it is rooted in family and subcultural practices transmitted through generational memory, embodied skills, and visual literacy. In respondents' narratives, clothing refashioning appears not as an isolated action but as a central element of a broader wardrobe strategy. As a process requiring time, attention, storage of materials, sourcing of accessories, and inspiration, refashioning also involves other clothing-related practices. It presupposes active engagement with second-hand markets, participation in clothing swaps, the acquisition of repair skills, as well as the organisation of storage and garment care. Refashioning thus becomes both an entry point and a core element in the formation of an alternative fashion model oriented towards long-term use of clothing, an individual approach, and sustainable relationships with the wardrobe.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that refashioning is associated with a number of barriers — temporal, spatial, and economic. Its implementation requires certain resources: free time, physical space, and access to tools, materials, and accessories, all of which entail investment. These constraints, on the one hand, make refashioning inaccessible to some; on the other hand, the effort invested and the

protracted nature of the process contribute to the development of a lasting emotional connection with clothing.

Thus, Chapter Two captures the existence of parallel and intersecting discourses on clothing refashioning, showing how this practice has evolved from a necessity into a symbolic and ethically motivated fashion strategy. It is precisely in the intersections of the personal and the cultural, the visual and the tactile, the utilitarian and the artistic that an alternative to normative fashion emerges.

Chapter 3 addressed the empirical and artistic-research analysis of clothing refashioning as an alternative wardrobe practice based on empathetic interaction with the item and delineated the stages of the practice. The study aimed to reveal bodily, material, and emotional aspects of refashioning not fully describable within the theoretical and discursive frameworks of the first two chapters. For this, a methodology combining object-oriented analysis and autoethnographic observation was used. This approach allowed moving from analyzing representations and narratives to studying the actual process of interacting with clothing. The analysis of the documented refashioning process of eight clothing items identified seven stages of interaction, collectively termed “co-refashioning”: decision to intervene (1), search for direction (2), fitting (3), ripping (4), refashioning (5), wearing (6), and pause in the process (7). The photo project was a key element of the artistic research: it does not illustrate results but expresses the research perspective — a slowed-down, sensitive, and attentive gaze allowing to “see” clothing anew as a bearer of memory, traces, imperfections, and potential. Thus, Chapter 3 fulfills the key research task: to show how the practice of clothing refashioning forms an alternative strategy of interaction with clothing based not on consumption but on attention, respect, and reworking of the existing.

CONCLUSION

The hypothesis underlying this dissertation was confirmed: the practice of personal clothing refashioning in the post-Soviet context indeed functions as the basis of an alternative wardrobe strategy, where bodily, material, and cultural interactions with the garment intersect. The conducted research demonstrated that the influence of the Soviet experience of scarcity continues to exert a significant impact on attitudes toward clothing, shaping a careful, empathetic gaze and a distinctive mode of interacting with the wardrobe. However, under the influence of sociocultural phenomena such as deconstructivism in fashion, subcultural clothing transformation practices, a new wave of DIY culture development against the backdrop of global political and economic crises and digital fatigue, the reconsideration of the roles of designer and consumer within the decolonial turn, and the archive turn, refashioning ceases to be solely a way of extending the life of a garment and acquires features of an autonomous design process embedded in everyday life, which takes into account the material characteristics, traces of past use, and the biography of the clothing.

The analysis of official fashion discourse made it possible to trace how the representation of clothing refashioning in Russian media has transformed: from a marginal practice associated with scarcity, it gradually becomes an accepted media form of engaging with clothing, though still underrepresented compared to the normative strategy of consuming new clothing. The study of unofficial discourse — based on in-depth interviews — revealed the empirical foundations and subjective meanings that shape refashioning as a sustainable wardrobe strategy linked to critical attitudes toward consumption, bodily reflection, and cultural memory. The artistic-practical research in Chapter 3 allowed tracing how the process of clothing refashioning is structured at the level of bodily and emotional stages, how the empathetic gaze functions, and how a new form of fashion subjectivity emerges through interaction with the material.

The methodology proposed in this dissertation for analyzing clothing refashioning as an alternative wardrobe strategy can be applied in future studies of other forms of everyday interaction with clothing — such as care, repair, storage, exchange, self-sewing, resale — as well as within research on sustainable fashion and wardrobe practices. The concept of alternative wardrobe practice presented in this work opens opportunities for developing new approaches in fashion theory, design education, and exhibition practice.

In the future, the results of this dissertation research may form the basis for both broader empirical studies focused on wardrobe strategies and methodological developments in the field of sustainable fashion. Given the growing attention to issues of ethical consumption, caring relationships with things, and the deconstruction of fashion norms, the study of clothing refashioning gains special significance as a tool for rethinking not only the fashion industry but also the very foundations of everyday interaction with clothing.

III. APPROBATION OF THE WORK

Publications on the topic of the dissertation.

Works published by the author in journals indexed in international citation and indexing databases, as well as included in the list of journals of the Higher School of Economics (HSE) level:

1. Salnikova, S. O. The Phenomenon of the "Own Thing": Practices of Forming Attachment to Clothing // *Artikult.* – 2023. – No. 3 (51). – Pp. 104-114.
2. Salnikova, S. International Conference "Fashion, Identity and Crisis: How We Create Clothes, Wear Them and Care for Them (and Ourselves)" (Armenian State University, Yerevan, Armenia, June 1-2, 2023) / S. Salnikova // *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie (New Literary Review)*. – 2024. – No. 3(187). – Pp. 402-416. – P. 411.
3. Salnikova, S. O., Nikiforova, V. I., Turman, R. L., Veresova, N. M. Methods of the Research Institute of Artistic Industry (NIIKhP) for Adapting Folk Crafts: Theory

and Practice on the Example of Finno-Ugric Crafts // Vestnik ugrovedeniya (Bulletin of Ugric Studies).

4. Veresova, N. M., Nikiforova, V. I., Salnikova, S. O., and Turman, R. L. Methods of the Research Institute of Artistic Industry (NIIKhP) for Adapting Folk Crafts: On the Example of Bone Carving Crafts // Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. Art Studies. 2025. Vol. 15. No. 3.

Other publications on the dissertation topic:

1. Salnikova, S. What Lies Behind New Seams: Cosewn Clothing and the Secrets of Its Creation / S. Salnikova // Fashion Theory: Clothing, Body, Culture. – 2024. – No. 4(74). – Pp. 413-428.