



# Searching for the New Luxury?

## *Fashion Colloquium 2018 revisited*

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## Searching for the New Luxury? *Fashion Colloquium 2018 revisited*

*The Fashion Colloquium: Searching for the New Luxury, organized by ArtEZ University of the Arts in collaboration with State of Fashion, took place on 31 May and 1 June, 2018 in Muis Sacrum in Arnhem, the Netherlands.*

During the two-day Fashion Colloquium, a seamstress constructed several garments on the stage of the plenary sessions. As the audience, we could hear the rhythmic sounds of her sewing machine, and of her cutting, making, ironing, and finishing the garments. This durational performance piece by Kasia Gorniak in collaboration with Karolina Janulevičiūtė aimed to bring the process of making a garment to the fore. In doing so, they shifted the focus from designers creating fashion collections—which are usually presented on stage as a spectacle—to seamstresses constructing garments, making the audience aware of the actual time and labour that goes into making clothes. As Gorniak explained, one of their inspirations was Richard Sennett’s work on craftsmanship: “we can achieve a more humane material life, if only we better understand the making of things” <sup>Sennett 8</sup>. This touched upon one of the central themes of the Fashion Colloquium and is in line with the main research themes of the Fashion Professorship at ArtEZ. As I argued in *Dissolving the Ego of Fashion* <sup>2018</sup>, it is important to explore how to re-engage with fashion’s

materials and materialities, and to develop a critical fashion discourse that does more justice to fashion's human dimension and to the processes of *making* clothes.

Starting from the urgency to rethink the role fashion plays in relation to socio-cultural, environmental, and economic challenges in contemporary society, the Fashion Colloquium explored how fashion can serve as a tool for societal transformation. A diversity of creative practices, peer-reviewed papers, and keynote lectures provided the context as well as concrete examples to analyse and critically reflect on the cracks in the system. These contributions also suggested alternative approaches to revalue the practice of making fashion and to redefine the value systems from which we live and work. The Fashion Colloquium hosted more than 40 contributors who presented their academic research, visions, designs, concepts, future scenarios, and new materials. This offered a deeper insight into questions such as: how can we activate the power of fashion—highlighting the role of design, imagination, and aesthetics—to act *differently* and to move towards resilient futures and equitable societies? How can we envision and create an alternative and more engaged future of fashion that does more justice to fashion's human dimension? And how can academic research, critical thinking, and creative interventions help to (re)imagine and build another kind of future where 'fashioned' human beings and materials have more agency?

This special first edition of the online journal *APRIA* offers a continuation of the conversations that we started during the Fashion Colloquium. In a variety of media—film, photography, live recordings, interviews, and a podcast of a radio show—this edition presents a selection of creative practices, academic articles, and keynote lectures that touch upon central themes that require further research to contribute to realizing our shared visions. This editorial note contains direct links to all the content of this issue.

### **The current state of fashion: searching for the new luxury?**

In line with the first edition of the quadrennial event State of Fashion (2018) in Arnhem, the Fashion Colloquium focussed on the main theme ‘Searching for the New Luxury’. As curator José Teunissen explains in her introductory article, the classical luxurious dream of fashion is outdated. In light of the current societal and environmental challenges, Teunissen argues that fashion needs to become relevant again and use its strength, such as its seductive power to create new values and new imaginations, “to redefine what beauty, luxury and seduction entail in the twenty-first century”. In her manifesto for State of Fashion, Teunissen redefined the ‘New Luxury’ in terms of, for instance, care, fairness, no waste, reuse, imagination, and agency. This corresponds with the vision of keynote speaker Oskar Metsavaht, who presented his ideas

on the ‘New Luxury’, which his Brazilian fashion brand Osklen promotes in the high-end fashion market. In Metsavaht’s view, ethics and aesthetics should stand side by side, and the new luxury is “the association of a design product with impeccable quality, where universal aesthetics is aligned with sustainable socio-environmental practices”. It is indeed a time in which designers, researchers, and, increasingly, representatives from the industry are searching for different ways to transform the fashion system. There is a shared sense of urgency to activate the (imaginative and aesthetic) power of fashion to move towards a more sustainable future society. Yet, in my view, the question is what the ‘new luxury’ actually means and implies, and whether that is indeed what we are searching for.

In his article, Luca Marchetti reflects on fashion and luxury in terms of its ‘relational aesthetics’ Bourriaud 2002. He discusses fashion’s nature to establish (physical, spatial, or symbolic) relationships between the body and its living context. Analysing the fashion imaginary, luxury brands, and exhibitions, Marchetti contemplates the relational future of luxury and fashion, aiming to move beyond its ‘reign of visibility’. By referring to the notion of ‘aposematism’ (a visual signal by animals to warn predators) as used by artist and brand strategist Lucas Mascatello, he points out the importance of acknowledging the relationality between the culture of clothing and the biological nature of living organisms, while taking into account the strategy that living organisms



possess to adapt to their surroundings. This relationality is indeed an interesting redefinition of fashion's 'new luxury'. Charlotte Bik Bandlien also aims to redefine the notion of luxury. She does so by analysing, reframing, and unpacking the normcore trend, which she views as an alternative way forward, moving beyond luxury. Speculating on the future of luxury, she states that searching for the new luxury by fetishizing local production and materials is, in fact, a historical reenactment of former forms of luxury. Instead, Bik Bandlien proposes an appropriated version of 'post luxury' or the term 'new new luxury' to find the new normal.

In addition to these reconsiderations and suggestions to reframe the discussion, Nora Veerman makes an important point in her article by explaining that the notion of the 'new luxury' is a controversial term. She refers to sociologist Maxine Berg <sup>2005</sup> who showed that the 'new luxury' was used as a term to refer to the new accessibility of luxury products in the time of the Industrial Revolution. As such, this term is necessarily related to increased consumerism and a "growing ethos of disposability", which is, as Veerman shows, at the heart of the current crisis of fashion Weinstein 2014. In addition, 'newness' in itself is central to the way in which the current established fashion system operates by continuously commodifying 'the new', which directly relates to overproduction and overconsumption. As Gilles Lipovetsky has argued, in today's hypermodernity, fashion operates as a social mechanism characterized

by its taste for novelty <sup>1994; 2005</sup>. In my view, this leads to the question of whether the new luxury is indeed what we should be searching for, or if we should think in other terms—moving beyond luxury—and use another vocabulary in doing so. Perhaps we are searching for more wellbeing—psychologically, socially, culturally, environmentally? Perhaps we are searching for healthy ecosystems? Perhaps we are searching for a more conscious and human relationship to material objects? To what extent should that be a (new) luxury?

In his essay and thought experiment, Timotheus Vermeulen uses the metaphors of the deteriorating shopping mall—where the air conditioning has created an ‘asthma of the soul’ <sup>De Toledo 2008</sup>—and the Nike Air Pocket to develop a deeper understanding of our current state of being in contemporary society and consumer culture. This is a necessary prerequisite in order to have a better sense of how to move forward and where to go. Perhaps we are actually searching how to step outside of the shopping mall that sells ‘informed naivety’, as well as a sustainable future as the new luxury?

### **Will it ever be enough?**

One of the key issues during the Fashion Colloquium was the discussion on growth vs. de-growth. Whereas the fashion system is largely focused on economic growth and thus continuously craves more and more, there is a desire in society for ‘de-growth’: a sustainable economy not driven by

consumption but by other values based on altruism, craftsmanship, economic equality, and ecological responsibility <sup>Ruyters 63</sup>. This debate tends to focus on two different perspectives: either (1) we need the big players in the industry if we really want to create systemic change on a large scale, and we thus need to start with optimizing the current system, or (2) the big players in the industry caused this problem in the first place and they are now claiming to invest their profit into new sustainable initiatives, but they are actually still sustaining an unhealthy and destructive system, so we need to embrace smaller, local initiatives that focus on creating alternative value systems. Consequently, the challenge is how to reconcile the values of de-growth with the desire to create impact on a larger societal scale.

During his keynote lecture 'Re-imagining Fashion as an Ecosystem of Commons', the author and activist David Bollier—director of the Reinventing the Commons Program at the Schumacher Center—shared the principles of 'commoning' as well as eight strategies to help imagine and build an alternative system with "new structural vehicles for human creativity, ethics, and social engagement to flourish". He explained how contemporary commoners are exploring creative, post-capitalist forms of provisioning, engaging with our 'common wealth' as a social practice, to develop alternative social, political, and economic systems—moving beyond the commodification of natural resources. In Bollier's view, "the real challenge for

socially minded fashion is to develop a parallel economy that can somehow separate and insulate itself from the hyper-capital-driven marketplace that now prevails”.<sup>[1]</sup> Starting from a critique of the neoliberal market-driven economy and of the ever-expanding focus on economic growth and consumption, he proposed that “the next big thing will be a lot of small things”, suggesting that many small-scale initiatives can create the change we need. He also emphasized that we do need the ‘connective tissue’ and the language to connect these small things to a larger evolving story. Pascale Gatzen, Head of the M.A. programme Fashion Held in Common at ArtEZ, already puts into practice some of these principles of commoning in her creative practice and in her workers’ cooperative ‘friends of light’, which produces handmade woven jackets. In her keynote lecture, Gatzen discussed the role of language in her practice and educational vision. Criticizing neo-liberal fashion education, she explains how most fashion educations prepare students to become star designers, alienating them from their own needs and teaching them to rely on “the narcissistic dimension of the capitalist paradigm” that is based upon one value: financial gain. In her work and educational programme, she starts instead from creativity, connection, joy, and cooperation. She aims to develop alternative social and economic systems, starting from fundamental human values and compassionate communication, in order to contribute to our collective wellbeing. Also in line with

the principles of the commons, Alison Welsh and Jasper Chadprajong-Smith presented a local, small-scale creative practice: their Tai Lue project. In their visual essay, they present their collaboration with Tai Lue weavers from Thailand to develop sustainable garments from hand-woven traditional cotton textiles and natural dyes.

Whereas these initiatives represent small-scale, local, creative, and social practices that privilege human agency, keynote speaker Louise Fresco, President of Wageningen University & Research, focussed on the life cycles of food and clothing on a global scale, in the context of the worldwide transition to the circular economy. In response to the rise of local, small-scale initiatives, she stated that it “is easy to say it all has to be human transactions, face to face, locally sourced” and also pointed out that “very often, the urban poor have no choice or chance not to pollute or not to buy things that are cheaply and poorly made”. In doing so, she draws our attention to the urgent global challenges that we are facing, again shifting the focus to the need for large quantities of clothing and the responsibility of the industry to reach people who live in poverty, while producing in the best possible way. While Louise Fresco argued for a culture and economy of ‘I have enough’, in the panel discussion David Bollier pointed out that “it will never be enough” in a market-driven economy, which is why he argues for the importance of a cultural shift of building long-term relationships instead of cash transactions.

Taking into account most consumer behaviour, can it ever be enough?

### **Aesthetic pleasure, emotional wellbeing, and love songs**

In the report ‘Fashion at the Crossroads’<sup>2017</sup>, Greenpeace criticizes that major fashion brands “fail to recognize that the overconsumption of textiles is the larger problem that must be tackled. In addition, the promotion of the circularity myth that clothes could be ‘infinitely recycled’ may even be increasing guilt-free consumption”<sup>2017: 6</sup>. Greenpeace also found that “design for longer life and promoting extended use of clothing are the most important interventions to slow down the material flow”, emphasizing the importance of the emotional durability of clothing<sup>Ibid.</sup>. This demonstrates the importance of a design-driven approach to create more emotional value and connectivity between wearers and users.

In her keynote lecture, Kristine Harper presented her vision on emotional durability and aesthetic sustainability from a design perspective. In her research on “why people dispose of things before their use has expired, while other things are kept and repaired time and time again”, she highlights the human need for aesthetic nourishment. She presented design strategies to store aesthetic—tactile, sensorial—experiences in material objects in order to reduce consumption and prolong the time of *being with* a product, creating a durable and sustainable bond between subject and object.

Fashion designer Sanne Karssenbergs creative contribution can be viewed as an interesting example of an aesthetically sustainable design process as she explores personalization and actively engaging the wearer as a participant. In her artistic research project Res Materia, she presents an alternative strategy to upcycle worn clothes that have special meaning or affective value for the wearer.

While many sustainable design strategies are based on producing less new clothes as well as reducing and creating durable products, this is far removed from most consumer's behaviour. In his keynote lecture, Otto von Busch added a refreshing perspective by starting from the question 'what do we want to sustain and *save* in fashion?' and by comparing our desire for fashion to love songs. Whereas we can fall in love with long-lasting classics and opera, he pointed out how love songs—representatives of the emotional *Zeitgeist*—trigger our inner desires and bodily passions as they accompany the most intimate moments in our lives. He highlights the embodied and emotional dimension of fashion and states that fashion is, not unlike love songs, "a passion, a sensibility of aesthetic desire, an ephemeral wave of pleasurable anticipation rushing through the body". Instead of starting from an activist resistance against the system, this is an interesting example of engaging *with* the system in an affirmative and affective way. Perhaps, then, we should focus both on creating sustainable fashion as love songs (products that flow), while simultaneously

letting people fall in love with garments that they want to cherish (products that last)? As keynote speaker Orsola de Castro argues, ‘Loved Clothes Last’. She demonstrates how we are addicted to buying and discarding too fast, stating that “waste is a design flaw”, and aims to inspire consumers to buy less and care more to make clothes last longer. <sup>[2]</sup> And perhaps, additionally, we could buy more ‘pre-loved’ clothes, as Nora Veerman suggests in her article?

These contributions demonstrate the importance of taking into account the affective relationship between wearer and object, the aesthetic pleasure and emotional value in the current discussion on sustainable fashion. In this regard, it is interesting to explore how to design clothing that actively contributes to more emotional wellbeing. In their article ‘In Touch with the Now’, Lianne Toussaint and Pauline van Dongen explore how smart fashion can encourage a more mindful relation between the wearer, the garment, and their environment. Drawing upon the postphenomenological notion of ‘material aesthetics’ <sup>Verbeek 2005</sup>, they explore the role of materiality to enable more ‘mindful’ experiences of the wearer through creating physical sensations. In doing so, they focus on designing intelligent fashion to create a state of ‘*embodied awareness*’. As Toussaint and van Dongen argue, this embodied design approach can “positively affect the wearers’ state of mind, causing them to feel more mindful, relaxed or comfortable”, as well as having an impact on how



the wearer behaves and relates to the world around her. This highlights the importance of the embodied, sensorial, and affective dimension of fashion for our emotional wellbeing.

### **Radical imaginations, and the speculative agency of living matter**

Whereas designers like Pauline van Dongen are developing intelligent fashion with new technologies, there is also a movement that focusses more and more on new biomaterials and biotechnology. This movement brings together art, design, technology, and science, often from a speculative design approach to develop radical future imaginations. Some of the creative practices—such as the Tai Lue project—featured in this issue go back to natural and *common* resources, highlighting the social and human dimension of creating hand-made textiles and working with natural dyes, often in collaboration with local craftsmen. Other contributions in this issue express a *post-human* approach by focussing on growing future materials in a lab by using biotechnology to develop radically alternative systems in collaboration with scientists.

In her project 'Biogarmentry', Roya Aghighi explores how living organisms can become an essential part of the design process. Through an experimental design research process, she developed the first non-woven, living, and photosynthesizing textile, which feels close to how linen does. In her research, she speculatively addresses questions such

as: what if living organisms are the new materials of fashion? And how would these ‘living textiles’ affect our relationship to fashion’s materiality and our behaviour? In a similar vein, Tina Gorjanc’s speculative design project, ‘The New Bio-ethics of Luxury’ explores how synthetic biology techniques could help to sustain biodiverse ecosystems. In doing so, she developed a speculative scenario, which invites a radical reconsideration of what it would entail to bring back extinct matter: the phenomenon of ‘de-extinction’. Aiming to reflect critically on “what we categorize as a synthetic and therefore unnatural/unsustainable material”, she points out how distinctions between “natural and synthetic, alive and dead are becoming obsolete as new discoveries in the field of synthetic biology are being made”. In a time when the relations between the human and non-human are shifting, these speculative design research projects raise new questions about the future of living materials, ecosystems, biodiversity, and living systems—and help us to reflect on the importance of moving beyond anthropocentrism and human-centred design processes in order to revalue and give more agency to living matter. This offers a radically different, alternative, and potentially disruptive perspective on future fashion matters.

### **A diversity of contributions and conversations on dissolving fashion’s ego**

In addition to the creative practice contributions, visual essays, peer-reviewed articles, and

key note lectures mentioned above, this issue also includes interviews with the keynote speakers conducted by our students on the ArtEZ M.A. in Fashion Strategy, a live recording of the keynote lecture by Orsola de Castro, as well as a podcast of the online radio show ‘Jajajaneeneenee’ that was recorded during the Fashion Colloquium. This radio show, ‘Loose Fit’, focussed on inclusivity and diversity and a more embodied way of ‘doing’ fashion.

The contributions to this special issue of *APRIA* are closely related to the main research lines of the Fashion Professorship at ArtEZ. Starting from the observation that the fashion system continuously feeds its Ego—with, for example, an excess of consumer products, glamour, money, exclusive luxury, constructed desire, and spectacular fashion shows of star designers—I aim to move beyond fashion as an Ego-system and to contribute to an egoless critical fashion discourse. As some of the contributions to this issue—Veerman’s article, in particular—have shown, the ‘new luxury’ is a contested term due to its historical use and meaning. As Mikhail Bakhtin has famously argued, “each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life”<sup>1981</sup>, which means that words always carry their historical connotations and traces. Speaking in terms of the ‘new luxury’—even when aiming to redefine it—could thus continue to feed fashion’s Ego. Therefore, I would suggest that we develop an alternative—egoless—vocabulary to express what we envision for the future of fashion.

In the research projects at ArtEZ, we aim to actively engage in creating alternative value systems, humanizing processes of *making*, and offering more love and care to fashion's bodies and materials. Over the next couple of years, we will further explore the main themes discussed during the Fashion Colloquium and we are looking forward to continuing these conversations with all contributors and like-minded people to expand our practice of dissolving the ego of fashion together.

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#### Footnotes

- [1] See the blogpost that Bollier published (13 June, 2018) about his contribution to the Fashion Colloquium: [www.bollier.org/blog/re-imagininghttp://www.bollier.org/blog/re-imagining-fashion-ecosystem-commons?fbclid=IwAR347MxLI\\_L\\_zDSs0nUcQ2mjFGqUuwdLIVcTgwHUPNGE9vQadlrz2EJwVgs](http://www.bollier.org/blog/re-imagininghttp://www.bollier.org/blog/re-imagining-fashion-ecosystem-commons?fbclid=IwAR347MxLI_L_zDSs0nUcQ2mjFGqUuwdLIVcTgwHUPNGE9vQadlrz2EJwVgs).
- [2] Please also see the Fashion Revolution fanzine, #002, 'Loved Clothes Last' (2017): [https://issuu.com/fashionrevolution/docs/fr\\_zine2\\_rgb](https://issuu.com/fashionrevolution/docs/fr_zine2_rgb).

Daniëlle Bruggeman

Daniëlle Bruggeman is a cultural theorist specializing in fashion as a socio-cultural phenomenon. In January 2017, she was appointed Professor of Fashion (Lector Mode) at ArtEZ University of the Arts. She teaches both the M.A. in Fashion Strategy and the M.A. in Fashion Design at ArtEZ and leads the Centre of Expertise Future Makers in collaboration with Professor Jeroen van den Eijnde. Bruggeman holds a PhD in Cultural Studies—'Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World' (2010-2014) from Radboud University Nijmegen, funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research—which was part of the first large-scale interdisciplinary research project on fashion in the Netherlands. She was a visiting scholar at Parsons, the New School for Design (NYC), and at the London College of Fashion. She has published on topics like the fluid, performative and embodied dimensions of identity, (Dutch) fashion photography,

and fashion as a new materialist aesthetics. Her current research interests include exploring more engaged approaches, vocabularies and strategies, using fashion as a tool for systemic change and societal transformation. On April 25, 2018, Daniëlle Bruggeman gave her inaugural lecture and presented the accompanying publication *Dissolving the Ego of Fashion: Engaging with Human Matters* (ArtEZ Press, 2018), which outlines her main research lines for the coming years. The Fashion Professorship aims to develop critical theories and practices in order to explore, better understand, and rethink the cracks in the fashion system, as well as the role that fashion plays—and could potentially play—in relation to urgent socio-cultural, environmental, and political developments in contemporary society.

For more information, see:  
[fashionprofessorship.artez.nl](http://fashionprofessorship.artez.nl)  
[futuremakers.artez.nl](http://futuremakers.artez.nl)

Read online:

<http://apria.artez.nl/issue/searching-for-the-new-luxury-fashion-colloquium-2018-revisited/>



consumers. Besides, they work remotely, re-defining the traditional functions of a home, an office, and a café and making the current boundaries between public and private disappear.<sup>[4]</sup> These completely fresh lifestyles and values are definitely transforming the representation and visual language of the fashion system, which has for a long time been recycling the same retro-trends over and over again. What's more, the straitjacket of young, slim, white, and rich, ideal men and women is about to be replaced by a more open and inclusive aesthetic which celebrates nature, abstract environments, and new ideals of gender and people.

Newcomers with a non-western background especially are purposefully breaking the conventional values and notions of the dominant Western fashion history and its intertwinement with movements such as conceptualism, modernism, or postmodernism. In doing so, they do not so much express the tradition from which they come<sup>[5]</sup> as the path they take between that tradition and the various contexts they traverse. They do this by performing acts of transition.<sup>[6]</sup> In particular, brands such as 11.11/eleven eleven and Button Masala (both from India), Rafael Kouto (Switzerland), and Osklen (Brazil) are able to create attractive, different imaginations by shaping new and more responsible, socially connected worlds without referencing conventional, ephemeral, and glamorous Western fashion history. For them, imagination represents, in terms of Appadurai, an organized field of social practice, a form of work—in the sense of both labour and culturally organized practice.<sup>[7]</sup>

Combining Chinese and English backgrounds, award-winning fashion designers VIN + OMI perfectly illustrate the new hybrid and activist designer exploring these acts of transition. They see their company not as a fashion brand but as an ideology. The illustrious duo from London rose to

fame with their innovative super luxury materials made from recycled plastic. Whilst dressing Michelle Obama, Lady Gaga, and Blondie, they primarily focus on the development of a range of sustainable textiles that are unique to the market that they use in their collections. Until now, they have produced and patented 12 unique fabrics. The origins of each fabric has a social programme built around it. For example, areas of river or ocean in need of clean up from plastic waste are identified, and VIN + OMI initiate a clean up project to collect the plastic which is then turned into rPET fabric. A percentage of the textile produced is then turned into fashion clothing or accessories and the proceeds are donated back to the clean up project or community. Imagination is no longer employed only as a materialised fantasy, as a form of escapism, or as a reflection of another world—instead, it is underpinned by a political agenda.

Inspired by new technology, the visionary work of Iris van Herpen, Yuima Nakazato, and Threeasfour also performs these acts of transitions by exploring wonderful, novel worlds with poetic images, innovative imaginations, groundbreaking experiences, and brand new products. They are able to create attractive and original imaginations shaping new worlds and innovative products without referencing the conventional glamorous fashion trends.

### **New Business Models**

There are many more levels to changing the multi-faceted fashion system. Digitalization, for example, has linked the world in terms of communications, but the world has also become even more 'horizontal' in the field of production. Uber and Airbnb are two of the best-known examples of a 'sharing economy' in which an online platform enables a direct relationship between consumer and supplier, making intermediaries redundant

(though their consequences are by no means only positive). In the fashion chain, where retail is already under considerable pressure, this kind of platform offers many advantages. Maven Women, for example, is an online clothing company that designs, manufactures, and releases new products with the help of a worldwide community of members. Members co-design and crowdfund the designs into existence within a matter of weeks. This new system helps the fashion system transform from a push market (40% is not sold) into a made to measure market—saving up to 30% of the costs.<sup>[8]</sup> Business models like these are going to make the fashion chain far more sustainable, since clothes will be made strictly according to demand and on a much more locally produced basis.<sup>[9]</sup> Moreover, every step in the production process—from the drawing board to the end product—will soon be linked digitally to machines and people. 3D scanning allows collections to be made exactly to size and produced locally where the order was made, which encourages new assembly methods.<sup>[10]</sup> All these technologies are slowly radically transforming the fashion system, which is still operating according to a twentieth-century industrial model. Biannual collections, big investments, and a compulsory catwalk show will no longer be conditions for a successful fashion business. The growing interest in sustainability and circular thinking will certainly help the development of a wide range of new business models, such as lease concepts, upcycling, and a circular approach underpinned by new digital manufacturing possibilities.<sup>[11]</sup>

### **The Product and the Maker in the Spotlight**

Another advantage of a more direct and transparent relationship between consumer and product is the decline of the power of brands as artificial dream sellers. The

Internet has made it possible to make all the layers within the production chain visible. Honest By, created by award-winning designer Bruno Pieters in 2010, was, for example, the very first to adopt a 100% transparency policy sharing the entire cost breakdown of its products. In order to enable the customers to make the most informed choices, Honest By provides a platform in which shows design processes and shares information related to supplier and production processes.<sup>[12]</sup> This allows consumers to consume more consciously and sustainably, and, in addition, it creates a more horizontal relationship between consumers and producers, bringing professionals and craftsmanship into focus.

NGOs such as the Fashion Ethical Initiative and Fashion4Freedom bring worldwide craftsmanship and heritage into focus by using economic justice and human dignity as part of the conversation on fashion about fashion:

At the heart of what we do is a shifting the paradigm from AID vs TRADE to a model of AID+TRADE built with design-think proving the results to be more sustainable, more meaningful, and economically driven. This is certainly a heavy subject more so than the subject of fashion or culture itself; but fashion can sustain culture and culture can be easily helped or destroyed by economic progress. [Fashion4Freedom](#) <sup>[13]</sup>

For example, Fashion4Freedom acquired precious metal mined from old technology—including discarded phones, computers, and tablets (fifty million tonnes of electronic waste is produced yearly)—to create the Data min'd collection with local craftsmans in Vietnam. The Koi fish was chosen as a visualization of the struggle to swim through a massive invasion of human 'stuff' scattered in the environment. This is yet another example revealing a shift from the 'star designer' to the value of the garment itself and the crafts and professionals behind it.



## **Fashion Design for a Better World**

It is also important to open up the scope of fashion by regarding the discipline not only as a field of production or as a market but also using its design capability to fully shape socio-cultural contributions. For too long, innovations in fashion have been led primarily by functional and economic driving forces, whereby the last business innovation—fast fashion—has made fashion the second most polluting industry and detached it from its socio-cultural role of criticism, condemnation, protest, and progressivism that it had in the twentieth century.<sup>[14]</sup> By embracing a more collaborative, cooperative, and project-based approach, fashion can actively contribute to building social communities and better lives.

Since the Fashion industry is operating worldwide, its scope and reach offer the industry the opportunity to take responsibility and make a significant difference. Designers such as Vivienne Westwood and Zegna have already shown how fashion is able to contribute directly to a better world—not only by producing in a socially responsible manner but also by applying its influence to directly create better living environments and communities. Vivienne Westwood is one of the Ethical Fashion Initiative's first partners. As part of the initiative, she developed her 'Handmade with Love' collection that was produced in the Kibera slum in Nairobi using recycled canvas, reused roadside banners, unused leather offcuts, and recycled brass.<sup>[15]</sup> Instead of training the community in the traditional Western craft skills needed for bag making, she explored and built on the traditional craft skills of this community, respecting the cultural heritage of country where she produces, which is unique.

For his accessories, Oskar Metsavaht, founder of the Brazilian luxury label Osklen <sup>1989</sup>, uses the skin of the Pirarucu from the

Amazon, one of the largest freshwater fish in the world. The hides are usually thrown away as trash, but Metsavaht started working with farmers to safely grow the fish, protect the Amazon, and support the local population.<sup>[16]</sup>

## **New Interdisciplinary Approaches**

In order to solve our current extremely complicated environmental issues and find solutions for a more resilient, fair, and hospitable life for the world population, we need all disciplines—science, social science, and design—to work together in building a far more resilient, inclusive, and fair future. Fashion needs to play its part by shifting its priorities from a focus on fashion as something that is primarily ephemeral towards a much more resilient product development that contributes to big societal change and reflects new values.

The merger of technical science and fashion is a prerequisite for creating a more sustainable future. Material experiments can lead to new opportunities, shapes, and functions for fashion, challenging the status quo. New materials made from algae, fruit residue, and other celluloses may still seem futuristic, but Orange Fiber and AlgaeFibre,<sup>[17]</sup> for example, show how new scientific technologies are already leading to new design applications.

It is also essential to redefine the parameters of fashion and its scope. With 'FOOTWEAR BEYOND THE FOOT: Extensions of Being' <sup>2017</sup>, Katherine Walsh, for example, redefines the parameters of footwear while encompassing designs that attach to a lower limb—regardless of that limb's characteristics—and explores what kind of effect such designs have on psychological well-being. The collection, which includes products for amputated lower-limbs and the non-amputated foot, aims to create both new images of the human body and

more empathetic relationships with it. [18] Research into practices of the prosthetics industry and into experiences some amputees face after amputation led to a focus on designs that encourage interactions relating to clinical research findings, interview responses, or medical techniques. The project advances our well-being by promoting emotional intelligence and showcases the potential for design to support a person beyond their physicality. Instead of focusing on the next trend and next ephemeral glamorous dream, the future fashion designer needs to take a much more inclusive and personal approach that engages with real people and their struggles in life. Finally, these innovations make us question the skills the designer of the future might need. Do we need to re-think our fashion education system? Will the next 'star-designer' be a couturier, a scientist, a psychologist, a philosopher, or a smart hybrid?

### Conclusion

For more than a century, fashion was very much about the *new*, where the new meant that it was in tune with and demonstrated the zeitgeist. But now, the fashion system has sped up the fashion cycle. There is an overload of new products, which has not only resulted in enormous overproduction and waste but has also led to trends becoming meaningless.

Therefore, we will have to move towards a new meaningful fashion system in which the product is no longer outdated as soon as it has been launched on a catwalk, but rather that it gains more value during its lifecycle. As such, the value of *new* (as the repetition of the same but different)<sup>[19]</sup> has to be replaced by the value of *innovation*<sup>[20]</sup>, materialised in digitally innovative products, the value of *ethics* shown in transparent and traceable products, and the value of *authenticity* embodied in, according to Bourriaud,

“cultural embedded stories not so much expressing the tradition from which they come, as the path they take between that tradition and the various contexts they traverse, by performing acts of transition.”<sup>[21]</sup> By reflecting on these challenges and new values of the current timeperiod, fashion as a cultural phenomenon will start to become relevant and meaningful again.

### Footnotes

- [1] [https://i-d.vice.com/en\\_us/article/bjz3eq/the-fashion-industry-needs-to-slow-down-step-back-and-think-about-whats-relevant](https://i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/bjz3eq/the-fashion-industry-needs-to-slow-down-step-back-and-think-about-whats-relevant).
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- [17] [https://issuu.com/stateoffashion/docs/stof\\_07\\_2018\\_catalogus\\_interactive\\_](https://issuu.com/stateoffashion/docs/stof_07_2018_catalogus_interactive_), pp. 178.
- [18] <https://kris-walsh.com/portfolio/projects/>
- [19] Barthes, Roland, *Systeme de la Mode*. Parijs, 1967. Pp 282-287.
- [20] 'Innovation' often refers to an invention; however, I am using the term 'innovation' to refer to a set of practical implementations and new imaginations reflecting novel values that have a meaningful impact on society and on the fashion system market.
- [21] (Bourriaud, 2009 51-51).

### José Teunissen

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Read online:

<http://apria.artez.nl/state-of-fashion/>

# Osklen and Sustainability

*an interview*  
*with Oskar Metsavaht*



View video online:  
<http://apria.artez.nl/osklen-and-sustainability/>

# The Fashion of Relations *from the Reign of Visibility to the Realm of Possibilities*



For several years now, academic programmes in Fashion Studies have offered an increasingly diverse variety of teachings on the most abstract and conceptual aspects of fashion. There are courses that dissect its imaginary, analyse its iconography, study the psycho-sociology or semiotics of clothing, or explore the emerging practice of fashion curating to explore the controversial subject of the cultural and industrial death of fashion itself. As though the mere materiality of the garment were no longer a concern for fashion intellectuals today, more and more publications in this field appear to reflect this shift, such as the illuminating *Critical Fashion Practice* [Geczy and Karaminas](#), which analyses the work of the most openly conceptual fashion designers of recent decades, or *Fashion Tales* [Mora and Pedroni](#), which discusses the potential for fashion to produce collective cultural narratives. This double tendency in academia and in publishing other is not that the reflex of radical mutations happened in the fashion imaginary over the last two centuries.

Following the birth of modern fashion with the arrival of the haute couture during the nineteenth century, the garment's cultural status has become increasingly complex, shifting from an exceptional artisanal product to a cultural artefact, the identitarian significations and social and aesthetic meanings of which carry greater importance than its physical characteristics. As the Dutch researcher Femke de Vries (also a contributor to the conference *Searching for the New Luxury*, where the research at the origin of this paper was presented) has recently argued, in contemporary society, fashion presents itself as a complex entity capable of

producing multi-dimensional value [De Vries](#): from the commercial dimension of the 'product value', to the individualizing dimension of personal and collective 'identity value', and not forgetting the dimension of 'appearance' that fashion has transformed into an essential communicational interface in our highly aestheticized society.

Amongst the most inspiring studies on contemporary fashion, *Thinking Through Fashion* by Agnès Rocamora and Anneke Smelik deserves special attention. Beyond offering a theoretical reading of the main themes that have nourished fashion culture over the last 30 years, this book demonstrates that most contemporary clothing production has the primary effect of connecting us to experiences that we would otherwise not have had. According to Rocamora and Smelik, fashion can be viewed as a relational agent that enables us to alter our perception of reality and apprehend the body, space, and people around us.

