To discuss fashion and the whole panorama of different meanings related to this term, here I will first consider the idiom of “being on fashion.” This phrase refers to a condition that I consider to be linked with the idea of resonance: things on fashion are fashionable because, in a given time, in a given space, for a given group of people, they vibrate together, creating a resonance. However, as this idea may perhaps be evocative, it is certainly not very useful: what does vibrate in this resonance? How do new resonances emerge?

To prepare the ground for my discussion, it is necessary to introduce a few concepts that are a little more operational. It can be observed, for example, that things on fashion are media that are communicative objects: those who adopt fashion items use them to say something about themselves and about the world in which they live, they partake in defining individual and collective identities. But there is more. They are, in fact, maieutic instruments that support certain behaviors. And, finally, they work as relational objects to promote dialogues and to foster the adoption of social practices and interaction.

On a theoretical level, every product can play these three functions. The truth is, some products more than others, such as those related to clothing, do it more frequently and in a more obvious way. That is why, as a first approximation, when we speak of items as “being on fashion” we refer to clothing, and vice versa.

First, fashion, conceived as I am proposing, has a history as old as that of humanity. However, in the pre-modern era, fashion was strongly intertwined with tradition: at a certain time and in a given place, the communicative, maieutic, and relational aspects of clothes were largely defined by social customs. They were unique indicators of social status: apart from some details, how to dress was not the result of individual choices, instead it was the outcome of deep-rooted social conventions and practices.

With the rise of the modern era everything changed. As everyone was suddenly in the condition to freely decide about his life project on a daily basis, individuals were also free to choose which objects to surround themselves with, and therefore how to dress. Consequently, for better or worse, fashion as we intend it today, emerged. A fashion crossed by the same contradictions of modernity. A fashion that speaks both of individual freedom as well as of individualism; of personal expression, as well as consumerism.

Today, in the midst of the environmental, social, and cultural crises we are facing, we cannot avoid acknowledging how much fashion has been an agent for accelerating unsustainable ways of being and doing. Nonetheless, in my opinion, these effects are not inscribed in fashion’s nature. Instead, they resonate with some ideas and practices that have become dominant in recent years. Different ideas and different practices could have led to different ways of using fashion. Furthermore, I do believe that if we will ever reach a form of sustainable society, it should allow people to choose how to dress: therefore, there will exist a fashion. In any other
case, it would mean there will be some form of coercive society: a dictatorship of the self-image (of how anyone should look), possibly an expression of a broader coercion that will act upon the right of expression as well as upon any other personal freedoms.

Therefore, today and for the future, the question is not whether there will be fashions, but what do they talk about? Which behaviors do they promote? And which conversations do they trigger?

Furthermore, as today’s efforts are all focused on solving the current socio-economic-environmental crises, we should first ask ourselves not only how fashion could reduce its environmental load but also how it could become an agent for positive regeneration.

In other words, the question is: could fashion communicate ideas, stimulate behaviors, and promote relationships in order to deviate from the catastrophic direction the system has taken? Could fashion objects become agents for positive change, to reweave the web of life which, in recent years, we have so recklessly torn apart?

Further, I do not have exhaustive answers to the previous questions. However, observations can be made by referring to the notions of newness, diversity, and care. And therefore quality.

**Newness**

I believe that the pleasure of discovering something that appears new and fresh is embedded within our human nature. Therefore, this search for newness is entirely understandable and desirable. What is not acceptable, however, is its amplification that feeds a continuous acceleration of producing “variations of the new,” which have led to a hyper-exaltation of what is being proposed as “new.” This causes a problem of exponential increase in consumption. But not only. It results as well in a double loss: the loss of our capability to evaluate and recognize the deep quality of things and the loss of caring about them. This drift toward “newism,” for which fashion has been one of the main engines, is completely consistent with some key ideas and practices of modernity. And as we can all acknowledge today, it is intrinsically and dramatically unsustainable.

The connection between newness, increased consumption (and therefore waste), and global environmental issues is clear and widely discussed. Equally important, but much less considered, is the link that “newism” has with the impoverishment of quality and care. And, therefore, the loss of the human capacity of imagining and concretely pursuing the new kind of civilization we must contribute to build.

**Diversity**

Saying that a new global civilization founded on the values of care and regeneration should emerge, and it is possibly emerging with difficulties and contradictions, does not mean imagining a future of homogeneity. On the contrary, a sustainable civilization can only be conceived as widely diversified and should produce dynamic socio-technical and cultural ecosystems, rich in diversity.

This is because their variety is a prerequisite to guarantee adaptability and durability. Within this conception, the ideas of care and capacity of regeneration should not be seen as a sort of “patina” covering and homogenizing diversity, but rather as humus for growing the new “garden of diversity,” that existence is allowed precisely by this common nourishment.

From this standpoint, the metaphor of the garden seems to me very eloquent: the more it is beautiful, durable, and able to face adversities, the more it is variegated. And the more this diversity is consistent with the shared rules of ecology. No need to be said that fashion could be a catalyst for this ecological diversity.

**Care**

Putting the idea of caring at the very center of our discourse on fashion its meant to link it with the broader ongoing discussion that puts “care” at the core of the needed reorientation of our culture, especially the western one; that is to say leaving anthropocentrism for developing a new capacity to care even for what is non-human, but which is never less fundamental to preserve the planetary web of life.

The concept of care is intertwined with that of time and durability. In short, care requires time and attention, the time and attention needed to connect all the different threads, to act in complexity without reducing it.

Care, therefore, implies an intrinsically artisanal approach: doing things taking the required time, giving them the required attention, using thorough know-how, layered in time. Consequently, we can affirm that relationships created by care produce sound qualities, including the deepest of all: the quality of being sustainable.

Finally, until now, despite some exceptions, fashion has promoted a civilization based on accelerated times and its resulting lack of care. Nonetheless, as anticipated, it does not necessarily have to be that way. Fashion has the capability to nudge and nurture other ideas, and to enable different behaviors, putting the topic of care at the heart of them.
Therefore, in pursuing it, developing new ideas of quality.

From this standpoint, the relationship between fashion and sustainability should not only reply to the question about how to reduce the environmental weight of fashion products, but it should also be investigated from the standpoint of seeking to understand how to turn fashion into a positive agent contributing in the transition toward a sustainable civilization.

Therefore, how to make fashion, in its communicative role, able to spread the ability to produce and recognize sustainable qualities; moreover, in its maeutic function, how to make it an enabler of new practices of caring; and ultimately, in its relational role, how to make it a promoter for the creation of networks of people capable of operating as transition agents. In short, going back to the earlier metaphor, we should ask ourselves how fashion can help diverse individuals to live their own lives as they prefer, allowing the garden of varieties to flourish, being in harmonic resonance with others: with some of them by sharing certain qualities and related practices of care. And with everybody by tuning with the deep vibration produced by the web of life on our planet.

Note
1. This Brief Report has been translated form the Italian by the co-editors of this Special Issue; the word used here by the author is “nuovismo.”

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.