(HOFF) Human-Oriented Fast-Fashion
Archive Framework

3.0 Background

Fast fashion is a business model employed by the fashion industry to produce large amounts of garments at cheap costs through reliance on outsourced labor and synthetic fabrics. This process reinforces neocolonial relationships between producer countries in the Global South and consumer countries in the Global North and produces high amounts of ecological waste. For consumers, fast fashion fulfills a need for self-expression, participates in identity-formation, and is reinforced through cultural pressures of advertising and marketing.

Currently, archival science has spent little time engaging with fast fashion, even as fashion archiving has a long history. Engaging with fast fashion offers archivists the chance to build collective memory around fast fashion while it is still the dominant business model in the fashion industry, creating opportunities to shift the narrative around fast fashion from a discussion of short-term consumption and consumer behavior analysis to a holistic discussion of the networks that produce fast fashion garments.

A fast fashion archive could serve the interests of researchers interested in popular culture, environmental justice, and consumer behavior patterns. For these groups, a fast fashion archive transforms garments into data, mobilizing them to uncover the cultural conversations and economic relationships fast fashion produces. If successful, a fast fashion archive could have wider usage outside of an academic or research context, showing consumers how it constitutes global network of relationships, stretching far beyond a local fast fashion retailer.

4.0 Framework

The Human-Oriented Fast-Fashion (HOFF) Framework conceptualizes garments as Phantasmagorical Cultural Objects (PCOs), intricate artifacts influenced by the intertwined dynamics of fast fashion. It illustrates the interplay of material, symbolic, and systemic forces across five latent layers: Material, Cultural, Labor, Temporal, and Spatial.

Instead of imposing strict categories, HOFF employs latent variables to organize metadata relationally. This facilitates both detailed object-specific analysis and broader insights across collections, making it well-suited for nonlinear archival processes. PCOs can be cataloged individually, in groups, or across multiple datasets while preserving their embedded meanings and evolving significance.

5.0 Case Study

The H&M Puff-Sleeved Velour Dress is a typical fast fashion item. Produced by the company H&M, it exhibits many of the core features of fast fashion garments - inexpensive price point (~$40), synthetic fiber usage, and a lack of extensive work. This garment is also interesting due to the cultural discourse it produced among sections of the *RuPaul's Drag Race* fandom in 2021, which prompted discussions around the role of fast fashion in the UK drag scene.

6.0 Scan to View Final Paper

This QR code links to our final paper in our GitHub repository where you'll find the full framework.

Fig 2. Case Study - H&M Puff-Sleeved Velour Dress

Material $\quad layer_m\ [n, x, y, z_2]$
Cultural $\quad layer_c\ [n, x, y, z_1]$
Material $\quad layer_m\ [n, x, y, z_3]$
Cultural $\quad layer_c\ [n, x, y, z_4]$
PCO
$[n, x, y, z_0]$
Cultural $\quad layer_c\ [n, x, y, z_5]$
Labor $\quad layer_l\ [n, x, y, z_6]$
Spatial $\quad layer_s\ [n, x, y, z_6]$

Fig 1. Phantasmagorical Cultural Object Map (PCO^M)

The Phantasmagorical Cultural Object Map visualizes the relationships between different pieces of information about the Case Study garment, following the HOFF framework.

(L) Labor	
Human Contribution	Undocumented
Recognized	Exploitative Labor
Factory Labor	Offshore Production
Subcontracted Work	Influencer Work

(M) Material		
Synthetic Blend	Velour	Dress
Polyester	Elastane	
Unrefined Petroleum	Puff Sleeve	
Low-Cost Textile		

(C) Cultural	
RuPaul Backlash	Drag Discourse
Exploitative Labor	TikTok Satire
Paris Fashion Week	Cultural Loop
Haul Culture	

(S) Spacial	
Global Chain	Drag Network
App Commerce	Exploitative Labor
Social Media Amplification	
In-store Retail	Distributed Retail