Art masters including Louise Bourgeois and Rebecca Horn can be considered pioneers in these experimental speculations through clothing. Nonetheless, it is only since artists began to analyse pop-culture through an artistic lens (as Andy Warhol did) that these explorations have acquired direct relevance for fashion, due to its hybrid status between art and commerce.

The artist, performer, clothing designer, and club-kid Leigh Bowery (1961–1994) embodied this emerging profile. When designing outfits for his performances in art venues or clubs, he aimed to distort sensorial perception rather than enhance it. Through proprioceptive displacement (many of his outfits were designed to block one or more

senses, or they constrained parts of the body as if flesh could be sculpted) and a radical alteration of bodily appearance (through prosthetic dysmorphic body-members, or oversized body parts), he demonstrates the social capacity of fashion to rewrite the codes of our presence in the world. Where is the boundary between beauty and taboo, between fashion and the self, or between the human and the unhuman? Through raising these unanswerable questions, Bowery's work provocatively suggests that there are no such boundaries.

Although he developed his work between some of the most renowned London art institutions and the unofficiality of the club scene, Bowery was not exactly considered a player on the fashion market and is primarily remembered as an artist. His approach to clothing and the body would be even better framed in terms of the "relational aesthetics" that Nicolas Bourriaud recently theorized *Bourriaud Esthétique relationnelle*—that is to say, characteristic of artists aiming to transform individuals' connection to their living context rather than producing material artworks.

There are traces of Bowery's influence in the work of ready-to-wear fashion designers attesting to, amongst other phenomena, the overlapping problematics between fashion and art. Specifically, Hussein Chalayan became known in the 90s for his vision of fashion as a tool to define the elaboration of human identity. For example, in his video and installation project *Place to Passage* (2003), the garment is "metaphorised" by a spatio-temporal vessel likely to accompany the female character during her inner metamorphoses as well as in her physical movements from Istanbul to London—two important cities for the designer, the former symbolizing his mother-culture and the latter the culture he currently lives in—syncretically determining multiple forms of displacement:

spatial, socio-cultural, political, and emotional. These aspects are also central to contemporary art speculation regarding the erratic nature of both identity and aesthetics in our 'altermodern times', in which the fragmentation of the self and the multiplication of experiential opportunities lead individuals to perceive their being as mobile, unstable, and in progress as a life-long itinerant journey *Abruzzese; Bourriaud Radicant*.

The echo of Bowery and Chalayan's research is also visible in the work of other contemporary designers such as Rick Owens. A recurrent theme within his approach to clothing is our relationship to otherness, understood as much as that which can be found within ourselves (one's dark side or the unpredictable aspects of personality) as that derived from a 'humanoid' rather than 'human' physical appearance. Owens pushed his statement as far as a provocative reconfiguration of the relation to the other, whose body was literally used as a fashion accessory on models' outfits in his 2016 spring-summer show.

In addition to the question of identity, the number of fashion designers involved in reviewing the codes of representation and gender construction today could not be greater. As one of the least known and most original designers, the Jordanian-Canadian Rad Hourani, based between Montreal and New York, chooses the axis of 'neutrality', which is investigated as an aspect inherent to the human species, to determine both the emergence of our gender traits and our interpersonal relationships of seduction and communication *Geczy and Karaminas*. In Hourani's vision, neutrality is what all humans have in common. It is a starting point from which one can relate to specific experiences that ultimately determine differences and appearances which define us as individuals. Indeed, these are not intrinsic to human nature and remain superficial occurrences.

The gradual extension of fashion discourse to such existential issues is likely the consequence of its social role in collective taste formation. In contemporary culture, every aspect of life seems to fall under the influence of a diffuse aesthetics [Mecacci](#) in which every object or human production is ostensibly designed to communicate a certain content and appearance that is anything but superficial. Through his research on the shop window and the artistic display, De Stijl artist and theorician Frederick Kiesler became aware nearly a century ago of the pivotal role appearance would soon play in modern society as its sole possible “essence”.<sup>[1]</sup> The emerging research field of everyday aesthetics studies posits that appearance can be considered the only possible form of essence left to us [Matteucci](#). Although it may seem ephemeral, in contemporary urbanized societies, appearance shapes individual self-construction, organises our self-perception and psychology, and determines the roles we can or cannot play in social life. In this context, the ‘feeling of being oneself’ also has a relational nature. The ‘feeling of being oneself’ is not only elaborated through continuous intersubjective practices (amongst individuals, and between individuals and their surrounding artefacts) which are made of deeply socialized gazes and exchanges; these continuous intersubjective practices constitute the very condition of its existence. Out of this relational play the bare existence of the contemporary self is hardly imaginable [Iannielli](#).

The conception of the contemporary sense of being as diffused and inherently rooted in environmental aesthetics also sheds light on the reasons for the significant role fashion exhibitions increasingly play in both the culture and the economy of museums worldwide. It is only in the exhibition that the aesthetic scope of contemporary fashion considered above can be displayed



Exhibition *Dysfashional*

and studied in its material, visual, conceptual, sensory, and emotional aspects [Marchetti](#). This is true for both exhibitions in artistic contexts and for exhibitions taking place in stores and other commercial spaces. Even when exhibitions are presented as non-profit initiatives, they sketch in situ an aesthetic frame within which products for sale acquire cultural relevance and—finally—monetary value [Coccia and Grau 44](#).

Due to the semiotic function (of producing and organizing meaning) based on the ostensive mode of communication that fashion and the exhibition have in common, both meet the definition of ‘apparatus’ given by Giorgio Agamben after Deleuze and Foucault<sup>[2]</sup>: “anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings” [Agamben 14; my translation](#). This point is particularly relevant since, following this perspective, garments, accessories, or any other fashionable accoutrement as well as the exhibition itself function as ‘relational machines’. While the former fashion-related aspects condition the perceptive and affective status of individuals, the exhibition conditions the public’s presence in the spatio-temporal environment defined by their visit, as the art critic Emanuele Quinz reminds us. The fashion exhibition *Dysfashional*, co-curated by Quinz and me from 2007 and 2011,<sup>[3]</sup> is a clear

illustration of this principle. Conceived as relational machine, it featured ‘open artworks’—some of which were interactive—the content of which could only be derived from the multiple, perpetually renewed relationships the visitors establish with and between themselves during their visit.

Seen as an aesthetic apparatus, the exhibition more generally represents the most accomplished form of embodiment of fashion’s capacity to consolidate the relationships we need to establish to our surrounding environment (be it physical, spatial, or symbolic) on a daily basis. Thus, the appearance of numerous foundations in the name of large luxury houses<sup>[4]</sup> presenting museum-like programmes straddling fashion and the arts comes as no surprise. Even when such initiatives present programmes that aren’t directly devoted to fashion, they still qualify the brand’s commercial offer through indirect and symbolic relationships with the brand-specific world vision they project across art.

Among non-fashion art projects initiated in the field of luxury, the Fondazione Prada in Milan has perhaps most radically interpreted the relational nature of a contemporary fashion brand, beginning with the conception of its headquarters. Rather than merely creating ‘a building’, the Fondazione chose a more fragmented option, consisting of a series of *micro* and *marco* pre-existing structures, sewn to each other by minor interventions such as bridges, tunnels, or inclined ramps. Considering the prism of its programming, the form of the Fondazione works like an architectural mirror of its artistic content which is also meant as ‘relational’. While the architect of the project, Rem Koolhaas, strives to organize a network of independent locations connected to each other by fitting joints, the artistic directors of the project imagined a programme based mainly on collaborative projects,



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performances, participatory activities, and original commissions, where the role of the traditional exhibition, intended as a curated selection of material artworks, is less relevant than the polymorphic relationships established between invited artists, the public, and the creative genres themselves.

An interesting counterpart to this choice is the Louis Vuitton Foundation of Paris, opened in 2014 in the monumental building designed by Frank Gehry in the Bois de Boulogne. Contrary to the exploded configuration of the Milanese project developed in total continuity with the texture of the city, the Parisian foundation stands out in its environment by a rupture effect, as a monolithic object placed in the landscape to be contemplated. Interestingly, the programming of the institution also follows an objectual logic based on artworks exhibited in its interior landscape.

With the purpose of understanding the impact of such initiatives on brand identity, we can easily recognize here the same relationship between a non-superficial surface and essence previously discussed regarding individual identity. Assuming these brands’ art foundations and commercial productions are emanations of their brand vision, this hypothesis would lead one to seek the brand-value of Louis Vuitton in its prioritization of the product and its appearance, and that of Prada in its focus



on an broader aesthetic resulting from a relational *bricolage* of remarkably diverse materials. According to a comparative analysis of Louis Vuitton and Prada's websites, this conception seems rather realistic. Louis Vuitton's website homepage includes a lexicon addressing manual fabrication (*savoir faire*), latest product collections (*les parfums pour la maison*), and the physical sites where these are fabricated (*la maison, Asnières*), focusing on craftsmanship and their material artisanal heritage. Conversely, by stimulating the visitor's curiosity through contents that are not immediately obvious (*Pradamalia, Scopri di più, "special projects"*), Prada introduces itself via the more imaginative 'Pradasphere',<sup>[5]</sup> in which the notion of the 'sphere' refers to complex cultural environments such as the 'biosphere', the 'blogosphere', or the 'semiosphere', in which the interconnections amongst the different components solely guarantee the cohesion and coherence of the whole.

A more extended inquiry shows how, far from being anecdotic, the relational logic proposed by the Fondazione Prada is intrinsically inscribed within Prada's brand equity. I recently had the opportunity to analyse [Marchetti and Segre-Reinach](#) a similar relational approach, which also defined the brand's flagship store in New York, which was ambitiously announced as the brand's 'vision manifesto' following its opening. The flagship store includes a number of technological devices created by the design studio Industrial Facility, such as various projection screens, plasma screens, intelligent labels and changing rooms, terminals for getting personalised product information, and a tactile interactive 'Prada atlas'. These elements were explicitly developed to support the "relationships between the environment and the individuals, the product and the tables, the chairs, the building and even with the surrounding city" [Colin and Hecht 88](#). The store itself

was conceived as a hybrid "augmented space" [Manovich](#), in which layers of virtual digitalized information are superimposed (thanks to technological tools) on visual (colours, images, texts) and material contents (the products and the interior design components) within which visitors could experiment in a close network on relations and playful interactions. The Prada augmented store "no longer presents the products of the brand, but its fashion [imaginary], broadly speaking, as a 'way of relating' to oneself, to how one feels, to clothing, image, the experiential context of the store and—by extension—the world" [Marchetti and Segre-Reinach 84-103](#).

Although the relational orientation of the fashion imaginary may seem surprising due to its immateriality and somewhat abstract language, this phenomenon seems logical following the interpretation of contemporary culture suggested by the New York-based artist and brand strategist Lucas Mascatello.<sup>[6]</sup> In an article published on the SSENSE editorial platform outside of any academic context, he applies the notion of 'aposematism'—the strategy that allows living organisms to adapt to their surroundings by emitting relational signals for their peers—to fashion. Fashion, the expression of individuality *par excellence*, would then be used by individuals to put in logical relation the overabundance of identitarian stimuli conveyed by the environment in which they live to maximize the possibilities of being understood and to establish relationships with the context of their lives. In addition to the author's analogy between sartorial culture and the biological nature of living organisms, the main source of originality in the article lies in Mascatello's anti-social reading of aposematic fashion. In this sense, by inducing multiple deformations of the appearance, it would succeed in de-identifying individuals rather than forging an identity for them. While these assumptions remain

debatable, as they are yet to be supported by specific research, a rising tension between identitarian phenomena (e.g., the public debate on cultural appropriation) and the claim for a higher degree of privacy—and in some cases of ‘social invisibility’—seems inherent to contemporary culture and the meaning of contemporary fashion (e.g., ‘normcore’ street style or the genderless trend).

Regarding the reflection on such tensions through fashion design, artist and designer Ying Gao presented a project in 2017 named ‘Possible Tomorrows’,<sup>[7]</sup> which addresses the issue of identity construction not as a fortuitous opportunity but rather as a threat of exclusion. The piece is made of two robotized garments connected to a fingerprint recognition system, which only becomes animated by unrecognized fingerprints. The garments are not made of fabric but of curved patterns comprised of unwoven threads, evoking the visual appearance of fingerprints. If these symbolize an individual identity that is not recognized as such, the unwoven threads convey the impossibility of constructing a viable social texture based on the notions of security and identity that the installation puts into question. ‘Possible Tomorrows’ seemingly confirms that neither the security promise nor the identity claim can guarantee the integration of each into a community. On the contrary, it is from the opening to all ‘possibles’ and by relating to ‘alterities’ that individuals can expect to build their tomorrow.

Gao’s project echoes other studies of identity within the social body, from Michel Foucault to Judith Butler,<sup>[8]</sup> leaving us with the responsibility of deciding between the notion of identity as coercion and the idea of availability to otherness as a guarantee of identitarian freedom. This ambivalence extends the focus of this brief analysis to the context of culture as a whole, where the relational approach that clothing helps to



Possible tomorrows : interactive clothing with fingerprint recognition technology from ying\_gao on Vimeo.

establish in the world may shape the near future of the entire fashion universe. Fashion has built its own social language on ostentation, which is defined by the opposition between ‘showing’ and ‘hiding’. As mentioned above, this logic is typical of the exhibition space, with both the social exposition of the self and the artistic one of the gallery space. Similar to what occurs in the art gallery, fashion offers the public specific visual and material elements woven into a storytelling, conveying aesthetic and identitarian contents. While the image of the gallery may faithfully represent the functioning of modern fashion, it does not fully illustrate what happens in the contemporary fashion system. For this purpose, the image of the ‘playground’ would be a preferable analogy since here, the visible and material elements acquire content only once they are incorporated into the performative acts of the ‘players’. While modern fashion has grown in terms of visibility, relational fashion evolves in the realm of possibility and makes sense only through the weaving of relationships established within a given context.<sup>[9]</sup>

If design—and, therefore, fashion—is the skin of the culture, as stated by Derrick de Kerckhove more than two decades ago, then, in the culture of tomorrow that we are already building, the need to establish relationships between the innumerable

diversities that the globalized world generates appears more as a necessity rather than as an opportunity. Relational fashion will play a major role in dressing the future in all its possibilities.

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#### Footnotes

- [1] Quoted and discussed by Coccia and Grau (42).
- [2] In the languages used by the quoted authors, 'apparatus' is translated as *dispositivo* (in Italian), or *dispositif* (in French).
- [3] Luxembourg Capitale Européenne de la Culture 2007; La Rotonde, 21 April-27 May 2007; MUDAC, Lausanne, 11 March-8 June 2008; Passage du Désir, Paris, 29 October-29 November 2009; Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 24 June-18 July 2009; Garage Centre for Contemporary Culture, Moscow, 12 November-5 December 2010; National Gallery of Modern Art, Jakarta, 8-30 May 2011.
- [4] Which haven't ceased to multiply on the five continents since the creation of the Parisian Fondation Cartier in 1984 ([www.fondationcartier.com](http://www.fondationcartier.com)).
- [5] See <https://www.prada.com/it/en.html>
- [6] "Aposématisme: la stratégie adaptative et antisociale de la mode", SSENSE, September 2018, [https://www.ssense.com/fr-ca/editorial/mode/aposematism-fashions-antisocial-adaptations?utm\\_source=ssense&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=magazine&utm\\_term=fr\\_aposematism\\_m\\_18\\_09\\_14](https://www.ssense.com/fr-ca/editorial/mode/aposematism-fashions-antisocial-adaptations?utm_source=ssense&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=magazine&utm_term=fr_aposematism_m_18_09_14).

- [7] The video of which was also visible in the exhibition *Searching for the New Luxury* in Arnhem (cur. José Teunissen, De Melkfabriek, Arnhem, 1 June-22 July 2018).
- [8] For a concise and fashion-related review of the ideas on identity by these two fundamental thinkers, refer to “Michel Foucault: Fashioning the Body Politic” by Jane Tynan (Rocamora and Smelik 2016, pp.184-199) and “Judith Butler: Fashion and Performativity” by Elizabeth Wissinger (ibid., pp. 285-299).
- [9] I had the opportunity to develop this suggestion more in detail, basing my hypothesis on the generative semiotic model applied to fashion spaces such as exhibitions in museums or galleries up to fashion stores by Algirdas-Julien Greimas. The analysed corpus was read according to the opposition between spaces of seeing and spaces of happening in which meaning can only emerge through the performative cooperation of playing visitors (“Meaning through Space: A Cross-Reading of Fashion Exhibitions and Stores”, Semiofest 2017 conference, 19-23 July 2017, Gladstone Hotel, Toronto, CA).

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# Post Luxury: *Normcore as Node and Prism*

## Introduction

This article attempts to frame and unpack ‘normcore’ in order to speculate <sup>[1]</sup> about the future of luxury. At a time where seemingly everyone is searching for the ‘new luxury’, this article instead proposes finding the ‘new normal’. It investigates a phenomenon that challenges the very nature of luxury in terms of exclusivity in the actual sense of the word; being exclusive, i.e. for the few or of restricted accessibility <sup>[2]</sup>, in line with Simmel’s classic insight: “we call those objects valuable that resist our desire to possess them” <sup>Simmel 67</sup>.

Normcore is not the answer, though. And it was never intended to be. Normcore is rather about speculation <sup>[3]</sup>, along the lines of the field of ‘speculative design’ <sup>see Malpass for an overview</sup>—that is, more about an idea of a possible future, a proposal without consideration for probability rather than a problem-solving, hands-on approach.

Normcore was not only the most Googled fashion trend of 2014 but also the runner-up for neologism of the year by Oxford University Press. The phrase generated numerous headlines, such as “Normcore Is (or Is It?) a Fashion Trend (or Non-Trend or Anti-Trend)” in the *Los Angeles Times* in 2015, “How a fake trend forecasting agency got us all dressing like Jerry Seinfeld” in *The Sydney Herald* in 2016, or “Everyone’s Getting Normcore Wrong, Says Its Inventors” in *Dazed* in 2014, indicating a multi-faceted and intriguing phenomenon.

Aiming to successfully tackle such a complex empirical phenomenon like normcore requires analytical tools beyond the scope of any singular discipline, thus making an interdisciplinary approach imperative. The theoretical perspectives combined this article lie at the intersection

of anthropology, consumption theory, and critical fashion theory.

This article covers both the normcore consumer trend and its conceptual origin in the art world—as well as the dialectics between the two—and proposes appropriating the term ‘post luxury’ as a suitable term for capturing the totality of the phenomenon. The article also points to a few possible directions for further investigation.

## Normcore as consumer trend

Anthropology was an influential contributor to the development of postmodern consumption theory, represented by, for example, Appadurai <sup>1986</sup> and Miller <sup>1987</sup>, introducing ‘material culture’ perspectives and an interest in universal dimensions of how people relate to things cross culturally, complementing sociological dominance in the field <sup>see, for example, Warde, 2002</sup>, and informing perceptions of fashion mechanisms.

Normcore is a cultural response to imploding fashion mechanisms.<sup>[4]</sup> The problem of upholding distinction value has been met with different responses over the past two decades as the conditions shifted. The answer was semiotic excess or ‘stylistic eclecticism’ in the 2000s <sup>Warde, 2008</sup>, and what is best characterized as the heritage paradigm or a ‘reorientation to materiality’ <sup>[5]</sup> in the 2010s. Much of the interest in so-called new luxury is concerned with this latter approach. This development, of course, has its theoretical equivalent reflected in the post-semiotic material turn. But as we head for the 2020s, what is next?

Normcore is an anticipation. As a consumer trend, normcore came to be associated with a kind of minimalistic attire based loosely around how comedian Jerry Seinfeld



(c) Nicolas Coulomb

looked throughout his TV show—or rather, if Jerry Seinfeld and Apple co-founder Steve Jobs had a baby: light blue, loose, high-wasted jeans (also known as Mom-jeans), black or white turtle necks, practical wind breakers, and sneakers with heavy soles, often in primary colours, with a hint of synthetic futurism—a sort of post-heritage aesthetic merged with a neo-90s swing of the pendulum.

Like most trends, it reaches critical mass at a point where there is nothing but surface left, without much trace of any ideological origin. Described as “a unisex fashion trend characterized by unpretentious, normal-looking clothing” by Wikipedia, normcore was in fact not meant to be a trend at all, nor to be used to refer to a particular code of dress. ‘Post peak normcore’,<sup>[6]</sup> this article aims to investigate a phenomenon that surely entailed more than first meets the eye:

It enlightens a theoretical issue, namely the missing link between habitus [Bourdieu, 1984](#) and the world of goods [Douglas and Isherwood, 1979](#) as problematized by Miller in saying that Bourdieu’s theory does not actually treat this gap between the two satisfactory—that is, between dispositions and material culture. Miller, therefore, encourages further research in mediating structures such as marketing. Contemporary art as influencer in the form of trend forecasting at the intersection of fake manipulation and critical

cultural commentary is thus an intriguing empirical landscape to enter to explore these dynamics.

### **K-Hole: art and/or trend analysis**

Normcore was initially a spoof marketing term, coined by the New York-based art collective/trend-forecasting group K-Hole, who have launched a total of five trend reports on their website [k-hole.net](#) since their inception <sup>[7]</sup>—seemingly a paradoxical task if contemporary art’s main agenda is (supposedly) cultural critique.

However, K-Hole belong to a long lineage of artist collectives piggybacking commercial channels, <sup>[8]</sup> with 90s phenomenon Bernadette Corporation and their imploding strategy for criticism mimicking the world of advertising [Simpson, 2003](#); [Becker, 2014](#) as a precursor, following the appropriation art of the 1970s and 1980s that, inspired by the historical avant-garde, blurred the lines in visual culture, and between art and life [Gibbons, 2005](#).

This tradition refers to rather opaque phenomena, things best described as having double ontologies, so to speak. K-Hole is best understood as being *both and*, rather than *either or*, flickering between two modes so that is difficult to identify which aspects define the separation, and their hybrid practices are blurring the distinctions between criticality and accelerationism;<sup>[9]</sup> practising what is critiqued.

Anthropology has proved to be particularly suitable for enabling identification of phenomena that defy our established ways of categorizing because its methodology of cross-cultural comparison generates reflexivity towards our own cultural configurations, and anthropology is currently gaining popularity across disciplines (after its last peak in the 90s) because of that.

K-Hole themselves have described their trend reports as ‘fan fiction’ rather than

satire—a much fuzzier approach at the intersection of mockery and celebration. But it is also about the dissemination of critical thinking. The field of trend analysis is characterized by extremely lightweight cultural analysis in fiercely sexy packaging—with astonishing impact. K-Hole’s project was to employ this superficial format as a *Trojan horse*. Their reports are almost indistinguishable from the real thing, and it takes some concentration to actually capture the astonishing accuracy of their descriptions of cultural tendencies in the unfolding.

### Normcore as critique

Normcore was originally a rather subversive concept, anticipating an alternative way forward, proposing anti-distinction as the radical new. The K-Hole trend report that introduced the term, “Youth Mode: A Report on Freedom”, was originally commissioned for the 89Plus Marathon at London’s Serpentine Gallery in October 2013. Co-founded by Simon Castets and curator superstar Hans Ulrich Obrist, 89Plus is a platform for selected creative talents born in or after 1989, thus unmistakably situating the origins of normcore in the art sphere.

The report in question starts out by analysing the contemporary context of challenges facing the possibility of distinction:

*It used to be possible to be special—to sustain unique differences through time, relative to a certain sense of audience. As long as you were different from the people around you, you were safe. But the Internet and globalization fu\$%#d that up for everyone. In the same way that a video goes viral, so does potentially anything.* K-Hole, 2013, p. 4

The report introduces several concepts, three of which are most important in this

context: ‘Mass Indie’, ‘Acting Basic’, and ‘Normcore’.

The term ‘Mass Indie’, in itself an oxymoron, refers to the social construction of value related to the alternative as imagined vs. the mainstream as imagined Gregson and Crewe 2003 that characterized the main trait of “alternative” consumption from around the 90s Frank, 1997; Heath and Potter, 2005. K-Hole declares “we live in Mass-Indie times”:

*But just because Mass Indie is pro-diversity, doesn’t mean it’s post-scarcity. There’s a limited amount of difference in the world, and the mainstreaming of its pursuit has only made difference all the scarcer. The anxiety that there is no new terrain is always a catalyst for change.* K-Hole, 2013, p. 16; emphasis added

The possibility of difference is now what is scarce. Crewe et al., 2003, already predicted problems concerning upholding the distinction value as ‘alternative’ 15 years ago. Appadurai 1986 described a solution strategy to this dilemma in the mid-80s related to complicating the criteria of authenticity. However, as K-Hole points out, there is a limit to how complicated the criteria of authenticity can be, and is thus seeking out the solution elsewhere.

Another important term stemming from the report is ‘Acting Basic’. This is indeed an interesting word play, and conceptually very clever. ‘Basic’ was already a well-established expression with its own trail of explanations in the online Urban Dictionary, such as “only interested in things mainstream, popular, and trending”. *Acting basic*, however, is described by K-Hole as the natural sociological response to the current Mass Indie situation:

*If the rule is Think Different, being seen as normal is the scariest thing. (...) Which*

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*paradoxically makes normalcy ripe for the Mass Indie überelites to adopt as their own, confirming their status by showing how disposable the trappings of uniqueness are. The most different thing to do is to reject being different all together. When the fringes get more and more crowded, Mass Indie turns toward the middle. Having mastered difference, the truly cool attempt to master sameness.* [K-Hole, 2013, p. 23](#);  
emphasis added

K-Hole proposes non-distinction as the ultimate form of distinction here. Blending in as the new standing out. Acting basic is thus acting *as if* being basic, without really being basic. Acting basic is actually the ultimate demonstration of symbolic power—by abstaining from it.

Normcore, on the other hand, is introduced as an approach *almost* indistinguishable from this, save from the fact that the *intention* or the motivation or aim lies elsewhere:

*Normcore doesn't want the freedom to become someone. Normcore wants the freedom to be with anyone. (...) Normcore moves away from a coolness that relies on difference to a post-authenticity coolness that opts in to sameness. But instead of appropriating an aestheticized version of the mainstream, it just cops to the situation at hand.* [K-Hole, 2013, p. 28](#); emphasis added

The term 'post-authenticity' is also worth noting here. As part of the 2010s heritage paradigm, authenticity became the doxic, unquestionable value to seek out. K-Hole speculates about what might be the next move—and identifies it as the exact opposite. Normcore was thus *not* meant to be a strategy of “appropriating an aestheticized version of the mainstream”. On the contrary, normcore is ultimately a nomadic social

strategy of blending in, of accentuating sameness—a bit similar to the Norwegian cultural trait of under-communicating difference as a framework for social interaction, often referred to as “egalitarian individualism” [Gullestad, 1992](#). Normcore implies the end of distinction as we know it.

### Normcore as Post Luxury

Luxury has obviously been a central issue in consumer research, and a rare overview of different scholarly definitions is provided by Csaba [2008](#), with the intent to translate discourses of luxury between disciplinary boundaries that are seldom crossed, such as those of economics and anthropology—merging business school approaches and cultural critique.<sup>[10]</sup>

One of the definitions gaining territory cross-scholarly is Appadurai's [1986](#), which proposed defining luxury based on the *characteristics of the consumption*, rather than classifying the material objects in question (in order for it to be universally comparable).

*Normcore seeks the freedom that comes with non-exclusivity. It finds liberation in being nothing special, and realizes that adaptability leads to belonging.* [K-Hole, 2013, p. 36](#)

In seeking “non-exclusivity”—the antithesis of luxury in most definitions [Csaba, 2008](#)—normcore is, therefore, often associated with *anti-luxury*, but it is substantially different from the ad-busting of the 90s, or the brand protesting ‘potlatch strategies’ of approximately ten years ago, popularized by journalist and brand consultant Neil Boorman's book *Bonfire of the Brands: How I Learnt to Live Without Labels*,<sup>[11]</sup> in which the self-declared recovering brand addict sought to free himself of the allure of all labelled items.

People have been searching for the ‘new luxury’ outside the realm of alluring labelled



items for a long time now, fetishizing local production and materials. But this is not new at all; it is rather a historical re-enactment of former forms of luxury, reflecting economic rather than cultural capital and a societal order of more static social stratification.<sup>[12]</sup> Within luxury management, ‘post luxury’ refers to “the decline of the income-upgrade phenomenon”, according to a Winston Chesterfield at [luxurysociety.com](http://luxurysociety.com), a term reflecting late capitalist consumer trends that respond to the democratization and hence devaluation of traditional luxury products along the descriptive lines of Dana Thomas <sup>2007</sup>.

This article proposes to *appropriate* the term ‘post luxury’ to capture the essence of the normcore phenomenon, first and foremost because it seems much more fit for capturing normcore’s *paradigmatic implications* than it is for its conventional use. Thomas Frank, author of the seminal book on advertisements’ appropriation of counterculture and the rise of hip consumerism in the 1990s <sup>Frank, 1997</sup> and co-founder of the cultural-criticism journal *The Baffler*, wrote this compelling comment on the normcore phenomenon:

*When I first heard about ‘normcore,’ the trend among the privileged toward anti-fashion clothes of the kind available at Wal-Mart, I thought immediately of a passage in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s unfinished novel, ‘The Last Tycoon,’ describing the plans that various wealthy Hollywood types made back in 1932 to survive the revolution they believed was coming.* <sup>Frank, 2014</sup>

Despite mixing up the concepts ‘acting basic’ and ‘normcore’ (like most people did), Franks thought-provoking essay in *Salon* from 2014 nevertheless sees normcore as indicative of a paradigm shift. This must be understood in relation to his previous analysis of the

paradox in that the relentless quest for the new is in fact imperative both to the avant-garde *and* to capitalism—and that the two are interrelated without the former necessarily being neither aware nor willing to acknowledge this fact <sup>[13]</sup> <sup>Frank, 1993</sup>.

Appropriating the term post luxury is also related to its parallel to the term ‘post art’; a term aiming to capture attempts in contemporary art to (re-)integrate art and life, after more than 200 years of separation. As the dialectics played out, normcore—both its ideological intention and its mass misconception (or success depending on one’s outlook)—are symptomatic of such an integration of art and life. This further relates to seeing fashion as an aesthetic metapolitics, in line with so-called critical fashion theory <sup>Gaugele, 2014: 11</sup>.

The purpose of proposing post luxury in relation to normcore is, however, not merely essentialist, but also *discursive*. K-Hole stated that after the era of the hipster, there was a neologism vacuum, and normcore was just what we all needed in order to talk about what was happening. Similarly, post luxury opens up the conversation about the future of luxury, and of what may lie beyond it.

Another plausible term would be ‘new new luxury’, referring to the genre in journalism following new journalism. ‘New new journalism’ was characterized by adding fiction, thus blurring the journalistic genre even more than new journalism’s autobiographical turn. Seeing normcore as *new new luxury* takes on relevant connotations related to its fictional or speculative strategies.

### Further investigations

The topic invites further investigations. One aspect worth covering would be the effect normcore has had on high fashion and fashion campaigns, not only as consumer

trend or as conceptual art. Vetements' AW17 collection was a reflection of the normcore ideology in that it featured a collection based on stylistic stereotypes, inspired by Exactitudes®, a photo project documenting subcultures meticulously like type specimen since 1994. Helmut Lang's AW17 campaign mimicked the 3×4 grid of Exactitudes® [14], and for the AW2017 campaign for streetwear brand Palace Skateboards, Exactitudes® co-operated creatively themselves.

It is also worth considering analysing the term post luxury in relation to other contemporary empirical examples where luxury is not necessarily about the *goods* anymore, but rather their *discursive qualities* see, for example, Skjulstad 2018; Crewe et al. 2003, as we are moving on from the post-semiotic material turn into a more immaterial landscape of consumption as discourse.

Post luxury is also a term with potential in relation to a broader theoretical discussion on *value*. In line with Appadurai's cross-cultural approach to luxury more than 30 years ago,<sup>[15]</sup> the editor of *Texte zur Kunst* has argued that a new approach is needed, as the animistic, ritual, indigenous perspectives must be integrated in order to fully understand the value of contemporary art [Graw, 2012](#).

### Summarizing Remarks

This article has attempted to frame and unpack normcore in order to speculate about the future of luxury. At a time where seemingly everyone is searching for the new luxury, this article instead proposed finding the new normal. The study of normcore invites reaching for new analytical tools, such as an appropriated version of post luxury or the term *new new luxury*, and functions as both node of the contemporary conditions and prism into the future—in line with *du jour* ambitions for speculative sartorialism.<sup>[16]</sup>

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- Footnotes
- [1] “*Specular* (adj.) 1570s, “reflective” (like a mirror), from Latin *specularis*, from *speculum* “a mirror” (see *speculum*). Meaning “assisting in vision; affording a view”.
- [2] It is worth asking the question of whether the very idea of ‘sustainable luxury’ is not in fact a contradiction in terms, and that sustainability should be the new normal rather than the new luxury.
- [3] Speculation is indeed hot stuff in theory at the moment, spreading from radical philosophy via contemporary art theory and into design theory and general discourse.
- [4] Fashion’s sociological function as regulation of social differentiation is under threat.
- [5] Fashion Colloquia in Paris in 2012 had materiality as one of two main themes in its call for papers: “The values linked to the fabrication of products (...) represent today a growing interest for international fashion and luxury companies. As real points of differentiation (...). Representations of the handmade, the workshop, the craftsman and his tools are flourishing in the products, on labels, on the catwalk, in advertising and even within stores (...).”
- [6] Normcore is still very much happening, though, and a fresh Google search offered results, such as “How to Dress Normcore in 2018” and “How to Dress Normcore Over 40”.
- [7] Their work has been shown or involved with contexts, brands, and people such as Moma PS1, LA Art Book Fair, 032c, MTV, RISD, Princeton, Stephen Colbert, Karl Lagerfeld and Pharell—to name but a few.
- [8] A contemporary sibling would be *DIS* magazine (2011-2017 RIP), and their internet platform of critical commentary with stock photo aesthetics, later bringing this ambiguity into the contemporary art scene as curators of the ninth Berlin Biennale. Another recent example would be the *Cuss Group*, a South African collective, whose latest project is entitled ‘fully automated image influencer’, featured online at *DIS*’ new platform established in late 2017: <http://www.dis.art/>
- [9] ‘Accelerationism’ is the idea that either the prevailing system of capitalism, or certain techno-social processes that have historically characterized it, should be expanded, repurposed, or accelerated in order to generate radical social change (Wikipedia).
- [10] A pioneering publication at this very intersection combined the perspectives of anthropologist Douglas and economist Isherwood in 1979.
- [11] It is worth mentioning that Boorman’s famous stunt of giving up all his branded belongings referencing *The Bonfire of Vanities* was in fact a sort of popularization of the art project entitled ‘Break Down’ conducted by Michael Landy in 2001, an artist associated with the Young British Artists (YBAs). Later, of course, Boorman’s book title became staple ingredient in consumer reports such as those of PwC.
- [12] “Modern consumers are the victims of fashion as surely as primitive consumers are the victims of the stability of sumptuary law” [Appadurai 32](#).
- [13] Those who are tend to claim affinity to the aforementioned idea of accelerationism: feeding the machine in order to generate an explosion.
- [14] Also a nod to the 90s, the height of both Helmut Lang and the idea of ‘urban tribes’—both of which are back in fashion.
- [15] A post luxury discussion of value would, of course, be with a post-distinction, post-scarcity approach this time.
- [16] Call for contributions for the Artez Fashion Colloquia 2018 asked for examples of “fashion’s power to create desire and imaginary worlds in order to transition into a more regenerative future society”.

