WHO WORE IT BEST? UNDERSTANDING MEDIATED FASHION AS DESIGN

ARTICULATIONS, IDENTITIES

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ABSTRACT

How interdisciplinary design practices intersect as a powerful communicational core in fashion is given little attention in design studies. Even as fashion design is a design domain in its own right, this paper argues that our conceptions of power in fashion need to more fully include fashion as a matter of communication design. This paper argues that power is enacted via combinations of material and immaterial articulations of design practices in fashion. Design practices are essential in shaping the tastes, styles, and desires at the heart of fashion, thus rendering fashion design as an expanded field that reaches far beyond material garments. This discussion paper proposes an expanded conception of fashion design, one that includes a mesh of networked media and design practices central to fashion. Via analysis of the fashion collective Vetements, these intersections are regarded as a locus of both economic and aesthetic power.

INTRODUCTION

This paper inquires into the role of design in the shifting cultural and communicational landscape of fashion, digital mediation and branding, and how it relates to fashion design, and power. Issues of power in fashion is often discussed with a focus on manufacturing and materials, relating to environmental and ethical aspects of production and labour (e.g. Annamma et.al. 2012), as fast fashion plays a significant role in pressing global problems. However, the power inherent in transdisciplinary design in fashion tend to be over shadowed by the long list of problems connected to fashion. These include issues of biased representations of race and ethnicity (e.g. Sharma & Sharma 2003, Sircar 2014, Cheang 2013), biased conceptions of beauty and the female body (e.g. Grimstad Klepp & Rysst 2017, McCracken 2014, Craik 1993) - just to mention a few. As fashion is part of an aesthetic economy (Gaugele 2014), aesthetic and economic power is enacted via design practices that connect the mediated and the worn, as fashion increasingly is weaved into our mediated daily lives and digital cultures. As part of an increasingly mediatized field (Roccamora 2016, Muriale 2014), fashion design needs to more fully take on a fine-tuned understanding of the persuasive power enacted via the interconnections between fashion and its mediations. Here, thinking of mediation of fashion in terms of design, as opposed to as in terms of media, may aid us in expanding our understanding of fashion as an expanded design domain.

Fashion ties together a range of competencies and professional design practices. Written from an interdisciplinary humanist perspective, this paper places the complex couplings between interdisciplinary design practices at the heart of fashion. It inquires into how contemporary fashion is performed and

enacted in a blend of material and digital design practices in contemporary networked media, such as the image-sharing platform, Instagram. The ways in which these digital networks are enmeshed in the design of fashion may inform our understanding of fashion design as situated and performed in digital cultures. In connecting perspectives from critical cultural studies, fashion studies, and studies of advertising and branding, a focus on interdisciplinary design allows us to more fully unpack matters of symbolic and aesthetic power in fashion and its mediation, circulation and distinction.

Connecting fashion design and fashion mediation to contemporary digital networked media culture and design, the paper draws on perspectives from the media/journalism- and creative industry scholar Mark Deuze. It relates and discusses Deuze's (2007, 2011, 2016) notion of pervasive media in contemporary advertising work and media use to fashion. He frames media as a significant component in our lives. Four main loci of power in the connections between fashion design and digital media culture is devised by drawing on Deuze (2016). In his article, *Living in media and the future of advertising,* he proposes three concepts relating to contemporary media practices. These are 1) media as life, 2) media as activities, 3) media as artefacts, and 4) media as arrangements.

In modifying and relating these concepts to a discussion of the linkages between communication design and fashion design, as these collapse into one another, fashion design might be rendered as an expanded design discipline. In such an expanded discipline, power might be understood as enacted via interdisciplinary design across the digital and the material.

By way of critical textual analysis of selected examples of mediated articulations relating to the fashion brand Vetements, selected articulations of how the garments and their mediations intersect as part of contemporary digital media and design cultures and practices are analysed. As a result, the paper suggests that we expand our notions of fashion design to also incorporate meditational design practices in our conceptualisation of fashion as a design domain. First it briefly presents the methods applied, followed by a presentation of the fashion brand Vetements, the relations between fashion and media, followed by a discussion of fashion and communication design, persuasion and fashion, and fashion and cultural studies. Deuzes's concepts are then related to fashion and to Vetements in the analysis, followed by a discussion and concluding remarks.