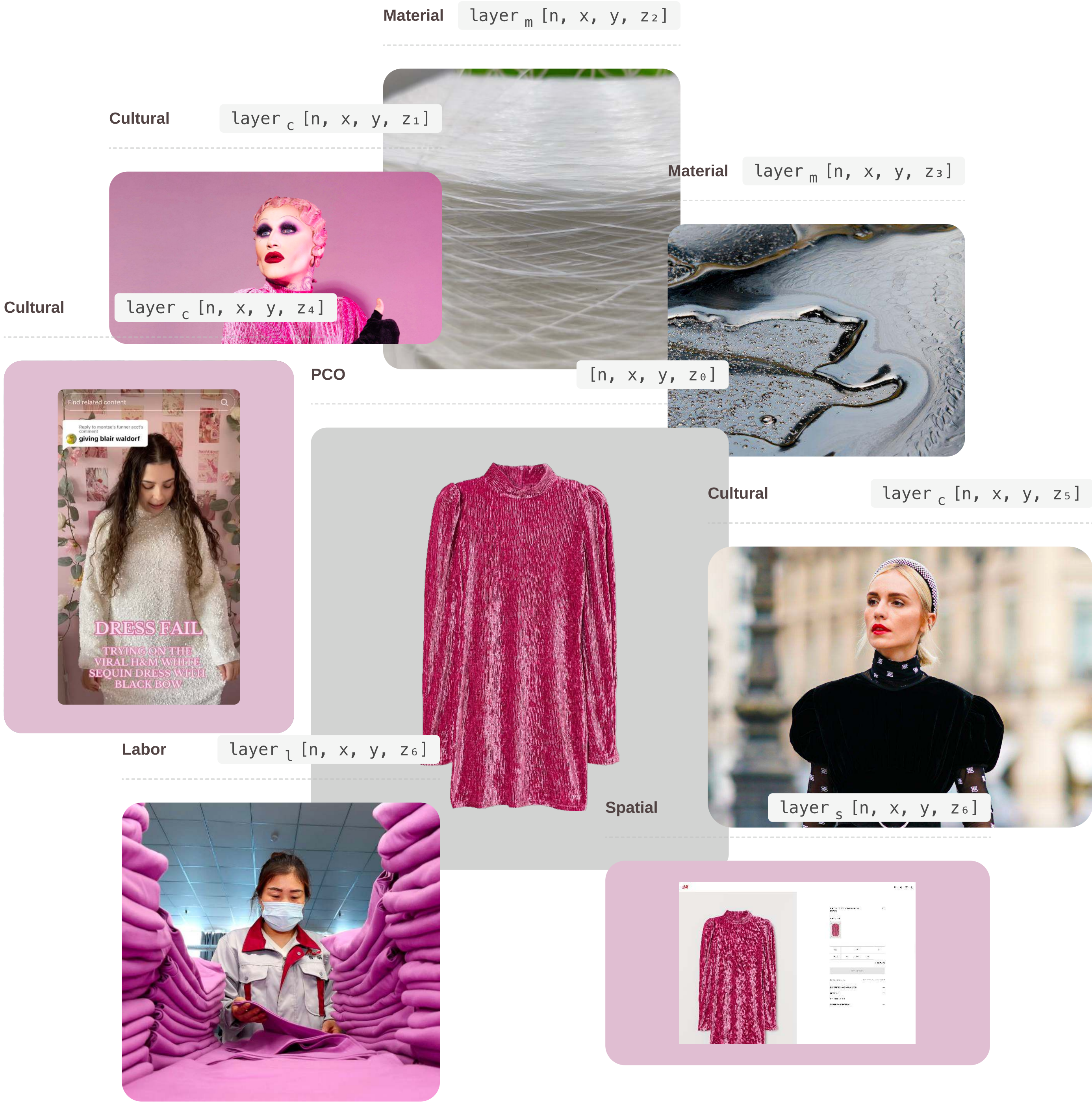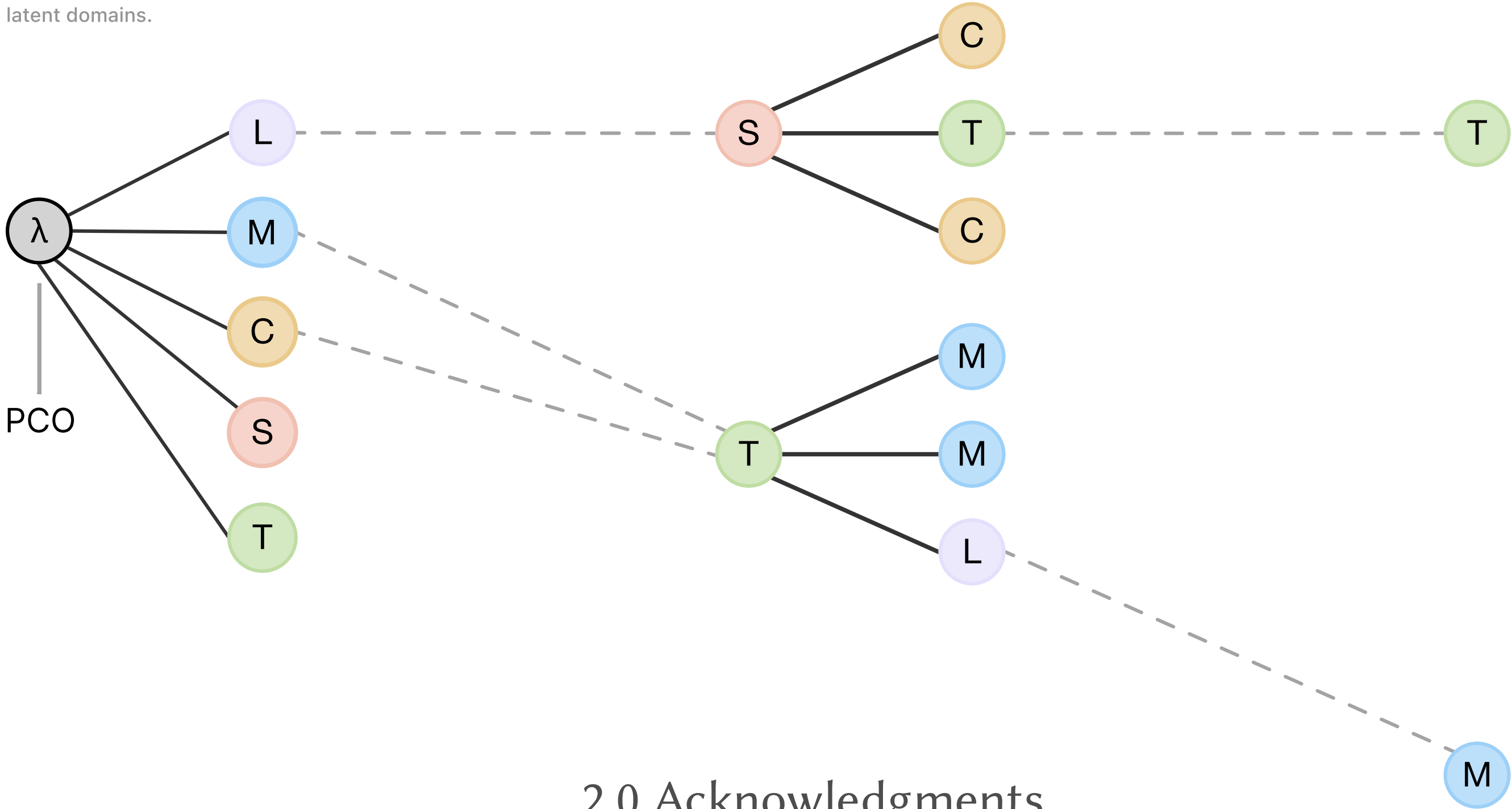| (T) Temporal	
Viral Moment	Cycle Compression
Meme Timeline	2018	2021
FOMO Pulse	