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# Luxurizing Pre-loved Clothes: A Material and Emotional Future of Luxury



## Introduction

As a category of goods, luxury mirrors what is valued in a particular culture at a specific moment in time. In recent decades, luxury fashion has come to be dominated by a handful of mammoth brands, whose names and logos are relished more than anything else. In *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost its Luster*, Dana Thomas famously argues that the appeal of luxury has shifted from the actual product to what it *represents* <sup>41</sup>. Luxury has turned into a spectacle of representations, consumed and renewed at a dazzling pace in ever more frequent fashion shows, product launches, and advertising campaigns <sup>Lipovetsky</sup>. As the fashion industry currently faces a crisis of consumerism and material waste, it seems urgent to reflect critically on what is at the top of the fashion pyramid and why—and to explore alternative forms of luxury that are more sustainable and regenerative.

The quest for a ‘new luxury’, however, as proposed by the 2018 Fashion Colloquium, is controversial. Sociologist Maxine Berg described ‘new luxury’ in 2005 as the form of luxury that was an offshoot of the Industrial Revolution:

*All manner of new products appeared in shop windows; sophisticated mixed-media advertising seduced customers and created new wants. This unparalleled ‘product revolution’ provoked philosophers and pundits to proclaim a ‘new luxury’, one that reached out to the middling and trading classes, unlike the old elite and corrupt luxury (...) in the eighteenth century commerce, luxury, and new products provided a parallel conceptual framework.* <sup>5</sup>

For Berg, ‘new luxury’ indicates a profusion of new and accessible luxury products and an increasing consumerism. In the eighteenth century, this ‘product revolution’ was accompanied by a growing ethos of disposability <sup>Weinstein</sup>. Indeed, the celebration of newness characterizes the modern capitalist economy that has generated the throwaway culture which has come to light in recent years and which lies at the heart of the fashion system’s current crisis. ‘New luxury’, then, is perhaps a point of departure rather than a point of arrival. The question is whether the exploration for other forms of luxury should exclusively probe *new* luxuries and continue to celebrate new designs, new production methods, and new materials, or, in addition, turn the gaze to what is already there: an abundance of pre-owned and pre-loved clothes.

The terms ‘pre-owned’ and ‘pre-loved’ will be employed in this text as alternatives to the terms ‘secondhand’ and ‘vintage’, traditionally used to define and classify clothes that are not new. Seen in a contemporary context, this set of terms seems problematic. The word ‘secondhand’ merely underlines a pre-owned garment’s ‘secondary’ rating and seems to suggest that a garment can only go through two sets of hands before it is out-lived. By contrast, ‘vintage’, meaning “unique high-fashion pieces of a specific era (...) [including] garments produced in the period between the 1920s and 1980s, associated with aspects of nostalgia”, is said to “offer the consumer luxury value” <sup>Ryding, Henniger, and Blazquez Cano 2; Gerval</sup>. Nowadays, the term ‘vintage’ has become widely used in fashion markets and media as a tool for value creation, causing confusion about its definition

Ryding, Henniger & Blazquez Cano 3; Cervellon, Carey, and Harms 958. The term also narrows the scope of ‘valuable’ secondhand clothing to a matter of age and style. Within a sustainable fashion discourse, should terminology not reflect the state of stuff, instead of its status? The terms ‘pre-owned’ and ‘pre-loved’ accord with this idea. Pre-owned clothing encompasses all clothing that has been owned and/or worn by a previous consumer. A pre-loved item can be a pre-owned luxury item, but it can also be any other pre-owned item that is materially qualitative and durable and has been taken good care of. Its trajectories through time and space have imbued it with (material traces of) a unique story.<sup>[1]</sup>

As this paper will demonstrate, pre-loved clothes have much to offer the consumer as a future form of luxury, not in the least because of their sustainability. However, despite their quality and exclusivity, not all pre-loved clothes are believed to offer consumers the luxury value vintage clothes do. Can pre-loved clothes become a luxury, and if so, how? This raises questions about how luxury fashion comes into being and about the stakes of human versus material agency in processes of the ‘luxurization’ of fashion. This paper takes the case of pre-loved clothing as an incentive to explore these processes. As such, it adds another new dimension to existing research on luxury and pre-owned clothing, which up until now has predominantly focussed on consumer motivations for buying pre-owned luxury or vintage luxury fashion Ryding, Henniger, and Blazquez Cano; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen. Whilst seeking a hands-on solution for an urgent problem, it expands the discourse on fashion and materiality, which has strongly developed in recent years Smelik “New Materialism”; Smelik *Delft Blue to Denim Blue*; Smelik and Rocamora; Woodward and Fisher; Riello, with an analysis of the materiality and materialization of luxury.

### Luxury (im)material

The work of historian Christopher Berry is particularly relevant to understand how the concept of luxury is structured. Berry defines a luxury good as “a widely desired (...) good that is believed to be ‘pleasing’, and the general desirability of which is explained by it being a specific refinement, or qualitative aspect, of some universal generic need” 41. As for fashion, Berry argues that “the most promising general explanation of the human need for clothes is [the] link with their symbolic character” 28. He admits that his general idea that luxury is naturally determined to the extent that its material needs to be pleasing to the senses does not exactly cut ice for fashion. Indeed, history proves that fashions deemed luxurious were not always necessarily the softest or the most comfortable—think, for example, of the corset. Luxury fashion, then, appears first and foremost as cultural and immaterial, based on representational value.

This would explain the fluid and seemingly ‘malleable’ character of luxury fashion nowadays. It is reigned by monolith brands ruled by luxury tycoons such as LVMH that, as critical literature in recent years has revealed, carefully and strategically luxurize their products, capitalizing on the brand’s heritage to authenticate their luxury status and to mark them as items of quality and craftsmanship. Simultaneously, seasonal offer and innovation are vital to these brands to keep consumers coming to their enticing boutiques. The brand logo is pivotal to the luxury brand and to the luxury consumer as a stamp that guarantees heritage, quality, exclusivity, and authenticity, but it is also symbolic of a certain fashion consciousness. Logos are easily readable and universally recognized signals of social distinction and in recent decades have become icons of consumer desire Thomas; Klein.

While an aura of authenticity, exclusivity, and desirability is upheld as part of a brand's marketing strategy, the quality and originality of their merchandise seems to become less and less relevant [Thomas; Lipovetsky; Klein](#). The logo, the brand, and the status that is derived from it form a perilous Bermuda triangle in which the actual material object seems to magically vanish. Consumer culture critic Jean Baudrillard famously argued that fashion was becoming a system of signs that only refers to each other and are devoid of any relation to the real world. Indeed, since the 1980s, critique on fashion and brands as hollow and deceitful systems has grown exponentially.

The market for pre-owned clothing has become an alternative market for those who search to escape the monopoly of brands. The last decades have known a veritable craze for pre-owned clothing, particularly for vintage, which is recognized as something luxurious. Early on, Baudrillard explained the appeal of the bygone object in the context of the consumer society as follows:

*In [the bygone object] the stigmata of industrial production and its primary functions are eliminated. (...) The taste for the bygone is characterized by the desire to transcend the dimension of economic success, to consecrate a social success or a privileged position in a redundant, culturalized, symbolic sign. The bygone is, among other things, social success that seeks a legitimacy, a heredity, a 'noble' sanction.* <sup>43</sup>

At first sight, this utterance seems a confirmation of the immateriality of luxury: the bygone object is only desired as cultural sign of critical consumption. Interestingly, however, Baudrillard also predicates that the allure of the bygone object lies in its ability to confer a sense of social distinction on its

owner without adhering to popular representational signs, such as the logo. As Efrat Tseëlon noted in her reading of Baudrillard, "The current trend for vintage fashion (...) shows how repudiation of the stylistic values of representation expresses yearning for these same values" [Tseëlon 227](#).

The idea that values of representation can materialize in a non-industrial form supports the conclusion that the bygone object is a place where principles of luxury and sustainability converge. Moreover, the notion that the 'bygoneness' of the material of these objects—as an indicator of craftsmanship or other material critique on the stigmata of industrial production—is apparently more important than universally legible signs of representation and social distinction. It proves that material is, in fact, central to luxury fashion. This is supported by critiques on contemporary luxury fashion. In these critiques, the general disregard for materiality in luxury fashion is far from ignored.

The materiality of clothes is thus essential, even to something as seemingly culturally determined as luxury fashion. What consequences does this assumption have for our understanding of how luxury is created? In 2014, Sophie Woodward and Tom Fisher explored a material-culture approach to fashion as a whole. Focussing on the material aspects of fashion, they argue that the materiality of things is not "just an ambiguous 'carrier' of the meanings of fashion" but that "objects are part of the generation and actualization of the agency of people, and, through their materiality, can carry or thwart human agency" and "externalize particular categories of identities" [Woodward and Fisher 4, 6, 8](#).

Anneke Smelik has contextualized this argument in a discourse of new materialism. A new-materialist perspective proposes that "matter" is not merely raw and inert stuff on which humans act, but is itself alive and



kicking, as it were (...) The role of agency of nonhuman factors in the field of fashion can thus be highlighted (...) from the textility of the garment to the tactility of the human body. Such a perspective helps to understand fashion as materially embedded in a network of human and non-human actors” [Smelik](#), “New Materialism” 34. She cites Prasad Boradkar: “Human beings and things together possess agency, and they act in conjunction with each other in making the world” [Boradkar qtd. in Smelik](#), “New Materialism” 39. Consequently, one has to conclude that luxury fashion cannot simply be ‘created’ by a designer or brand without considering this conjunction.

Throughout various works, theorist Gilles Lipovetsky has argued that contemporary luxury is ‘emotional’. It has ceased to be a mere expression of the desire for social recognition —social classes, after all, are no longer as strictly delineated as they once were—but is becoming a manifestation of personal betterment [Lipovetsky and Roux](#). Uniqueness, sensual experiences, and emotional values are central to this kind of luxury [Lipovetsky](#). Though the strategy of most dominant luxury brands nowadays seems to fit the bill in its emphasis on quality, craftsmanship, heritage, and exclusivity, their approach is nevertheless nearing its expiration date because these values are only materialized in the brand’s communication media, such as advertisements. These uphold myths that products finally not always live up to. Materiality and knowledge about materiality may ultimately become more important than image, especially as personal betterment is increasingly defined in terms of making socially responsible, sustainable choices, as is also reflected in the popularity of vintage garments [Fredriksson; Guiot and Roux](#).

Pre-loved clothing chimes with an idea of luxury that is emotional, sensual, unique, and at the same time sustainable—as much so as vintage clothing, which has merely age

and nostalgia in advantage. Yet the market for vintage clothing is venerated, whereas the market for other pre-loved (and pre-owned) clothing is still perturbed by the stigmas that originated in modernity, when the new, the industrial, and the disposable became markers of status; the pre-owned became looked upon as ‘scanty’, ‘old-fashioned’, or even ‘dirty’. The pre-owned clothing market has not yet fully managed to shake off these negative connotations [Weinstein](#). In addition, the growing speed, scale, and industrialization of the fashion industry—as well as the myths and fetishes sustained on the market—have caused alienation among consumers. This partially manifests itself in a lack of knowledge about the quality of materials. Whereas in the case of new clothing, this responsibility is transferred to brands, on the pre-owned clothing market, it is transferred to the seller. This poses a problem because pre-owned clothing shops are often disorganized spaces with poor transaction structures. Although this bolsters the precious ‘alternative’ image of the pre-owned clothing market for some, it provokes further confusion and distrust among many consumers, which causes the market to be subject to bargain hunting and a regime of carelessness and disposability. This in turn affects the overall sustainability of the pre-owned clothing market [Weinstein; Le Zotte](#).

However, several initiatives are beginning to transform existing views on pre-owned and pre-loved clothing. These prove that pre-loved clothing could become a form of luxury, one that does perhaps not comply with the formal standards of scale and price projected by mammoth luxury brands, but which is a more democratic, experiential, and emotional form of luxury originating from an alternative market. Pre-loved luxury materializes “the metamorphosis of demand, its aspirations and motivations, the relations of individuals

with social standards and with each other as well as with consumption and scarcity” [Lipovetsky 31–32](#), not only through images and spaces but also through clothing itself.

### **Luxury materialized: Adornment**

If material—specifically, the material of garments—is considered central to luxury fashion, then it follows that the creation of luxury is a process of materialization. Following Woodward and Fisher, to understand how other forms of luxury emerge, it is necessary to envisage luxury in terms of a process or a transformation that occurs in the relationship between clothes and humans. To discuss the luxurization of pre-loved garments is to discuss a sustainable and regenerative alternative to current forms of luxury, which also allows us to focus not on the ‘making’ of luxury in terms of design but instead on the imparting of meanings on existing material that moves and has moved through more than one pair of human hands.

Although semiotics, as Woodward and Fisher righteously point out, ultimately denies the materiality of clothing [Woodward and Fisher](#), semiotic concepts can be useful when discussing luxurizing processes. As Anneke Smelik and Agnès Rocamora have pointed out in their introduction to *Thinking Through Fashion*: “Putting the emphasis on materiality (...) does not preclude an understanding of matter as symbolic; rather, it shows that there is a constant negotiation between the material and the symbolic” [Smelik and Rocamora 13](#). Semiotics usefully considers the places and spaces, whether physical or conceptual, where the unstable meanings of clothes are mediated. Roland Barthes stated that “the Fashion sign (...) is situated at the point where a singular conception and collective image meet, (...) is simultaneously imposed and demanded” [215](#). Previous literature on the pre-owned clothing market has identified the pre-owned clothing shop as

the primary locus where the meaning and value of pre-owned clothes are negotiated between seller and consumers—visually, rhetorically, as well as socially [Gregson and Crewe; Weinstein](#). In addition, this is a space where humans encounter materials in this process. The pre-owned or pre-loved clothing shop is a crucial node in a network of human and non-human, material, and symbolic relations.

A relevant example of one such space is the Swedish pre-loved clothing boutique Adornment, situated on Stockholm’s Styrmansgatan. Here, shop owner Pauline Cappelen sells a selection of pre-loved clothing. This selection includes several vintage garments, yet most of her merchandise is of more recent date and not all garments are labelled or can be otherwise traced back to a specific brand or era. Cappelen worked in high fashion for several years before opening Adornment in 2015 and has, therefore, considerable knowledge of material, durability, and craftsmanship. These are her primary criteria for sourcing pre-loved clothes, followed by colour and cut. Adornment is particularly compelling because it incorporates an atelier where, together with her business partner and couturier Elian Yacoub, Cappelen designs and makes made-to-measure clothing from leftover fabrics. I will return to that later, but let us first focus on the shop as a space where pre-loved clothing is luxurized.

It could be said that Cappelen sells her clothes as luxuries because they generally cost more than comparable products within the category of pre-owned clothing and are still relatively costly when placed within the general clothing market at large. Although price is only one aspect of identifying a luxury good, it is cogent of the value of garments as negotiated between the seller and the consumer. This mediation takes place in the Adornment shop as well as on website and Instagram pages, which are nowadays

## Luxurizing Pre-loved Clothes:



Fig.1—Adornment, 2018,  
copyright Nora Veerman.

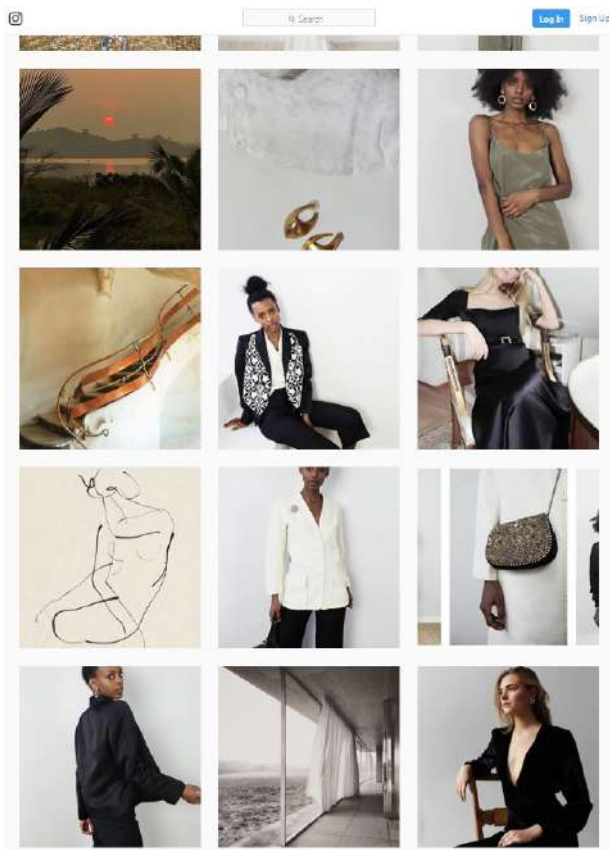


Fig.2—The Adornment Instagram page,  
2018, copyright Pauline Cappelen.

considered integral to the shopping space. In the shop, a small and intimate but luminous space, Cappelen presents a small selection of garments on well-organized and spacious racks [Fig.1](#), allowing the unique details on each individual item to show. Cappelen shares her expertise on materials and craftsmanship with customers, creating

a pleasurable shopping experience while passing on knowledge to the consumer. As the materiality of pre-loved clothing itself may seem to refuse fashion, Cappelen styles and photographs the garments in fashion-able-looking silhouettes, presenting these on the Adornment website and Instagram page, where she combines the photos with images that seem to confer a lifestyle rather than focus on individual products [Fig.2](#). Indeed, the strategies outlined above are in line with values of emotional luxury [Smelik, \*Delft Blue to Denim Blue\* 173; Lipovetsky 31-32](#).

Cappelen washes and mends garments whenever possible, although some traces of wear sometimes remain. However, as product descriptions on the Adornment website read: “This pre-loved item has been captured on one of our travels for its unique characteristics and great quality (...) fading, wearing, and other traits display each item’s history and add to its character and charm” ([www.adornment.se](http://www.adornment.se)). Stains or other traces of wear are not considered flaws but rather as elements that display the garment’s history and add to its value. This is also reflected in Cappelen’s use of the term ‘pre-loved’, which, apart from being a useful classification tool in research, has become more commonly used on the pre-owned clothing market in recent years, where it connotes positively previous ownership, countering part of the stigmas that afflict pre-owned clothing.

Gregson and Crewe already noted in 2003 that imagining a pre-owned garment’s former life is, to some consumers of pre-owned clothing, a positive experience [Gregson and Crewe](#). More recent research has suggested that it even adds considerable value to a pre-owned good: the consumer is more likely to establish an emotional relationship with a pre-loved garment, and instead of acting merely as user, envision herself as an “active part[y] in the long and ongoing lifecycle of a luxury (...) product”



Fig.3A—Pre-loved skirt as sold by Adornment, 2018, copyright Pauline Cappelen.



Fig.3B—Skirt designed by Adornment, 2018, copyright Pauline Cappelen.

[Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 61](#). This manifests itself in the incentive to mend or resell the product instead of disposing of it, further extending its duration. These actions are not only characteristic of a luxury that is emotional but also demonstrative of a new perception of the relation between pre-owned garments and their owners, where agency emerges through material as they “shift perception and suggest experiments with new practices, or make us think again about or relations with them” [Hawkins](#). As these examples show, the seller and consumer, as well as the material itself, have a major role to play in the luxurization of pre-loved clothes.

Ultimately, however, the designer cannot be eliminated from the creation of luxury; changes in the meanings of clothes need to be ‘consecrated’, too, at this level

of the fashion system [Davis 12](#). In the case of Adornment, the pre-loved items in the shop are muses as well as merchandise: they influence new designs by Cappelen and Yacoub, particularly in terms of craftsmanship and cut [Fig.3A-3B](#). The materialization of these new clothes is often led by the availability and characteristics of the materials, which are leftovers from Italian fashion brands. As Woodward and Fisher mentioned, “materials (...) are not just a medium for the realization of designer’s ideas, but the very catalyst for these ideas and therefore their creativity” [Woodward and Fisher 14](#). Through the use of worn or leftover material and attention to craft in new fashion design, newness can also foster more appreciation for the existent. This way of thinking about materiality could inspire creative practices elsewhere to a greater extent—for example, at fashion academies.



Fig.4—Adornment, 2018,  
copyright Nora Veerman.

Finally, the fact that Adornment's boutiques and ateliers are conceptually and spatially integrated is pivotal. Yacoub's worktable stands next to the clothing displays, opposite racks of textile fabrics [Fig.4](#). At Adornment, the customer has the possibility to make personal choices when it comes to the colour, fabric, and cut of a newly made garment—moreover, the customer is actively invited to do so. According to Kristine Harper, this possibility constitutes an element of 'aesthetic sustainability', a design strategy which aims to reduce perceived and planned obsolescence and overconsumption through creating a durable aesthetic experience. This experience is both emotional and sensory and results in a lasting bond between subject and object [Harper](#). Finally, to encounter the garment in an environment that is both its consumption and production context raises consciousness of, and helps the fashion consumer reconnect with, the practices of clothing production. This amount of transparency is crucial in order to further demystify fashion and to arrive at long-term solutions for the crisis in the fashion system.

### Conclusion

Starting from the idea that luxury need not necessarily be new, this paper set out to explore an alternative form of luxury, that

of pre-loved clothing. Besides offering a sustainable alternative to current forms of luxury, the case of pre-loved clothing has prompted an exploration into processes of luxurization of material, both theoretically and as they take place in concrete spaces. This investigation has offered a new way of looking at luxury: as something that is material as well as cultural. Moreover, it turns out that material is central to creating luxury: however important its representational values, the search for personal comfort, sensual experiences, uniqueness, and also the new-fangled aspiration to make responsible and sustainable choices will eventually lead back to the material of luxury fashion—more specifically, to the clothing itself. Lipovetsky's discourse of emotional luxury, then, should perhaps be reviewed to consider the momentousness of the sustainability debate and the emphasis on materiality discussed here.

Though pre-loved clothing is not yet generally recognized as a luxury good, it is likely to become so in the future, as both theoretical probing and the example of Adornment have demonstrated. It has to be emphasized that Adornment is certainly not a one-of-a-kind example of luxurizing practices, and this paper does not intend to propose Adornment's specific strategies as ideal or impeccable. The case study serves merely to exemplify how luxurizing processes might work inside the clothing market and to underline the relevance and potential of merging clothing consumption with education. These strategies may encourage the destigmatization of and appreciation for the pre-owned clothing market, rendering it more sustainable and may support the demystification of the fashion system as a whole. Emotion and knowledge, luxury and sustainability, though seemingly oppositional terms, are closely knit together in what might become the future of luxury.

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#### Footnotes

- [1] Some have argued that 'pre-loved' is a hollow marketing euphemism for 'second-hand'. In 1979, *New York Times* Magazine columnist William Safire included the word in his satirical column on the rise of marketing euphemisms: "(...) the 1979 Language Prettification and Avoidance of Ugly Reality Awards (...) Runner-up is the Philadelphia secondhand dealer who advertised 'pre-loved' Oriental carpets" (Safire 213). Nowadays, several authors (e.g., O'Reilly and Tennant 168) and dictionaries such as the Cambridge Dictionary or Wiktionary still refer to this euphemistic function. However, 'pre-loved' is nowadays often used more neutrally to refer to well-kept, restored objects or to pre-owned luxury items, in the media as well as academic research (Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen; Ryding, Henniger, and Blazquez Cano).

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<http://apria.artez.nl/luxurizing-pre-loved-clothes/>

# Nike Air Pocket: *Fashionable Ecology*

## Introduction

In this essay, I contemplate the recent concern with ecologically conscious luxury in fashion alongside similar developments elsewhere—such as the ‘cli-fi’ blockbuster in film or ‘hedonistic sustainability’ in architecture—in the context of and, indeed, as an expression of a distinct yet increasingly prevalent and pervasive cultural dynamic, a shift in our collective mood or what more popularly tends to be called *zeitgeist*: the passage from postmodernism to metamodernism. I consider this, the movement to the mood, to the passage, by recourse to two metaphors that I have long been thinking and writing about which both, metonymically, pertain to fashion and have been the subject of much debate in studies of the post- and post-post-modern: briefly, the metaphor of the shoe and, especially, at some length, that of shopping mall. Indeed, this essay considers contemporary fashion by way of the likes of the Adidas x Parleys and the Nike Flyleather, the All Bird shoes made from eucalyptus tree fibres, and the locally sourced Veja sneakers that are increasingly visible in our shop windows today.

The titular phrase ‘Nike Air Pocket’ links the brand Nike Air with the notion of the ‘air pocket’. Nike Air, as I imagine the reader knows, is a sneaker whose sole is advertised to be so soft that it feels like you are walking on air, floating above the ground, unperturbed by the realities of that ground—gravel, rocks, tree roots, etc. An ‘air pocket’ is a misnomer for a sudden shift in airflow, in updrafts and downdrafts, that makes air passengers feel as if they are dropping from the sky whilst in actuality the plane merely changes ‘wind lanes’—turbulence, in other words. The Nike Air Pocket is a shoe whose sole lifts us from the realities of the ground

so as to fly into virtual—or, in any case, virtualised—obstacles. My argument is that what the editors of this issue call the ‘new luxury’, a movement in fashion that values the environment as much as it does indulgence—or that, as the architect Bjarke Ingels <sup>2011</sup> once put it in a TED talk, is as “sustainable” as it is “hedonistic”—may well resemble this: the performance of the effect of the environment, its sentiment as an abstraction.

## A Feeling for Metaphors

By way of introduction, I would like to contextualize my argument by explicating two not altogether unproblematic implicit assumptions. First, by thinking of distinct cultural developments by recourse to general metaphors, I assume that the latter may help us make sense of the former. As those familiar with critical theory and continental philosophy will know, this assumption is not at all uncommon, though it too rarely receives the critical reflection it deserves. Just think of the frequent, often short-lived invocation in recent times of metaphors like the ‘archipelago’, the ‘desert’, the ‘plateau’, the ‘virus’, and the ‘swarm’ to describe current phenomena and processes. Indeed, if we were to take stock of the last fifty years of cultural theory, we’d find a wasteland, a scrapheap, of exhausted metaphors. By returning to two such exhausted metaphors—the shoe and especially the shopping mall—I am interested in tracing their afterlife: what do they tell us about the continuities and discontinuities of experiencing the ‘present’ over an extended stretch of time.

I think it is important to clarify here that it is by no means my intention to reduce complex phenomena and multifaceted processes to word play—not intentionally, in any case, since, as Nelson Goodman <sup>1978</sup>



has suggested, we often use metaphorical designations literally that have been used for so long we have forgotten they are metaphors. An experience such as love, especially an individual person's love for another (say, John's for Mike, or Cindy's for Omar), obviously exceeds any and every long song ever written, just as a war film does not exhaust the experience it sets out to communicate to its audience. I further agree with the likes of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson <sup>1980</sup> that the use of metaphors to describe processes is inherently and problematically political. For one, metaphors fictionalize—that is, they treat one thing in terms of another that it is not. They also focalize. They frame. In the process, metaphors select, exclude and supplement, foreground, obscure and transfigure the phenomenon they set out to communicate. Love can be a journey and paradise and heroin and a whale singing and a picture window and a closed door and whatever. Each metaphor reterritorializes its reality along different procedures and affords and limits different thought processes and affective engagements. Whether you discuss war in terms of sports or a slaughterhouse will impact what you can and cannot say about it.

At the same time, of course, metaphors open up an alternative perspective onto an experience that is otherwise difficult to frame, in its entirety but even in part. It steps in, you might say, where empiricism and logic take off. This is why people still write popular songs about love and filmmakers return again and again to the subject of war: there is always more to be said about these experiences. Worryingly, I imagine this is also why politicians and opinion makers can scrupulously use metaphors in opposition to facts so as to persuade electorates of one argument or another. In this essay, I turn to the shoe and the shopping mall to disclose a novel point of view onto a complex metamorphosing experiential register

of the here and now: the reterritorialization of postmodern simulation to metamodern speculation. Specifically, I draw on these metaphors so as to shed light on the manners in which designers, artists, and architects respond to environmental developments that they know, in an abstract sense, to be real but that are of such magnitude or dynamism that many of us cannot envisage or perhaps even comprehend them—the sublime, or what Timothy Morton <sup>2013</sup> calls hyper-objects, I guess.

Second, I follow a long line of thinkers who argue that there are, in any culture or society, feelings that are shared so widely so as to be called collective, or, in Raymond Williams's apt terminology, structural: "structures of feeling" <sup>1977</sup>. This is not to say that these structures are universal or exclusive, that they are the only conceivable responses to the socio-political or material conditions at hand, the sole available feelings at a particular moment in time or a place. Nor does this mean that they are necessarily expressed in a single fashion. Indeed, as Williams points out, they allow for a range of expressive languages. What the notion of the structure of feeling suggests is that culture is an affective register as much as, say, a semiotic one or material one; that the culture of the Enlightenment and the culture of German Romanticism, or the *soixante-huitards* and the Reagan era, feel differently about the state of the world as well as think differently about it. Or rather, each culture feels differently about the state of the world and correlationally thinks differently about it.

A structure of feeling is not just a feeling that is structural; it is a feeling that structures. A mood, if you will. As Noel Carrol writes, discussing the relationship between art and mood, "when I am irritable, in an irritable mood, there is no one in particular who irritates me. Everyone and everything that falls into my pathway is

likely to become the locus of my foul mood”<sup>526</sup>. If you are in a foul mood or an optimistic one, if you feel depressed or elated, this will influence how you think and can think about things—not to mention how you act. In this essay, I draw on the notion of the structure of feeling to discuss postmodernism and metamodernism, understanding postmodernism, per Fredric Jameson, as “senses of an end of this or that”<sup>1</sup>, often but not always an ironic disposition, whilst arguing that we should think of metamodernism, as I will explain shortly, as an “informed naivety”. This essay, thus, considers the phenomenon of ecologically conscious luxury metaphorically—so as to contemplate it at all—as an expression of a collective sentiment characterized by informed naivety.

### **Postmodernism – the Shopping Mall as Simulation of the Environment**

I want to recount here in some detail a metaphor I developed a while back in an essay on art and cultural change: the metaphor of the shopping mall to think both the postmodern structure of feeling and the metamodern one (Vermeulen and van den Akker, “Thoughts on the Space of Contemporary Sculpture”). Towards the close of the twentieth century, there was a sense, shared by many in the West, though of course not by all and not necessarily elsewhere, that most of the universalist utopian projects propelling that century—in philosophy, in art, in politics—had come to an end. For a progressive thinker like Jean-Francois Lyotard, grand narratives such as the Enlightenment and communism had failed to deliver on their promise; indeed, they had turned decidedly dystopian and should be abandoned. The conservative Francis Fukuyama<sup>1992</sup> suggested, on the contrary, that it was precisely because of a grand narrative’s success—more specifically, that of liberal democracy—that the search could be relinquished. But

whatever the reasons, there was consensus that the modern momentum had stalled, had perhaps even come to a standstill. As Fredric Jameson put it in the early 90s:

The last few years have been marked by an inverted millenarianism, in which premonitions of the future, catastrophic or redemptive, have been replaced by senses of the end of this or that (the end of ideology, art, or social class; the ‘crisis’ of Leninism, social democracy, or the welfare state, etc., etc.)<sup>1</sup>.

The label most often attached to this “inverted millenarianism”, to these “senses of an end”, is postmodernism, though of course the label covers significantly more conceptual territory than that single notion—indeed, depending on the context, postmodernism can refer to amongst others a philosophical regime and a sociological liberation, an emancipatory programme and a cultural critique, an analytical tool and a distinct style, each of these suggesting that if postmodernism designates an end, it also, certainly, signals many, many beginnings—whilst the phenomenon in turn is not the exclusive property of the postmodern.<sup>[1]</sup> Jameson categorizes postmodernism along three lines, which in many respects demarcate our cognitive map of the current moment as well. The first of these is ahistoricity. What is meant by this is the impossibility of cohesively thinking our current conditions beyond the immediate parameters of the present—which have expanded to include the entirety of the past and future—which are defined by neoliberalism. As Mark Fisher has so aptly put it: it is “easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism”<sup>2</sup>. As examples, Jameson mentions eclecticism and pastiche: history as gesture, as style, history as gimmick. But one could also think here of scenario planning—or, in terms of fashion, trend forecasting: the colonization of the future for market purposes.

The second category is depthlessness, the implosion of depth-models such as dialectical schemas of appearance and essence, semiotic codes distinguishing between signified and signifier, and psychoanalysis with its interest in the latent and the repressed. Depthlessness precludes the possibility of the hermeneutic gesture: there is no one or nothing behind or beneath the surface to which to reach out. Here, one of Jameson's examples is the simulacrum. I will return to depthlessness in more detail later, when discussing shoes. Thirdly, Jameson observes the "waning of affect", the desubjectivisation of our affective registers. This doesn't mean, to be sure, that we no longer feel anything, as is sometimes suggested. What it means is that without firm footing in history or depth, our emotions are found wandering all over the place, are everywhere and nowhere all at once, up in the air, if you will, rather than our body.