METHODS
The main methods applied in this study are what Karlsen (2017) refers to as online ethnography, where online activities and communities are observed and interacted with over time. A large network of more than two hundred international fashion media actors, such as stylists, online fashion magazines,

fashion photographers, artists, photographers, bloggers, commentators and fashion critics have been observed over a period of more than six months, as has the brand's Instagram account. Vetements's online (and offline) activities were also observed. Readers are encouraged to articulations are temporally and geographically distributed. With reference to the author's practice-based and critical engagement and research in digital communication design, spanning two decades, the selected examples serve as what Sean Cubitt (2013) refers to as anecdotal evidence, that is particular textual articulations that allow us to root a larger discussion of a phenomenon in particular cases. This is combined with critical textual analysis of selected web/Instagram mediations of Vetements's activities and on-going digital campaigns.

VIRAL FASHION: VETEMENTS
The Georgian-French, Zürich-based fashion design collective labelled "Vetements", (French, meaning "clothes"), has from its' inception developed into a successful, yet contested brand with a cult-like following. Vetements has attracted the fashion-world's attention and generated heated discussion as well as massive hype. As stated by Vogue "The label launched in 2014 based on the idea of urban cultures, the internet, everyday life on the streets and a modern wardrobe without seasonal themes"[i]. What makes Vetements an interesting case for inquiring into the relationships between fashion design, communication design and power is the brand's ability to tap into and harness prominent features in digital culture and design, and to treat the design and mediation as mutually dependent on one another. That being said, this paper does not have a normative approach to design, and does not see Vetements as doing design work better or more holistic than other fashion designers or brands. However, this brand provides an interesting case when inquiring into how fashion design might be embedded in contemporary mediational cultures. The brand's mediation and overall presentation of its identity forms an integrated communication design in and across ecologies of genres and formats, where design across fields is a unifying feature binding together the artefacts and their mediations. An example of the blur between garment and medium in Vetements is a hooded sweater seen in figure 1. In showing the garment as part of their The quote has its origin in the television series Beverly Hills 90210, where the character Dylan McKay says: "May the bridges I burn light the way"[1]. Designed as to generate engagement with possible sources of the quote, steering its audience straight in to mediated popular culture, this anti-intellectualism paired with luxury fashion caters to the tastes of generations of digital natives, casting themselves into accomplices in a nostalgic media journey into the lives of its audiences and actual and potential customers.

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[1] Available at: http://www.esquire.com/style/news/a49095/vetements-luke-perry-bridges-i-burn/[accessed 31 May 2017].

Figure 1: Model wearing a hooded sweater, with the Beverly Hills 90210, where the character Dylan McKay says: "May the bridges I burn light the way" as shown in the FW/16 collection.

With clothes designed as luxury versions of the kinds of brands and garments already part of this generation's wardrobe, Vetements treat these original items as readymades to be modified and imbued with meaning and aesthetic appeal. The clothes circulate and become discursive artefacts in the networked spheres as a result of design that combines the mediated and the worn. A comprehensive analysis of the ways in which Vetements taps into contemporary networked Internet culture is outside the scope of this paper. However, the cases included in this paper are selected so as to highlight how design may aid us in unpacking the potential for power in interdisciplinary design practices at play in contemporary luxury fashion. In particular, Vetements addresses the urge for a space between the artificially branded reality in which we live, and the authentic experiences of it. How this ambiguous articulation of the relationship between the authentic and the designed is visible in the brand's appropriation of a T-shirt that is part of the uniform of employees of the logistics company DHL. Vetements's recast version of the t-shirt retails at 185 pounds, now extensively copied, and sold cheaply on sites such as Ebay.

Figure 5: Screen grab from the fashion house *Vetements* SS16 collection, showing Russian designer Gosha Rubchinskiy wearing a DHL t-shirt.

As an example of design that triggers participation, the t-shirt can be understood as nudging participatory practices. The DHL t-shirts stirred up debate[2], and spread across fashion networks, spinning it into a sought-after item for a short period of time. More importantly, it was part of a coherent design where the responses to it, provided valuable publicity and controversy – and thereby the attention of the fashion world. A twist was added as CEO of DHL, Ken Allen was modelling the t-shirt for Vetements, in seemingly being "spotted" with the t-shirt. A spoof tweet from DHL-Africa juxtaposed the images of Allen and the Russian designer Gosha Rubchinskiy, who initially modelled the t-Shirt, followed by the text: "Gobal fashion icons? DHL Express CEO, Ken Allen tried out the Vetements t-shirt. Who wore it best? #DHLVetements." Such a media ploy is designed so as to spark off digital networked Internet activity, aiming for a garment to *go viral,* as it was referred to in a journalistic article in dazeddigital[3].

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[2]Available at: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3517575/Would-pay-185-Vetements-DHL-t-shirt.html [05 April 2017].

