THE ELEGANT CASUALNESS: REFLECTIONS ON SLOW FASHION THROUGH BRANDS OF SÃO PAULO CITY

O DESPOJAMENTO ELEGANTE: REFLEXÕES SOBRE A SLOW FASHION A PARTIR DAS MARCAS DA CIDADE DE SÃO PAULO

EL DESPOJAMIENTO ELEGANTE: REFLEXIONES SOBRE SLOW FASHION A PARTIR DE MARCAS DE LA CIUDAD DE SÃO PAULO

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ABSTRACT: Since Pierre Bourdieu published La Distinction, contemporary culture has undergone significant transformations, leading to a fruitful debate about his concepts. With this in mind, we researched slow fashion brands in the city of São Paulo between 2023 and 2024, asking to what extent the emergence of ecological concerns and the concern with "sustainability" may have altered fashion consumption to the point of rendering Bourdieu's concepts, particularly that of distinction, inoperative. Our investigation into the proposals and trajectories of slow fashion producers, as well as the profiles and motivations of its consumers, demonstrated that, rather than disappearing, mechanisms of distinction are redefined and reaffirmed on new foundations within this social space, where supposedly only "politically correct" values prevail.

KEYWORDS: Slow fashion. Fashion. Conscious consumption. Lifestyle. Distinction.

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RESUMO: *Desde que Pierre Bourdieu publicou La distinction, a cultura contemporânea passou por grandes transformações, o que tem levado a um profícuo debate sobre seus conceitos. Com essa intenção, pesquisamos marcas slow fashion na cidade de São Paulo nos anos de 2023 e 2024, tendo como pergunta em que medida a emergência da questão ecológica e da preocupação com a "sustentabilidade" teria alterado o consumo de moda a ponto de tornar os conceitos bourdieusianos inoperantes, notadamente o de distinção. A investigação sobre as propostas e a trajetória das produtoras, bem como do perfil e da motivação dos consumidores da moda slow demonstrou, ao contrário, que neste espaço social, onde supostamente vigorariam apenas os valores "politicamente corretos", os mecanismos de distinção se redefinem e se reafirmam sob novas bases.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Slow fashion. Moda. Consumo consciente. Estilo de vida. Distinção.*

RESUMEN: *Desde que Pierre Bourdieu publicó La distinción, la cultura contemporánea ha pasado por grandes transformaciones, lo que ha llevado a un fructífero debate sobre sus conceptos. Con este propósito, investigamos marcas de slow fashion en la ciudad de São Paulo en los años 2023 y 2024, planteándonos en qué medida la emergencia de la cuestión ecológica y la preocupación por la "sostenibilidad" habrían alterado el consumo de moda hasta el punto de hacer inoperantes los conceptos bourdianos, especialmente el de distinción. Sin embargo, la investigación sobre las propuestas y la trayectoria de las marcas productoras, así como sobre el perfil y la motivación de los consumidores de moda slow, demostró que, en este espacio social donde supuestamente prevalecerían solo los valores "políticamente correctos", los mecanismos de distinción se redefinen y se reafirman sobre nuevas bases.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Slow fashion. Moda. Consumo consciente. Estilo de vida. Distinción.*

Introduction

The ecological issue is, without a doubt, one of the most pressing concerns of our time. Supported by a variety of different agents, it has become a global cause par excellence. An increasing number of individuals and social groups have come into contact with and become concerned about the dilemmas posed by ecology. Since the ecological issue gained global visibility, countless proposals aimed at solving or at least mitigating the damage caused by the current development model have

emerged across the world and in every area of knowledge. Within this context, the complex discussion surrounding sustainability or sustainable development began. It is within this debate that we propose to investigate a movement of moderate visibility: slow fashion. We argue that investigating this movement will allow us to touch on a crucial point of modern capitalism: the world of consumption, particularly fashion. We understand that, in this universe, the contradictions between the aims of sustainable development and the objective conditions for its realization become more evident.

Slow fashion began as a socio-cultural movement whose history is marked by two key figures. The first is Angela Murrills, a fashion writer who is said to have coined the term in 2004 in an article for the Canadian magazine *The Georgia Straight*. Inspired by the book *In Praise of Slow*, by Canadian journalist Carl Honoré, also published that same year, Murrills sought to reflect on how, in some way, the principles of the slow food movement "could have a positive impact on our wardrobes" (Murrills, 2004). This kind of "foundational text" for slow fashion already pointed to the principles that today guide what has become a movement and, as we will see, a market segment: support for the local economy over multinational corporations; valuing products made through artisanal methods as opposed to mass-produced goods – in other words, fast fashion; and the pursuit of "conscious consumption," which emphasizes the importance of knowing the origin of what we consume[1].