A metaphor that is frequently used to describe this theory of postmodernism is the shopping mall, particularly megamalls like the West Edmonton Mall or the Mall of America. The end of history was not announced, as Hegel suspected, by Napoleon on his horse at Jena. Nor was it laboured, as Karl Marx prophesied, by the force of a united proletariat. At the close of the twentieth century, what comes to signify the end, not just of "Utopian hope ... but of history itself" is the shopping mall <sup>ALexander 55</sup>. The shopping mall, Ian Woodward writes, is the "exemplar of postmodernism" <sup>48</sup>. "To walk in the contemporary place of pleasure, the shopping mall," Richard Keller Simon remarks, "is to walk through the avenues of the postmodern mentality" <sup>248</sup>. As Anne Friedberg puts it: the postmodern subjects are "flâneurs du mal(l)".

The reason for the recourse to the metaphor of the shopping mall is not just that towards the close of the twentieth

century, as most writing on postmodernism is published, "mall-ing", spending time in the shopping mall, is the "chief cultural activity in America" <sup>Kowinsky 24</sup>. Woodward points out that the reason is rather that most accounts of postmodernism could just as well be descriptions of the sociology of the mall. Postmodernism treats life as if it were a shopping mall. Certainly, as architectural historians and geographers like Margaret Crawford <sup>1992</sup> and Rob Shields <sup>1991</sup> have demonstrated, and as many novels, photographs, films, and series from the era attest, a mall is a heterotopia of the present substituting for a utopia of the future, suspended from the world at large so as to simulate a world in miniature, eclectically copy-pasting styles and tastes from everywhere and nowhere regardless of their original context and compatibility, mimicking life by prescribing the range of people's behaviour, scenario planning our routes according to financial models, encouraging us to take a left here, at the chain sneaker store and a right there, at the franchise jeans seller, hurry towards the McDonald's and pause at the Starbucks. It is "a sugar-coated dream world", writes the architectural historian Peter Hemenway, "where we can shop, play, and experience danger and delight without once stepping outside" <sup>qtd. in Backes 6</sup>.

The shopping mall blurs the boundaries between the public and the private, the outdoors and the indoors, indeed, reterritorialising place, as the architectural critic Mark Pimlott <sup>2007</sup> has observed, into one, single "public interior". It similarly abandons the separation between the civic discourse of the street and the commercial ideology of the shop and between subject and object, turning every encounter into a commercial one, every gaze and every glance into a commodity fetish, an undifferentiated euphoria of self-realization through and as objects. The shopping mall further shares with the

postmodern sensibility a proliferation of surfaces, of facades and shop windows, screens and mirrors. Appearances, indeed, which, too, are commodified, telling the customers ‘buy this’, ‘buy me’, ‘buy you’. Indeed, what Jameson talks about in his account of postmodernism is this: a momentary suspension in and of time and space, a “holiday from history” <sup>Krauthammer</sup> for those with the available cash flow.

Unsurprisingly, one of the buzzwords in accounts of the postmodern is simulation. The shopping mall is a simulated eco-system, a nonplace <sup>Auge</sup>. There are storefronts simulating history—or perhaps time, duration—and food courts simulating locality. There are carefully designed parks and planters of various sizes, some with real trees and bushes and flowers, others with fake ones; there may even be grottos and water falls. Street planning simulates our behavioural patterns, our rhythms and, indeed, our spontaneity. Corporate security simulates law and order, just as the credit card simulates the bill of human rights. Temperature can be simulated. In the shopping mall, of course, even the air is simulated. The name for this is air conditioning: a process that feigns ventilation—that is, a relationship between the inside and the outside—by blowing out the very air they suck in.

Hal Foster has distinguished between a postmodernism of reaction and a postmodernism of resistance. The former is critical of modernism, but affirms the present. The latter both deconstructs modernism and resists the status quo. Both agree that the modern project has, for whatever reason, been abandoned; but whereas the former celebrates our point of arrival, the latter laments it. However, because the latter assumes the utopian drive is exhausted, its lamentation can take no other form than critique.

As Friedman suggests in her study of the “flâneur du mal(l)”, postmodernism is a

closed circuit, a Möbius strip looping from front to back. There is no way out. There are mirrors everywhere but no windows. There are doors, but not exits. The exits are locked, from the inside, mind you, allegedly to protect us from the ideological Chernobyl outside, a historical disaster zone unfit for life anytime soon; but no one is sure, exactly, who has the keys. (There is evidence to suggest they were once passed on by Margaret Thatcher to Tony Blair. He, however, alleges to have inadvertently misplaced them during a visit to his friend Rupert Murdoch.) If we think, therefore, of postmodern practices that resist the status quo, we think of the critique of the inside—because the inside is all there is, because everyone and everything is on the inside: the writing of Michel Foucault, questioning our assumptions about what is natural and unnatural, normal and abnormal; or of grunge, criticizing consumer society; or of the photographs of Cindy Sherman, decrying patriarchy; or the novels of Efriede Jelinek, lamenting the loss of (moral) compass; or, indeed, the installations of Wim Delvoye, whose *Cloaca*, a machine that mimics the human bowel system so as to produce poop, was a critique of late twentieth-century’s culture fetishization of every interaction, person, or object as a commodity, including excrement, as well as an acceptance of its inevitability, since as far as I am aware, the individual excreta were sold on the art market.

### **Metamodernism: the Shopping Mall and the Speculative Environment**

In times of oil shortages and desurbanisation, of server parks and distribution centres, scholars have all but abandoned the metaphor of the shopping mall. Yet surely we still find ourselves in the shopping mall, so to speak, in an eclectic, hybrid, infinite interior ecosystem ruled by the logic of the market. It is just that the conditions have deteriorated

considerably. Shops are boarded up. Middle-class mallers unexpectedly find their credit cards declined. There are cracks in the floorboards. The air conditioning splutters. Toilets are clogged. People feel ill. The mallers fight over who and what is to blame—the system, the shop owners, the shop employees, the shop window decorators, the mall technicians, the mall security team, the consumers who buy in all stores, the consumers who buy in only one store, the people who buy nowhere, the architecture, the screens, the food, the air. It is no surprise that there have been so many films and series recently where the shopping mall is home to zombies.

There are four manifestations of decay, specifically. The first is a political-economic crisis, boarding up the shops and bankrupting the costumers; the second is a generational fatigue, a general feeling of unwellness; the third is the technological revolution initiated by social and locative media; and the fourth is pending ecological doom, or, the unexpected return of the outside. This essay considers the response of the mall's dwellers to the last one, specifically; but in order to understand this response, we need to take into account how it relates to the other three changes as well.

If I speak about a political-economic crisis, I am talking in part, of course, about the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008 and its aftershocks in the global economy. Though this widespread crisis initially appeared to set in motion a radical restructuring of our financial system, it ultimately deepened its foundations, in the process widening even further the rift between the wealthy jet set and the global dispossessed. Indeed, as the abyss of neoliberalism expanded, it was those in the middle who disappeared. However, by political-economic crisis, I also mean the corollary changes in politics, both on global and national levels. Globally, as symbolized by the decline of the

so-called 'PIIGS' and the rise of the 'BRICS' as much as by new proxy wars, power is decentralized, dislocated from its former concentration in the West to the east and the south, turning countries such as Russia and China in particular to hubs of negotiation, but also the likes of India, Brazil, and Saudi Arabia. Nationally, of course, I am thinking here of the decline of liberal democracy and the rise of populism, or 'illiberal democracy', disintegrating the political centre, abandoning compromise, a balancing out of everyone's demands, for exchange, a market place of demands, where demands are traded as currency not content. Civilization and its discontents once again make way for Eros and Thanatos.

In his brilliant essay "Coming of Age at the End of History"—in many a sense the inspiration for the thought-experiment you are reading presently—Camille de Toledo describes the generational fatigue with post-modernism as an "asthma of the soul"<sup>1</sup>. All of us who came of age at the end of history, he writes, suffer the same condition, a respiratory disease of the spirit, a claustrophobia of the chest resulting from an acute awareness we are unable to see beyond the "transparent walls" that surround us "on all sides"<sup>2</sup>. "This world, the world we live in now, is all there is. There's nothing left outside it and there's no other world possible"<sup>3</sup>. It is tempting to trace the origins of this "asthma of the soul" to the dust clouds resulting from the collapse of Lehman, but as de Toledo notes and as anyone who has ever read the essays of David Foster Wallace or other writers associated with 'New Sincerity' can attest, this illness precedes this event by some years. It is not dust we are choking on; it's the draft of the closed circuit: the floating signification—systemic, arbitrary, relative—of air conditioning.

If the political-economic changes necessitate an alternate state of mind and

the generational fatigue suggests a will for another sensibility, the development of social media has provided some means for achieving it. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and Snapchat and whichever corporate algorithm hits the investment jackpot tomorrow allow each and every single one of us, for better but more and more often, I guess, for worse, to contribute to the mall's privatized public sphere, its "public interior". They have radically different implications, in any case, than zapping did in the 1990s, or buying a ticket to a concert in the 1950s. We can publicly question the mall's architects. We can enter a debate with others about the whereabouts of the keys. Indeed, we can form ad hoc communities, interest groups. But more than anything, I am always surprised to find, we can confuse structures and individuals, mistake the latter for the former, and either threaten, abuse, or shame them for their inability to share our point of view. All of this is to say: in the midst of the mall's deterioration, we can find momentary common grounds affording and limiting particular types of action to counteract, accelerate, and/or escape its possible collapse.

What frames each of these developments, these crises of capital, communion, and consciousness, like a soundtrack in a film, is a faint but increasingly present drum. Padam. Padam. Padampadam. As the mallers become aware of the drum, they gradually realize it comes from the walls, from outside their scripted but spinning life. It is—yes, they are certain—a knocking.

For a while, there is some dissensus about its cause. Is it a technical glitch? An issue with the lighting, maybe? A problem with ventilation? Yet as the sounds increase in tempo and volume, amping up the suspense like in a horror flick, most people begin to wonder: is there life out

there—could it be? Or is what we are hearing the reverberations of the end of the world, after all? The name that they, that we, give to this uncertain phenomenon that is ubiquitous yet invisible and, even more, incomprehensible, is climate change.

What I and others talk about when we talk about metamodernism is the lived experience of this hermetic hyperreality by all accounts and appearances coming apart at its seams *cf.* Vermeulen and van den Akker, 2010, 2014, 2017. Necessitated by the political-economic crises, delirious because of the thinning air, and desperate to confront the knocks on the walls, a new generation of mallers hallucinates that they discern images of elsewhere on the walls, like a desert dweller believing in spite of better judgment in the oasis in the far distance. They are indeed hallucinating; it is a false consciousness. Many of them, though not all, realize as much—the term van den Akker and I have previously used to describe this awareness is "informed naivety". They are hallucinating because they cannot in actuality see the outside nor can they with their exclusive knowledge of the inside virtually imagine what that outside may look like. But once they've seen these images, they cannot unsee them. The outside is suddenly once again a possibility—even if it is an entirely fictional one. In other words, in this scenario, simulation is what necessitates but also what affords speculation, a speculation, in turn, which is at once restricted to the terms of the simulation but not its debate, nor its 'reality'. People can imagine, that is reassemble, the parameters constituting their experiential register into an as of yet inexperienced or even impossible modality—indeed, into just about whatever they feel like, and generally without responsibility or in any case accountability, since the outside is still unregulated territory.

### **Depthiness and Shoes That Straddle Two Realities at Once Without Ever Inhabiting One**

It seems to me that over the past years, culture has responded to the return of this hallucinatory horizon—or, as a student at the University of Art and Design Linz whose name I unfortunately do not recall aptly put it a few years back in a discussion about this, ‘horizhome’—in three ways. The first is to stick, foolhardily, to the laws of the inside, either disavowing the boarded-up shops and cracks in the floor and, especially, these knocks on the walls, pretending to take them into account, or recontextualizing them so that they conform to your beliefs. This is the route, I suppose, that Third Way politicians such as Angela Merkel and Emanuel Macron, Hilary Clinton and Justin Trudeau take. I also think that this is what a cultural scaremonger such as Jordan Peterson and, seemingly paradoxically, a number of activists concerned with identity politics propose. The single difference between these is that the former would like business to continue as usual, whilst the latter prefer it to continue as usual but under the explicit auspices of (white) men or, alternatively, the inclusion of a range of distinct and/or not mutually exclusive minorities.

In fashion, I would presume, this disavowal is that of the multinational corporations whose practices haven’t changed, haven’t been altered, really, in response to the knocks of geopolitical developments, generational concerns, or the environment. Here, unfair labour practices aren’t so much reconsidered in light of economic redistributions or political regulations, but moved about, inscribed elsewhere, in other systems. Similarly, environmental policies—in terms of sourcing materials, chemical processes, waste, or carbon footprints—aren’t so much tightened as they are broadened to include

other countries or bilateral agreements, alternate legal loopholes, and so forth.

A second way artists and writers, especially, appear to have responded to these circumstances is what I have elsewhere described as the “new depthiness” (“The New Depthiness” and “Periodising the 2000s”). Here what happens is that a hallucination, i.e. a virtuality, is painted, that is to say, actualized, on the inside of the walls as if it was an accurate or possible or conceivable intimation of what may or may not exist behind them, of an outside—so as to be able to imagine the outside at all. The flat surface—in other words, the surface whose formal qualities or texture reveals no depth—is treated as if it nonetheless hides depth. Depth here is less an ontological quality than a performative one; or indeed, a reality whose ontology depends entirely and exclusively on its performance. The term depthiness is a reference both to Jameson’s notion of the new depthlessness and to comedian Stephen Colbert’s joke about truthiness: a statement of truth whose truthfulness cannot be empirically verified—or indeed, which is proven to be false—but is felt to be true in the gut.

In *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson distinguishes postmodernism from modernism by way of an analysis of two artistic renderings of shoes: Andy Warhol’s ‘Diamond Dust Shoes’ and Vincent van Gogh’s ‘A Pair of Shoes’. The former is a glossy, monochromatic photograph of a variety of individual women’s shoes cropped closely and against a uniform background, making it difficult for the viewer to reach beyond the picture—to either the artist’s state of mind or a particular localizable or historical objective reality. The picture might just as well refer, Jameson writes, to a shop window or the aftermath of a dance hall fire or, indeed, the remainders of a concentration camp. This is to say: it floats, is



'A Pair of Shoes' by Vincent van Gogh (c)Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

everywhere, and nowhere all at once; it isn't anchored anywhere.

Van Gogh's 'A Pair of Shoes', in contrast, is painted in thick, textural brush strokes, vibrant in colour, figuration, and composition, the shoes worn out and dirty, not just allowing the viewer to peek beyond the painting but indeed giving the viewer little other opportunity than to see into the artist's state of mind or observe the lived reality that the shoes suffered—the hard, unforgiving labour of the peasant. These shoes, in other words, are very much grounded in—and grounded by—a particular, localizable, historical reality.

Warhol's shoes, it seems to me, are comparable to the Nike Air Max—or similar Adidas or Asics types—of the late 1980s and 1990s. Their purpose is precisely to float, to be obstructed by the particular qualities of the ground as little as possible. The shoes Clinton and Macron wear—indeed, there are pictures online to prove this—are updated versions of the Air Max: the Nike Zoom, or the Adidas Ultraboost. Van Gogh's peasant shoes are sandals: if you walk around in them, you register every bump in the road, every gush of wind, every raindrop.

What I am talking about when I talk about the new depthiness is the Nike Air



Nike Zoom Kobe V

Pocket. It is a shoe that has the simulated comfort of the Air Max and its relatives, but performs the reality of the sandal: the bumps, the wind, the rain. If Van Gogh excavated depth from the surface and Warhol flattened depth by means of the surface, then the Nike Air Pocket applies depth onto the surface. Examples of shoes like these are, I guess, the five-finger shoe and, more recently, the free runner shoe: each use techniques of simulation similar to those modelling the Nike Air Max, but they employ them precisely to allow our feet to be closer to the ground, to the sentiment of the ground; they allow us, allegedly, not to float above it, but to experience the ground more intentionally. We don't often think of these shoes in political let alone environmental terms, but I would argue that in their engagement with the environment, they are very much shoes of our particular moment: hallucinations of the outside without even the slightest chance of realization, idealizations of our register of reality that can exist exclusively by the abnegation of the logical terms of that reality.

Depending on your situation, you may consider this model—and, indeed, this model may well be—either liberating or prohibitive. You might think it liberating because though not a condition of change itself, it is the index of the possibility of change, the sign that suggests that change is still feasible, even if just in theory. But it is also prohibitive. After



all, as Jodi Dean has argued so convincingly, it constitutes the dissolve of limiting but stable symbolic laws—first amongst them truth—into unattainable liquid imaginary controls—where, indeed, everything could be true, depending on the scenario. Here the subject isn't interpellated by social strata but by "creative potential" <sup>Dean 66</sup> and individual fulfillment—often masquerading as community needs: I must be better, it should be like this, we must make it like we imagine it to be, and only like this. It is the inverse of that phrase by Dostoyevski: here nothing is true and because of that everything is true; nothing is possible anymore and, as a consequence, everything is possible.

The third way, finally, that I think culture integrates these knocks on the wall into the mall's ecosystem is what we might call the 'seismographic method', or the parable of Plato's mall. This is, I think, another method people in fashion studies and design often think of when they talk about the 'new luxury' or 'sustainable hedonism'. If the new depthiness responds to the historical silence on the inside and the knocks it imagines coming from the outside poetically, the seismographic method is more of a pragmatic approach—though not, it is important to note, empirical; its modality, too, is entirely and exclusively performative. The seismographic method, as the name suggests, listens carefully to the reverberations coming through the wall so as to echo their effects inside. The knocks are taken as guiding principles for the rhythm and organization of the inside.

The shoes I am thinking of here are the shoes I mentioned in passing at the beginning of my essay: the Adidas x Parley, Ultraboost shoes made in part from upcycled plastic recollected from the ocean, or the Nike Flyleather, produced in part from reclaimed leather fibre, or indeed the Veja collection, organically and locally sourced



Adidas x UltraBoost Parley  
in Deep Ocean Blue

in its entirety. These shoes echo, in slightly different manners, the reverberations scientists have measured in the environment: the plastic islands polluting the ocean, changing in concrete ways the oceanscape, affecting the diets of fish, manipulating migratory streams, even turning water in to land; the needless slaughter of animals; systems of waste disposal; carbon footprints; and so on. Indeed, what they echo, I would be inclined to say, are generalized feelings about diagrams and datasets, about statistics; in other words: sentimental abstractions. The wearer of the shoe experiences environmental change in the same manner that the player of that Pokémon game experiences their surroundings: by an epistemic, abstracted detour, an encounter with a reality that they never actually encounter.

I don't intend this to sound as cynical as I imagine it may do—though I am very sceptical of this development. What I want to highlight here is that these shoes, too, are still very much products of the mall, property of the inside. They listen to the knocks, move with them, dance to them, but they don't return the call. Importantly, I think we should therefore ask ourselves whether these shoes are made for the inside as well, or rather, I guess, whether they could ever be worn 'outside', whether they would sustain whatever it is the outside holds.

What I have attempted to think through in the above is a distinct

relationship between a number of increasingly widespread phenomena and their cultural context: the shoe and the deteriorating mall, the Adidas x Parley and environmental change. In many senses, my thought experiment has been both indirect and inappropriate, a generalizing, entirely metaphorical account of a very specific, very real problem. But what I hope to have achieved is a frame, or, I guess, in Jameson's words, a cognitive map, in which to consider this problem cohesively and coherently. In a time where so much happens all the time, we tend to lose track not just of what happens but also of where we find ourselves. By discussing in a single vernacular or genre some of these occurrences, I hope to establish some sense of clarity. For understanding but also for action. Because if we don't understand where we are, we certainly would find it difficult to know where to go—outside of the mall.

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#### Footnotes

- [1] It is difficult to overstate the importance of understanding both that 'postmodernism' can describe a variety of experiences, objective realities, and indeed theoretical models; and that each of these is more nuanced and indeed complex than they are often assumed to be these days. This is important especially in the context of the recent wholesale dismissals of postmodernism as a 'cultural Marxism', responsible for, well whatever those dismissing it—who are, it seems to me, mostly frightened and frustrated reactionary white men—need it to be responsible for at any moment in time. I am reminded here, ironically, of Hal Foster's critical analysis of postmodernism's critiques of modernism:

*In cultural politics today, a basic opposition exists between a postmodernism which seeks to deconstruct modernism and resist the status quo and a postmodernism which repudiates the former to celebrate the latter: a postmodernism of resistance and a postmodernism of reaction. ...The postmodernism of reaction...is singular in its repudiation of modernism. This repudiation, voiced most shrilly perhaps by neoconservatives but echoed everywhere, is strategic: as Habermas cogently argues, the neoconservatives sever the cultural from the social, then blame the practices of the one (modernism) for the ills of the other (modernization). With cause and effect thus confounded, 'adversary' culture is denounced even as the economic and political status quo is affirmed—indeed, a new 'affirmative' culture is proposed. (xi-xii)*

## Nike Air Pocket:

Timotheus Vermeulen

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Read online:

<http://apria.artez.nl/nike-air-pocket/>

# Re-imagining Fashion as an Ecosystem of Commons

## Re-imagining Fashion as an Ecosystem of Commons<sup>[1]</sup>

Many players in the global fashion world are increasingly concerned about problematic industry norms and practices—from energy-intensive supply chains and abusive labour practices to transgressive marketing and elitist sensibilities. Is it possible to imagine a more humane and eco-responsible fashion system? This paper describes how diverse commoners around the world are pioneering creative, post-capitalist forms of provisioning, peer governance, and social practice. The principles of commoning—autonomous ‘world-making’ of provisioning and peer governance from within market/state polities—may hold some answers in helping to imagine a new ecosystem of commons for fashion design, provisioning, and distribution.

## The Commons as a Social System, Not Unowned Resources

One general way to understand the commons is as everything that we inherit or create together, which we must pass on, undiminished, to future generations. Our common wealth consists of countless resources that we share such as public lands, state-funded research, the atmosphere, the oceans, the airwaves used by broadcasters. Historically, the state has been the self-styled trustee of such resources—a task it has not performed very conscientiously or faithfully.

In truth, the commons is not simply a collection of shared resources. It must be understood as a social and political system for managing that shared wealth, with an emphasis on self-governance, fairness, and sustainability. The commons consists of resources *plus* the social system for managing them *plus* the specific rules, social practices, institutions, and traditions used to manage

the resources. The commons is an integrated social system for provisioning and peer governance—one that focuses on inclusiveness, fairness, basic needs, and stewardship of shared wealth.

If you mention ‘the commons’ to someone today, the first idea that usually comes to mind is ‘the tragedy of the commons’. That idea was launched by biologist Garrett Hardin in the journal *Science* in a now-famous essay published in 1968. Hardin asked readers to imagine a pasture in which no individual farmer has a rational incentive to hold back his use of it. He declared that each individual farmer would put as many sheep on the pasture as possible because no individual has a rational incentive to hold back. By this logic, Hardin declared, the pasture will inevitably be destroyed through over-exploitation: the tragedy of the commons. Over the past two generations, economists and conservative ideologues embraced the ‘tragedy parable’ as a powerful way to denigrate the collective management of resources, especially by government. Hardin’s narrative also proved useful as a way to champion private property rights, so-called free markets, and deregulation.

Even though the term ‘the commons’ became widely associated with the idea of the word ‘tragedy’, the irony is that Hardin was not really describing a commons. He was describing an *open-access regime* in which there are no rules for managing a resource, no boundaries around it, and, indeed, no community. The scenario he was describing—in which free riders can appropriate or damage resources at will—is more accurately a description of unfettered markets in which everyone does whatever s/he wants. You might say Hardin was describing the *tragedy of the market*.

The late Professor Elinor Ostrom of Indiana University powerfully rebutted the whole ‘tragedy of the commons’ fable in her landmark 1990 book, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. This book and hundreds of case studies by Ostrom and her colleagues showed that it is entirely possible for communities to manage forests, fisheries, farmland, irrigation water, wild game, and other natural resources as commons, without over-exploiting them. Her research and that of many scholars that she assembled into the International Association for the Study of Commons<sup>[2]</sup> demonstrated this through hundreds of empirical studies.

One might ask, how, then, is the over-exploitation of resources avoided? The short answer is, people *talk* to each other. They negotiate rules for working out their differences. People who live near each other or work together have strong incentives to cooperate. They are entirely capable of self-organizing systems that can identify and punish free riders, develop a shared community ethic and norms, and in other ways protect their shared wealth. This is not always easy and it is certainly not automatic, but it is an historic tradition in the human species. An estimated two billion people around the world depend on natural resources managed as commons for their everyday survival.

Most economists ignore this reality, however, because their very language and terms of analysis privilege the market economy—the world of exchange-value, not use-value. Adam Smith’s writings about markets are most notable for providing a moral justification for market activity, sanitizing the vices of greed and envy as ‘self-interest’ that ultimately benefits the public good via the Invisible Hand. He redefined the very idea of ‘the economy’ by ignoring

self-provisioning that takes place outside of conventional circles of money and market exchange.

Ostrom’s great achievement was in demonstrating how much value and stable management actually occurs through commons. She won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009—the first woman to win the award—by documenting and theorizing about cooperation, sharing, trust, and other nonmarket behaviours that most conventional economists neglect as ‘exogenous variables’. Its epistemological model quite literally can’t make sense of such social behaviours because, by the terms of the model, they are ‘irrational’. For economists, market transactions are the main event, and anything that cannot be priced is not taken very seriously. No wonder the commons and its social behaviours are culturally invisible!

### **Market Enclosure as a Scourge of our Time**

One of the reasons that the commons discourse is being resurrected today is to make the commons more visible—but also to highlight the idea of ‘enclosure’. Enclosure consists of the privatization and commodification of shared wealth by corporations, often in collusion with governments. It can be seen in countless attempts by market players to appropriate for themselves such shared resources as land, water, seeds, genetic information, cultural works, information, public spaces, and much else.

Across the world, timber companies are seizing great swaths of forests and wilderness that belong to the people, many of whom have tended the forests for generations. Big Pharma is privately patenting valuable drug research for which taxpayers have paid billions of dollars. Enclosure can be seen in corporate ‘partnerships’ with universities that privatize research funded by

the public. Most recently, we have seen fierce attempts by telecom and cable companies to seize control over access to the Internet in order to convert that great commons into a closed marketplace.

Enclosures amount to a massive theft and dispossession of common wealth for private gain. It is typically portrayed as 'progress'—the idea that private investment and marketization will improve societies. But in fact, the relentless expansion of market activity is often a profound dispossession of people's shared wealth. It is not just a taking of resources but the destruction of community identities and cultures based on sharing. It is an erasure from memory that certain traditions and ways of life are possible.

People who have been victimized by investors, corporations, and market growth are increasingly fighting back, however. They seek to reclaim what is theirs and re-establish the communities of commoning that once flourished. For example, indigenous peoples are trying to preserve their ethnobotanical knowledge from the biopiracy of big pharmaceutical and ag-biotech companies. Subsistence farmers are trying to protect their right to share seeds. Fishers are trying to protect their livelihoods from industrial harvesting. Many Latin Americans are fighting the neo-extractivist agenda of multinational companies who are plundering oil, minerals, and genetic knowledge. Internet users are trying to preserve their right to share their research, creative works and data outside of the control of strict intellectual property rights (copyright, trademarks, patents).

The emergence of the World Wide Web in the early 1990s demonstrated that the commons is arguably more generative than conventional intellectual property industries. But the latter, of course, have huge investments that they wish to protect. They

are understandably wary of the enormous efficiencies and creativity that digital commons offer. The Internet is really a massive hosting platform for commons, a lightweight infrastructure for cooperation that is fantastically generative because it doesn't have the huge overhead costs of markets (physical infrastructure, lawyers, marketing, etc.) and because it elicits and distributes creativity far more efficiently than conventional markets.

By the early 2000s, the power of open networks had given rise to something that economists are still trying to understand—commons-based peer production. This is a growing sector of production that takes many forms. Among them: free and open source software, which dominate the software world; the great Wikipedia project in dozens of languages and hundreds of wiki offshoots; the estimated 1 billion documents and creative works using Creative Commons licenses; and the more than 10,000 open-access scholarly journals that bypass the exploitations of commercial publishers. The explosion of creativity in this sector cannot simply be explained by economic models that regard human beings as selfish, rational, utility maximizing materialists. This creativity is the work of peer-organized commons.

Over the past fifteen years, the idea of commoners having agency and power to build their own provisioning systems as alternatives to predatory, anti-social market systems has gained ground. We can now see the rise of an eclectic international movement based on the principles of commoning. It consists of food activists trying to rebuild local agriculture and software programmers building free software and open source software as well as open source design, hardware, and global production. We can see the commons at work among artists devoted to collaborative digital arts; in scientific communities that share their research and data



Bangla-Pesa from The Christian Science Monitor (c) Jason Patinkin

on open platforms; and among rice farmers who use the Internet to share agronomy techniques to improve their yields, in a kind of open-source agriculture. We can also see the commons rising among activists in cities like Amsterdam, Barcelona, Seoul, and Bologna who demand that urban spaces and resources be used to benefit all citizens, not just developers and the affluent.

Some commoners are developing alternative currencies, such as the Bangla-Pesa in Kenya, which has made it possible for poor people in slum neighbourhoods to exchange value with each other. Many engineers and designers are engaged with global communities in which design is globally developed and shared without patents, but manufacturing is done at the local level in ways in the style of open-source software: free, accessible to anyone, locally sourceable with modular components. This movement of 'cosmo-local production' has produced the Wikispeed car that gets 100 miles per gallon of fuel, the Farm Hack community that has produced designs for affordable farm equipment, and specialized open-source prosthetic limbs that major medical suppliers don't have the creativity or profit incentive to make.

What unites these highly diverse communities?

They are all asserting a different universe of value. They all share a basic commitment to production for use, not market exchange. They are asserting the right of communities to participate in making the rules that govern themselves. They are demonstrating the feasibility of fair rules and transparency in peer governance. As commoners, they step up to serve as long-term stewards of resources.

The commons not only embodies a different system of power and value-generation than the market and state but also expresses a distinct worldview and ethic. It emphasizes cooperation and sharing for common benefit and eschews the individualistic competition, rational calculation, and materialism that economists regard as the defining traits of humanity. Because commons deliberately seek to protect their practices and ethos against market enclosures, they are more able to thwart the usual types of co-optation and dilution that normally occur. In other words, commons have the potential to carve out protected zones of social sovereignty that cannot be readily traduced by the market/state.

Of course, mainstream political and corporate players still regard the commons as archaic relics from history. They are half-right: commoning *is* as old as the human race. But it is hardly irrelevant or obsolete. In light of the cascading crises of climate change, wealth inequality, and the implosion of the neoliberal market/state (among many others), it is reassuring to know that the commons is the one of the most enduring, resilient forms of social organization in history. Its rediscovery is opening up all kinds of new conversations and projects seeking to imagine, and then build, new types of post-capitalist institutions.

The fledgling movements are not arid intellectual pipedreams; they are vigorous



exploratory projects to build an alternative economy. They seek to develop a new theory and practice of value beyond market price. As social institutions based on use-value, diverse commons focus on the intrinsic value of nature, the importance of care work and affective labour (often disproportionately done by women), socially created collective wealth, and the intergenerational stewardship of biowealth.

So how might these insights into the commons help us imagine a new vision for the fashion industry? In the remainder of this essay, I would like to reflect on the significance of the commons framework, discourse, and ethos for the world of fashion design, production, and distribution (to use the conventional economic categories).

### **Reimagining Fashion as an Ecosystem of Commons**

Our first challenge is to ‘jump the tracks’ of standard economic analysis. Its thought-categories and language virtually dictate the types of human behaviour and institutions that are seen as ‘realistic’. Economics presumes that capital, large-scale markets, and private property—as well as the designated roles of investor, business executive, employee, consumer, etc.—are the only ways to organize provisioning and distribution. It somehow seems utopian to try to imagine feasible alternatives notwithstanding the documented, chronic damage that the existing system wrecks.

Let us dare to imagine how we might devise the rudiments of a different sort of fashion design and garment production system. Among socially minded designers and enterprises, this is a welcome idea. Creative artists tend to understand the real power of imagination and the collaborations that fuel it. They realize that while artistry obviously

needs resources, it is increasingly being held captive and despoiled by money and the market economy.

Interestingly, software programmers once faced a similar challenge when Microsoft held a virtual monopoly over personal computer software in the late 1990s. The response that emerged, and then grew and grew, was free and open-source software—programs that were built by open networks of programmers and legally designed to be re-used, modified, and shared for free. In other words, collaboration was the key to reclaiming the commons of software design.

I think there is a deep kinship between fashion design and open-source software principles. One might say that fashion design has *always* been an open-source enterprise, as I once explored through a 2005 conference that I co-organized, ‘Ready to Share: Fashion and the Ownership of Creativity’.<sup>[3]</sup> Even though capital and corporations typically try to own creativity through patents or copyrights, in fashion, creative design has always been treated as shareable. You can’t own the herringbone suit or peasant dress. You can only own your trademarked name and logo. Everything else is free to use and re-purpose and share without permission or payment.

There have been attempts by people like Diane von Fürstenberg and big fashion houses to expand the net of copyright control over fashion design. But such attempts to own creativity are ill-fated and silly. As Coco Chanel famously said, “Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only. Fashion is in the sky, in the street, fashion has to do with ideas, the way we live, what is happening”. Attempting to own fashion design is doomed to failure and is itself destructive of very ecology of fashion.

To me, this naturally raises the idea of fashion itself as an ecosystem of commons.

Unlike a market, in which wealthy businesses attempt to govern and control the system through money, fashion as a commons points to a very different social system. A commons allows the various elements of the ecosystem to find their own sovereignty and niches, and to develop their own symbiotic relationships with others. A commons is a world of negotiated relationality and social practice that arises from the bottom up. It is not a world animated by narrow, top-down mandates by those with property rights and money (even if commoners must develop their own working rapprochement with both).