[3]Available at: http://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/30561/1/the-fashion-meme-vetements-vetememes-viral-clothes-dhl [05 April 2017].

Figure 2: Screen grab of the tweet showing a juxtaposition of Gosha Rubchinskiy and Ken Allen with DHL t-shirts.

In the case of the DHL t-shirt, the relations between the design of the garment and its mediation is blurred to extent that it does not make sense of them if regarded just as pieces of clothes or as mere branding. The creative director of Vetements, Demna Gvasalia explained that the t-shirt became a mediated commentary on the role of DHL in the daily lives of the designer, resulting in the incorporation of the DHL t-shirt into the collection:

> For me, it was such a recurring topic in my life. Every day someone was saying, 'The package didn't arrive, we have to stop working with DHL, we will be bankrupt by DHL.' DHL seemed to be more a part of my life than anything else so I thought, why isn't it in the show?"

However, the t-shirt is a classical case of appropriation, a technique borrowed from the art world, where the potential meanings of an object is recast as is it transported into a different context than the original one. Much like the most notorious of readymades, Duchamp's "Fountain", which signed with the letters R. Mutt, was recast from an urinal into an object of art when exhibited in an art gallery, Vetements appropriation of the DHL t-shirt into the fashion show plays on the same by now well known mechanisms. However, the big difference between Duchamps's commentary on the art world and the DHL t-shirt, is that Vetements knowingly design for contingence, and for their design choices to be debated, commented upon, shared and copied, all adding to the brand's buzz.

As a luxury fashion brand, they operate in the upper scale of he luxury market, where "entry level products" are common term for less expensive products that is more widely available, often with an easily recognisable marker of the brand. As Vetements states that they are not conceptual, that they simply make clothes they would like to wear, this T-shirt does not make sense as a design if not seen as related to a wider discussion of conceptual versus non-conceptual fashion. In combining these elements so as to stay "true" to its anti-conceptual profile, while still being conceptual in their design of

such a response to criticism, the mixed message they send simultaneously confuses and caters to those who can see through it. This technique, through which a sense of complicity and being part of a conceptual game is an outcome of the integrated design, this addresses the brand's audience in ways both similar and different from those described by Ryan (2007) as relating to Prada's involvement in the art world. As Prada relates to fine art and cultural institutions such as museums and galleries, and has invested heavily in architectural innovation as part of their brand's strategy, Vetements plays on popular digital culture and post-art practices (see for example Joselit 2013) in treating jokes and Internet-memes as disruptive yet powerful mechanisms in generating network activity. As stated by the design collective Metahaven:

> "The joke has an untapped power to disrupt – a power far greater than we thought. On the Internet, jokes may "scale" quickly, and reach hundred, thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of people in the course of a few minutes".

However, as opposed to the anti-commercial political project of Metahaven, the power inherent in fashion design that has taken digital popular culture into the very core of their design is to both critique and do business simultaneously. The art world Vetements indirectly comment and caters to is not so much those of traditional cultural institutions, but what may be referred to as post-art. This is art that responds to the power of digital networks, image populations that form specific contingencies in the world and where a semi-uncontrolled controlled digital buzz is one potential outcome (Joselit 2013).

FASHION: DESIGN AND MEDIA

For the study of fashion design, gaining more nuanced insights into fashion beyond matters of sartorial design, garment- and textile production is crucial to better understand the fine tuned workings at play in how fashion currently plays out in the digital environments in which we live. The potential for power, that is aesthetic power, economic power and power in defining communities of tastes and sensibilities cannot be found in fashion as material sartorial practices alone, nor in traditional advertising. As fashion design includes interdisciplinary communicational practices, these are not easily grasped if regarded as fashion *and* media. Discussing fashion film in terms of an ecology approach to genre, Skjulstad and Morrison (2016: 34) point to a "(...transformation of fashion brands into media and communication entities…)", as well as the "…emergence of new media and design networks whose actors co-produce new content, expressions and forms in the media and cultural sectors". Fashion has never existed in a vacuum. According to Arnold (2009), fashion is more than mere clothes or a selection of images. Fashion has a rich history of deep integration between material garments and their mediations, spanning from renaissance portraits of dignitaries, Chanel's costumes for the Ballet Russes, and Hussein Chalayan's fashion shows as social commentary

bordering performance art (Hoffmann 2009). As relating to explorations of the potential in digital mediation of fashion, the platform Showstudio.com has been ground-breaking. Included in the long list of designers who have advanced digital mediation of fashion are Ruth Hogben's collaborations with Gareth Pugh (Khan 2012a&b), or Helmut Lang, who live-streamed a collection over the Internet as early as 1998 (Muriale 2014, Skjulstad & Morrison 2016). As fashion reflects cultural transformations, Vetements demonstrates how aesthetic- and economical power in fashion is enacted via a blend of networked communication design practices that differ from traditional formats in a designed activation of digitally networked fashion cultures, thus providing a case for discussing fashion design as an expanded field.