The second prominent name is Kate Fletcher (2007), a professor of Sustainability and Design at the Royal Danish Academy, who wrote an article for *The Ecologist* in which she defined slow fashion by contrasting it with fast fashion: fashion rooted in mass production, the sale of products in often global retail chains, and the frequent launch of new collections. Indeed, "today, fashion cycles have accelerated, and between 50 and 100 mini-collections are released to the market each year" (Domingos; Vale; Faria 2021, p. 1, our translation). In other words, if the emergence of fashion in the mid-19th century had already introduced the constant change of clothing styles – initiating significant movement within this sphere of social life with up to four collections per year – the current phenomenon known as fast fashion has accelerated this pace to an unprecedented level.

Elizabeth Cline, a New York-based author specializing in sustainability and labor rights in the fashion industry, points out that "in 2009, [American] consumers spent less than 3% of their annual household budgets on clothing" (Cline, 2012, p. 18, our translation). These figures, however, do not merely indicate a reduction

[1] The slow food movement emerged in Rome in 1989, led by the intellectual Carlo Petrini, as a reaction against fast food and the food industry. According to him, "gastronomy, working from flavor and pleasure," could reinvent the act of eating based on the pillars of GOOD (for the senses), CLEAN (respect for the environment), and FAIR (to the farmers) (Bueno, 2021, p. 132, our translation).

in clothing consumption, but rather its falling cost. Domingos, Vale, and Faria (2022, p. 1, our translation) present data on the growth of clothing consumption in Europe: "[…] between 1996 and 2012, studies estimate that each person increased by 40% the number of new garments purchased, thereby increasing the fashion industry's negative ecological impact." The lower prices of fast fashion brand items are undoubtedly a consequence of the globalization of the fashion industry and the outsourcing of production, particularly the use of cheap labor from countries such as China, Bangladesh, and Vietnam[2].

The expansion of the slow fashion movement occurred within this context, also impacted by the frequent exposure of scandals involving major fashion corporations, especially in the 2010s. In 2012 and 2013, two tragedies at poorly maintained garment factories in Bangladesh claimed the lives of over 500 workers (Ethical, 2013). In Brazil, in 2011, Zara – part of the multinational conglomerate Inditex – was held accountable for labor practices akin to slavery (Zara, 2017). These are just a few of many cases that came to light through media, books, documentaries, etc., revealing the appalling working conditions in garment factories that supply the fashion world – particularly those that feed the fast-moving products sold in global department stores.

Simultaneously, slow fashion emerged as a market segment. As we will see, the characteristics of this market niche coincide with those of the movement itself since, in a capitalist society, new aspirations and values are often materialized through production and consumption[3]. According to Diana Crane (2011), in the United Kingdom, sustainable fashion became a commercial reality between 2006 and 2008. Our empirical research, presented later, reveals a more recent establishment of this segment: in São Paulo, only three of the slow fashion brands investigated were launched before 2010, with more than 20 founded in the following decade.

Research Methods and Techniques

The construction of this research and its investigative techniques is grounded in two main theoretical pillars. On the one hand, to demonstrate how social class is one of the first limits encountered by slow fashion, we draw upon the analytical framework of Pierre Bourdieu (1983; 1988), focusing on his concept of social class and related notions such as distinction, economic and cultural capital, social space, and field. On the other hand, we also adopt as a theoretical premise the segmented

[2] According to the World Trade Organization (WTO), in 2021, the main exporting country of clothing items was China. However, there was significant growth in clothing exports from other countries, such as Bangladesh (30%), Turkey (22%), and India (24%) (Lu, 2022).

[3] For an in-depth look at the relationship between the socio-cultural movements generated by the modern condition and market segments, see Mira (2001).

globalization of cultural markets, which justifies our spatial focus. Based on these conceptual foundations, we conducted empirical research on self-identified slow fashion brands operating in the fashion market of São Paulo.

The choice of São Paulo as a spatial focus is justified by our methodological approach, anchored in Renato Ortiz's (1994) idea of the globalization of culture. According to the author, this process is characterized by the expansion of capitalist modernity across much of the world, establishing a new pattern and defining a new way of life. The globalization of culture materializes primarily through the globalization of cultural markets, which circulate objects, ideas, and values in a segmented way – that is, the modern lifestyle does not reach everyone equally but rather reaches each lifestyle group according to, in particular, their social class, but also their gender, generation, ethnicity, and other factors. Thus, we understand that the dynamics of contemporary society and culture must be considered from a global perspective that does not eliminate the local and the national, but rather redefines them. In this sense, major cities play a crucial role in the globalization process, as analyzed by Saskia Sassen (2010, p. 95–96, our translation):

> The most powerful of the new global geographies of centrality connects major international financial and business centers […]. The intensity of transactions in these cities, particularly in the financial market, in service trade, and in investments, has increased remarkably, as has the scale of the transactions involved.

In addition to cities like New York, London, Paris, Frankfurt, and others, Sassen argues that cities in the Global South – such as São Paulo – also qualify as "global cities" (Sassen 2010, p. 85, our translation). In these cities, financial transactions are intense, and people, objects, and discourses circulate continuously. Therefore, São Paulo is a privileged location for understanding a global movement/market segment like slow fashion. In other words, we believe it is more heuristic, from a sociological standpoint, to focus on the city of São Paulo in relation to other global locations than to compare what happens there with other places in Brazil that do not qualify as "global cities."