Serious fashion designers and producers who wish to engage with contemporary life are understandably attracted to the idea of the commons. They realize that feelings and aesthetics are primary forces in fashion design. They also see that the global market apparatus and fashion business models are becoming more and more hostile to genuine creativity. Global markets traffic in garments-as-commodities and only secondarily in garments-as-cultural expression or use-value. If a designer is serious about engaging with the world through their work, they will know that aesthetics is not just about looks but about social ethics, aliveness, and human presence. Corporate fashion attempts to simulate and capture these things, but the structural imperatives of global markets (at least for mass fashion) cannot honour such human values and intangibles.

Many fashion designers and fashion houses are rightly appalled by a global production/distribution system that depends on underpaid, abused labour, sprawling transport chains that use vast amounts of carbon fuels, prodigious amounts of fabric waste, and odious marketing strategies. The 'fast fashion' segment of the industry has contributed to the doubling of garment production

worldwide between 2000 and 2014, accordingly to the group Fashion Revolution. Some 40% of purchased clothes are rarely or never worn—the average garment is worn only four times on average over its lifetime—and about one-third of retail clothing is never sold, and is, therefore, burned or destroyed. The industry produces some 400 billion square meters of fabric waste each year.<sup>[4]</sup>

One could easily augment this critique with many other industry practices that are profoundly harmful to the environment, workers' health and well-being, cultural norms, and consumers. But I am interested here in imagining new ways that the fashion industry might reconfigure itself. As the Fashion Colloquium in Arnhem, the Netherlands, in May 2018, put it: "Fashion is in dire need of more value-based critical thinking as well as design-driven research to thoroughly explore, disrupt, redefine and transform the system". Its organizers believe that we need to "collectively investigate how to move towards a fashion reality that addresses ethics, inclusivity and responsible consumerism in a more engaged way".

Toward that end, I wish to propose eight strategies by which committed players in the fashion world might begin to imagine a new type of system. These strategies should not be taken as a blueprint, but rather as a set of general guideposts for building the elements of an alternative system. As the first half of this essay has shown, the commons can help guide our imaginations and critical thought, and help us develop new structural vehicles for human creativity, ethics, and social engagement to flourish. It provides affordances that are simply unavailable under the socio-legal structures of the market/state. Aesthetics, ethics, creativity, and culture can actually provide powerful energies for re-defining 'the economy' of fashion. This will necessarily require novel types of institutions

and infrastructures that are likely to be seen as alien or repugnant to conventional banks, investors, and industry players.

### 1. Develop ways to resist enclosure

One of the first imperatives of an effective commons is to protect itself from enclosure—the private appropriation of shared wealth, usually for market purposes. This means that the web of relationships needed to design and produce garments must be strong and committed, and not based on mere business relationships. Any alternative fashion network must nurture a shared purpose and values that unify the community. It must engender trust and the generous sharing of knowledge. In medieval commons, one of the means by which communities achieved these goals was to stage an annual party in which they ‘beat the bounds’. This was a formal walking of the perimeter of their commons in order to identify and destroy any hedges or walls that enclosed the land for private purposes. That is an apt metaphor for what contemporary commons must do—identify capitalist appropriations of shared wealth, such as intellectual property grabs on designs or the use of market power to marginalize commons-based provisioning.

### 2. Focus on the Triad of Commoning

In a forthcoming book, my co-author Silke Helfrich and I propose a new conceptualization of the commons that we call the ‘Triad of Commoning’.<sup>[5]</sup> It consists of the ‘Social Life’ of participants, their systems in ‘Peer Governance’, and systems of self-managed ‘Provisioning’. Each of these dimensions are intertwined, but it helps to focus on each one as a way to see how and why commons are so productive and satisfying.

The Social Life of a commons is based on people seeing themselves as interconnected and interdependent—as ‘Nested-I’s’,

as we put it. Participants contribute freely to their collective goals, practising a gentle reciprocity and never a selfish calculation. They pursue challenges collaboratively and realize that their work is entangled with natural systems.

Peer Governance seeks to bring the diversity of participants into shared purpose, and to ensure that relationships are transparent and that knowledge is shared generously—all within a sphere of trust. The third major dimension of the commons, Provisioning, consists of systems that enable people to make and use things together, and to share risks and benefits. Provisioning should rely on ‘convivial tools’ that are open ended and user friendly, not closed and proprietary. It must also decide how to allocate the fruits of commoning fairly.

### 3. Build new types

of collaborative institutions

As the Triad of Commoning suggests, new types of institutions are needed to help sustain collaboration. These can take many forms: cooperatives, commons-based peer production in digital contexts, collaborative networks, and trusts, among others. The point is to develop social practices and norms that support commoning at appropriate scales.

Larger-scale collaborations need not be achieved by ‘scaling’ an enterprise into a large, unified organization. The preferred approach is to emulate other projects at smaller scales and then federate themselves as a loose network. This helps diverse commons align to pursue larger cooperative strategies (via ‘inter-commoning’). They can extend their reach without falling prey to the ‘big is better’ dynamic that market enterprises typically follow. (Scaling tends to re-introduce the inefficiencies, costs, ecological harm, and dehumanization that progressive fashion people are trying to escape!)

Relationality is a key aspect of a commons, so any growth in the reach of commons must find ways to preserve the shared mission, values, and relationships. Because commercial dealings tend to erode deeper relationships—the ethic of ‘it’s nothing personal, just business’—commons strive to keep commons and commerce distinct. To be sure, a commons can interact with markets, but it must do so in careful ways so that market imperatives (growth, profit, capitalization) do not become ends in themselves and take over the life of the commons.

#### 4. Lead with practical

experimentation, not ideology

While the commons has a lot to say about modern capitalism and the nation state, it is not an ideology or political agenda. It is better seen as a series of practical experiments for meeting human needs in fair, liberating ways. It is primarily about social practices and cultural shifts that can flourish in new types of institutional spaces. It helps to see that the commons is not so much a noun as a verb—the habit and activity of engaging in commoning. As historian Peter Linebaugh has said, “There is no commons without commoning”. Ideological approaches tend to be rigid and brittle. Commoning is flexible, creative, and adaptive.

The fashion world has already embarked upon many fascinating experiments in social and ecological innovation, such as weaving cooperatives, natural and non-toxic colour dyes, local sourcing of renewable materials, recycling and upcycling of fabric waste, novel revenue models to support humane working conditions, and so on. This sort of experimentation is more likely to flourish and endure through commons-based systems because that can help them escape the profit imperatives and market competition of conventional fashion. Risks

can be mutualized more readily, revenue requirements are reduced, and working relationships are more stable and committed.

#### 5. Reinvent infrastructures & finance for the commons

If the goal is to build a new parallel provisioning economy that decommodifies production and distribution and empowers distributed commoning, then new sorts of infrastructures and finance will be needed. Conventional investors and lenders virtually require that fashion enterprises become hooked on debt, growth, and a fealty to price as the measure of value. A commons regime could instead look to new systems of mutual credit and cooperative finance to spread risks and minimize costs and even the need for debt. In addition, the sharing of design in translocal ways could help develop a coherent network of like-minded fashion players and reduce transport costs. Developing more personal, social relationships with ‘suppliers’ and ‘consumers’ (re-imagined as supporters and collaborators) could help wean people away from market-driven consumerism and fast fashion.

Some of these ideas are already being developed in small-scale networks of producers of raw materials and artisans, for example. But with the infrastructure and finance to help these efforts grow into a larger ecosystem, new sorts of supply networks could evolve into producer cooperatives, for instance, or become Internet-based guilds for certain types of garments or styles. By maintaining control over infrastructure and finance and practicing a ‘gentle reciprocity’, the many participants could develop their own parallel ‘economy’, less vulnerable to the power of large corporations. This approach is needed to improve security and stability of individual ventures.



WIKISPEED car

#### 6. Explore cosmo-local production

Thanks to the Internet and new forms of digital networking, it is now possible to share design and production knowledge globally while producing locally. First pioneered in open-source software, this approach has now evolved into the production of physical products such as automobiles (Wikisppeed car), electronic circuit boards (Arduino), agricultural equipment (Open Source Ecology; Farm Hack), and 3D printing (Fab Labs, makerspaces). Cosmo-local production amounts to an alternative form of ‘globalization’ that allows greater local self-determination and autonomy while reaping the benefits of distributed innovation on a global scale. The dynamics of cosmo-local production are likely to expand as derivative uses of blockchain technology (the software breakthrough used by Bitcoin) transform conventional forms of production and commerce, and social life.

Alternative fashion players should explore the possibilities of developing their own cosmo-local production federations, with commons-style governance and branding identities. Provisioning of garments could be local in ways relying on open source principles: modular, locally responsible, customizable, nonproprietary, and bottom-up driven.

7. Shed archaic vocabularies and learn a commons-friendly language

A major part of the challenge of moving to a commons-based ecosystem for fashion (or another other provisioning) is shedding the almost fundamentalist language of contemporary market capitalism. The vast, diversified world of the commons shows that other social forms of organization and provisioning are entirely possible, beyond those sanctioned by standard economics. But it can be difficult to entertain such ideas when the vocabularies for describing the alternatives are so limited or non-existent.

It is helpful, therefore, to shed some of the market vocabularies that invisibly presume that people respond only to market ‘incentives’; that existing law and policy in effect define the limits of the possible; and that business structures are the only viable option. The world of the commons has developed words such as the ‘Nested-I’ to suggest that individual agency is not the only source of change because all individuals are ‘nested’ within communities that affect their very identities and aspirations. Similarly, the idea of *homo economicus* and calculative rationality used in standard economics need not be controlling; we have seen how most people welcome the opportunity to show ‘Ubuntu Rationality’, in which their individual well-being is wrapped up in the well-being of others (‘Ubuntu’ roughly translates as ‘I am because we are.’) It helps to see that ‘resources’ are not just commodities defined by their price; they often take the form ‘care wealth’, which suggests that ‘objects’ are cared for and partake in all sorts of social meanings and relationships.

#### 8. Emulate & Federate

Finally, as mentioned earlier, we should not obsess about how to make a new system ‘scale’. Scale—in the sense of a large, unified system that eclipses human needs—is part of the problem. The more appropriate way to

have a larger impact is to emulate and federate. As a Dutch designer has put it, “The next big thing will be a lot of small things”. The life of the Internet has shown that smaller-scale projects can still have a large impact, and that voluntary federations and swarms can achieve things that large, centralized systems (bureaucracies, corporations) cannot. The future will emerge from the edge. It won't be imposed from the centre.

## Conclusion

### Re-imagining Fashion as an Ecosystem of Commons

Trying to imagine fashion as an ecosystem of commons may seem a bit farfetched or utopian. But in truth, all sorts of commons-based experiments are already underway. What is missing is the mutual self-awareness that another system is possible. Missing, too, is a richer vocabulary to collectively make sense of what is occurring and what is possible. Those who aspire to develop new forms and practices of commoning need to develop deeper relationships with each other, and reconnoitre the creative frontier of what could be done.

The examples of other parts of the Commonsverse (agriculture, software, cities, currencies) show that it is possible to shift from a world defined by market identities and property-defined roles to a world of relationality and social practice. Commoning is tremendously generative and value-creating in humane, eco-minded ways, but its achievements and folkways have been denigrated by the dominant market/state system as a ‘tragedy’. That needs to change. As a creative field that thrives by engaging with contemporary culture, fashion should seize the rich, possibilities of this moment.

Read online:

<http://apria.artez.nl/re-imagining-fashion-as-an-ecosystem-of-commons/>

## Footnotes

- [1] This essay is derived from remarks made by David Bollier, Director of the Reinventing the Commons Project, at Schumacher Center for a New Economics, to the Fashion Colloquium: Searching for the New Luxury, a conference held in Arnhem, Netherlands, on 31 May and 1 June 2018.
- [2] Originally, the International Association for the Study of Common Property.
- [3] David Bollier and Laurie Racine, *Ready to Share: Fashion and the Ownership of Creativity* (Los Angeles, California: Norman Lear Center, 2005), at <https://learcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2003/02/RTStranscript.pdf>.
- [4] Orsola de Castro, Fashion Revolution, presentation at the Fashion Colloquium: Searching for the New Luxury conference, ArtEZ University of the Arts and State of Fashion, Arnhem, 31 May, 2018.
- [5] David Bollier and Silke Helfrich, *Free, Fair and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons*, forthcoming in spring 2019.

## David Bollier

David Bollier is an American activist, scholar, and blogger who is focused on the commons as a new paradigm for re-imagining economics, politics, and culture. He pursues this work as Director of the Reinventing the Commons Program at the Schumacher Center for a New Economics [[www.centerforneweconomics.org](http://www.centerforneweconomics.org)] (Massachusetts, US), and as Cofounder of the Commons Strategies Group, [[www.commonstrategies.org](http://www.commonstrategies.org)] an international advocacy project. Bollier is the author of many books, including *Think Like a Commoner* [[www.thinklikeacommoner.com](http://www.thinklikeacommoner.com)] (2014); *Patterns of Commoning* (2015) [[www.patternsofcommoning.org](http://www.patternsofcommoning.org)] and *The Wealth of the Commons* (2012), [[www.wealthofthecommons.org](http://www.wealthofthecommons.org)] both with co-editor Silke Helfrich; and the forthcoming *Free, Fair and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons*, co-authored with Helfrich. Bollier lives in Amherst, Massachusetts.

# Take Back Fashion!

## *Fashion Held in Common*

The new curriculum of the M.A. Fashion Design at ArtEZ is called 'Fashion Held in Common'. In this essay, Pascale Gatzén, head of the programme, shares her vision on fashion, language, and commoning based on her personal experiences, and she explains how this is integrated into the new curriculum.

### **Life-Alienating Communication**

From an early age, most of us in Western countries have been educated to speak and think in judgements. We learned to use language to compare and classify people and their actions, including ourselves and our own. Our attention became focussed on analysing and determining levels of wrongness. The use of moralistic judgements is life-alienating communication. It traps us in a world of ideas about rightness and wrongness; it is a language that dichotomizes and creates separation.

This is the use of language that has been promoted in our society and that we have internalized; it frames the perspective through which we view the world, others, and ourselves.

I remember very well that I didn't dare to come home when I had a bad grade in school—disappointing my mother was the thing that I dreaded most. A bad grade meant that I had not been studying hard enough. Her disappointment in me was insurmountable, and I was left feeling insufficient and unable. She would also praise me in front of her friends when I had done very well in school. I was praised for being in the top of my class. It made her feel accomplished as a mother; it affirmed her idea of being a good mother, and it negated her fear of not being one. I know that my mother wanted us to do well and the only way she knew how was to make sure we received a good education.

Her needs were to care for and to contribute to our well-being, her strategy was that of domination and control. If we didn't comply with how she thought we should or should not behave, she would love us a little less. From an early age on, I learned that love was conditional.

God evaluates everybody: if we are good, we get rewarded and we go to heaven; if we are bad, we get punished and we go to hell. In our Western culture, the people who were considered closer to God were regarded as superior to the people beneath them. They dictated what was thought of as good or bad behaviour. We have superiors who have the right to control the people beneath them at all levels of our society. We have parents who think they are superior in the realm of the family. In schools we have been educated that our whole life was dependent on how other people judged us. Blame, praise, criticism, punishment, and reward—this is how we have been systematically educated for thousands of years.

The use of language as a way to control and dominate is also the language through which neo-liberal thinking has been able to advance its agenda. As Foucault points out, with the rise of neo-liberal thought in the West, the concept of governmentality has transformed radically: the idea that society should be left to regulate itself naturally means that the freedom of the individual and the regulation of the population have become subtly intertwined. Separated and divided by competition, we are challenged to be the entrepreneurs of our own lives.

### **Neo-Liberal Fashion Education**

Fashion education has become a tool to position ourselves favourably in a market that is emerging as increasingly homogeneous.

Growing up in social and educational systems of oppression, we have learned to prioritize uniformity and discipline over curiosity, playfulness, and spontaneity.

Modelled after industry and Spectacle notions of success, most fashion educations still prepare students to become star designers. Being educated alienated from their own needs and true potential, students develop as dependent and fearful human beings. Reliant on external affirmation, they perpetuate the narcissistic dimension of the capitalist paradigm that governs our society.

Even though Fashion as appropriated by capitalism promotes and prides itself on the notion of the 'new', nothing 'new' can ever occur in a capitalist paradigm. In a capitalist paradigm, there is only one perspective; the 'new' is always already structured relative to and contingent upon one value—financial gain.

Up until this day, I am unable to collaborate with my best friend and fashion designer, Saskia van Drimmelen. In the late 80s early 90s, we were both educated in the B.A. Fashion Design programme at ArtEZ. At the time, there was only one value that was truly supported and communicated: we were all competing to become the next big fashion designer. Whenever Saskia and I collaborate, old habits of being in competition are triggered and we have to contend with them.

In the 90s when I was working as a fashion designer in the Fashion System, I believed that the only way to be seen and to be loved was when I was successful in that system. I did not know another reality; I didn't recognize any other type of success. If I wasn't successful and didn't find recognition within the system, my life had no meaning and I would not be loved. This might sound dramatic and extreme, but this was the fear that was propelling me to alienate myself more and more from my life energy and my needs.

I didn't have a personal life; all my time was invested in meeting intangible expectations which I had internalized and solidified as a real but not true reality.

What if the way we have learned to use language is preventing us from creating a more beautiful world that our hearts know is possible? What if our use of language is structuring our thoughts in such a way that we inevitably perceive the world in dualities and categories? What if our dualistic mind continues to create stories of separation and opposition? What if it persists in grasping and solidifying an ever-changing reality into fixed concepts and ideas about ourselves, others, and the world?

### **Compassionate Communication**

Can we imagine a consciousness, a language that is life-affirming? Can we imagine a use of language that emerges as a process always in connection with that which is alive in ourselves and others?

Compassionate communication is one of the core practices in the 'Fashion Held in Common' curriculum. Compassionate communication begins by assuming that we are all compassionate by nature and that we have an intrinsic need to give and contribute to the well-being of others. It assumes that we all share the same, basic human needs, and that each of our actions forms a strategy to meet one or more of these needs. These basic human needs or values, such as our need for love, connection, companionship, being heard, and being seen are never in conflict. Rather, conflict arises when strategies for meeting these needs clash. We only resort to violent strategies that harm ourselves and others when we do not recognize more effective strategies for meeting our needs. Marshall Rosenberg calls judgements tragic expressions of unmet needs. Under every judgement we pass lies a beautiful need that wants to be expressed.



One of the main practices of compassionate communication is emphatic listening. By listening emphatically, we connect with what's alive in the other person. It's not an understanding of the head in which we only understand mentally what another person says. Empathic connection is an understanding of the heart in which we see the beauty in the other person and the life that's alive in them. Empathy involves emptying the mind and listening with our whole being. When we listen to ourselves and to others with our whole being, we focus on listening for the underlying feelings, needs, and requests.

Once we understand and connect to the underlying needs in ourselves and in others, we can create strategies for meeting these needs in ways that create connection, joy, and well-being for everyone. If we intend to hold everyone's needs equally, we will discover life-affirming strategies to meet them. Harmony and learning for future cooperation is developed when people identify shared needs and collaborate to form effective strategies to meet them.

The process of compassionate communication is a creative process. Once we become more familiar with the consciousness of compassionate communication, we discover that there are a thousand strategies for meeting each one of our needs. In answering the question 'How can we make life more wonderful?', we develop an inspired and generative approach towards all aspects of our life.

Although the principles of compassionate communication seem simple and logical, the practice of compassionate communication is counterhabitual. Our minds are wired to categorize and pass judgement. It takes substantial and repeated practice to come to clear, specific, and measurable observations about what is happening and to connect to the feelings and beautiful needs that are alive in ourselves and in others.

Krishnamurti considers the ability to observe without evaluating the highest form of intelligence. When people first start practicing compassionate communication, the recognition of having needs often translates itself into the negative judgement of 'being needy'. We hold many negative judgements about ourselves which obscure and block our capacity for self-empathy and, consequently, empathy for others.

### **Fashion Held in Common**

At 'Fashion Held in Common', we seek to support participants in creating their practices from what is alive in them, instead of having them answer to internalized and external expectations. In the first semester, self-connection and an understanding of the values and needs that are very much alive in them connects them to their authentic and vital life energy. Once we learn to practice from what is alive in us, we can also more easily connect to what is alive in others. Most of our basic human needs—such as love, connection, community, and friendship—are relational. We support participants in organizing their practice in such a way that it makes life more wonderful, both for them and the people they choose to work and connect with. To hold something or each other in common means that we are in a relationship of mutuality and interdependence, no longer in a relationship of domination and control. Silvia Federici points out that no common is possible unless we refuse to base our life, our reproduction on the suffering of others, unless we refuse to see ourselves as separate from them. Indeed, if 'commoning' has any meaning, it must be the production of ourselves as a common subject. Marshal Rosenberg underlines that our survival as a species depends on our ability to recognize that our well-being and the well-being of others are, in fact, one and the same.

Practicing from a framework of shared human needs and values helps us to move beyond a world in which the only reality is the logic of the market—a world in which our activities are always being valued as being economic or uneconomic and in which our strategies need to meet market and or Spectacle notions of success. When we focus on needs, our creativity flourishes and solutions arise that were previously blocked from our awareness. Underlying all human actions are needs that people are seeking to meet. Understanding and connecting to these needs creates a common ground for connection, cooperation, and more harmonious relationships on both a personal and global level.

**‘Never walk when you can dance’  
– Marshall Rosenberg**

That which is alive in us—our feelings and our needs—is in constant flux. Compassionate communication doesn’t assume a past or a future; it expresses and connects us to what is alive in us, right here and right now. Compassionate communication is an embodied practice, it is a language of life, a language that emerges from listening with our whole being. When we are intimately connected to what is alive in us and others, perspectives of rightness and wrongness, goodness and badness, that have kept us hostage for such a long time slowly dissolve in favour of a language and a consciousness that assists us in connecting to a life filled with creativity, connection, and joy—a life in which our natural giving thrives and contributes to the well-being of others and ourselves. Just like me, every person has a unique gift to give to the world and just like me they will not feel happy and fulfilled unless they are giving their gift.

We still live in a myth of separation, a myth in which everybody is in it for themselves and where we are always competing

with each other; more for me means less for you. Can we transition to a new story, a story of interconnectedness in which more for me means more for you? A story in which we see the beauty in the other person and the life that’s alive in them. When people can see each other’s needs, we see our oneness; we then understand that we get more joy contributing to each other’s well-being than trying to dominate or compete. Every time we act from the new story we disrupt the psychic substructure of the old story and we offer an alternative.

*‘I want to make, move, learn, teach, exchange, I want to dance and feel light, I want to share this feeling. I want to fall in love with the world again.’ – Alya Hessa, 2018, participant in the M.A. Fashion Design, ‘Fashion Held in Common’ at ArtEZ*



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Pascale Gatzen

Prof. Pascale Gatzen is the head of the Fashion Design Master's programme at ArtEZ and also an artist, educator and fashion designer based in New York and Arnhem, The Netherlands. Within her art and design practice, Gatzen produces and facilitates large collaborative projects using clothing as her main medium. Embracing fashion as a mode of human togetherness, the focus of both her artistic practice and her teaching is on the relational and empowering aspects of fashion, advancing cooperative models of production and exchange. As an Associate Professor at Parsons of Design in New York she developed and implemented an alternative fashion curriculum with an emphasis on community, self-expression and love. She is a founding member of 'friends of light' a worker cooperative for textile production in the Hudson Valley, New York. She is the new Head of the MA Fashion Design program, at ArtEZ, University of the Arts, Arnhem, The Netherlands where she is creating and implementing a radically new curriculum named Fashion held in Common. Her work has been shown and published internationally.

Read online:

<http://apria.artez.nl/take-back-fashion/>

# Fashioning Tradition: *The Tai Lue Project*



Fig.1—Ban Sala (village), fabric design. Alison Welsh, garment design. Buachan Barikut, garment construction. Ban Sala Indigo Dress, 2017. Photograph, image courtesy of Korn Creative Agency Co. Ltd.



Fig.2—Ban Sala (village), fabric design. Jasper Chadprajong-Smith, garment design and construction. Ban Sala Indigo Jacket, 2017. Photograph, image courtesy of Korn Creative Agency Co. Ltd.

As part of the British Council's Crafting Futures programme, the Tai Lue Project is working with women weavers at a micro level in craft villages in Northern Thailand [1]. [Fig.1-2](#)

Fashion designers Alison Welsh and Jasper Chadprajong-Smith are working hand-in-hand with Tai Lue weavers from the Silalang community in Nan province, a mountainous agricultural region of north-east Thailand. Together they are developing new garments using traditional hand-woven cotton textiles. The project aims to explore methods of equipping local artisans with knowledge in design thinking and the ability to integrate their cultural identity into their cloth in an authentic and thoughtful way. [Fig.3-5](#)

The communities still create hand-loomed cotton fabrics and the designs can be very sophisticated and time consuming

to produce. These designs have passed from one generation to the next; they have not been written down or recorded, and are regarded as family heirlooms. The previous generation of weavers would have dyed the yarns using local vegetable dyes, but the use of natural dyes has been gradually declining. This project is exploring a return to the use of natural dyes to support sustainable and eco-friendly garment production. [Fig.6-7](#)

Before the start of the project, the weavers identified their practical needs, which were to produce new product designs and to understand "how to choose colour to beautifully create products". These needs were identified in an initial Research Framework Report,<sup>[2]</sup> which, combined with the British Council's terms of reference, underpins this work. [Fig.8-11](#)

Methods of co-creation are being tested through practice-based design initiatives.



Fig.3—Ban Donchai (village), 2017. Photograph, Alison Welsh.



Fig.6—Weaving loom. Made from locally grown wood, 2017. Photograph, Alison Welsh.



Fig.4—Ban Hea (village). Yarns drying naturally outside, 2018. Photograph, Alison Welsh.



Fig.7—Ban Sala (village). Natural Dye Yarns and Fabrics, 2017. Photograph, Alison Welsh.



Fig.5—Wat Phumin Temple, Nan. Wall mural (detail), Nineteenth Century. Photograph, Alison Welsh.



Fig.8—Ban Hea (village). Annato seed pods harvested for use in dyeing, 2017. Photograph, Alison Welsh.



Fig.9–Ban Hea (village). Naturally coloured and naturally dyed cotton yarns, 2017. Photograph, Alison Welsh.



Fig.12–Ban Donchai (village), fabric design and garment construction. Alison Welsh, garment design. Ban Don Chai Pha Lab dress, 2017. Photograph, image courtesy of Korn Creative Agency Co. Ltd.



Fig.10–Ban Donchai (village). Hand-carved shuttle, family heirloom, 2018. Photograph, Alison Welsh



Fig.13–Ban Hea (village), fabric design. Jasper Chadprajong-Smith, garment design and construction. Ban Hea shirt, 2017. Photograph, image courtesy of Korn Creative Agency Co. Ltd.



Fig.11–Ban Donchai (village). Weft brush, family heirloom, 2018. Photograph, Alison Welsh.



Fig.14—Ban Sala (village), fabric design. Julie Williams, first phase of construction. Alison Welsh, garment design. Ban Sala Ikat Dress, Phase 1, 2017. Photograph, image courtesy of Korn Creative Agency Co. Ltd.



Fig.15—Ban Sala (village) and Ban Donchai (village), fabric design. Alison Welsh, second phase of garment design and construction. Ban Sala Ikat Dress, Phase 2, 2018. Photograph, Nathan Cutler.

Hybrid garments are created with mutual respect for each other's skills. The relationship is normally an equal balance of fabric design/making and garment design/pattern cutting, with an overlap of shared responsibilities in the middle. [Fig.12-13](#)

The creative process can be likened to a game of consequences, where the responsibility for creative decision making is passed from one person to another. Once a fabric has been designed, the fashion designer and the textile weaver will run through new possibilities for the weave together—a new weight, a change in colour, or a change of scale might be discussed. Then a garment design is created in response to the new fabric design. The next step is for one of the team to make up the garment, then after discussion and feedback in a trying-on session, the garment will be re-worked by the fashion designer. In turn, it will be taken back to the village for more analysis, alterations, and possibly embellishment. This 'consequences'

co-creation method creates a hybrid garment designed by a number of people. [Fig. 14-15](#)

The weavers became active co-researchers through multiple meetings, trying-on sessions, and long discussions focusing on their needs and ambitions over three intensive field trips. Central to the development of shared learning were workshops that focused on natural dyeing and pattern cutting, weaving and colour. [Fig.16-18](#)

An interim outcome of the project was a collection of 20 fashion garments that celebrate the intricacies of Tai Lue weaving. However, it is not the garments themselves that are the outcome here but the knowledge and cross-cultural understanding that have taken place throughout this journey.



Fig.16–Ban Donchai (village). A trying-on and feedback session, 2018. Photograph, Alison Welsh.



Fig.17–Ban Sala (village). A dye workshop with the weavers, yarn being dyed using mango leaves from their gardens and local mud as a mordant. 2017. Photograph, Alison Welsh.



Fig.18–Ban Sala (village), fabric design. Alison Welsh, garment design. Ban Sala Bell Sleeve Dress, 2017. Photograph, Alison Welsh.





Fig.19–Ban Donchai (village).  
Exhibition at the Community Centre,  
2018. Photograph, Alison Welsh.

The joint aims of this project are equipping artisans with design thinking and the integration of their cultural identity into new products, and a significant technical and conceptual design exchange between the participants has taken place. The learning has benefitted all parties, and these new collaborative methods are drawing attention to the community's traditional fabrics, helping them to find their place in the new realms of luxury fashion. [Fig.19-20](#)

#### Acknowledgments

This collaborative research would not have been possible without the valued contributions of the Tai Lue weavers and entrepreneurs at Ban Hea, Ban Sala, and Ban Donchai in Nan Province, Thailand. Thanks are due to the Tai Lue Project team, particularly Jasper Chadprajong-Smith, technical staff from the Manchester Fashion Institute, Sasiwimon Wongjarin and Patcharawee Tunprawat from the British Council, and Professor Stephen Dixon at Manchester Metropolitan University, who have all supported this research.



Fig.20–ArtEZ University, Arnhem.  
The finished garments at the Searching  
for a New Luxury conference, 2018.  
Photograph, Alison Welsh.

#### Footnotes

- [1] <https://design.britishcouncil.org/projects/crafting-futures/>.
- [2] This information is based on the outcomes within Part 3 of a report prepared for the project by Chain Mai University, *The Research Framework of Tai Lue Textile from Silalang*, in section 'The Needs of Weaver and Textile Crafting Business Entrepreneurs Concerning Product Development'.

#### Alison Welsh

Alison Welsh is Head of Fashion Research at Manchester Metropolitan University and is based within the Manchester Fashion Institute. Welsh is a fashion designer and educator with four years of departmental leadership experience. She works with communities and museums, advocating fashion and textiles as instruments for social change. Her research focuses on developing models of sustainable craft and design collaboration, to stimulate regeneration of rural craft practices and their dependent communities through design initiatives with commercial outcomes. She has been collaborating with craftsmen and women in Gujarat, India for approximately 10 years. She is currently participating in a project run by the British Council, Focusing on Design Thinking and Cultural Identities.

Read online:

<http://apria.artez.nl/fashioning-tradition/>

# Crossovers

## *Food & Fashion and the Impact of Science*

This text is based on Louise Fresco's contribution to a panel discussion led by Farid Tabarki on 31 May 2018, the first day of the Fashion Colloquium. Other contributors to the panel were keynote speakers David Bollier, Oskar Metsavaht, and Pascale Gatzien.

*FT: Louise, you bring to this debate two angles: science and food. How can science and research be helpful in developing our systems? And what can we learn from the perspective of the system of food?*

LF: Basically, food and clothing have on the deepest level many things in common. Both are biological products—this is products from nature. Both are the most intimate avenues in the way we communicate with nature. In the case of food, even more so; we digest it. Both are produced from natural fibres or natural chemicals through an ecological process. We as humans use knowledge, science, to get the best possible products. We want food that does not go to waste immediately, that has the best content of vitamins, etc. We want fibres that don't use themselves up within a few days. Even the most artificial fibres that come from the petrochemical industries are still fossil, natural fibres. So everything you wear is natural.

There are some lessons to be learned for fashion from food. Both are very emotional. Food and fashion are identity. Tell me what you eat or wear, and I will tell you who you are. It is difficult to talk about them in general. Your taste may not be mine, but there are some basic principles that are important. The devil is in the details. It is the details of how we produce that determine if something is sustainable or not. In my view,

sustainability is never an easy 100%. It is always a trade-off between different types of goals. If you say we don't want to have cotton grown on fields any more, we only want recycled cotton. Let's assume that that is possible. That sounds good from an environmental perspective. But we take away a livelihood from a small farmer in India, which also has a negative social cost.

Remember the famous dimensions: people, profit, planet. It's very important to understand that there is hardly ever something like an absolute form of sustainability. But there is an issue of effects locally, or at a longer distance, or effects now, or in the future.

We should do life-cycle analyses. *If we want to go for alternatives, let's really go and calculate what we want do.* Using and reusing fibres is an excellent idea. But we should also ask, how much water does it ask—how much energy—is involved when we clean up things. What kinds of dyes are we using? For Wageningen University, it is interesting to look at food waste as a source for fibres. Food waste in Europe represents 60% of Europe's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

*FT: What does it mean for designers? How can they act more responsible to this life cycle notion?*

LF: One of the problems we have is that we try to optimize little fragments of the whole production chain. What we really need is to look at the whole cycle. That starts before productions. What kind of inputs do you need? And how does this go all the way down to the consumer? Technology will help us with this. We have now sensors and ways to weave in materials that help

to trace from the source all the way to the consumer. That he/she has the security, that what he/she buys has this authenticity. That will give a far greater comfort to consumers. This applies to food and fashion and textiles, but also to the wood of our floor in your house. This is about a paradigm shift. We go from a linear economy to a circular economy. Everything is a (re)source for new production. That's what ecology is all about.