However, as this paper argues, power in fashion can be tied to processes of design for invoking desire and semiotic-material distinction. Such a distinction may be understood in terms of aesthetic power, and more fully grasped if treated as a matter of interdisciplinary design practices where the material and the digital intersect. In contrasting the global culture industries with Adorno and Horkheimer's initial notion of culture industry, Lash & Lury (2007: 5), give prominence to the blurring of media and artefacts in such a global culture industry. They claim that the global culture industries largely work through brands, not commodities. They stress the power of brands, as they see production and consumption as "…processes of the construction of difference". This difference, vital for brands is spun from interdisciplinary design practices that unfold and are articulated by way of a deep understanding of Internet culture and communication design. In relating such conceptions of the relations between the commodity and the sign to Vetements, separating the two is problematic.

FASHION AND FASHIONING

Fashion is a slippery term, and in need of some disambiguation. In tracing the etymology of the word *Fashion,* Edwards (2011: 1) unpacks various meanings of it, describing the concept of fashion as "…the proverbial Pandora's box". As a verb, *to fashion* refers to the ways things are done, much like design can refer to the activity of designing and the material articulations of such activities. However, given the slippery quality of the term, Edwards (2011: 3) points to the importance of distinguishing between the study of dress, style and adornment from studying fashion as "[…a wider phenomenon of social change". Fashion is also tightly interwoven into the material matter of the world and our bodies (Negrin 2013). As stated by Entwistle (2009: 8), in her study of the aesthetic markets of fashion, "Fashion is a surprisingly vague term….]" She understands fashion as referring to a "[…constant movement for the sake of movement." As relating to fashionable clothing, Entwistle (Ibid) stresses that while

referring to stylistic innovation, fashion is also deeply connected to systems of production and distribution and to changing ideals.

At a fundamental level, according to Entwistle (2009), fashion is about aesthetic value. Such value is also a matter of design. Aesthetic value is created, negotiated and mediated in its many facets, outtakes and articulations (Skjulstad and Morrison 2016). According to Rocamora (2016 :5):

"The fashion industry has embraced digital media to the point that they are now intrinsic to and formative of many practices taking place in the industry and among fashion consumers".

Fashion is also a large and diverse industry, spanning from the fast high-street market to haute couture. Fashion design and the role of the fashion designer also refer to quite diverse roles in the industry, spanning from auteur-artists such as the late Alexander McQueen, to industrial designers for the mass market (Edwards 2011). However, the role of fashion designers is seldom discussed as tightly related to communicational design practices that includes a deep understanding of the mediated lives within which we make aesthetic choices and nurture our sartorial desires. As fashion is nested in communication and culture (e.g. Barnard 2002, Hebdige 1979), the articulation of these integrated design practices tend not to be included in our conception of fashion design. Contemporary mediation of fashion integrates a variety of design practices needed for creating appropriate conditions for promotional networked activities, such as activities that nudges Instagram postings and and journalistic coverage (Roccamora 2016). Behind the mediated articulations through which a brand such as Vetements, enter the lives of their audience are complex sets of design activities geared towards harnessing the power of networked engagement as means for attracting attention and as means to build symbolic-aesthetic power. Skjulstad (2017) Have inquired into Instagram, fashion branding and fashion art photography drawing on van Dijk's (2011) notion of connectivity, where power is located in and across extensive digital networks. For fashion designers and fashion brands, making their work visible to the world is key. Fashion is thus very much about designing for these networks in ways that links together the garments and their mediations, making fashion part of what Jansson (2002: 5) refers to as 'image culture', that is "…a socio-cultural state in which media images and media-infused commodity signs are to an increasing extent used as sources for- and expressions of, cultural identity". These commodity-signs, this paper argues, are articulations of interdisciplinary design practices, and in the case of Vetements, an expanded fashion design that emerges from and blends digital and networked cultural articulations into the fold.