Having justified this focus, the first part of the research corpus consisted of the self-definitions provided by slow fashion brands, as found on their own websites. Since the aim was to understand the characteristics and dynamics of this market niche in São Paulo, all the brands selected for analysis have at least one physical store – not just resellers – in the city. The brand selection was conducted through two surveys between February and July 2023. In the first, we selected the finalist brands of the EcoEra award, created in 2015 by *Vogue*, a renowned fashion magazine, which allowed us to identify brands recognized within the industry for their environmental, social, and economic sustainability initiatives (Gadaleta, 2018). The second survey

was conducted systematically using a Google search with the keyword "slow fashion São Paulo," selecting brands that appeared in the first five pages of results. Another important selection criterion related to the types of products sold. Slow fashion is a segment that includes both clothing items and cosmetics – and, at times, home décor and design products. In this research, we focused exclusively on clothing items (for men, women, and/or children) – including garments, footwear, and handbags. The final result was a list of 24 brands with physical stores in São Paulo. After creating a unified document with the definitions through which the selected brands identify themselves or present their history and values[4] on their websites, we coded the material using the NVivo qualitative research software[5].

Subsequently, we found it necessary to focus on potential slow fashion consumers. First, we examined the geographic locations of the stores within the metropolitan urban space, understanding that these locations might provide clues about their customer base. Then, we analyzed two systematic literature review articles on the topic – one produced in Brazil (Ferraz; Ferreira, 2022) and another in Portugal (Domingos; Vale; Faria, 2022). Both compiled a large amount of new and highly elucidative data on these consumers, which will be explored further ahead.

Finally, in order to better characterize slow fashion as a market segment in São Paulo, we deemed it important to learn more about its designers. To this end, we carried out two additional investigations during the first semester of 2024. First, we aimed to outline the profile and, when possible, the professional trajectory of the founders and owners of the selected brands (the overwhelming majority of whom are women). When available, information on education, international experience, and previous work in the fashion industry was gathered from the brands' websites, biographical articles in online newspapers and magazines, or their profiles on the social network LinkedIn.

From this investigation, we saw the need to better understand the dynamics of higher education fashion programs in the city, since many of the slow fashion market agents obtained their degrees in São Paulo. For this purpose, we conducted a search on the e-MEC platform (National Registry of Courses and Higher Education Institutions), selecting currently active, in-person bachelor's and/or associate degree programs in the municipality.

[4] In general, we analyzed the texts available on the brands' website pages, such as "About Us," "Our Story," "Who We Are," "Values," etc.

[5] We did not start from a predetermined set of codes, but rather allowed the codes to emerge from the agents' discourse.

Slow fashion brands in São Paulo and the career paths of their designers

The 24 slow fashion brands selected for this study offer clothing, shoes, and accessories with considerable variety. Some work with recycling – or *upcycling*, as it is commonly referred to in the field. Some produce vegan products, while others use leather for its quality and durability. *Yes I Am Jeans*, for example, aims to recreate fashion's "villain," denim, in a more "sustainable" way through a "neutral color palette, reducing the need for chemical products in laundry processes and consequently the environmental impact" (Yes I Am Jeans, n.d.). It is important to highlight that slow fashion is one form of "sustainable fashion," a broader term that includes the purchase and sale of second-hand clothing, clothing rental, and more. As a segment of sustainable fashion, slow fashion is characterized by the production and consumption of a new garment – even if that garment is created from used clothing (upcycling).

Figure 1 – Fernanda Yamamoto's fashion show at São Paulo Fashion Week, featuring upcycled pieces from previous collections

Source: https://www.fernandayamamoto.com.br/p/desfiles.

What unites the diversity of slow fashion brands and their products – and sets them apart from others in the market – is their discourse of sustainability. This segment is defined by its commitment to a number of principles, such as: slowing down production time, as the term itself suggests; the use of artisanal work; the use of natural or organic raw materials; the valorization of local or national products and producers; and fair trade practices – all of which relate to environmental concerns.

The chart below shows the presence of these and other principles in the statements made by the brands studied:

Chart 1 – Chart developed by the authors using codes created in the NVivo qualitative research software

CODE	Nº OCORRÊNCIAS
National and/or local raw materials and/or services	14
Respect for production time / "handmade" products	12
Timeless design	10
"Natural" or "organic" raw materials	10
Sustainability (such as respect for the environment)	9
Conscious consumption	8
Certified raw materials and/or production	7
Upcycling	7
Authenticity	6
Unisex products / agender fashion	6
Brands made by and for women	5
Diversity of bodies	4
Transparency	4
Social inclusion	3
Minimalism	3
Vegan products	3
Circular economy	2
National and/or local raw materials and/or services	2
Respect for production time / "handmade" products	2

Source: Research data.