*FT: Do you agree with that we lost that feeling of being part of a community?*

LF: I think everybody wants to and must belong or connect to a community. One notion of caution here. It is easy to say it all has to be human transactions, face to face, locally sourced. The reality is that two thirds of the world population lives in urban centres. We have already 35 cities of more than 10 million inhabitants. There are many parts where this connectedness and poverty is a real issue. Very often the urban poor have no choice or chance not to pollute or buy things that are cheaply and poorly made. I would look to a solution to finding a local scale but also a value chain that gives the best possible sustainable values to those who are not able to go for the real fashion. I think it's the responsibility of the industry to make sure that through designing and the invention and reinvention of the value chain, we also reach those who are hard to reach. Poverty is a very strong factor in our societies. We should take responsibility for that.

*FT: A critical notion on circular economy is that it does not change our mind-set because it is still about consuming. The idea that consuming and even consuming more is fine but because we do it in a circular way it is fine. Can you respond to that?*

LF: If we wait for a paradigm shift or a cultural change, in the meantime we better produce in the best possible way. This

probably proves true even stronger for food than for fashion. We have a strong need to want to have things. That is such a fundamental driver. It is very hard for people to stop. There are experiments that show that people do not stop eating if you feed them in a particular way. Although we know in the brain that our saturation point has been reached, we will not stop. That's because the drive to feed or cloth or protect ourselves is very strong. It is very difficult for people to change that. We have to move to a culture and economy that has this quality of 'I have enough'. Good habits in terms of sustainable behaviour, of caring for each other, and human connectedness come at an early age in childhood. That's what we are lacking. In order to get us into a different type of driver (not the more I have), we also have to look at the generations that go now to the cheap fast fashion places and throw clothes away after two or three months when they are not in fashion any more. The whole concept of what is in fashion is very sensitive. That also applies to food. Food also has fashions. We should discuss that. That awareness about changing our relation to our natural world and what we take from it—that is a real challenge. It does not come easy. That's why I still think we need solutions. If we have to wait for a world population of 10 billion to become a world society of having enough, we will have to wait a long time.

*FT: How can science and education have an impact in developing this narrative?*

LF: The main task of education and science in developing this narrative has two basic dimensions. The cultural one, which is a matter of sensitizing people, of creating awareness, of organizing alternative markets or supply chains, etc. The other one is understanding very well how the capitalist system works. Otherwise, you would be very naïve. That has to be part of your education.

The matter is in the details again. I would look for students who are able to analyse the different ways of producing things, and of how satisfaction comes about. There is good research that shows that when people do something that is perceived as a good, objective, altruistic deed, the same type of neural systems in the brain that are activated as, for example, by eating organic food. So understanding the neurological basis of satisfaction would be important, but also understanding the chemistry of how fibres can be used and reused and what design does. There is satisfaction in having things that last and play a role in your own life and in learning how to attach positive images to the objects that we have. But in our field, you must also have a real quantitative understanding of what the differences are between, for example, wearing organic or recycled cotton, between eating an organic or an ordinary apple. Literature and art are beautiful, but you also have to learn how to calculate.

Louise Fresco

Professor Louise O. Fresco has been appointed as President of the Executive Board of Wageningen University & Research with effect from 1 July 2014. From 2006 to July 1, 2014 she was University Professor at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) specialized in the foundations of sustainable development in an international context. Since 2000, she has served as Assistant Director-General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Rome.

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# Aesthetic Sustainability

When I initially became engaged in sustainability research, I was quickly captivated by the aspects of sustainability connected to human behaviour—particularly our lack of connection to the majority of the items we surround ourselves with, and our tendency to discard them without further thought. Furthermore, I was fascinated by the fact that, contrariwise, some objects are important to us—we find pleasure in using them, we take care of them, and we even mend them. It seems that there is a difference between significant and insignificant objects. Therefore, I outlined this initial research question:

*Why do we dispose of some things before their use has expired, while others are kept and repaired time and time again, despite their wear and tear?*

My hypothesis is that the answer to this question is connected to aesthetics. Longevity is more than wear resistance. Unless the objects that we use, and wear, meet our aesthetic needs, we are disinclined to keep and sustain them. Unless our furniture and garments contain aesthetic longevity, we tend to replace them. Hence, in order for an object to be truly sustainable, it must be attractive enough for users to want to keep repairing and reusing it, and it must meet the human need for aesthetic nourishment. Consequently, the most sustainable object is an aesthetically sustainable object. An object that nourishes our senses and is made to be used. An object that gets better or more attractive when worn and used. An object that decays in an aesthetic way.

In the following sections, I will outline various aspects of my theory, as well as the aesthetic strategy that I have developed in *Aesthetic Sustainability, Product Design and Sustainable Usage*.

## Aesthetic Nourishment

In sustainability debates, the three R's (Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle) are often underlined as a sustainable rule of thumb. However, in my approach to sustainability, I mainly emphasize the importance of *reducing*. This is not done to underestimate the value or importance of the other two R's. But no matter how good we are at recycling waste materials into new materials and objects, it still requires large amounts of natural resources to do so. And no matter how efficiently we reuse discarded objects by implementing take-back systems, it doesn't eliminate the fact that there are too many unwanted things in the world. I recently had a concrete experience of this when, after cleaning out my wardrobe, I went to a second-hand shop in Copenhagen that focuses on supporting low-income families. I brought a large bag of used clothes that I wanted to donate. The women that run the shop were thankful but were also sorry to tell me that they receive far too many discarded clothes, and that they simply aren't able to sort through and re-sell them all. Their back room was overflowing with discarded garments—discarded garments that, mind you, were still usable and wearable but that were nevertheless unwanted by their previous owners because they somehow didn't 'work' for them anymore. They were 'wrong' in some way or the other. Like the garments in my bag, they were unimportant and obsolete since they didn't provide their owners with aesthetic nourishment.

Aesthetic nourishment is related to the experience of beauty. When we feel aesthetically nourished, we are stimulated by beauty in the context of new or familiar surroundings or objects. Aesthetic experiences are 'stored up' in our bodies and minds and can hence be described as nourishing. They

‘build’ us up, and they linger. Designers can help rouse their recipients’ senses and minds and nourish them aesthetically by creating products that are sensorially stimulating and durable—they have the potential of being experienced, continually, as thought provoking, beautiful, challenging, or comfortable. Aesthetically sustainable products are precisely characterized by offering the recipient aesthetic nourishment time and time again.

The nourishing and durable aesthetic experience of an artefact is both visual and tactile. The Greek word *aisthetikos*, the origin of ‘aesthetics’, means sensation. This meaning is rarely conveyed by the word ‘aesthetics’ today, as it is typically used to connote a visual aesthetic experience. But an aesthetic experience is a sensorial experience, which isn’t solely visually appealing (or beautiful or picturesque); it is also tactile. I use the term ‘texturesque’ as a counterpart to picturesque in order to point to something beyond the picturesque or visual qualities of an aesthetic experience. The texturesque design experience is characterized by tactile stimulation that nourishes and cultivates the recipient’s sense of touch.

A thorough design process is a cornerstone when creating long-lasting objects that may enrich the user’s everyday life aesthetically. Slowness, so to speak, passes both forwards and backwards. Artefacts that have been infused with time and careful considerations—and that have been marked by the hands that literally or metaphorically shaped them—invite users to give them a long life. The aesthetically sustainable object is an object that has been created to be used and appreciated day after day. It is a crafty and visionary thing.

Danish philosopher and sculptor Willy Ørskov (1920–1990) deals with three concepts of time that are highly relevant in regard to exploring aesthetic sustainability: the time of becoming, the time of



Fig.1—Susanne Guldager,  
Process photo, 2018

existence, and the time of being. In my usage of Ørskov’s concepts of time [Harper Chapter 4](#), they can be applied as guiding principles in relation to the design process. The designer can *charge* an object with time, and thus seek to create a durable connection between subject and object. Briefly put, Ørskov’s three concepts of time can be defined like this: The time of becoming is the process time, which can manifest as visible or tactile traces in the object; the time of existence is related to the way an object decays or ‘deals’ with wear and tear. If designed to ‘embrace’ usage, an object gets better, or more aesthetically pleasing, as the time of existence passes by. The time of being is the most abstract of the three concepts of time; it is, so to speak, the time it takes the recipient or user to *be with* an object in order to detect or comprehend it. The time of being can either be of long or short duration. Conditioned by how complex the object is, a kind of ‘inflection’ takes place. Hence, the time of being is associated with the interplay between a subject and an object that the process of detection demands; the focus is the aesthetic experience itself. Prolonging the time of being



Fig.2—Susanne Guldager,  
Canvas Dress #2, 2018

betrays a potential for establishing a durable or sustainable bond between subject and object, since this temporal extension, and the break it introduces, ‘forces’ the subject to experience a sense of presence. The intense experience, following the experience of a prolonged time of being, tends to linger.

Ørskov’s phenomenological point of view means that he considers physical objects, and what shows itself to consciousness (phenomena), as the most crucial path to insight. The body and the senses, in other words, constitute the most vital point of entry for human beings to navigate and understand the world. And the object (which for Ørskov concerns the sculpture primarily, but which in my interpretation and usage of the terms can also encompass the ‘design-object’ more broadly conceived) is a source for understanding more about life and the world—through the body and by way of the senses, rather than through cognition or reflection. The aesthetic experience based on phenomenological insight is neither intellectual nor founded on thought in any way; instead, it is corporeal and sensuous.

The symbolic side of an object—meaning the connotations that an object might trigger—is, to Ørskov, only a secondary quality, whereas the primary quality concerns the purely physical and spatial existence or presence of an object. As such, it is by ‘being-present-with’ an object that the world becomes available to the subject in a new way, rather than by interpreting its symbolic value.

### Aesthetic Strategy

*The experience of beauty cannot be as subjective as it first appears to the person affected by it. If the productive effort to create beauty is to have any meaning at all, then it must be supposed that our experiences of beauty are, at least to a certain extent, shared. [...] The artist, the designer, the architect will want to know what he or she has to do to ensure that a public will experience his or her objects or arrangements as beautiful. And to say what the artist has to do would be the task of aesthetics.* <sup>Böhme 23</sup>

According to the German philosopher Gernot Böhme (b. 1937), different experiences of beauty are similar in kind, despite their apparently subjective nature, and are, therefore, characterized by a certain universality or by being common to all (or most) human beings. This is probably why we enjoy reading fiction about the experience of unity in the world, or why we get caught up in film sequences about other people’s sensuous experiences of beauty. If there were no similarities between different human beings’ experiences of beauty, it would not make sense that we feel a certain satisfaction characterized by the joy of recognition or understanding, compassion and identification, when exposed to a description of other people’s enlightening, beautiful, or harmonious aesthetic experiences. It is precisely this

point—that the aesthetic experience is characterized by being universal, and that it thus (largely) defies cultural and zeitgeist-based differences—that forms the basis of my definition of aesthetic sustainability. Furthermore, this universality is fundamental to the aesthetic strategy that I outline below.

In *Aesthetic Sustainability, Product Design and Sustainable Usage*, I explore the aesthetic experience and the fundamental division between the beautiful and the sublime, which constitutes the basis for the aesthetic strategy that I have developed in the book. The aesthetic strategy is meant as a tool for the designer to be used in the design process in order to create long-lived, aesthetically nourishing products. The historical division between the beautiful and the sublime indicates that an aesthetic experience is not necessarily linked only to beauty but can also be induced by something unpleasant, unbalanced, distorted, or even the hideous, yet still aesthetically fulfilling. This counterpoint to the beautiful aesthetic experience is defined by the sublime. The difference between the beautiful and the sublime concerns the difference between order and chaos, symmetry and asymmetry, predictability and unpredictability, demarcation and boundlessness, shape and shapelessness, proportion and irregularity, and between the comfort providing the aesthetic experience and the special kind of aesthetic experience that challenges us or breaks our comfort zone. Hence, the sublime aesthetic experience pulls us away from familiarity and the well-known and forces us to be present.

The connection between the beautiful and shape, or proportion and balance, is rooted in ancient times. Aristotle (384–322 BC) describes in his *Metaphysics* how the Pythagoreans (from the sixth century BC) viewed the world's manifestations as mathematically structured and determined by numeric relations. To the Pythagoreans,

beauty was identical to order; as a result, it was linked not only to the human experience of the world but rather to something absolute, something unchangeable and universal. Beauty was seen as the sum of the world's harmonious, symmetrical, proportional forms [Jørgensen 29](#).

In the Platonic dialogue *Hippias Major* (c. 390 BC), Socrates and Hippias are searching for a definition of beauty, and as part of this search, they try to determine whether a spoon made from gold is more beautiful than one made from fig-wood [Plato 908](#). Socrates feigns uncertainty. Of course, a golden spoon is finer (and thus more attractive) than its wooden counterpart, but it is harder to handle when eating soup. In the final analysis, the wooden spoon is more beautiful since it is better at being what it is (that is, a spoon)—it is more functional, useful. For Plato, beauty is linked to the *good*. In this way, for an object to be considered beautiful and, hence, durable, the material must, fundamentally, follow form.

In eighteenth-century aesthetic and philosophical treatises, the idea of the sublime comes prominently to the fore. The sublime is generally considered as a counterpoint to classic beauty, and thereby as something formless, chaotic, horrific, and alien. The sublime is the antithesis to that which is proportioned, symmetrical, and graceful. The first to name the difference between beautiful and sublime aesthetic experiences is British critic Joseph Addison (1672–1719). However, in *Poetics* (c. 335 BC), Aristotle had already called attention to the multifaceted nature of aesthetic experiences. Using the concept of catharsis, he discusses the nature of aesthetics, touching upon the curious phenomenon of how human beings are drawn to moments of emotional release—such as bawling at a sentimental theatre play (or movie)—and how they even find comfort in doing so [Aristotle](#).



An example of one of the eighteenth-century's pioneering treatises on the division between the beautiful and the sublime is *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* from 1757, in which British philosopher Edmund Burke (1729–1797) connects the sublime to vast, redoubtable (nature-)experiences. Burke suggests that the classical ideal of beauty—as pursued by neoclassical artists, who (referencing the Hellenistic worldview) adhered to symmetry, harmony, and order—no longer includes all facets of the beautiful, and he uses the concept of the sublime to connote everything that evokes aesthetic pleasure, but which falls outside the sphere of classical beauty.

When I started developing the theory of aesthetic sustainability and the aesthetic strategy, my initial assumption was that the most durable expression is easy to decode and appears balanced and in proportion to its message. This kind of expression contains a certain degree of 'neutrality' and minimalism. 'Neutrality' here is understood as referring to harmonious objects that may appear in many different contexts and appeal to a broad range of tastes; they comprise a kind of expressive or common universality. Furthermore, that aesthetic sustainability is joined to expressions producing a form of pleasure that is founded on the expectation that basic rules regarding symmetry, harmonious colour schemes, and design materials are maintained. This angle on durability is linked to the beautiful aesthetic experience. Inspired by the division between the beautiful and the sublime aesthetic experience, I was—and still am—also fascinated by an opposite, yet related, question: can a sustainable expression be so complex and challenging that it demands a sustained interest in exploring it (for an extended period of time)? Is the most aesthetically sustainable object a thing of such elevated complexity that

the user is immediately (and time and time again) challenged and forced to consider its provenance in relation to the surrounding world? Perhaps the pleasure of sustainable objects lies in their ability to disrupt the user's comfort zone since colour schemes bleed and asymmetrical shapes confront our powers of perception and conception when combined with the use of unexpected materials. Understood in this way, sustainable artefacts possess a multifunctional dimension, in either a practical or aesthetic sense, that enhances their aesthetic flexibility. This perspective is related to the sublime aesthetic experience.

It is important to note that neither approach cancels out the other. The point is rather that each form a different overall strategy for analysing and working with aesthetic sustainability. I usually view them as the *yin-yang* of sustainable aesthetics. I have named the first approach 'the Pleasure of the Familiar' and the second as 'the Pleasure of the Unfamiliar'.

Regarding the universality of the aesthetic experience (that I touched upon in the beginning of this section, and on which I elaborate thoroughly on in *Aesthetic Sustainability, Product Design and Sustainable Usage*), I draw, among others, on the perception theory by German philosopher and psychologist of perception Rudolf Arnheim (1904–2007). Arnheim considers a natural function of sight to actively select and categorize: for example, oval shapes are spontaneously and immediately categorized as variations on circles. In the effort to order and understand our surroundings, the human sense organs will naturally seek out forms that are easy to recognize and label. In *Art and Visual Perception*, Arnheim lays out a number of concrete principles for spontaneous universal human visual experiences. For example, it may be that "an unbalanced composition looks accidental, transitory, and therefore invalid"

Arnheim 20, and consequently, designers seeking to satisfy the spontaneous universal human pleasure derived from balanced expressions should work toward creating well-balanced pieces. The human senses search for balance and harmony and will thus be ‘repelled’ or confused by unbalanced pieces.

As a designer, it is of course possible to challenge the universal and instantaneous drive to juxtapose and categorize sense impressions in order to understand them. However, since the human gaze is constantly looking to structure and order its surroundings, by accommodating this drive artefacts can create a high degree of immediate satisfaction or instant *pay-off*. This immediate kind of satisfaction is connected to the Pleasure of the Familiar and to the beautiful aesthetic experience. Contrarily, challenging the human need to categorize and recognize is linked to the Pleasure of the Unfamiliar.

The beautiful and the Pleasure of the Familiar involve an experience of impeccability, harmony, symmetry, and limitation, as well as an experience of being able to easily comprehend or decode and apprehend a given object. By contrast, the sublime and the Pleasure of the Unfamiliar demand, antithetically, the dissolution of forms, harmonies, and symmetries; this side of the aesthetic spectrum can be accessed through objects or concepts that are difficult to apprehend and decode, or not easily ‘taken in’. The Pleasure of the Unfamiliar is characterized by an almost magnetic and corporeal or sensuous kind of attraction (the fingers just *have* to touch, investigate, and prod), as well as a bodily and psychological *taking-a-step-back-from* to recover control through a moment’s reflection and a processing of one’s sense impressions. Herein lies the strength of this form of aesthetic pleasure: the fact that what overwhelms or disgusts us is that much harder to ‘shake off’. The feeling of being in a room with a challenging (design-)

object lingers, so to speak, for a while afterwards, and it can be difficult to forget the experience.

The aesthetic strategy is structured around four conceptual pairs that constitute each other’s opposite, meaning that they either provide the receiver with the Pleasure of the Familiar or the Pleasure of the Unfamiliar. The four pairs are the following:

- instant payoff versus instant presence
- comfort booster versus breaking the comfort zone
- pattern booster versus pattern breaker
- blending in versus standing out

Designers wanting to give the recipient an aesthetic experience in line with either instant payoff or instant presence should primarily seek to appeal to the recipient’s senses and bodily presence; these categories are, in other words, based on phenomenological detection. If the emphasis is on either boosting or breaking the recipient’s comfort zone, designers should focus on working symbolic value into the product, and, hence, semiotic decoding. The same goes for the two other conceptual pairs. Working with pattern boosting or pattern breaking is related to the sensuous aesthetic experience, whereas the categories blending in and standing out are more closely associated with either meeting or challenging the recipient’s basic cultural and societal assumptions and the identity providing qualities of design-objects. In the following section, I elaborate on one of the four conceptual pairs, namely instant payoff versus instant presence, in order to exemplify the way the strategy is built up.

### **Instant Payoff versus Instant Presence**

Seeking to provide the recipient of a design-object with an experience of either instant payoff or instant presence implies that the recipient is either able to instantly detect and

use the design-object, or that she is being challenged due to the materials, shapes, and colors used, hence making her suddenly feel very present or torn from her daily 'hypnotic' activities. The category of instant payoff/presence is especially useful in the creation of physical objects, as opposed to intangible design-concepts or experience-design, since the focus is on sensuous experiences. In the instant payoff/presence category, the recipient's sensuous handling of the object is the centre of attention. The focal point of this category is the phenomenological experience of the object itself, rather than the connotations triggered by the object.

No matter which type of aesthetic experience one aims to provide the recipient with—or in what way one strives to nourish the recipient aesthetically—thorough knowledge of the target audience is essential. In relation to instant payoff/presence, it is particularly important to obtain knowledge about the recipient's bodily or sensual basic assumptions. For example, what does the recipient expect when introduced to a winter coat? Are there certain materials she specifically associates with outerwear? Are there certain colours, colour combinations, or patterns that are generally linked to the product category in question? Only by knowing what the recipient expects is it possible either to meet or to challenge those expectations, and thus to either provide the recipient with a sense-based Pleasure of the Familiar or with the opposite.

### **Instant Payoff: Accommodating Tactile Expectations**

Designers working with an aesthetic strategy that includes instant payoff should basically meet the recipient's sensuous expectations, meaning the recipient's anticipations regarding the sensations of the product—how it 'should' feel when touched, held, lifted, or worn. A particularly satisfactory instant

payoff experience can be triggered by imbuing a product with an immanent or obvious way of using it, thus rendering it transparent. This would imply that the product itself, without the use of supplementary words in the form of hang tags or other such text, can 'explain' to the recipient how to use it. As part of the instant payoff experience, the aesthetic quality of an object must be easy to detect as well as how to use the object immediately. This aesthetic category should, therefore, lead to creating unobtrusive and accessible objects of harmonious expression.

The aesthetic experience of instant payoff is straightforward and characterized by an instant connection between the object and the recipient, and, hence, the Pleasure of the Familiar. The recipient gets what she expects, or maybe an even more 'tailored' product experience than she could ever imagine.

The aesthetically sustainable object *juggles* both familiarity (the resemblance of something the recipient is already familiar with and, as such, has seen or touched before) and rejuvenating variation. The rejuvenating or regenerative element can, in relation to instant payoff, be relatively understated and can involve, for example, the use of materials that can easily adapt to the shape of the object, thus fitting the idiom perfectly but at the same time differing slightly from materials that would usually be used in similar objects. Maybe they work even better. Or maybe they are more sustainable. Incorporating an instant payoff strategy into the design process can advantageously include a study of how much renewal an object, such as a coat, a chair, or a coffee cup can hold: How far can you stretch the shape or the sensory qualities that characterize the object and still be confident that it can give the recipient a pleasurable instant payoff experience?

Working with instant payoff as one of the building blocks of one's aesthetic



Fig.3—Susanne Guldager,  
Wrap Me Jumpsuit, 2018

strategy includes having the following guidelines in mind:

- The product should basically be quickly and easily detected; the usage of it should ideally even be a part of the idiom. The instructions for use, so to speak, must be inherent.
- Functionality should be in focus, akin “the most beautiful spoon is the spoon which is best at being a spoon and hence is made of a material that can actually withstand being used for cooking and eating”. The object should be immediately usable, functional and ‘talk’ to the user’s hands.
- The recipient’s physical and sensual expectations must be met; if the design object appears heavy, it should be heavy, and if the object looks soft, it should be soft.

- Non-complex, symmetrical, harmonious structures are typically perceived as easily detectable and should therefore dominate the product expression in accordance with instant payoff.
- The material must ‘fit’ the shape—or it should have a minimal degree of inertia in relation to the object’s shape.
- The experience of the object should be characterized by a short time of being. It must, so to speak, be easily accessible.

### Instant Presence: Challenging Sensuous Assumptions

*“The more different temporalities are deposited in an object, the richer and more complex its appearance”* Ørskov 84

As shown by this quotation, working different time courses into an object will make it appear complex and hard to detect, according to Ørskov—and when working with the instant presence category, complexity is desirable. Hence, if one *charges* an object with both the time of becoming and the time of existence and simultaneously (or due to this) aims for a prolonging of the time of being, the object-accessibility will be remarkably reduced and thereby the recipient might experience the Pleasurable of the Unfamiliar.

A product that is charged with different temporalities or that appears complex due to, for example, asymmetry or the use of a material that doesn’t seem to match its shape is intrusive. It forces the recipient to stop. It forces her to be present. And the sudden presence is the core of this aesthetic category. Aesthetic nourishment in an instant presence way includes being forced to be present, forced to relate to the object one is facing, touching, or holding, and forced,

more or less brutally, out of the daily grind. An aesthetic instant present experience is often characterized by self-awareness; the recipient's expectations are underlined, and she is thereby confronted with her experiential limitations.

The arts, whatever their materials, pressed forward by the aesthetics of the sublime in search of intense effects, can and must give up the imitation of models that are merely beautiful and try out surprising, strange, shocking combinations [Lyotard 100](#).

As the quotation points out, according to French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924–1998), surprising, strange, or shocking combinations (of shapes, materials and colours) can be effective agents when aiming to pull one's recipient out of her daily hypnotic chores, or 'force' her to be sensuously, physically present. The fact that something (unexpected) is happening can cause the pleasurable instant presence experience.

If the designer works with instant presence as a jigsaw piece of her aesthetic strategy, it will generally include aiming for an extension of the time of being or the detection time—thus retaining the recipient in *chaos* for an extended moment with the intention of inducing the Pleasure of the Unfamiliar. In order to achieve this, one can work with one or more of the following guidelines as a part of the design process:

- Disrupt universal aesthetic principles for composition and harmony, such as asymmetry or interfering with colour harmonies. Working with such disruptions is a way of challenging the visual sense, since the eye of the recipient is unable to immediately find balance and structure and to capture or conceptualize the object. Thus, the time of being is prolonged.
- Repeal gravity in the sense that the designer can 'play' with

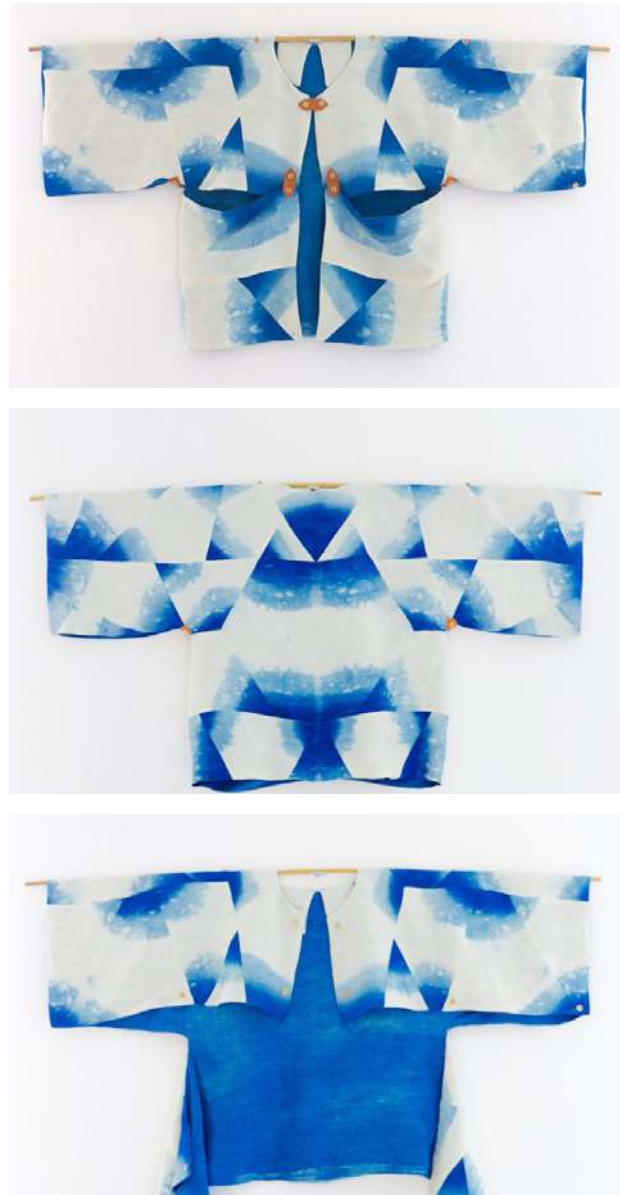


Fig.4—Sofie Edvard, An Archive of Usage #1, versions 1, 2, and 3, 2017

something that ostensibly looks light when in fact it is heavy. For example, one could create an illusion of lightness by imitating lace or other featherweight fabrics as print on a heavy material—or simply create a hole-pattern in a compact material and thereby visually break its dense surface.

- Redesign focussing on using materials and/or objects in new ways or in new contexts. An example of this could find inspiration in the

principles of ready-made art and Surrealism and place objects that belong in one particular context into another, thus experimenting with “surprising, strange, shocking combinations”<sup>Lyotard 100; emphasis added.</sup>

- Charge the object with time. By underlining the time of becoming or the design process in the object itself, whilst emphasizing the time of existence, the complexity of the object will be increased and the detection time will be prolonged. For example, by incorporating flexibility or open shapes into the design, or by creating an illusion of wear or decay, several different time courses are deposited in the object. Garments with aesthetic flexibility and inherent changeability in the aesthetics or the expression of the object can challenge the way we use clothes. Incorporating open, changeable shapes into a dress or a jacket is a way of inviting the user to engage in sensuous explorations and a way of prolonging the lifespan of the garment.

I would like to finish this article by answering my initial research question:

*Why do we dispose of some things before their use has expired, while others are kept and repaired time and time again, despite their wear and tear?*

A simplified answer could be because the things that are insignificant to us—that we hence discard without further thought—don’t nourish us aesthetically, due to the fact that they provide us with neither the Pleasure of the Familiar nor the Pleasure of the Unfamiliar.

Read online:

<http://apria.artez.nl/aesthetic-sustainability/>

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### Kristine H. Harper

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# RES MATERIA

Res Materia is an artistic research project by fashion designer Sanne Karssenber that proposes a personalized form of the reproduction of garments and an alternative form of value creation.

The title Res Materia is inspired by the Latin phrase Res Publica, meaning ‘public affairs’ or ‘commonwealth’. Res is a Latin noun for a substance or a concrete thing. ‘Materia’ is Latin for material. In this project, the material and the thing, or in this case, the textile

and the garment, are the starting point for an embodied reproduction of garments—an attempt to bring change into ‘public affairs’.

In this project, a person brings in a garment with a history, or a special emotional value or personal memory.

This is a piece that one would not throw away but also no longer wants to wear. The garment is then shredded and its remnants are re-used as a layer on another garment by the same wearer.



**TIMO RISSANEN** wearer /  
**H&M CONSCIOUS** garment /  
**VIVIENNE WESTWOOD** garment /  
**SANNE KARSENBERG** designer /

**GARMENT 1 - to shred**  
**H&M conscious collection**

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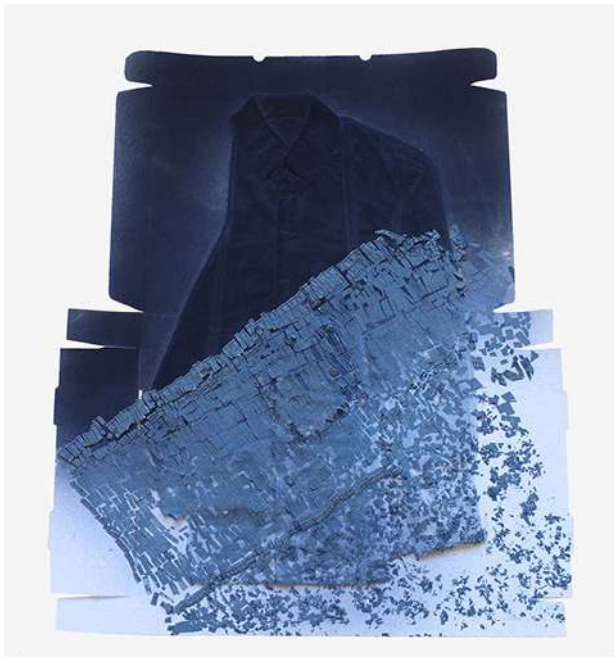
Material	coton
Color	denim blue
Date of purchase	2014
Place of purchase	New York
Manner of purchase	present from work
Use quantity	approximately a 100 times
Favorite time/ place	on the move, travels
Default	actor in a planned obsolescence business model
Loved	the quality of the material, the ease in use and maintaining
Worn signature	Worn out elbows



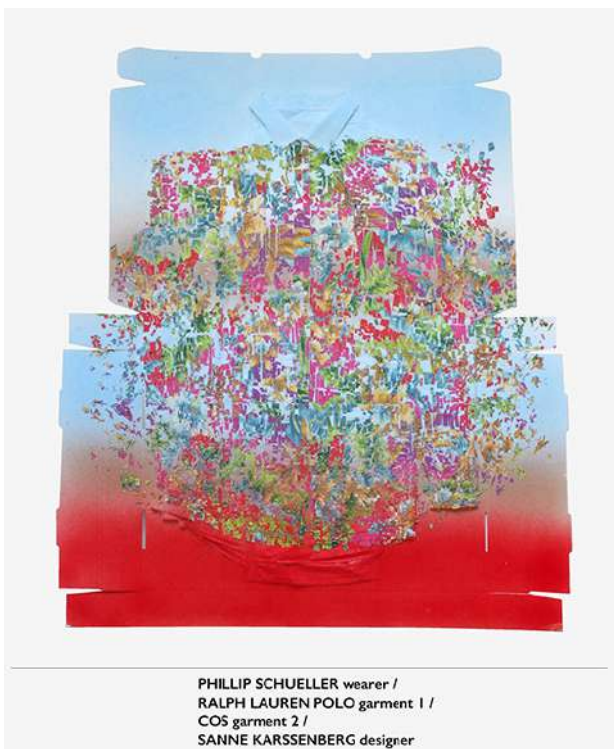
**GARMENT 2 - to keep**  
**Vivienne Westwood London**

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Material	coton
Color	dark blue
Date of purchase	2014
Place of purchase	New York
Manner of purchase	bought in a discount store
Use quantity	approximately a 100 times
Favorite time/ place	leadership position
Default	the fusion is stiff, this ruins the fabric
Loved	The fit and style
Worn signature	worn out collar and cuffs



TIMO RISSANEN wearer /  
VIVIENNE WESTWOOD garment 1 /  
H&M CONSCIOUS garment 2 /  
SANNE KARSSENBERG designer



PHILLIP SCHUELLER wearer /  
RALPH LAUREN POLO garment 1 /  
COS garment 2 /  
SANNE KARSSENBERG designer



PIETER VAN BOGAERT wearer /  
AGNES B. garment 1 /  
NEWYORKINDUSTRIES garment 2 /  
SANNE KARSSENBERG designer

The added layer provides a new aesthetic component and is a way to repair torn or worn out pieces of the second garment.