COMMUNICATION DESIGN, PERSUASION AND FASHION

The relationship between mediation and design opens up questions of design as communication and as digital and/or material multimodal articulations (Skjulstad 2008). Initially discussed as relating to socio-cultural perspectives, by Morrison (2010:40), as a "…means of framing design processes and developmental aspects of sociosemiotic and situated approaches to mediated meaning making", the concept of communication design binds together design as both process and situated semiotic outcome. As relating to web interfaces, Skjulstad (2008) investigates the role of intersecting design practices such as graphic design and interaction design. In regarding interfaces as meditational sites where a range of design practices intersect and are articulated visually, communication design is proposed as an overarching concept for grasping these interconnections.

In terms of persuasive mediation of fashion, Elke Gaugele (2014) discusses what she refers to as the emerging *ethical regime* in fashion. In her review of various ethical fashion initiatives, she points to how new hierarchies are created, and what tend to be communicated, is that fashion brands ultimately are aiming to be portrayed as do-gooders. With reference to power, Gaugele (2014: 221) connects this turn to global capitalism, now loaded with ethical, political and moral values, albeit one "…which creates new forms of supremacy". However, power and new forms of supremacy is seldom explored as relating to the persuasive communication at the heart of fashion. The growing significance digital media plays in fashion is taken up by Roccamora (2016: 3), who establishes linkages between fashion studies and sociology-oriented studies of mediatization. With reference to a significant body of scholarly engagement on mediatization, she points to the "…idea that the media have become increasingly central to the shaping and doing of institutions and agents, to their practices and experiences". She relates this to the field of fashion, its institutions and practices. Also the conditions for genre innovation in this domain is discussed with reference to genre ecology and fashion film (Skjulstad & Morrison, 2016). Via an ecology approach, genre in fashion film, the emergence of distinct distributed, multimodal and multiplatform genres within fashion are explored in terms of innovation within the culture industries. Such genre ecologies are in end of the day, interconnected materialisations of interdisciplinary design.

FASHION AND CULTURAL STUDIES

In writing about design and culture, Sparke (2004) reminds us about the deep connections between design and people's needs and desires that are fuelled and met by visual and material images available on the marketplace. He regards the marketplace as fundamental to what he refers to as design's "acculturalisation". In positioning design in contexts of consumption, Sparke (2004) positions design firmly in the domain of culture, and vital to the enculturation of taste and conspicuous consumption, social mobility and distinction. As part of this coupling of design to tastes, designers and consumption, he links strategic cultural referencing to fine art as means through which to achieve high prices for otherwise anonymous products. Such linkages between art, design and culture are seen both as creative impulses (Gibbons 2005) and as ways of appropriating and neutralising critical art practices engulfing them into brand building strategies (Ryan 2007). However, contemporary design of communication for leading fashion brands moving on from paper-based publications into the digital spheres (Perthuis 2015), embrace key aspects of digital Internet culture such as memes (Shifman 2014), aspects of digital culture increasingly reflected in fashion design. The DHL t-shirt is a powerful example of such a fashion-meme, as are recent spoof designs commenting on the fashion brand Balenciaga's bag Arena's resemblance to the large blue IKEA bag FRAKTA. Gvasalia is also creative director at Balenciaga. Generating a creative participation in visual conversations as new spoof products spanning from IKEA sneakers to jewellery occurred in digital networks, the parody attracted attention to both Balenciaga and IKEA in various publications and digital networks[4]. The full scope of the exchanges between various fashion publishers and Instagrammers that comments on this is beyond the scope of the paper, but the main point is that participatory practices such as memes and parodies in digital networked media are becoming part of fashion design itself, also in its material articulations.
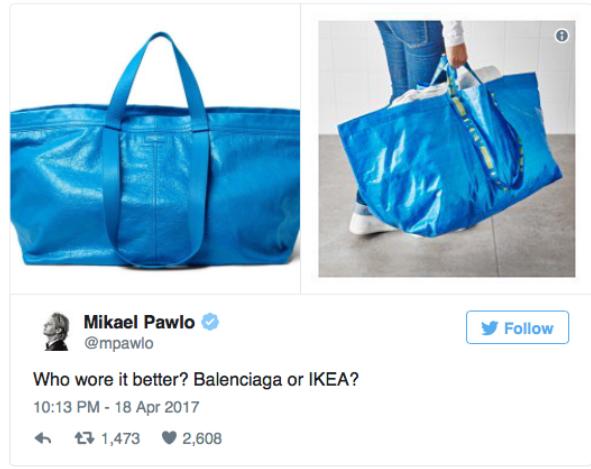
Figure 3: Screen grab showing the Balenciaga ARENA bag (left) and the original IKEA FRAKTA bag (right, referencing one tweet among numerous juxtapositions of the two bags. While the IKEA bag retails at $0,99, the Balenciaga bag retails at $ 2145.