Fig 3. Layer Propagation

These first-order variables extend into second-order interactions, recursively combining into expressive outputs and feedback cycles. Solid lines represent direct factor loadings; dashed paths indicate mediated or cyclical transformations across latent domains.

1.0 Abstract

Fast fashion in the 21st century necessitates a re-evaluation of our conceptualization of fashion, which significantly diverges from the industrial practices of the 20th century fashion industry. This shift is influenced by various mediators such as the internet and social media platforms which have enabled new kinds of engagement with fast fashion, not only through the production and consumption of fast fashion but by how it is positioned within the ever evolving cultural sphere. Fast fashion today is characterized by short-term consumption, exploitative labor practices, and increased amounts of environmental waste.

Traditional archival methodologies struggle to accommodate this complexity, signaling an urgent need for adaptable, multimodal frameworks that can engage with the temporal and spatial fluidity of fast fashion objects. Additionally, while fast fashion is a prominent subject of discourse among scholars interested in fashion studies and environmental justice, it is not a particularly prominent topic in archival or information theory. To address this, we propose a new framework for understanding fast fashion - the "Phantasmagorical Cultural Object" (PCO).

Drawing on scholarship in fashion archiving, ecocriticism, and computer vision, we develop this framework to take the first steps in constructing an archival practice capable of addressing the interconnectedness of fast fashion garments with social, cultural, and economic processes.

2.0 Acknowledgments

7.0 Contributors

Nick Brenner
(Advanced Certificate in Digital Humanities)
nbrenner@pratt.edu

Adonis Fuentes
(Advanced Certificate in Archives)
afuente6@pratt.edu

Pratt