As expected, almost all of the slow fashion brands analyzed here touched upon the issue of time when discussing their goals or values, using expressions such as "respect for production time," referring to "artisanal work" or "handmade" pieces. Out of the 24 brands investigated, 12 referenced these themes. Another 10 mentioned the importance of "timeless design," of creating clothing that has a "long life." From this perspective, it became clear that the dimension of "time" is central to the construction of their purpose. The brand Iara Wisnik, which produces clothing and footwear, summarizes the two ways in which the concern with time emerges among São Paulo's slow fashion brands:

> And always respecting time. The time of the one who conceives, the time of the one who wears, and the time of the clothing itself. Alongside this respect comes the care in pattern making and the desire to bring to life timeless pieces that can (and should) be reinterpreted with each collection (Iara Wisnik, n.d., our translation).

The clothing brand Fernanda Yamamoto also states its belief in timelessness, in the idea that a garment should be worn by someone for many years:

> […] our time is extended. It is not the time of fast fashion, of the superfluous and disposable. We work in slow fashion: each piece we produce is a study in pattern making, sewing, and finishing, in a constant learning process. We believe that an FY garment should accompany the person who wears it for many years" (Fernanda Yamamoto, n.d., our translation).

In clear opposition to fast fashion, the brand also declares that it participates in fashion shows "only once a year," due to the need to "experiment, dive into a completely new universe, and reinterpret it in our own way" (Fernanda Yamamoto, n.d., our translation).

The brand MyFots shares a similar narrative, positioning itself as "a timeless brand. Each piece is designed to last a lifetime. It is comfortable, versatile, and made for those who appreciate a simple and unique design" (Myfots, n.d., our translation). Likewise, the brand Escudero&Co, which offers "accessories and shoes made from high-quality leather with timeless design," includes "authenticity" as one of its pillars, in addition to "sustainability" and "locality" (Escudero&Co, n.d.). In the same spirit, Botti aims to create "long-lasting shoes, filled with care, comfort, and stories," claiming to produce "on a small scale, honoring local craftsmanship, valuing the handmade, quality, comfort, and authenticity" (Botti, n.d., our translation).

All of these statements also reveal the importance given by the slow fashion brands studied to the use of national and/or local raw materials and services. Fourteen brands stated that they either prioritize or exclusively use such resources. Unlike space, which is an abstract category, the idea of the local refers to a place imbued with history. In Brazil, however, the local is often expressed as Brazilian. The brands Insecta, which produces vegan shoes, and Escudero&Co express pride in using exclusively national raw materials and services (Insecta Shoes, n.d.; Escudero&Co, n.d.). The brand Emi takes a similar stance: "Our pieces are not just handmade; they are made with our Brazilian hands – loving, delicate hands full of care" (Emi Beachwear, n.d., our translation). In Brazil, talk about the local almost always leans into the discourse of *brasilidade* (Brazilianness). Similarly, Benglô, a collaborative platform of slow fashion brands, highlights "Brazil" and "Brazilian":

"Products made in Brazil by Brazilian artisans and designers who understand nature as a fundamental part of our existence" (Benglô, n.d., our translation).

The preference for using national products and services is directly related to the use of "natural" and "organic" raw materials, which are often of Brazilian origin. Ten of the brands studied affirm the use of this type of material. For example, the brand Flávia Aranha adopts natural dyeing techniques in its pieces, using "tree bark, fruits, leaves, and roots," particularly of native origin: "[…] we preferably use native species in our pieces, stitching together our biomes and colors. Connecting with Pau-Brasil, Crajirú, Urucum, Macela, Erva-Mate, Pomegranate, Jabuticaba, and so many other plants is to connect with our land and our history" (Flávia Aranha, n.d., our translation). Sauslito Slow Fashion states that it is "a 100% Brazilian brand that prioritizes the use of high-quality raw materials with conscious production, natural fabrics, and fair labor" (Sauslito, n.d., our translation).

Figure 2 – Natural dyeing technique used in the production of Flávia Aranha's brand

Source: Available at: https://www.flaviaaranha.com/p/tingimento (accessed on June 2, 2024).

A wide range of terms emerged from the research, many of which overlap[6]. For example, a brand that uses natural or organic raw materials and claims to be concerned with its production chain – relying on national and local services – is, in some way, expressing a discourse of "sustainability," even if the term itself is

[6] It is also worth noting the engagement of various brands with issues relating to representativeness, such as agender fashion, body diversity, etc. However, as this is a topic that requires specific discussion, we decided not to address it in this article.

not explicitly mentioned. The same applies to a brand that emphasizes its respect for production time and timeless design: although it may not directly mention the idea of "conscious consumption," this notion is clearly part of its philosophy. What matters at this point is to highlight the presence of the same lexicon found in slow movements. Their expressions are rooted in what we refer to here as a "belief in sustainability." A magical belief, whose effectiveness, as Lévi-Strauss (1975) explains, lies in the belief in magic itself. It is a collective belief that forms "at each moment, a kind of gravitational field within which the relations between the sorcerer and those he bewitches are defined and situated" (Lévi-Strauss, 1975, p. 194–195, our translation). The belief in sustainability supports the movement and the market segment – on both the producers' and consumers' sides – who certainly believe they are helping fashion become less harmful to the environment, to people, to animals, and so on. But as we will see more clearly, in the case of fashion, the belief in sustainability is intertwined with another gravitational field, made up of those who believe and those who hold "the power to create rare objects through the mechanism of branding" (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 155, out translation). Thus, it is essential to underline the role of the designers and/or founders of the brands studied, as they are key agents within this other gravitational field.