[4] Available at: http://www.highsnobiety.com/2017/04/26/balenciaga-ikea-bag-fashion-industry-opinions/ [accessed 31 May 2017].

Figure 4: Screen grabs showing the resulting ad from IKEA, referencing the the comparison between the Balenciaga bag and the original FRAKTA.

LIVING IN MEDIA, WEARING CLOTHES

Writing from the vantage point of social media theory, Mark Deuze argues that we live *in* the media as opposed to positioning media as outside entities that we simply use (2011, 2016). He writes (2016: 1):

"Media are to us like water is to fish". Stressing that this is not a determinist position, he claims that media are central, if not vital to our lives, as people carry out many of the activities in their daily lives in, via, and through mediated environments. However, these insights are vital if we are to understand the power of current communication design, as these mediationally embedded activities, ones that take place in the lives of situated subjects. In exploring the future of advertising as it evolves in an era characterised by changing roles, changing professional practices, convergence, and integration between domains such as marketing, advertising and media companies, Deuze (2016: 1) explores how contemporary media practices frame our lives. He stresses many of the ways in which media provide conditions for our actions. As a point of departure, drawing on Hepp and Krotz (2014), he refers to what he sees as "…an increasingly pervasive and ubiquitous mediatization of everyday life". By way of his studies of the production and design practices of media professionals, Deuze (2016) frames media as infrastructures. Taking as a point of departure such a conception of media as infrastructures, these provide opportunities for a variety of mediated design practices in fashion, practices that also increasingly draw on the networked qualities of our digital lives and the intimate relationships we have with our media.

Fashion, and its mediation and communication design is trans-disciplinary design area, which tends to fall between disciplinary domains. Within cultural studies, fashion has been framed as communication (e.g. Barnard 2002), as vital for subculture (Hebdige 1979),

and as part of post-art anthropology practices (Bik Bandlien 2016). Fashion is also connected with celebrity studies (Church Gibson 2012) and with media forms such as costume dramas (Edwards 2011), and the Hollywood star system (Berry 2000). Fashion studies, has increasingly acknowledged the role media and meditational processes play in fashion, adopting concepts from media studies such as mediatization (Roccamora 2016), and Lev Manovich's ideas about permanent presence in digital media (Khan 2012). In terms of fashion branding in digital media platforms Skjulstad (2017) have inquired into how experimental fashion photography explores and adapts to the technological conditions and constraints inherent in the platform Instagram, and Morrison and Skjulstad (2016) have inquired into genre in terms of ecology in fashion film. They stress that fashion, mediation and design intersect in novel digital networked articulations. As relating to branding, an important aspect of fashion, various techniques for making brands matter in our lives are analysed in depth by Arvidsson (2006). Lury (2004) highlights how brands work as an interface between producers and consumers, promoting a form of interactivity between them, much like contemporary networked media. Arvidsson (2006) positions capital as an embodiment of value. However, his study does not closely relate to how the design of such value is articulated, and how such value may be the result of a nexus of related design practices. However, studies of fashion tend not to take up fashion as an expanded field where media practices are regarded as vital, even as the number of studies that gives these relations attention is increasing. For example, Roccamora (2016) has related the concept of mediatization to fashion, establishing the relevance of the underlying ideas behind this concept to fashion studies, thus incorporating insights from media and communication studies into this discipline. However, differing from the often sociology-framed studies of mediatization (e.g. Lundby 2009), Roccamora (Ibid) investigates how such processes provide conditions for actual articulations of fashion, inquiring into how fashion shows are designed in ways adjusted to mediation and dissemination in social media. Also the adoption of moving images in digital mediations of fashion in the emerging format of fashion film has gained momentum (Khan 2012 a & b, Uhlirova 2013, Muriale 2014, Skjulstad & Morrison 2016). Even as the many close interdependencies between fashion and various digital mediations receive increased scholarly attention, these interconnections tend not to be discussed in terms of design or in terms of design of power. It does indeed encompass sets of cultural practices nested within the cultural industries, driven by a variety of combinations of different design practices (Entwistle 2009).

MEDIA AS ARTEFACTS, CLOTHES AS MEDIA

Deuze (2016: 3) discusses media as pervasive to the point that they almost become invisible, still, the artefacts with which we surround ourselves suggest an "…. Increasingly seamless and altogether ambient lived experience of multiple media as we navigate everyday life". How advertisers deal with this, he claims is to

"…promote personal relationships with consumers who are outfitted with artifacts that afford a permanently connected always online, and progressively telecommunication presence".