The added layer does not hide its recycled aesthetics, but rather turns recycling into an added value. Hence, this specific technique emphasizes the garment's transformation into its next life. The old remains present within the new.

A cardboard packaging material is used as a frame during the transformation process. The resulting product is a combination of the transformed garment and the cardboard. This item will be shipped back to the wearer in this casing. It is up to the wearer to keep the garment as an artefact, or to unpack it and wear it again. If worn again, the same transformation process can be repeated endlessly. A desire for the new is altered into a process of change.



In times of mass production and overconsumption, this project presents the process of re-using or even upcycling worn clothes that have a special meaning or affective value for the wearer as an alternative strategy for value production. Instead of merely representing 'the new', Res Materia explores how clothes can express personalized forms of upcycling. In doing so, Karssenbergh contributes to a critical fashion discourse.

Different wearers are invited to join the project as participants. The garments are a starting point for a dialogue about the individual's relation to the garment and fashion's societal impact. Both the material specifics of the garment, such as the brand and textile composition, and its personal history, like the favourite place to wear the garment, are revealed as part of the material value production.

#### Sanne Karssenbergh

Sanne Karssenbergh obtained her Masters in Art and Design at the Sandberg Instituut, Fashion Matters in 2017. Her work is situated in the intersection of art and design, with a strong focus on materiality and textile. She investigates and designs alternative perspectives and strategies within fashion. The relation between individual identity and global production, which she critically analysed in her MA thesis and project, are her main points of interest. Her work explores the role personalization can play for a possible future of embodied fashion design by focusing on the relationship between the wearer and their garments. She employs different media and forms to investigate how individual stories reflect and relate to larger societal structures. Currently, she develops self-initiated projects, working both collaboratively and on commission. She lives and works in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Read online:

<http://apria.artez.nl/res-materia/>

# Love songs

## *Fashion, Flirting, and Biosocial Growth*

*“Everybody’s got the fever,  
That is something you all know,  
Fever isn’t such a new thing,  
Fever started long ago.”*  
Elvis Presley, “Fever”

It may seem obvious that the best way to challenge today’s accelerated and unfettered consumerism is with frugality and calls for more lasting experiences—for example, through ‘slow fashion’. However, this ascetic response of austerity and self-denial seems at odds with the more passionate connections of dress and desire. It seems reasonable to aim for lasting and emotionally durable designs. Yet as with our passions and love in general, making emotions last is no easy thing. Or rather, it seems almost natural that suffering can be lasting and chronic, however unwanted (such as depressions), yet euphoria and bliss can only exist as ephemeral waves of elation. By definition, passions appear unsustainable and unquenchable.

Perhaps we must approach fashion differently if we are to make it sustainable. Our first question must be *what it is* we want to sustain in the current phenomenon of fashion. *What do we want to sustain?* Or to perhaps put it more poignantly: what do we want to *save* in fashion, since we have to give up the current model of consumerism in order to sustain life on our planet?

Some ascetics would argue that we technically don’t *need* fashion to survive. Fashion is, after all, a problem of aesthetic abundance. To even spend time thinking of fashion is a form of luxury and excess. But at the same time, our culture is saturated by unnecessary and unsustainable practices—not least the arts, which is drowning in its own wastefulness. The whole aesthetic sensorium of life itself seems dependent on

squandering, from the continuous production of flowers and beauty in the realm of nature, to the human fabrication of new paintings and novels. I myself often revel in the needless multiplication of new love songs, these ceaseless loops of desires, passions, heartaches, and longing, which seem to just feed entire radio stations with endlessly emotive hits.

With the help of love songs, I think we can approach one of the central paradoxes of fashion: every age needs its new looks, just like every generation needs its new love songs. Yes, classics have their place, and may even form the back bone of an aesthetic canon, but every passion is framed in its time, in its emotional *Zeitgeist*, attuned to the sensual landscape of the moment. We may fall in love to the soundtrack of classics, or at the opera, but our passions more likely burst their dams to the tunes of a certain moment. Indeed, if we look back at the pinnacles of our life’s passions, they may be swathed in the soundtracks of those special moments: love songs are accompanying interfaces to our most intimate moments, like radio waves connecting hearts in ways that language often fails. The love song is a *space we enter together*, where our desires meet, play, and excite our shared dreams. They are soundtracks to our sizzling passions.

And even if some of our most intimate moments in life may be sparsely clad, or perhaps enveloped in bedsheets rather than winter jackets, our passionate bodies are most often draped in clothes that in some way answer to the fashion of the time. These garments are, in a sense, also soundtracks to our passions. To understand fashion as an emotional phenomenon of deep interpersonal connection, we should perhaps not only look to mood boards and fashion magazines

but turn the search towards our own bodies, desires, and emotional journeys. We must start to understand fashion from the emotive agency of the body, from the draped soundtracks of our burning desires.

Not unlike the passions of an emerging love affair, or the stirring emotions of the shared love song, when fashion works best, we *feel it in our bodies*. It may be a sense of excitement, allure, or arousal. Fashion is a passion, a sensibility of aesthetic desire, an ephemeral wave of pleasurable anticipation rushing through the body. It is sexually charged, but not necessarily in a narrow, genital sense. Fashion can trigger our erotic imagination, a stirring dream world, but as with sexual fantasies, this may include a wide variety of relationships, events, and scenarios that are not always explicit, nor speak to our more rational side. When fashion works on us, it changes our posture. We feel seen and on top of things. We expand emotionally, socially, and bodily, opening up our sensibilities to the world. We feel a plasmatic pulse of energy streaming along the spine and through our limbs. The eye contact, the affirmative comments and looks; it's like a kick, and once you have experienced it, you cannot get enough. Yes, at its best, fashion is that thrill of appreciation and adoration and a surge of inflammable aliveness sweeping like a wave of pleasure through the body. In a way, it is the fever.

But like passions, our desires can be betrayed, our passions answered by silence, or even ridicule. Thus, when fashion *does not work*, we also feel it in our bodies. We feel the anxiety, humiliation, and shame that emanates from what is jokingly called a 'wardrobe malfunction'. We may not pay attention to it a run-of-the-mill occasion or when we have no witnesses around, but like a numb limb or broken tool, we first recognize it in the moment of failure, we realize the agonizing effects of the clothed wound.

The anxiety makes us cringe, our posture changes, we feel wounded, contract into a ball and try to escape from sight like a suffering animal. We may rationally know that looks do not matter, but the experience of social pain in a humiliating situation may be just too much to bear. Fashion connects not merely to our identity but to the emotional grounding of the body, the very core of our biological being. We desire the pleasures of an answered love, but we fear the exposure and pain of ridicule.

We are born free, but we are constantly held in chain stores. Through the dynamics of dressed pleasure and pain, most of us come to desire our velvet chains of safe conformity. Exposing our passions too publicly feels unsafe and we become anxious when putting our appearance at risk. Whereas some garments come to feel like a safe haven from unwanted attention and comments, other garments help us take social risks, to engage and move socially and emotionally. Such garments help us reach out and touch our social surrounding. On such occasions, we may feel more alive than usual, as people respond to our appearance, and we can feel the touch of their perception, their eyes on us. However, the same looks may feel uncomfortable when it happens in the wrong setting or from an unwanted source. In some instances, it may even be an attention tainted by fear.

In order to unpack these clashing desires of fashion, we could approach it from a biosocial perspective, where the emotions of the body are tightly coupled to the affective dynamics of the social realm. The biosocial perspective on fashion in this essay primarily emerges from the works of psychoanalyst, political theorist, biologist, and natural scientist Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957). Reich's ideas offer a twofold approach to fashion that helps capture two central dynamics in the emotional experience of everyday fashion.

On the one hand, it helps see how *the emotions of fashion are moving the body as a bio-social energy*, how we *feel fashion* as an allure and pleasure (or promise of pleasure). On the other hand, because of its anchoring in the body, we may also *become anxious of the emotions evoked by fashion*, to fear the judgments and responses of others, which in turn draw us towards authorities. Even if Reich's original ideas do not touch on fashion specifically, his analytical framework combines embodiment and psychology with sociological and political theory, thus coupling politics and emotions. In order to enrich Reich's perspective, other theorists will also become relevant as fashion is unpacked as a biosocial phenomenon, straddled between the embodied sensations of pleasure and pain, arousal and anxiety, allure and predation.

Reich began as a physician and psychoanalyst and was considered one of Sigmund Freud's most talented but controversial students. Reich was immediately captured by Freud's ideas of the libido as a "motor force of sexual life," an "electrical field," a "quantitative energy," and "something which is capable of increase, decrease, displacement and discharge, and which extends itself over the memory traces of an idea like an electric charge over the surface of the body" [Freud 577](#). Yet Reich draws his own conclusions around this sexual energy of the body to open new vistas of thought and practice in the bio-social realm. Firmly grounding his theory in biology, Reich explores whether the libido is no metaphor but in fact a material form of bioelectrical current, streaming through the body in a process he called 'energetic functionalism'. This focus on the biology of the body makes Reich one of the early innovators of psychosomatic therapy, connecting the body to its social environment, in its cultural, sexual, and socio-economic context and conditions, thus merging the biosocial realm with political theory.

Reich develops the idea of the streaming of the libido to describe a biosocial "sexual economy", or "energy household" of the organism, in which energy is excited and flows through the body or is regulated by contracted muscles or inhibitions. He comes to call this bioelectrical energy 'orgone', primarily because Reich sees this energy capable of charging organic, non-conducting (insulating) substances [The Function of the Orgasm 340f](#). Similarly, it is specifically the movement and direction of energy, its streaming and pulsating tendencies, that makes Reich see these flows as the fundamental drivers of emotion and health.

In a healthy person's body, the energy flows and pulsates freely. But some people are "armored", with inadequate circulation of energy. The flow of emotion is held back. This 'armouring' results in muscles binding the energy, making it stagnate. The binding corresponds between body and mind: a rigid body ties to a strict character. Such character is not only prone to neurotic disorders but also to fear of spontaneity, life, and freedom. Under a regime of authoritarian family and repressive social institutions, this fear of one's own life energy makes people irrational and draws them to authorities and leaders. Armoured people are uncomfortable with the streaming sensations of the energy throughout their bodies, as it evokes a loss of control. They fear what others may think of them. Similarly, they also feel uncomfortable together with more spontaneous and free-minded spirits, who are looked upon as a threatening other, someone who threatens the order of things. To Reich, it is this fear of what others may think that is the foundation of the dilemma that, "*man is born free, yet he goes through life a slave*" [An Introduction to Orgonomy 467](#); *original emphasis*. The judgment of others and the avoidance of emotional self-knowledge keeps people fearful of the emotions streaming through their animal

bodies. Trapped in their bodies while living in their heads, fear of life and spontaneity ensnares them to their habits. The only way to mitigate the trap of this “emotional plague” is to challenge the everyday repressive anxieties and find therapy that unlocks the muscular binding of the plasmatic energy of the body.

From a Reichian perspective, the human animal shares its basic functional characteristics with very simple organisms. Even if humans live and experience much of their life through the lens of culture, the basis of our being is highly organic and animalistic. Consequently, as organic beings, we share the same biological functions as our primitive relatives. We are basically jellyfish, pulsating with organic life, from the single cell all the way up to the complexity of our whole bodies. Rhythms of plasmatic excitation resonate throughout our bodies, from the heartbeat and pumping of blood, to breathing and digestion, sleep, metabolic and menstruation cycles, all the way to the cycle of a lifetime itself. The organic life of the protoplasm is the “morphological forerunner” and is echoed in the function of the human autonomous nervous system *The Bioelectrical Investigation of Sexuality and Anxiety* 56. The autonomous nervous system “merely carries on, in an organized manner, a function which already exists in principle in animals without nervous systems; i.e., the function of plasma movement, hydration and dehydration, contraction and expansion, tension and relaxation” *The Bioelectrical Investigation of Sexuality and Anxiety* 58; original emphasis. At the basis of these plasmatic movement in the protoplasm, Reich traces the foundations of emotion. As Reich points out, “literally defined, the word ‘emotion’ means ‘moving outwards’ or ‘pushing out’” *An Introduction to Orgonomy* 137.

Emotional sensation also echoes through the protoplasm, as in the “inner stirrings” of music *An Introduction to Orgonomy* 140 or

the frissons of excitation, and is, as such, beyond words or rational communication. But an important component of Reich’s perspective is how the emotions of the body expand outwards into the world, beyond the boundaries of the organism. Emotions are plasmatic pressures in the organism. Reich points out how many languages reflect this, for example in the German word *Ausdruck* and the English equivalent ‘expression’ (outward-pressure), as the language of the living organism; “*the living organism expresses itself in movements; we therefore speak of ‘expressive movements.’ Expressive movement is an inherent characteristic of the protoplasm.*” *An Introduction to Orgonomy* 141; original emphasis If we think of fashion as an ‘ex-pression’, it is felt as an emotional pressure, a stirring of the plasmatic core of our being.

The plasmatic motility does not happen in isolation but is coupled with other organisms. Emotional movements of organisms affect each other, their sensorium membranes touch and relay plasmatic movements between each other, like waves throughout the social plasma. The protoplasmic movement, or ‘ex-pressure’, expands into the sensorium of another organism that thus transfers the wave to the next. An example can be the sensing of danger: “the panic reaction in the animal kingdom is based on an involuntary reproduction of the movement expressive of anxiety” *An Introduction to Orgonomy* 143. Such expressions “bring about an imitation in our own organism” *An Introduction to Orgonomy* 144; original emphasis. As a result, emotional affects and imitations are physical expressions in the organism—not conscious thought patterns—that are anchored in the depths of the organism: “*the living organism functions autonomously, beyond the sphere of language, intellect, and volition*” *An Introduction to Orgonomy* 147; original emphasis. The main body of emotional functioning and social expressions are thus non-conscious, or “supra-personal”

*An Introduction to Orgonomy* 149. In relation to current discussions around ‘mirror neurons’, Reich saw material and embodied component in biosocial imitative behaviours. Our emotional life is therefore governed by excitation waves and “*biological energy is being transmitted in these wave movements*” *An Introduction to Orgonomy* 154; original emphasis.

As with the “inner stirrings” evoked by music, an analogy between fashion and music is not far fetched—in fashion, there are trends and recurrent themes in music styles. The anticipation of new rhythms, tunes, and sounds excites people, producing an endless desire for new songs and artists. On a very material level, the pulsations of music also have the ability to break the isolation between individuals—doomed by their membranes to remain distinct from each other—and dancing is the recurrent playground of passion and flirting. Rhythms echo between the organic plasma of bodies, making peers move to the same beat, even if separated. It is music that brings them together in an undeniable unity, deeper than what language can bring about: their bodies pulsate together while separate. It is this sense of unity that also brings about a micro-utopian state between musicians, listeners, and dancers. Fashion, like music, leaves a sense of discharge, exhaustion, relaxation, and, in the end, a sense of haunting loss.

A Reich-inspired perspective opens some exciting avenues of thought in relation to fashion. Firstly, we can radically rethink *fashion as energy*, and secondly, the social phenomenon of fashion is *the transmission of this energy*. Like orgone, this energy can change organic (insulating) materials, such as everyday clothing, and it is essentially connecting waves of social excitation with plasmatic movements in the body—that is, *conveying fashion into passion*. A new look or aesthetic expression sweeps across the

social field like a wave of an energetic force, moving all affected bodies floating on the surface of encloded sensibility, transmitting this force into plasmatic motility. A new fashion is, indeed, a contagious passion that spreads like wild fire: neurons firing from the seductive energy of allure and arousal; new sensibilities matched with new looks; a network of bodies ready for new dopamine charges. Passion is an energy that pulsates through the body awakening the emotional sensorium. But passion is also erotic, that is, a force of imagination, a vitalization of desire and anticipation. It is a process defined by movement, as fashion *never is*, it is *always becoming* <sup>Simmel</sup>. Thus, fashion is a wave of anticipation, a connection, a sense of frisson. We use fashion to dream up a world of becoming, and even if not always eroticized, it builds suspense and expectations—a becoming as a process, pointing to pleasure and the arousing ascent towards coming.

Applying Reich’s perspective of bio-social energy and plasmatic motility to the realm of fashion would rearrange the spatial configuration of agency and action within the everyday realm of fashion. The locus of fashion is not in the ‘system’ or in the ‘industry’, even if these are its commoditized vectors (that is, the channels or infrastructure through which most of the energy is fashion transmitted). Instead of being out there, in the system, an energetic perspective puts the locus of fashion in the body, in the plasmatic flows of energy rushing our excitement when our cognition is attuned to the expression and allure of another peer, or the ‘object’ of our cognition. *Fashion streams inside and between organisms in the excitation of emotional and plasmatic movements*.

This means fashion does not happen in isolation. It is fundamentally a social phenomenon, a pulsation of energies coupling two bodies together. *Fashion is a form of flirting*. Enacted socially, it grabs attention and

holds it: you know fashion works when you can't tear your eyes off its wearer. This attention excites and affirms the other, radiates a sense of attractiveness, sends a pulse of affection and pleasure. It is a co-creation between two people, an exchange of looks, of mutual recognition and allure. At its best, fashion connects two people; it ties their attention together to form an emotional charge of attentive togetherness. There is such a thing as a biosexual "sexual aura" or "sex appeal", which Reich sees as "the contact of two fields of orgonotic excitation" *The Bioelectrical Investigation of Sexuality and Anxiety 7*. It is two aroused plasmatic systems pulsating together in mutual energy exchange, growing and expanding together.

Flirting in this sense should not be limited to the narrow experience leading up to sexual intercourse, but a much wider array of emotionally changed practices connecting the living bodies of organisms. Flirting is a series of practices, behaviours, and rituals capturing the attention of a peer, drawing their sensory apparatus into an intimate world, inviting them to attune their sensations to each other in order to share an experience of anticipation. Flirting is a *space of connection* in which passions are entwined; it is here fashion takes place.

If I have dressed up and I feel at my best, I build up an excitation in the body, a willingness to be seen and be judged by my looks. Through my dressed sensorium, I reach out into the world and seek to touch the attention of others. Then, if someone gives me an affirming look or acknowledgement, I feel a rush of excitement, a release of tension, and pleasure rushes through my body. A passage has been opened between us. A build-up of excitation and then a wave of affirmation surges through my nerves from being seen and acknowledged. My neurons fire, dopamine rushes: I feel a sense of life affirmation, alive in my body in the most positive sense.

When I experience this, I realize fashion is not a thing, it is not bound to clothes or goods, but it is a place you go, an emotional space you enter inside yourself and another. Fashion is a pleasure, a feeling of growth in between bodies as their emotional sensorium reach out, touch, play, and embrace. As with flirting, this emotion can be cultivated and shared abundantly as the important erotic endorsement it is.

Coming back to the homology of fashion and music, we see how sound waves and beats make people move in unison while they stay separate. The love song frames our desires, as we are alone together, or together while alone. Music as well as fashion can be used in marching tunes as much as in soothing lullabies. But music can also help us imagine waves of sustainable forms of togetherness, like the never-ending cycle of new songs that pollute the airwaves and our attention but do not destroy the planet through environmental disasters. Perhaps loving forms of fashion can be like love songs. And there is a continuous need for new love songs. Each new generation needs their new love songs, and the repertoire is endless, just like the wide spectrum of anticipation, eroticism, intimacy, and disappointments of love. Indeed, perhaps we also need to reframe our work around fashion as love songs rather than collections, accessories, or aesthetic statements. Perhaps we can paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari, who argue:

Psychoanalysis ought to be a song of life, or else be worth nothing at all. It ought, *practically*, to teach us to sing life. And see how the most defeated, sad song of death emanates from it: *eiapopeia*. From the start, and because of his stubborn dualism of the drives, Freud never stopped trying to limit the discovery of a subjective or vital essence of desire as libido. But when the dualism passed into a death instinct against Eros, this was no longer a simple limitation, it was a

liquidation of the libido. Reich did not go wrong here, and was perhaps the only one to maintain that the product of analysis should be a free and joyous person, a carrier of the life flows, capable of carrying them all the way into the desert and decoding them... <sup>331</sup>

In a similar vein, the task is never to 'save' fashion from consumerism or emotional armouring, and is not even to save it from itself, but rather to ask how fashion can be closer to the wellsprings of life and desire, how fashion can be a joyous love song to life, a flirting with the cosmos unchecked by anxiety and fear. Reich's endeavour echoes throughout this search. Or paraphrasing Robert Smith (lead singer of The Cure), at its best, just like a love song, fashion can make me feel like I am free again, like I am clean again, like I am young again, like I am fun again.

Like the superabundance of emotions flowing between anticipating mates, the plenitude of love songs marks the relentless desires aching in organic bodies. It is the enigma of love, to which we owe our being. By exploring the emotional grounding of fashion and its vital affects, we may shift the locus of fashion from sustaining the 'system' to focusing instead on the passions of togetherness. In togetherness, we can work towards making fashion a crucial democratic science, cultivating mutual ways of attraction in ways that will serve the many rather than the few.

It's a passion. Call it fever, or call it fashion: oh, what a lovely way to burn.

#### Note

This text is a reworked version of the first chapter of *Vital Vogue: A Biosocial Perspective on Fashion* (Selfpassage, 2018). The text has been changed to add emphasis on the love song as a medium to understand the connection between fashion and sensuality from a Reichian perspective.

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#### Otto von Busch

Otto von Busch is Associate Professor of Integrated Design at Parsons School of Design. In his research he explores how the energies of fashion can be bent to achieve a positive personal and social condition with which the Everyperson is free to grow to their full potential.



# Loved Clothes Last



As a response to the Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh Orsola de Castro and Carry Sommers founded in 2013 Fashion Revolution, a not-for-profit global movement that campaigns for systemic reform of the fashion industry with a focus on the need for greater transparency in the fashion supply chain. During *Fashion Colloquium: Searching for the New Luxury?* (May 31st, the Netherlands) Orsola de Castro discussed the Fashion Revolution magazine issue *Love Clothes Last*. It explores waste and mass-consumption in the fashion industry, and hopes to inspire readers to buy less, care more, and know how to make the clothes they love last last for longer.

## Orsola de Castro

Orsola de Castro is an internationally recognised opinion leader in sustainable fashion. Her career started as a designer with the pioneering upcycling label *From Somewhere*, which she launched in 1997 until 2014. Her designer collaborations include collections for Jigsaw, Tesco, Speedo, and 4 best selling capsule collections for Topshop from 2012 to 2014. In 2006, she co-founded the British Fashion Council initiative *Estethica* at London Fashion Week, which she curated until 2014. In 2013, with Carry Somers, she founded *Fashion Revolution*, a global campaign with participation in over 100 countries around the world. Orsola is a regular key note speaker and mentor, Associate Lecturer at UAL, as well as Central Saint Martins Visiting Fellow.

View video online:

<http://apria.artez.nl/loved-clothes-last/>

# IN TOUCH WITH THE NOW

## *Stimulating Mindfulness through a Smart Denim Jacket*



### Introduction

In our 'always-on' society [Olshannikova et al.](#), mindfulness is the new luxury. As a result of our constant interactions with mobile technology, we are continuously distracted from our physical reality and bodies and pulled into a world of quantified data and digital information flows. This common-felt lack of connection to the body in the here and now explains the current and increasingly growing popularity of yoga, mindfulness, and meditation [see, for example, Pickert](#). Such 'datafication' of human life [Lupton; Leder](#) also manifests itself in the design and application of smart fashion.<sup>[1]</sup>

During our PhD research, we have both noted that there is a tendency for everyday applications of smart fashion to focus predominantly on measuring and obtaining information from our bodies [Toussaint; van Dongen A Designer's Material Aesthetics](#). Smart fashion such as the Hexoskin Smart Shirt or OM Signal Bra allows wearers to monitor their bodies by displaying biometric data. Ironically, many smart fashion designs thus uphold the promise that data and self-tracking can make us more mindful of our bodies, while they in fact distract and disconnect us from our embodied subjectivity.

Despite smart fashion opening up possibilities for greater attention to the lived experiential body, most designers seem to integrate technology into fashion merely to maximize physical performance, efficiency, and productivity. As an alternative to this focus on self-enhancement and data visualization, designer Pauline van Dongen and her team designed a smart denim jacket called 'Issho' [van Dongen Issho](#). The design intention

behind *Issho* was to deliberately turn away from making a garment that acts as a simple intermediary between body and screen. Instead of encouraging people to attend to data that merely quantify physical experiences, van Dongen and team explored the possibility of stimulating wearers to be more mindful of their body and environment. To be 'mindful' here means to focus one's awareness on the present moment and to consciously experience one's embodied presence in the here and now. For the purpose of our argument, we thus disconnect the notion of mindfulness from its manifold therapeutic, spiritual, or meditative associations in order to narrow it down to a more mundane and down-to-earth state of *embodied* awareness.



Fig.1—Pauline van Dongen, 'Issho', 2017. Photograph by Sharon Jane D.

### Problem statement

The smart denim jacket *Issho* [Fig.1](#) has been designed to encourage a more mindful relation between the wearer, the garment, and their environment. This article explores how *Issho* may encourage wearers to be more mindful of their embodied presence in the here and now. In order to answer this question, we first describe the material qualities and design process of *Issho*. Second,

we discuss the set-up and findings of several user tests with this smart jacket. We then analyse the interview data collected on wearer experiences with the help of the postphenomenological notions of mediation and material aesthetics. Postphenomenology studies the relations between human beings and artifacts, combining philosophical analysis with empirical investigation [Verbeek, What Things Do 190](#). It does not approach artifacts as merely functional and instrumental objects but as mediators of human experiences and practices. In other words, postphenomenology helps not just to speak of smart fashion designs in terms of functions and signs but also to understand them in terms of mediation [Ibid.](#). This article will conclude with a reflection on how *Issho*, as an example of smart fashion, mediates wearers' experiences of their bodies in relation to their immediate surroundings.

### Design process of *Issho*

Our emphasis on the role of materiality and embodiment in understanding the experiences and practices of people wearing *Issho* prompts us to first describe the material-oriented approach that characterizes the design process. Denim is a sturdy, common, and protective fabric that invites the wearer to move and be active. It is characterized by its durability and graceful aging: through fading, it embodies the traces of time and wear. In addition, denim's widespread and universal popularity made the design team recognize its potential for designing everyday sensorial experiences. One of their translations of mindfulness centred around the idea of touch, namely of being 'in touch' with one's body and environment, and the importance of touch for our emotional well-being. Being so physically close to the body, clothing could play a role in enhancing haptic perception and heightening body awareness. Moreover, denim itself could be



Fig.2 and 3—Denim with conductive yarns woven in a striped pattern

made touch sensitive by weaving conductive yarns into the fabric. *Issho* thus allows the technology to form a soft, tactile, and fluid interface between the body of the wearer and the direct environment. The qualities of denim inspired the team to create a design that stimulates a kind of 'friendship' between the wearer and the garment. Like a close friend, the jacket becomes an active mediator in the social dynamic between wearers and their environment, while at times also reminding wearers to take a moment for themselves.

The conductive yarns, woven into the weft of the fabric, rise from the surface to create a subtle tactility and a pattern of golden stripes. Placed on the shoulders and



Fig.4—Design sketch of ‘Issho’ [Berentzen](#)

next to the large (and only) front pocket, these striped areas are sensitive to touch [Fig.2-3](#). The microcontroller embedded in the jacket registers physical interactions, such as an embrace or a pat on the shoulder, between the wearer and others. The jacket also registers smartphone use by sensing the gesture of taking a smartphone in and out of the front pocket. After a certain amount of social interactions, *Issho* gives wearers the sensation of a gentle caress on the upper back, inviting wearers to shift their attention to their body in the here and now. The haptic feedback is created by four vibration motors that are programmed to simulate a stroking gesture [Fig.4](#).

### Study

To collect data on actual wearer experiences of *Issho*, a small user test was set up and conducted by Isabel Berentzen in the context of van Dongen’s design studio [Berentzen](#). The study involved four participants [2] who were asked to wear the jacket for three consecutive days. These participants were unaware of how the jacket operates and did not know the location of the integrated technologies. Afterwards, each of them used diaries to report on how many hours a day they wore the jacket and how frequently the jacket gave feedback. Additionally, the four test subjects were interviewed to gather in-depth data on their experience of wearing the jacket, focussing particularly on how they perceived the vibrational feedback. In this data set, we found several interesting

remarks that can be understood and further analysed with the help of postphenomenological theory, particularly the notions of mediation and material aesthetics.

### Postphenomenology

A postphenomenological approach to smart fashion is valuable for two reasons. First, postphenomenology helps to highlight that responsive garments not only change what the wearer experiences (the object of experience itself) but also affect how that experience comes about [Toussaint 46](#). In our interaction with material artefacts, our relation to and existence in the world takes shape. Following this perspective, design (including smart fashion) involves not just designing things but also designing human-world relations [Ihde Technology and Lifeworld; Verbeek What Things Do](#). A sturdy denim jacket that records, senses, and reacts to touch not only shapes how wearers experience their own body but also affects the way they act, move, and behave in relation to their surroundings. In addition, we find a particularly useful element of postphenomenological thinking in Verbeek’s suggestion to broaden our understanding of aesthetics to a ‘material aesthetics’ [Verbeek, What Things Do 209](#). This “sensorial conception of aesthetics” includes (the predominantly visual understanding of) style and beauty, while emphasizing the ways in which the material qualities of an artefact mutually inform our behaviour and perceptions [Verbeek, What Things Do 211](#). The prevailing understanding of fashion is to focus on visual aspects of garments and what they represent [Bruggeman 13](#), while the integration of technology in fashion usually elicits mainly functional and aesthetic explanations [Seymour](#). Material aesthetics places a semiotic and functional understanding of smart fashion in a completely new perspective because it helps reveal the material influence of artefacts on shaping relations between humans

and the world [van Dongen A Designer's Material Aesthetics](#). The user test we did with *Issho*, for example, indicates that this denim jacket invites outdoor and physical activities, such as cycling, not because of its visual properties but because of its warm, loose, and robust materiality. We will now further analyse the findings of the user tests with *Issho* by connecting the postphenomenological notions of mediation and material aesthetics to wearers' experiences of this smart jacket.

### Analysis of wearers' experiences

#### Encouraging body-awareness

The data from the user study were recorded and carefully transcribed, but considering the relatively small data set, there was no need for coding. Applying an empirical phenomenological approach [Moustakas](#), we combine the participants' descriptions of their experiences with our interpretation of the meaning of these. The first theme that stood out in the interview data was body-awareness. Two wearers described how the sensations exuded by the jacket drew their attention to their body and posture. By provoking an unusual and surprising physical sensation, *Issho* makes its presence felt and reminds wearers to stay in touch with themselves [Eco 192](#). Several wearers also noted how the material qualities of *Issho*—including the denim and the haptic sensations it evokes—stimulated them to relax their shoulders and back. We interpret these experiences as indicative of how the material aesthetics of *Issho* (i.e. the touch of denim in combination with the haptic feedback that the smart technology provides) invites wearers to become more aware of their bodies and of any physical signs of stress. By reminding wearers of their bodily states and physical interactions, *Issho* amplifies the wearer's body awareness and promotes a kind of "self-conscious self-surveillance" [Balsamo 216](#). As such, the jacket's haptic feedback has the potential to

positively affect the wearers' state of mind, causing them to feel more mindful, relaxed, or comfortable.

#### Encouraging awareness of the immediate surroundings

The second type of experience that several wearers of *Issho* mentioned concerned a heightened awareness of their own actions, behaviour, and relation to their immediate surroundings. One respondent explains that the jacket "confronted" her with what she was doing (Karlijn). Another respondent described how she often cycles the familiar route to and from work as if on automatic pilot. The vibration of *Issho* interrupted this routine behaviour, stimulating her to be more attentive to the world around her. She noted: "And I actually quite enjoyed that because normally I am not paying any attention at all to the things happening around me while I am on my way" (Barbara). In postphenomenological terms, this implies that the relationship between the wearer and the world is *technologically* mediated by *Issho* [Ihde 57; original emphasis](#). The jacket not only changes what this wearer experienced (the object of experience itself) but also affects how she behaves and relates to the world around here.

#### Material aesthetics and emotional durability

The third and final type of experiences that the user tests with *Issho* highlighted is how wearers experienced the design's material capacities and the ways in which the jacket affected their emotional state. Wearers experienced the material qualities of *Issho* as having a "comfortable fit" (Barbara, Karlijn) and liked the "rugged texture" created by the golden yarns (Sam). They described the fabric as "warm" (Angela, Barbara) and "windproof" (Angela) and interpreted the vibration of the jacket as a "short massage" (Angela). Due to these qualities, the jacket



Fig.5—Pauline van Dongen, ‘Issho’, 2017. Photograph by Sharon Jane D.

is easily integrated into daily activities and allows wearers to develop their own personal interpretation of and relation with the garment. One wearer described her experiences as “fun” because the jacket “sort of automatically made her happy when it started to vibrate” (Karlijn). Another wearer pointed to how she particularly enjoyed the self-activated haptic feedback *Issho* provides: “I like the fact that it does not matter whether I or someone else wears the jacket (...) the jacket is something in itself and works independently” (Barbara). These comments indicate that smart fashion designs such as *Issho* can be experienced as having an “apparent autonomy” or extraordinary power [Verbeek, \*What Things Do\* 127](#). The jacket is able to respond and vibrate of its own accord and acts in ways beyond the control of the wearer [Toussaint 98](#); see also [Toussaint and Smelik 94](#).

The findings of the user tests with *Issho* show that wearers connect the material aesthetics and self-acting capacities of the jacket not just to their sensorial experiences but also to the level of feelings and emotions. *Issho* has the ability to reinforce or improve the emotional state of the wearer, which means it can emphasize positive emotions but may also evoke unpleasant or undesirable ones. This raises questions about the potential of designing smart fashion for emotional attachment, including human values such as friendship and happiness. It also signals that “smart textiles and smart clothing developments are very exciting, if not without some concerns” [Cranny-Francis 170](#).

### Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that the relationships mediated by the jacket are diverse and that *Issho* affected the embodied experience of each of the wearers in different ways. The specific meaning, functionality, and role that they ascribe to the jacket depended on their subjective interpretation and practical dealings with the jacket in an everyday context. However, what all wearer experiences have in common is that *Issho* somehow transformed the ways in which they related to their own bodies, their clothes, and/or their surroundings. Whether *Issho* can effectively give the wearer a sense of mindfulness and self-awareness is only partially determined by its material aesthetics, yet has everything to do with the embedded, situated, and embodied ways in which it is experienced [De Preester 343–44](#).

We realize that this study has its limitations, given the small number of participants and the fact that they are automatically more aware of their relationship to the garments because of their involvement in the test. Still, the relatively small data set already generated a wealth of insights. Our study revealed that wearers valued the qualitative experiences

(for example, heightened body-awareness) that *Issho* mediated, which hints at the opportunity for smart fashion to encourage more mindful and embodied human-technology relations. This further indicates that there is an opportunity to move beyond the quantified and functional approach to smart fashion. *Issho* represents a more embodied design approach that embraces smart fashion for its potential to stimulate a more qualitative and moment-by-moment awareness of our bodily sensations and environment.

#### Acknowledgements

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#### Footnotes

- [1] Following Michelle Addington and Daniel Schodek's definition of smart materials, we define 'smart fashion' here as garments that possess the internal capacity to respond to their environment and activate themselves directly, in real-time, and in concrete and predictable ways Addington and Schodek 9.
- [2] These four test users (3 female, 1 male; aged 25-26) have not been anonymized because they consented to their first names being included in all research output.

#### Pauline van Dongen

Pauline van Dongen (1986, Amsterdam) is a fashion designer specialised in wearable technology. Through her design studio (founded in 2010) she focuses on developing alternatives for fashion by exploring how technology (i.e. electronics and digital materials) can add new value and meaning to clothing and can enhance the way we experience the world around us. Her studio received international recognition with projects such as the Solar Shirt, Phototrope and Issho. Pauline also received several nominations for her work: she was selected by Forbes for their list of 'Top 50 Women

in Tech Europe' (2018) and as 'MIT Innovator under 35 Europe' (2017). Pauline is currently in the final stage of her PhD research that is part of the broader NWO- funded project 'Crafting Wearables' (2013-2018). For her dissertation, she combines design research with the philosophy of postphenomenology to reframe the understanding of technology. The aim of her research is to better inform the practice of designing wearable technologies and their role in the daily context of fashion.

#### Lianne Toussaint

Dr. Lianne Toussaint is a lecturer and researcher at the department of Cultural Studies of the Radboud University Nijmegen (until summer 2019) and at the department of Media and Culture studies at Utrecht University (as of summer 2019). She currently teaches courses in the BA and MA programmes of Arts and Culture Studies, including Working through Fashion, Thinking through Fashion and The Body in the Arts and Visual Culture. Lianne's research focuses on the socio-cultural implications of the integration of fashion and technology, which resulted in a PhD dissertation with the title 'Wearing Technology: When Fashion and Technology Entwine' (2018). Her PhD was part of the broader NWO- funded project 'Crafting Wearables' (2013-2018) that explored the properties, design, and application of fashionable technologies: [www.craftingwearables.com](http://www.craftingwearables.com).

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<http://apria.artez.nl/in-touch-with-the-now/>



# What if Our Clothes Were Alive and Photosynthesized?



Fig.1—Roya Aghighi, Biogarmentry at Vancouver Design Week, 2018

“To be human is to be involved with cloth”— Beverly Gordon

## Introduction

We are touched by fabric and textiles since birth. We interact with textiles in every little action we make, from surrounding our naked bodies with clothes to covering ourselves with textile while sleeping at night. We use clothing to express our personal, social, and cultural identity. We use clothes to protect ourselves and keep warm. We seek shelter under textiles, sit on rugs, use nets to provide for fishing to survive, wrap our funds in textiles, and light up our spaces with candles that are made by tiny twisted fibres. We use textiles for indisputably everything. And there is a long history we could learn from.

## What if Our Clothes Were Alive and Photosynthesized?

The fashion and textile industries need to be urgently cared for. They need more permanent and deeper solutions rather than temporary ones, which have to be immediately addressed. Making less wasteful clothes is no longer enough; we need to restructure



Fig.2—Roya Aghighi, Biogarmentry, 2018

the fundamentals of our global/economic fashion industry, beginning with the destructive nature of our current mainstream relationship to clothing. This dynamic has significant consequences. Fashion consumption has become a passive act, and we no longer care for the longevity of our clothing. Clothing is often disposed long before it reaches its expected life. How can we urgently address all the negative impacts of the fashion industry and have an impact on fashion consumers? Fashion needs to be rethought. Our understanding of textile as a material needs forward and active thinking.

*“We are potentially on the brink of materials revolution that could help rebalance our relationship with our planet and reshape society for the better”* [Radical Matter:](#)

[Rethinking Materials for a Sustainable Future.](#)

[Kate Franklin and Caroline Till, 9](#)

The era of thinking of material as a natural resource and relying on it is over. Humanity



Fig.3—Roya Aghighi, Photosynthetic and Compostable Garment, 2018

has created a mess that is no longer manageable. We need new, impactful approaches. We need to look into infinite qualities of materials for a potential revolutionary shift and explore new ways in which they could be understood by society, designers, artists, scientist and all creative fields. Therefore, alternative practices need to adopted by practitioners.

*“Design with sustainability at its core has the power to change the world as we know it”.*  
– Carole Collet

As result of rethinking our world, merging the fields of design, art, technology, and science has become more common and the results are quite powerful. We need better, deeper, and cyclical approaches to our relationship with materials as the core of design. Emphasizing on materials opens up possibilities for reconsidering the building blocks of design process from the bottom up. Now The world has a clearer vision of potential possibilities for textile thanks to pioneering designers such as Suzanne Lee, the founder of Biocouture, who reimaged the design process by placing the focus on material itself. In her creative process, she refers to living bacteria as “the factories of future” and has created the first bacteria-generated clothing. [Fig.3](#)

In a similar vein, Biogarmentry aims to challenge our perception of natural materials and exceed the material potential capabilities. What if living organisms are simply the new materials? And if this became part of today’s reality, how would it change our relationship to materials such as textiles? How would it change our behaviour towards fashion?

Biogarmentry is a transdisciplinary collaboration of nature, science, and design in which living organisms become an essential part of the design process. In order to tackle the complex issue of the fashion industry, the project employs the fields of synthetic biology, material science, and design as a way to open up possibilities for the future of fashion. Biogarmentry works through implementing a deeper, more holistic idea of change, creating a new material—while focussing on a transformation of our values, goals, and collective behaviours around our consumption-oriented habits— embracing values that emphasize an ecological system and are capable of lowering waste and carbon emissions. It also explores what place design should have in our relationship to living things. Biogarmentry at the core aims to detach one from objective approach to clothing by challenging one’s briefs and values around it. Thus, it aims to open up one’s mind to re-create relationships with textiles. To achieve this goal the work has found a special condition in clothing that users will connect to—a living textile that is capable of photosynthesis. [Fig.4](#)

Biogarmentry’s first proof of concept was created through collaboration of design, science, and technology. With the help of a group of scientists—Dr. Jae Lee and Dr. Sun-Joo Lee from Biological Sciences department and Dr. Addie Bahi and Dr. Frank Ko from Material Engineering department all from University of British Columbia—we created the first proof of concept for the survival of



Fig.4—Roya Aghighi, Preparing the Cells for Creating the First Photosynthetic Textile, Botany Lab, UBC, 2018

photosynthetic living cells on natural textiles, such as different kinds of cellulose and protein-based fibres. As a unique approach to this project, biological manufacturers replaced industrial ones, and living entities are designed to make textiles. [Fig.5a-6](#)

In developing the living fabric further, a mixture of cells was spun into natural fibres. The outcome of this experiment was the first non-woven living and photosynthesizing textile, which feels close to how linen does [Fig.7](#). This textile is 100% natural and biodegradable, fully compostable, and, more importantly, the material will work-while living-to purify the air through photosynthesis. Thus, by simply being present in the environment, we can reduce the harm we do to our planet. The work focuses on reducing the negative impacts of fashion on environmental levels such as waste, carbon footprint, and air pollution, as well as acting as a catalyst for behavioural change through challenging our current relationships to clothing. [Fig.7-8](#)

After proving the feasibility of this concept, the biogarmentry family of living textiles was created with specific attention to both the variety of pollutant gasses and the need for a variety of clothing. The biogarmentry family consists of six textiles that come from different plant sources and absorb different gases from air. Based on



Fig.5a—Roya Aghighi, The Result of the First Experiment of Making Living and Photosynthetic Textile, Botany Lab, UBC, 2018

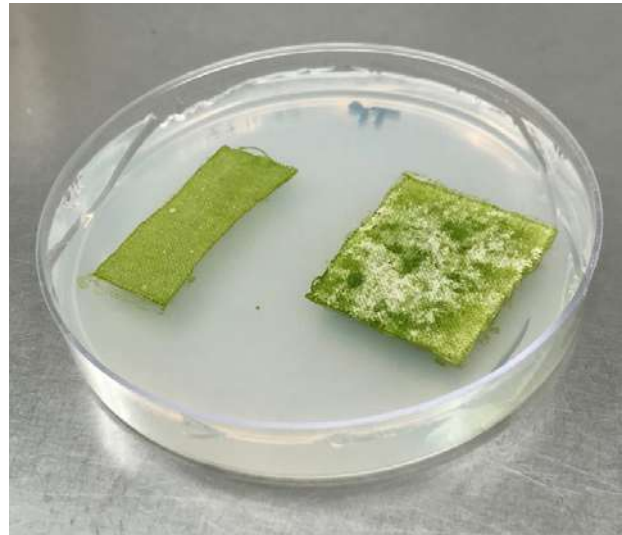


Fig.5b—Roya Aghighi, PAM Measurement of Cells Activities Proving the Life and Photosynthetic Activity, Botany Lab, UBC, 2018

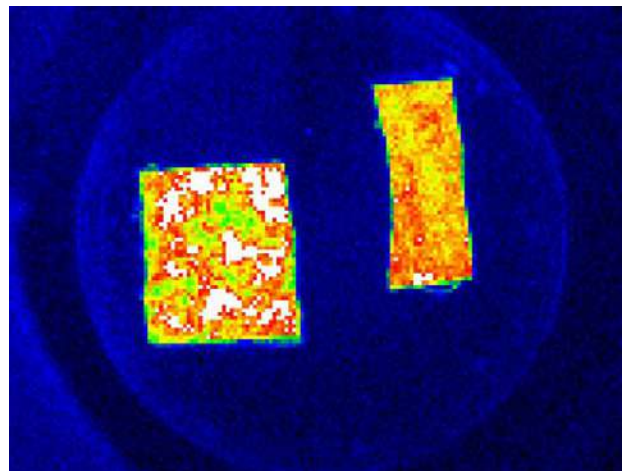


Fig.6—Roya Aghighi, Desired Nano Fibre Scaffold for Survival of Cells Made at AMPL UBC, 2018



Fig.7

their source, each one needs a different care instruction and grows differently. [Fig.9](#)

Biogarmentry's targets fashion and textile industry on a larger and deeper scale. Making changes and impacting the future will not happen fundamentally unless behaviours, values, and thoughts change. With a specific focus on seeking alternatives for textiles, biogarmentry ultimately introduces a shift from traditional models of buy, use, and dispose to buy, care, and compost.

Since the lifecycle of the living photosynthetic textile is directly dependent on how it is taken care of, caring for clothes would regain ascendance as a crucial part of the system, encouraging users to actively embrace habits that work to support their living textile to flourish. In other words, Biogarmentry aims to employ one's emotional attachments to living things that bring agency back to textiles and clothing. Simply put, regardless of how deep is one's connection to living things, they wouldn't want to harm them. This will change the way we engage with our clothes slowly but surely. [Fig.10-12](#)

The biogarment comes with exclusive care instructions in order to help the user keep the biogarment alive and last longer, which encourages a shift in our current perceptions of fashion and how we value and treat it. More importantly, since keeping



Fig.8—Roya Aghighi, World's First Living and Photosynthetic Textile Spun at AMPL UBC, 2018



Fig.9—Roya Aghighi, Biogarmentry Family of Living Textiles and Their Required Care Instruction, 2018

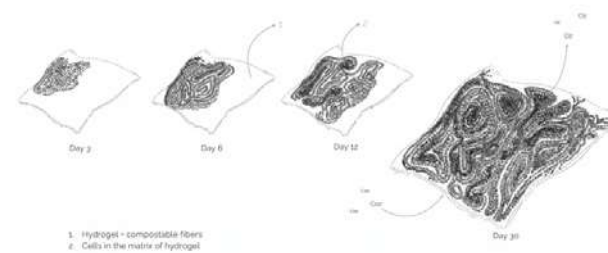


Fig.10—Roya Aghighi, Biogarment Growth Process Illustration, 2018

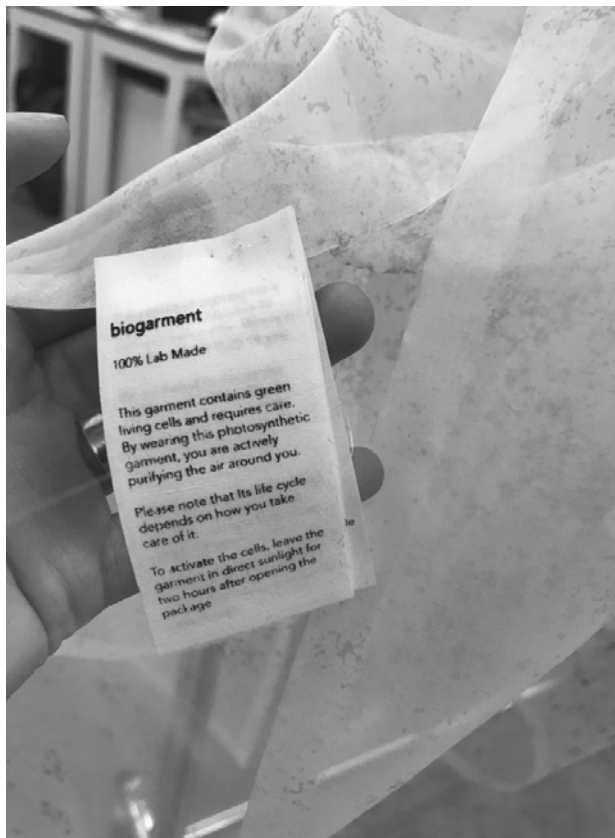
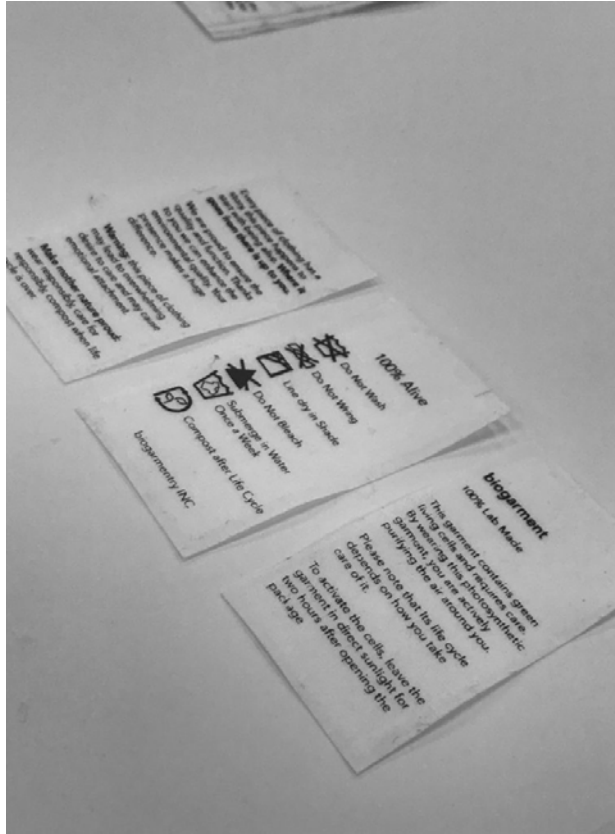


Fig.13—Roya Aghighi, Biogarmentry in Use, 2018

Fig.11 and 12—Roya Aghighi, Biogarmentry Care Tag, 2018



Fig.14—Roya Aghighi, Biogarmentry, 2018



Fig.15—Roya Aghighi, Biogarmentry, 2018

each piece of biogarment alive and healthy requires user's attention and time, users are encouraged to buy less clothes to manage to keep them alive. Which helps to slow the fast fashion and revers current consumerism habits. [Fig.13](#)

When garments are dependent beings, we build a more intimate relationship with our clothes through caring for them. Biogarmentry ultimately aims to introduce a possible future for textiles and to explore the application of biology in design to provoke thinking and facilitate new roles and ideals for design. [Fig.14](#)

Now in a near future when textiles are alive, photosynthesizing, and compostable, how would you take care of your biogarment? [Fig.15](#)

#### Roya Aghighi

Roya is a multidisciplinary designer holding two industrial design degrees from Emily Carr University of Art and Design, Canada and Iran University of Science and Technology. Through her practice she aims to highlight the critical role of design in shaping human behaviors. Being a multidisciplinary designer, she activates the gap between various fields and aims to push the borders between traditional academic disciplines to explore and introduce alternative future possibilities. She has been exploring with materials as the fundamental element to re-imagine the role of designer as well as shifting the emphasis from product to process. She believes that focusing on materials could shape a new way to experience the world and how we position ourselves within it. Roya has been one of the material activist designers- collaborating with material engineers, scientists and biologists at University of British Columbia for past years to activate bio-design practices in Canada.

Read online:

<http://apria.artez.nl/what-if-our-clothes-were-alive-and-photosynthesized/>

# The New Bio-ethics of Luxury



Fig.1—Tina Gorjanc, Pure Human, 2016, personal archive

Luxury can be a divisive word. Traditionally, luxury indicated a status symbol and worked as a social interface in a context of privilege, exclusivity, and accessibility. However, the last few decades have seen a decline in the possession of material, as luxury appears to have started refining itself from its social interest and become far more personal and individualistic. [Fig.2](#)

Scientists, futurists, and philosophers have theorized about the immortality of the human body as the ultimate stage of the luxury hierarchy and advocate that human perpetuity could be achieved in the indefinite future. This awareness regarding the possibility of extending our stay on the planet combined with the new responsibility towards next generations to come—felt by most of us as the remainder of the excessive



Fig.2—Luxury definition, Google Dictionary, screenshot on 23 May 2018



Fig.3—Tina Gorjanc, Pure Human 0.01, 2016, personal archive

exploitation of our resources—seems to have infused the meaning of the term with a more nostalgic aftertaste. This new approach to the idea of luxury puts its values in an entirely different context that emphasizes notions of identity and inheritance. [Fig.3](#)

Furthermore, as our current society is becoming mostly driven by the aspiration to constantly innovate, it is starting to lack the ability to analyse the cultural understanding of what we are experiencing in the process of innovating. Old definitions and stereotypes of original and fake, natural and synthetic, alive and dead are becoming obsolete as new



Fig.4—David Parry, Mark Post holding the world's first laboratory-grown hamburger, 2013, PA Wire



Fig.5—Tina Gorjanc, Phylogenetic Atelier, 2018, personal archive, blueprint of a pigeon

discoveries in the field of synthetic biology are being made. [Fig.4](#)

Looking specifically at the de-extinction proxies, the paradox of what we categorize as a synthetic and, therefore, unnatural/un-sustainable material becomes evident. The research behind the Phylogenetic Atelier project showcases the process and findings



Fig.6—Tina Gorjanc, Phylogenetic Atelier, 2018, personal archive, project display

of The Great Passenger Pigeon Comeback project— the template project from Revive&Restore that offers a blueprint for most of the de-extinction aspirations. [Fig.5](#)

Portrayed within the display of the research project is a speculative scenario of a future venue that showcases a possible intersection of practices such as laboratory work, museum environment, and a luxury artisan gloves workshop. The product displayed in the fictional venue is a glove made from the de-extinct passenger pigeon skin—replicated by creating pigeon leather to resemble the hypothetical outcome. Visitors are encouraged to move the mechanical arm and examine the gloves to understand the ambitions and the motives of the organization Revive&Restore to de-extinct the species. [Fig.6](#)

A display of blueprints and informative posters alongside the replicated first edition of the leather showcases the process and findings of the project. The documents displayed include research from the Revive&Restore organization: a sequenced DNA from the passenger pigeon and the band-tailed pigeon, a comparison of the two DNA, easily understandable graphics representing the proposed plan for the de-extinction process and a timeline of the development of The Great Passenger Pigeon Comeback project. [see Fig.7](#)



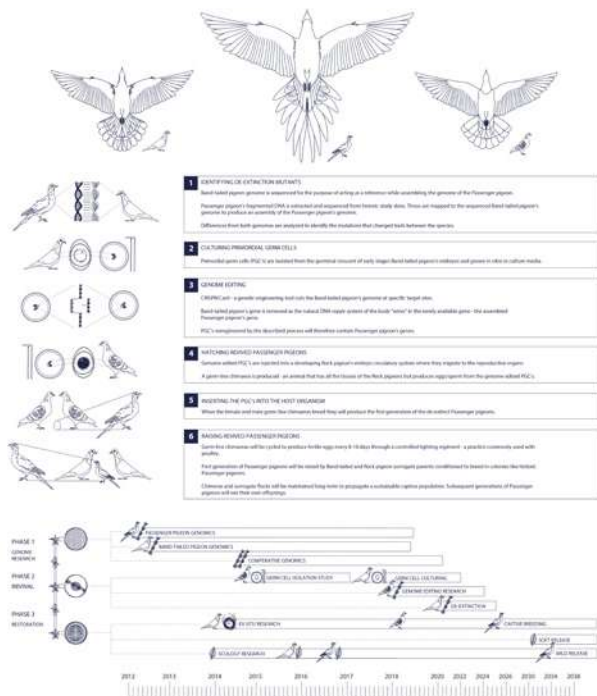


Fig.7–Tina Gorjanc, Phylogenetic Atelier, 2018, personal archive, informative poster

Scaling down the complexity of the project to the debate already present in our society in terms of real and artificial leather, the project tries to understand and tackle the complexity of the much bigger scientific problem. Therefore, I am proposing that the public engage with some of the following questions: [Fig.8](#)

> as biodiversity is decreasing at a fast speed, would enhancing it with synthetic biology techniques help introduce and sustain a more holistic ecosystem? [Fig.9](#)

> if we are going to be able to bring back extinct matter, would that impact our willingness to care for the environment? [Fig.10](#)

> do we have the right to take ownership of nature? [Fig.11](#)

> is producing ‘fake’ copies of an extinct material an attempt to understand the past, or is it just an excuse to constantly create the desire for rarity? [Fig.12](#)

> if we can do it, does it mean that we should?



Fig.8–Tina Gorjanc, Phylogenetic Atelier, 2018, personal archive, glove



Fig.9–Jane Asholock, Petri Crop, 2015, Earth Island Journal



Fig.10–Tina Gorjanc, Phylogenetic Atelier, 2018, personal archive, pigeon dissection



Fig.11–Christian Leste, Greenpeace protest, 1999, Germany, protests against cloning



Fig.12–Tina Gorjanc, Phylogenetic Atelier, 2018, personal archive, pigeon skeleton model



Fig.13–Tina Gorjanc, Phylogenetic Atelier, 2018, personal archive, leather detail

Tina Gorjanc

Tina Gorjanc is a Slovenian multidisciplinary scenario designer who is recognized for her work that merges the practices of fashion and textile design with biotechnological procedures. Her exposure to the media placed her as one of the leading promoters of critical and speculative design as well as an active advocator of bioethics, bio-sustainability and bio-design. With just over two years from opening her practice, she had the privilege to present her work on several events and exhibitions across the globe including Biofabricate New York 2016, Most Contagious 2016, London Design Festival 2016 and 2018, Demo-Adi Barcelona 2017, Echo Dubai 2017, Eye of Gyre Japan 2018, E-Cuerpo Mexico 2018 and 2019, Vienna Biennale 2019, etc.

In May 2017, she has been awarded the A' Silver Design Award in Public Awareness, Voluntarism and Society Design Category for her current work. Her work has been featured in the new TV series produced by the public Franco-German TV network ARTE in September 2017, which is dedicated to new emerging talents in the innovation design field. Tina is currently developing commissions from several galleries - Science Gallery Dublin in Science Gallery London - and private organizations - Somerset House, Architect Association in Westfield Center London as well as being an educator and writer for educational institutions such as Central Saint Martins, London College of Communication, University of the Arts London, etc. She is also a contributing writer for Clot magazine.

Read online:

<http://apria.artez.nl/the-new-bio-ethics-of-luxury/>

# Fashion and Activism

*an interview with*  
*Orsola de Castro & Otto von Busch*



View video online:  
<http://apria.artez.nl/fashion-and-activism/>

# Reinventing the Commons

*a conversation with  
Pascale Gatzen & David Bollier*



View video online:  
<http://apria.artez.nl/reinventing-the-commons/>

# Aesthetic Sustainability

*an interview  
with Kristine Harper*



View video online:  
<http://apria.artez.nl/aesthetic-sustainability-2/>

# Hedonistic Sustainability

*an interview with*  
*Timotheus Vermeulen*



View video online:  
<http://apria.artez.nl/hedonistic-sustainability/>

# Podcast Loose Fit: *about diversity in fashion*



One size fits all or one size fits nobody? Listen to the podcast about inclusivity, diversity and a more embodied way of fashion, recorded during the two-day conference Fashion Colloquium, Searching for the New Luxury (31 May–1 June 2018) in Arnhem. The online radio platform Ja Ja Ja Nee Nee Nee made a live broadcast that can be listened to [here](#).

#### With:

Daniëlle Bruggeman (Lector Mode, Professor Fashion ArtEZ)  
 Ruby Hoette (Fashions and Embodiment Studio, Goldsmiths)  
 Adele Varcoe (designer, School of Fashion and Textiles, RMIT University)  
 Julius Thissen (visual artist, curator & gender activist)  
 Pelumi Adejumo (writer, initiator Student Curatorial Platform, ArtEZ)  
 Chet Bugter (activist, artistic and embodied researcher, ArtEZ)  
 Janice Deul (journalist, fashion activist, founder Diversity Rules)

#### Credits:

Podcast: Ja Ja Ja Nee Nee Nee  
 Host: Arif Kornweitz, Radna Rumping  
 Producer: Sara Liz van Til  
 Language: English  
 Broadcasted on  
 31-05-2018 at 11:15.

Listen to podcast online:  
<http://apria.artez.nl/podcast-loose-fit/>



# Biographies Editorial Board

## *Searching for the New Luxury?*

**Daniëlle Bruggeman** is a cultural theorist specializing in fashion as a socio-cultural phenomenon. In January 2017, she was appointed Professor of Fashion (Lector Mode) at ArtEZ University of the Arts. She teaches both the M.A. in Fashion Strategy and the M.A. in Fashion Design at ArtEZ and leads the Centre of Expertise Future Makers in collaboration with Professor Jeroen van den Eijnde. Bruggeman holds a PhD in Cultural Studies—‘Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World’ (2010–2014) from Radboud University Nijmegen, funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research—which was part of the first large-scale interdisciplinary research project on fashion in the Netherlands. She was a visiting scholar at Parsons, the New School for Design (NYC), and at the London College of Fashion. She has published on topics like the fluid, performative and embodied dimensions of identity, (Dutch) fashion photography, and fashion as a new materialist aesthetics. Her current research interests include exploring more engaged approaches, vocabularies and strategies, using fashion as a tool for systemic change and societal transformation. On April 25, 2018, Daniëlle Bruggeman gave her inaugural lecture and presented the accompanying publication *Dissolving the Ego of Fashion: Engaging with Human Matters* (ArtEZ Press, 2018), which outlines her main research lines for the coming years.

The Fashion Professorship aims to develop critical theories and practices in order to explore, better understand, and rethink the cracks in the fashion system, as well as the role that fashion plays—and could potentially play—in relation to urgent

socio-cultural, environmental, and political developments in contemporary society.

For more information, see:

[fashionprofessorship.artez.nl](http://fashionprofessorship.artez.nl)

[futuremakers.artez.nl](http://futuremakers.artez.nl)

**Jeroen van den Eijnde** was appointed in 2016 as professor Product Design & Interior Architecture to shape the professorship E||scape. He was trained as a product designer (ArtEZ) and design historian (Leiden University). He did his PhD research on ideology and theory in Dutch design and fashion education. Van den Eijnde is author and editor of books and articles about art, design and design education. In 2018, he will publish a new handbook for design students and young design professionals. In the function of teacher ‘design history’ and ‘design theory’, he taught, among others at Haagse Hogeschool, department Industrial Product Design, Design Academy Eindhoven and still teaches at the Product Design department of ArtEZ. He was a member of the board of Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds Gelderland and Design Platform Arnhem. He was advisor art and design for, among others, the province of Gelderland and the National Fund for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture (now Creative Industries Fund NL). In May 2015, Van den Eijnde was appointed for a period of four years as a member of the domain committee on Visual Arts, Design and Architecture of the Raad voor Cultuur (the Council for Culture): the legal advisory body of the government and parliament in the fields of arts, culture and media. Since 2016 he is one of the program co-ordinators of the Applied Network Design Research that focus on design research at higher vocational

institutes. In April 2018 he will be member of the new program board of CLICKnl, the national research and innovation network for creative industries and responsible for the further development and implementation of the Knowledge & Innovation Agenda Creative Industries 2018–2021.

**Ian King** is a research professor at the University of the Arts, London and London College of Fashion. He is currently Chair of the Research Degrees Committee at the college. King is widely published in academic journals, media publications. His recent books include: *The Aesthetics of Dress* (Springer, 2017) explores the relationships between how the body appears and feels in everyday life through aesthetics.

King is also the founder and co-ordinator of the International Fashion colloquium series that originated in 2011. Previous locations for Fashion colloquium include: London; Milan; Paris; New York; Amsterdam, Shanghai, Ho Chi Ming, and Sao Paulo, Vietnam. Future locations include: Rome in September 2019 and Jaipur, India in 2020.

**Catelijne de Muijnck** is the editor of APRIA and programme maker of ArtEZ studium generale.

[www.studiumgenerale.artez.nl/eng](http://www.studiumgenerale.artez.nl/eng)

**Kim Poldner** is Professor of Circular Business at The Hague University of Applied Sciences (THUAS). Poldner obtained her PhD at the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland for which she studied 58 sustainable entrepreneurs in the fashion industry longitudinally. Her research interests evolve at the crossroads of business, aesthetics, and sustainability, and she has written award-winning case studies on sustainable fashion pioneers, such as Veja and Osklen.

Poldner is the founder of the Circular Fashion Lab at Wageningen University & Research, which brings designers and companies together with researchers and students to answer pressing questions in fashion supply chains. The Lab contributes to the creation of new ‘categories’ of materials previously unknown in the fashion industry, disruptive technologies that re-define textile supply-chains and inspired processes of organizing that turn competitors into comparables.

Poldner is a member of the Scientific Committee of the Fashion Colloquium 2018, because she is fascinated by how we can translate sustainable design and technology to marketable innovations. Before she embarked on an academic career, Kim initiated the first eco fashion store in the Netherlands and she was a founder of online platform Eco Fashion World. Her green wardrobe, including her upcycled wedding dress, was exhibited during the exhibition *Wear I Am* in 2017.

For more information, see: [www.wur.eu/circularfashion](http://www.wur.eu/circularfashion)

### **Anneke Smelik**

is Katrien van Munster professor of Visual Culture at the Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands, where she is coordinator of the MA programme ‘Creative Industries’. She published widely on identity, body, memory and technology in cinema, popular culture, and fashion. Recent books include *Delft Blue to Denim Blue. Contemporary Dutch Fashion; Materializing Memory in Art and Popular Culture*; and *Thinking Through Fashion. A Guide to Key Theorists*.

Smelik is project leader of the research programme “Crafting Wearables; Fashionable Technology”, funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research, which will be presented together with Pauline

van Dongen and Lianne Toussaint at the exhibition of *State of Fashion. Searching for the New Luxury*.

She is a member of the Scientific Committee of the *Fashion Colloquium*, because she finds sustainability the most urgent issue for contemporary fashion. Anneke Smelik is developing a new research project on 'slow' fashion from the perspective of 'posthumanism' and 'new materialism', to understand how human and non-human factors are interrelated. If we recognize that humans are deeply entangled with things, such as clothes, it may be easier to see why we need to take responsibility for the earth—and change the fashion system.

See: [www.annekesmelik.nl](http://www.annekesmelik.nl)

**José Teunissen** is Professor of Fashion Theory and Dean of the School of Design and Technology at London College of Fashion, UAL. She is the curator of *State of Fashion: Searching for the New Luxury* (2018).

Teunissen is currently a board member of the Dutch Creative Industries Council and Chair of the network CLICK/Next Fashion, the Dutch Government innovation network for the creative industries in the Netherlands. In 2015, she established the Centre of Expertise Future Makers at ArtEZ, which is dedicated to new production

processes in fashion and design. She holds a Visiting Professorship in Fashion Theory and Research at ArtEZ and works as an independent fashion curator.

Teunissen has previously worked as a professor, a journalist for several Dutch newspapers and Dutch broadcast television, and was a curator in Fashion and Costume at the Centraal Museum in Utrecht (1998–2006).

In 2002 at ArtEZ, Teunissen was one of the first professors in the Netherlands to conduct research and develop theory in the field of fashion. She took various hot items from the fashion industry, including the effects of globalization, sustainability, and technology, and used them as the basis for research projects, publications, and exhibitions in association with ArtEZ Press, which earned her an excellent international reputation.

Teunissen has co-edited many books including *Fashion and Imagination* (2009), *The Art of Fashion* (2009), *Couture Graphique* (2013), *Fashion Odyssey* (2013), *The Future of Fashion is Now* (2014), and *Everything but Clothes* (2015). She has also realized many exhibitions, including *The Art of Fashion* (2009), *Couture Graphique* (2013), *The Future of Fashion is Now* (2014), and *Everything but Clothes* (2015).

Read online:

<http://apria.artez.nl/editorial-board-searching-for-the-new-luxury/>

# Colophon

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