The investigation into the background of these agents revealed fundamental points for analysis. The first is their high level of education: all 21 designers/owners for whom data was available hold a university degree, and in some cases, a graduate degree. It is also worth noting that among the 21 designers with higher education, eight attended fashion courses at the various institutions that emerged in São Paulo during the last quarter of the 20th century[7].

Indeed, according to Maria Lucia Bueno (2018, p. 46), fashion courses began to flourish in Brazil after 1988, following the democratization process. This growth occurred mainly in private institutions, which were more aligned with market demands. The same author noted in 2018 the expansion of university-level fashion programs, which paralleled the growth of the national fashion market, highlighting the city of São Paulo as "the country's first industrial center," where the textile sector played a key role (Bueno, 2018, p. 46, our translation). In fact, according to our research, most higher education courses related to fashion are located in the city of São Paulo. Currently, there are 23 higher education fashion programs recognized by the Ministry of Education (MEC)[8] in São Paulo – 12 bachelor's degrees and 11 technical programs – which represent more than 14% of the fashion courses

[7] Flávia Aranha, Heloísa Faria, Iara Wisnik, Bruna Botti (Botti), Ana Carolina Olyveira, and Mariana Bonfanti (Jouer Couture) studied fashion at Faculdade Santa Marcelina. Tatiana Marcondes (My Fots) holds a degree in Fashion Design from Anhembi Morumbi. Finally, Raquel Ferraz (Yes I Am Jeans) graduated in Fashion Business from FMU.

[8] We refer to the courses currently in operation.

operating in the country, offering up to 23% (4,370) of the available spots. Except for the bachelor's degree in "Textiles and Fashion" offered by the University of São Paulo (USP), all other programs in the city belong to the private education sector. Therefore, it is possible that the emergence of dozens of slow fashion brands and the period in which most of their stores began operating in São Paulo, between 2011 and 2020, are related to the impact of the education of hundreds of designers from the city's fashion schools in search of professional opportunities.

Another important finding regarding the careers of the leading designers is that many had prior experience in the fashion market, which, in some way, gave them industry knowledge and the initial capital to start their own brands. Some accounts suggest possible family support, at least during their education and early professional experiences. The pioneer Fernanda Yamamoto studied Business Administration to work at her parents' medical catalog factory. Later, she moved to New York to study at Parsons, a renowned fashion school. Also holding a degree in Business Administration, the founder of Linus, Isabela Chusid, was a trainee at Red Bull when she decided to "give it all up," and in an interview, admitted: "My family wanted to kill me – but obviously I have the huge privilege of being able to do that" (Terapins, 2021).

The educational and professional trajectories, along with the possible family backgrounds of these agents, suggest that they likely come from at least upper-middle-class origins. In this sense, it is worth emphasizing the "internationalization" aspect of their paths: Fernanda Yamamoto, as already mentioned, studied at Parsons (Tavares, 2019); Barbara Mattivy (Insecta Shoes) completed postgraduate studies at IED Milan and the University of Toronto (Souza, 2021); Anna Luiza Vasconcellos (Emi) continued her education at Central Saint Martins in London and at IED in Milan; and finally, Kelly Kim (*Calma São Paulo*) and Flávia Aranha undertook long professional trips that, according to their own accounts, changed their perceptions of the fashion market (Eiras, 2019; Calma São Paulo, s.d.).

Upper class, haute couture, high culture. The social class of the most talked-about designers is also marked by their closeness – viewed by strict-sense artists perhaps as pretentious – to haute couture and high culture. In relation to high culture, it is interesting to observe how they position themselves within the art world by calling their workplaces "ateliers," as renowned designers do. This is explicitly the case of Ateliê Luíza Pannunzio, a designer trained in Visual Arts at FAAP, but also of others who refer to their workshops as ateliers, such as Fernanda Yamamoto, Heloísa Faria, and Iara Wisnick, noting that they also have prêt-à-porter collections. As seen, they also flirt with the world of haute couture. Certain brand names stand out, such as Jouer Couture and Maison Calma São Paulo – even printed on their shopping bags. However, these are just the surface layers of what the designers claim for themselves: the development of an *authorial* body of work. Especially among

designers trained in Fashion Design – but not exclusively – there is a recurring emphasis on the value of the "one-of-a-kind piece," resulting from natural, organic, or recycled raw materials, but above all, from the designer's conceptual work. Calma São Paulo states that it "makes […] unique, colorful, joyful clothes […]" through "a meticulous, manual process within […] the atelier" (Calma São Paulo, n.d., our translation). Coletivo de Dois, which works with fabric scrap recycling, also defines itself as "an authorial brand free from market labels" (Coletivo De Dois, n.d., our translation), while Kitecoat, which repurposes kitesurfing sails, claims to produce "jackets that are one-of-a-kind and full of history" (Kitecoat, n.d.). In Fernanda Yamamoto's words, authorial work would consist of "imprinting a very personal and unique perspective on a design, an ancient technique, or a well-studied process" (Fernanda Yamamoto, n.d., our translation).