Such a presence is part of the often tailored and personal, and at times even curated media stream available to potential consumers via Instagram. However, when the relationship with a brand is communicated via material media such a garment, the relationship between what might be considered media and what might be considered fashion complicated. The relationship between media and objects as design materials is taken up in what Lash and Lury (2007) identified as an on-going process of media becoming objects and objects becoming media, referring to *mediatization of things* and *thingifaction of media* as defining features of the global cultural industries. Design for trans-media storytelling where some of the creative labour is outsourced to the audience/participants as originally recognised by Jenkins (2006) and elaborated by among others, Deuze (2016) is key in such processes. A full range of design practices where media and artefacts are intertwined in an elaborate design intensive media presence is central to Vetements's. In tapping into post-Soviet youth culture and aesthetic preferences of digital- and design-savvy audiences, power in contemporary fashion lies not only in the design of interesting, beautiful or challenging material artefacts, but in embedding these in contemporary digital culture and in designing artefacts that reflects a deep knowledge and appreciation of Internet culture. Garner and Evans (2012:67) refer to design as narrative and communication:

"Building a narrative into design is frequently overlooked, but it provides a key unifying concept across today's disciplines. If design is communication, then designing is the creation of a narrative".

The narratives at play in Vetements' design practice is about the entanglement and pervasiveness of Internet and design cultures, and how fashion design may reflect and comment on these mediationally *and* materially.

MEDIA ARRANGEMENTS AND FASHION.

Deuze (2016: 6) propose media as arrangements for our lives, and points to how identity work is central to many people's media practices:

"A crucial contemporary aspect of the relationship between self and social identity is the skilful maintenance of multiple selves existing in the world, each of which we can have a profound impact on who we (think we) are".

In terms of power relations between advertisers and 'prosumers', these go beyond positions of resistance or enforcements of power relations between them, as discussed by Deuze (2007). In Enwtistle's (2009) in-depth analysis of the aesthetic economy of fashion, she investigates the practices of fashion byers. In her study she refers to established concepts in the industry such as commodity chains and commodity circuits central to the profession and the creative industries of which fashion is part. However, interestingly, she points to how the concept of networks is gaining relevance as a metaphor when trying to grasp the various interconnections between the various nodes in these networks. The inclusion of the DHL t-shirt in the Vetements collection is designed as one promotional node in an unstable ecology of mediations, and power lies in the understanding of fashion media as part of a messy ecology of articulations across domains and contexts which can be set in motion and simultaneously feed into the material and digital articulations of fashion. However, a deliberate play with such changing positions, Vetements, engages potential customers to actively appropriate and clothes that are not considered fashionable in the first place, something anyone can do, at the same time as they position themselves as possessing enough aesthetic power to make anything fashionable by simply including it in their show. In doing this, they have designed situations where they bot present themselves as in possession of power to define what is fashionable, as they simultaneously invite audiences to participate and ad their own visual fashion comments to the networked fashion ecology and buzz. In arranging a situation, a contingency where the outcome is copies of copies of what is part of a logistics company's very unfashionable uniform, they treat the cultural mediated life-worlds and identity projects of people as design material for fashion and for arrangements in which one can *do* fashion.

MEDIA AS ACTIVITY, DOING FASHION

According to Deuze (2016: 5), media is something we *do,* as opposed to something that is located on the outside of life. Media are something that is "… in our pockets and ever so close to our bodies". Pointing to the increasingly intimate relationship we have with media, and the resulting intimate communication designed by advertising professionals in which we increasingly invest emotionally, he points to the risk of perceiving our realities as fake experiences designed for making us nurture close relationships with brands. Vetements have designed a brand that mediates and aestheticizises situations, styles and realities into which everyone can place themselves fashionably and with which one can identify. Via a very active Instagram account, Vetements oscillate between communicating authenticity and conceptual games in various ways, deliberately sending mixed messages. Via the combination of unglamorous photo locations and garments and props most

