Contemporary traditional Inuit clothing as sustainable clothing

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The Inuit (Eskimo) women of North Alaska get a new atigi parka each year, just by changing the cover of the garment.

In this way, they can create new clothing and change their presentation of themselves with the help of atigi covers. Additionally, those who do not produce their own clothing, but choose only to wear the garments, can also do so. Atigi parkas for both women and men have a thick, quilted lining similar to what polar-expedition personnel use; they last for many seasons. On the exterior of the parka they affix a cover, which is really an atik322;uk (indoor traditional garment) made of thin cotton fabric. For women’s atigi covers, patterned fabrics are most common. The atigi has a hood trimmed with a big ruff called a "sunshine ruff," which is made preferably of wolverine or wolf fur; it typically also has fur on the edge underneath, and on the wrists.

The atigi is a practical garment that keeps a person warm. The covers are very attractive, with qupak trim around the hips that is built up by numerous rows of different colours of bias tape, in addition to one or several rows of rickracks. Bits of bias tape, in colours that contrast with those of the bottom tapes, are intermixed through the use of a special technique. It appears that the aesthetic aspect of the atigi is as important to the Inuit as its practical use. Because the atigi has an almost loose cover, it is easy to change the outer covering of the garment. The atigi parka is a material object that functions almost as a social means of creating an aesthetic impression.

I discuss this garment from the perspective of sustainability, especially as it relates to contemporary ready-to-wear clothing, other design items, and relevant theories.

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