According to Bourdieu (1983), there is a structural homology between high culture and haute couture, both of which are sustained by collective adherence to their respective belief systems. In the case of haute couture, as we have seen, it is upheld by the belief in the brand, a mechanism capable of producing rare objects – "one-of-a-kind pieces." By aligning themselves with the discourse of haute couture, slow fashion brands take a stance within the fashion field against mass fashion, while at the same time positioning themselves as carriers of a new proposal not embraced by other competitors. The virtues of the materials and techniques they use, as well as the personal skills of the designers, are mobilized to imbue the final product with a sense of rarity. In this way, slow fashion designers establish a position of distinction within the local, national, or international fashion scene, depending on their scope of activity[9]. As we will see below, what is expressed by designers through the ideas of "authorial work" or "one-of-a-kind piece" is perceived by their consumers as something that grants them "exclusivity" and "personal style."

Elegant simplicity as a lifestyle for the slow fashion consumer

In order to deepen our understanding of the brands and to identify potential slow fashion consumers in the city of São Paulo, we conducted a geographic mapping that ultimately revealed a concentration of stores in the neighborhoods of Pinheiros, Vila Madalena, and Jardins. The following table and map present the territorial distribution of all the brands investigated:

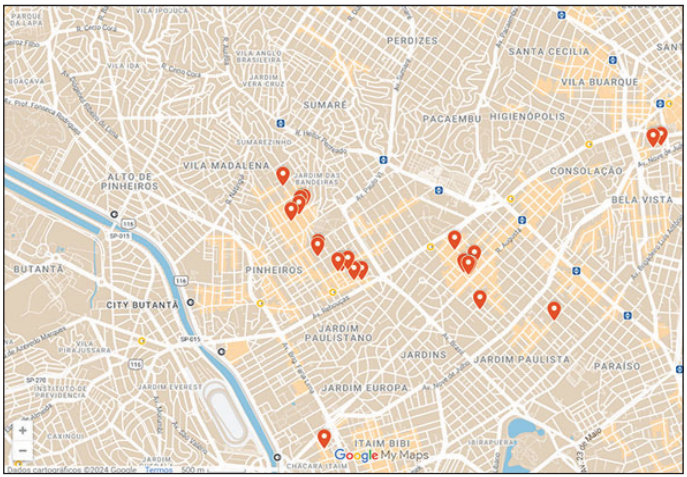
[9] It would be possible, at another point, to develop Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the field and the position occupied by slow fashion in relation to its competitors. However, this topic is beyond the limits of this article.

Table 2 – List of the brands analyzed alongside the locations of their stores

#	BRAND	NEIGHBORHOOD OF SÃO PAULO
1	Atelier Luiza Pannunzio	Jardins
2	Bemglô	Jardins
3	Botti	Jardins e Cidade Jardim
4	Calma São Paulo	Pinheiros
5	Coletivo De Dois	Centro Histórico
6	Comas	Butantã
7	Emi	Jardins
8	Escudero&Co	Jardins e Itaim Bibi
9	Fernanda Yamamoto	Vila Madalena
10	Flávia Aranha	Vila Madalena e Jardins
11	Heloisa Faria	Pinheiros
12	Iara Wisnik	Vila Madalena
13	Insecta Shoes	Pinheiros
14	Jouer Couture	Vila Madalena
15	King 55	Pinheiros
16	Kitecoat	República
17	Linus	Pinheiros
18	Myfots	Pinheiros
19	Pantys	Jardins e Morumbi
20	Sauslito	Vila Madalena
21	Shop Ginger	Cidade Jardim
22	Timirim	Vila Nova Conceição
23	Vibra Slow Fashion	Jardins
24	Yes I Am Jeans	Pinheiros

Source: Research data.

Map 1 – Concentration of physical slow fashion stores in the neighborhoods of Pinheiros, Vila Madalena, and Jardins



Source: developed by the authors using Google My Maps.

Of the 24 selected stores, eight are located in the Jardins area and 12 in Vila Madalena and Pinheiros, which are neighboring neighborhoods. The latter, part of the Pinheiros district, are widely known for their leisure establishments, including bars, restaurants, and shops, as well as for their art and design studios. This territory lies within what has conventionally been called the "expanded center," which includes the historic downtown area, Avenida Paulista, and parts of the South and West Zones. It is important to highlight that this urban space is endowed with what Bourdieu (1988) referred to as "cultural nobility": it concentrates most of the city's art museums, theaters, cinemas, concert halls, schools, universities, libraries, and, for the most part, their audience.