people have in their closet, such as for example oversized sweaters and hoodies, sneakers and backpacks, they both include and exclude its audiences by offering luxury versions of what is already in everyone's closet. In developing a specific visual style with anti-fashion poses, anti-fashion locations and castings, Vetements has tapped into current trends in fashion where the authentic and imperfect is becoming an ideal. This invites everyone interested and with access to a scruffy street, a hooded sweater, metal band t-shirts and oversized street wear items to stage themselves in Instagram postings where they directly or indirectly reference the brand. The easily copied distinctive features in the brand's Instagram postings may be understood as gentle nudges to activate the networked potential of their audiences and potential costumers. Vetements particular visual meditational and material style often involves castings and locations that differ significantly from more traditional glamorous styles often associated with fashion photography. However, their specific Post-Soviet aesthetics is so distinct as to even be parodied by the spoof brand labelled Vetememes[5], a contraband web-shop working as a commercial, running commentary on the style of Vetements by way of parody garments they produce and sell[6]. In choosing not to prosecute Vetememes, Vetements positions themselves both as a liberal and enlightened patron of fashion and media culture, much in the same ways as (Ryan 2007) has discussed as relating to the luxury brand Prada and its embrace of art works that openly criticise consumerism. Also what Vetements knowingly do is to be deliberately unclear, so as to trigger discussion and media coverage about what they really mean by selling their version of a DHL-t-shirt at luxury price. In deliberately breaking with such "commodification of dissent" and "consumption of dissidence" as discussed by Ilya Becker (2014: 78) with reference to the art/fashion project the Bernadette Corporation, while simultaneously embracing it as a locus of power, they design for what Becker places at the heart of being fashionable, that being being different differently. In aiming for attention and presence in the networked mediated world in which we live, steering up debate and controversy is one way of positioning the brand at the centre of power in fashion - that is attention.

DISCUSSION

This discussion paper has aimed at opening up a discussion of how to engage with the symbolic-aesthetic power and its relations to design and economic power at play in contemporary fashion, referring to the interdisciplinary design practices of Vetements. In proposing an expanded view of fashion design, one that also takes into account the need for an updated understanding of digital, networked

Internet culture, a deliberate opening of a cluster of Pandora's boxes is present. In entering the messy interchange between mediated fashion and fashion as media, the focus on all these practices and activities as matters of design may guide us further in unpacking what Deuze (2009: 244) refers to as "… the blurring of real or perceived boundaries between makers and users in an increasingly participatory media culture challenges consensual notions of what it means to work in the cultural industries". Such concerns need further unpacking in fashion and fashion design. However, relating this participatory impulse to fashion, does this imply that potentially everyone contributing to the brand's buzz in these networks should be regarded as fellow designers? Probably this is to stretch the comparison too far. But in relating questions and concepts from current research in media and communication studies, such as those taken up by Deuze (2016, 2007, 2011) into design studies, even more questions arise at a fundamental level, and that are far beyond the scope of this paper to fully answer. For design studies, however, to more comprehensively engage with the entanglements between matters of the material and the mediated, these interconnections are currently acutely present in fashion. Vetements are but one actor that actively articulates such issues visually and materially. As fashion increasingly enters the networked media infrastructures of our lives and become part of them, fashion also become even more clearly part of on-going dialogues in and across media platforms and services, and the collections presented at fashion shows form material contributions to these dialogues. Drawing on Schön (1983: 79) we may see design as a dialogue: "He shapes the situation in accordance with his initial appreciation of it, the situation 'talks back', and he responds to the situation's back talk". However, such participative polyvocal dialogues transverse the material and the digital. Fashion often do talk back, but as the conversations multiply and are increasingly tailored to the tastes and preferences of the individual who engages with fashion via their smartphone Instagram accounts, how the professional and amateur contributions to the conversation are articulated as media and as fashion is in need of scholarly attention. Drawing on the heritage of design studies in critical design, further inquiry into the critical potential inherent in fashion could be a route to take for continuing the exploration of the intersections between fashion design and media studies.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has discussed how fashion design, a design discipline that has manifold connections with contemporary media and Internet culture, via Deuze's (2016) conceptions of media as life, media as artefacts, media as arrangements and media as activities. As these concepts are devised by Deuze so as to discuss

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[6] Available at: http://www.vetememes.com, [accessed 05 April 2017].

current digital, networked and participative media culture, they are useful in framing currents in contemporary high fashion. In referring to Vetements as one actor in the field of fashion that exemplify such an impulse, we may more fully be made aware of how current digital media cultures intersect with and become intrinsic to fashion design. However, it is important to note that this is not applicable to all fashion design or design practices taken up by all fashion brands by far. However, in we may more fully understand how fashion design may be conceived of as encompassing more than material and sartorial articulations and media as a matter of communication design. Fashion is now increasingly becoming a design discipline that has deep and manifold connections with our media lives, media that may also fruitfully be inquired into in terms of design, and integrated design practices. Fashion design may thus be considered as an expanded discipline, one that more or less seamlessly ties together, reflects on and talks back via the infrastructures media provide.

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