In this sense, it is worth recalling the author's analysis of the fashion field in *The Couturier and His Label* (Bourdieu; Delsaut, 2002), where he explains the contrast between two regions of Paris, on the right and left banks of the Seine. Bourdieu and Delsaut (2002) argue that the dynamics of this field are inscribed in the physical space of the city, forming what they call an "appropriated physical space." This, in turn, must be seen as a "more or less rigorous retranslation" or "spontaneous metaphor" of social space (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 134, our translation).

Thus, from a Bourdieusian perspective, the location of slow fashion stores gives us a strong indication of who their consumers are in São Paulo: most likely individuals with high cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1988), knowledgeable about fashion trends and more familiar with ecological and "sustainability" themes. Since slow fashion products require more time to produce and the "natural" raw materials are

more expensive, it is assumed that the consumer's economic capital must also be high – something that coincides with the profile of the neighborhoods where slow fashion stores are located.

Therefore, the profile of the neighborhoods where slow fashion stores are concentrated alone suggests that "conscious consumption" of clothing items is not accessible to just anyone. It is a form of consumption that carries a distinctive quality in Bourdieu's (1988) sense – that is, it signals a class difference with a positive status in the social hierarchy. In general, those without a certain level of economic capital – and, in this case, cultural capital – neither have access to nor are familiar with certain stores in Vila Madalena or Pinheiros that sell so-called "alternative" products. Those who lack economic capital, even if they have cultural capital, are not consumers of the luxury market in Jardins. Even those who shop online must, in principle, meet the same prerequisites. However, one can only become a consumer depending on the volume of their economic capital. It is also important to note that not all brands have the same price range: brands that work with upcycling, for example, tend to have lower prices. However, the most highly regarded brands and designers create a barrier to consumption precisely through the high prices of their "work." The Jardins area, populated by art galleries, is the perfect place for them to assert their distinction (Bourdieu, 1988).

However, there is further evidence of the connection between slow fashion consumption and distinction. Returning to our methodological premise regarding the globalization of the material and symbolic goods market, we sought additional data on slow fashion consumers in two systematic literature review articles on the subject. The first comes from the University of Aveiro. Compiling studies in Portuguese and English on slow fashion consumers, Domingos, Vale, and Faria (2022) brought enlightening insights to this discussion – particularly the fact that, even in this segment, concern with style does not disappear. Through a survey of the Scopus and Web of Science databases using the keyword *slow fashion*, the authors selected 25 articles from different fields of study considered relevant for analyzing the behavior of slow fashion consumers.

The terms and expressions found in these articles about slow fashion consumers belong to the same lexicon used by activists of the movement and the designers of the brands identified in this study on the city of São Paulo. Consumers express concern for sustainability, which in this context means knowing "where the product is made"; "being less driven by fashion cycles and wearing clothes for longer"; valuing and being informed about "fair trade," "organic products," and "sustainable production" (Domingos, Vale; Faria 2022, p. 11, our translation). The authors also mention a concern for the working conditions of employees in the fashion industry and for animal welfare – elements that did not emerge as clearly in our investigation. However, among consumers' motivations, there is also the perception of exclusivity

that a slow fashion item can provide. This factor may even carry more weight in the purchasing decision, making them willing to pay more for this type of product and to consider future purchases.

Several studies compiled by the authors explicitly mention the importance of exclusivity in the purchased piece. A 2009 study by Finnish author Niinimäki on "eco-fashion consumption and consumer purchasing decisions" showed that

> […] the main reasons that seem to lead consumers to engage in sustainable consumption are related to the ability to find alternatives that minimize harm to the planet without giving up style – in other words, 'sustainability as a facilitator of style and sustainable fashion as a source of pleasure and well-being' (Domingos; Vale; Faria, 2022, p. 12, our translation).

This result is reinforced by the study of Szmigin and Carrigan (2005), which linked "sustainable consumption to feelings of personal growth, well-being, and experiential pleasure" (Domingos; Vale; Faria, 2022, p. 2, our translation). Meanwhile, the works of Štefko and Steffek (2018), Zarley Watson and Yan (2013), and Yoo and Lee (2009) argue that:

> These consumers seek to distinguish themselves from others and pay attention to their social and personal image. Self-image is related to the creation of a unique style, rather than simply following trends; a distinct and personal style seems to enhance self-esteem. Classic clothing, with simple and discreet design and greater durability due to the materials used, expresses maturity and sophistication (Domingos; Vale; Faria, 2022, p. 12, our translation).

The second systematic literature review on slow fashion consumer characteristics is by Ferraz and Ferreira (2022), from UFMG. The authors mention additional studies that highlight concerns with clothing style: Legere and Kang (2020) note the consumers' "desire […] for self-enhancement in social environments"; Magnuson, Reimers, and Chao (2017) emphasized two valued aspects: "physical attributes, involving design, color, and comfort, and extrinsic attributes, what the clothing represents in terms of brand and origin"; and Jung and Jin (2014) stated that exclusivity "had a significant impact on the value generation for the slow fashion consumer," while "knowledge about fair labor involved in slow fashion was not significant for generating perceived value" (Ferraz; Ferreira, 2022, p. 8-9, our translation).

Such is the importance of exclusivity in the slow fashion universe that scholars Jung and Jin (2014), from the field of Business Administration, included it in their widely accepted definition of the concept. According to the authors, as explained by Ferraz and Ferreira (2022), five elements define slow fashion consumption:

> […] equity, establishing fair trade with producers who are properly compensated and respected, without excessive workloads and with suitable working conditions; authenticity, involving pieces produced outside of traditional production lines, conveying their story and uniqueness; localism, favoring local resources, supporting and valuing local production and industry; exclusivity, since the pieces gain distinctiveness and uniqueness in their production process; and functionality, with high-quality pieces that are durable and versatile (Ferraz; Ferreira, 2022, p. 6, our translation).

In other words, we might say that slow fashion becomes a kind of haute couture in reverse. Due to its characteristics in terms of raw materials, production methods, and ideological positioning, it produces an effect of rarity that distinguishes its consumer, creating a style that could be called "elegant simplicity." It is only available to those who can afford to pay for the decelerated time required for its production, the high cost of "natural" raw materials, and the techniques used in its manufacture. More than that, it is only accessible to consumers with a certain level of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1988), aware that, in the contemporary world, flaunting famous luxury or mass-market brands does not necessarily equate to distinction. These consumers recognize that valuing ecological and humanitarian causes is important, but it can also become a new way of demonstrating superiority over others and identifying with an exclusive lifestyle group.

Figure 3 – "Saia Graciosa" skirt and shirt, from Atelier Luiza Pannunzio's online store

Source: https://www.atelierlp.com.br/produtos/saia-graciosa/.

The exclusivity promised by slow fashion is different. It is not like that of the luxury world, which is meant to be enjoyed in restricted circles (Ortiz, 2019); nor is it like the massification of logos from major brands among emerging millionaires; much less like the cheap shine of department stores or the counterfeit logos of contested (or pirate) markets. It is about the possibility of consuming conceptual fashion, which requires a cultivated habitus that grants the individual (in this case, this lifestyle group) an "aesthetic sense," that is, the ability to apprehend art (in this case, fashion as art) as a field of form and style, regardless of morality or sensory pleasure (Bourdieu, 1988). To achieve this lifestyle, one must know how to dispense with fashion's most obvious attractions: the shine, the sexualization of the body, and the display of famous brand logos.

For its consumers, slow fashion is an element of distinction (Bourdieu, 1988). It provides them with a difference in terms of superiority within the social hierarchy. Through slow fashion, the contemporary consumer can demonstrate, as in the art world, their detachment from fashion trends, widely seen as a lack of style, mass consumption, and nature destruction; they can present themselves with a politically correct image, carefully constructed by seemingly unpretentious clothing and accessories, elegantly disheveled, as if none of it mattered – thus conveying the symbolic reference of a person concerned with the environment and the collective, of a mature and sophisticated individual.

Final considerations

Throughout this article, we sought to discuss the scope and limits of the slow fashion movement/segment. To this end, we placed it within the broader discussion of sustainability. We did not focus on defining this term, as we consider it a belief, in the sense used by Lévi-Strauss (1975) and Bourdieu (2002), something capable of bringing a community together around it. In this context, we observed that slow fashion emerged as a sociocultural movement against fast fashion, but it took only a few years to become a segment of the fashion market. This means that criticizing fast fashion does not imply rejecting fashion itself but positioning oneself in its field with a new proposal. In the case of slow fashion, the sustainability ideal and the products that emerge from it, as we have shown, grant São Paulo designers a position of distinction.

When implementing sustainability proposals, class boundaries become evident. First, economic boundaries: slowing production time by returning to artisanal production decreases labor productivity and increases product costs. Natural fibers and organic products also have higher production costs and are generally made by producers in poor countries, who are the intended beneficiaries of so-called fair trade

initiatives, which, if realized, again raise the final product prices. But the barriers also relate to the cultural capital of the consumer, who must be familiar with the discourse of sustainability and its intersection with the fashion field – that is, must have fashion knowledge. Due to their characteristics, slow fashion brands must be small and sell to exclusive consumers who, above all, can afford this lifestyle, which we call "elegant simplicity."

We aimed to outline the profile of this consumer in the city of São Paulo by locating slow fashion stores, based on Bourdieu's idea that there is a homology between production and consumption and between physical and social space. Thus, an equivalence could be established between the slow fashion consumer and the residents and visitors of culturally prestigious neighborhoods where these stores are located. Next, we sought to deepen our understanding by working with systematic literature review articles on the topic, addressing slow fashion and its consumers in various parts of the world. From these studies, we particularly extracted the importance that exclusivity of the acquired piece holds for this consumer. Bourdieu's theoretical framework allowed us to analyze how designers construct distinction relative to their competitors in the fashion field, as well as to perceive how distinction occurs in relation to slow fashion consumers or clients who embody a fashion that supposedly unites sustainability with style. In terms of lifestyle, a group is formed composed of fractions of the intellectualized upper-middle class, a group of believers in sustainability and in the legitimacy of style.

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