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## Fashion, Market and Materiality Along the Seams of Clothing

By Therése Andersson

Andy: [seeing Nigel holding an exclusive gown] I love that! Will that fit me?  
Nigel: A little Crisco and some fishing wire and we'll be in business.

The Devil Wears Prada (2006)

The aim of the 'Fashion, Market and Materiality' section is to let fashion / dress / textile scholars deal with the topic from their own particular theoretical perspective and subject of interest. The study of clothing, costume and fabrics is, as such, a field, which crosses established boundaries between academic disciplines. There are no claims whatsoever of giving an account of the entire field of fashion studies, or of dealing with every subject matter possible within the sphere. Instead, this section brings together a range of scholarly approaches and methodological frameworks, and by compiling these articles the interconnections between production and consumption of fashion and dress are acknowledged. As Joanne Entwistle argues: the relationships between different agencies, institutions, individuals and practices ought to be considered for a better understanding of fashion and dress (Entwistle 2000:3).

This article begins with a quote drawn from the filmic comedy-drama *The Devil Wears Prada* (David Frankel, 2006). It captures Andy's (Anne Hathaway) naive hope of squeezing into a dazzling, too expensive, size zero designer garment, only to be undeceived by Nigel's (Stanley Tucci) sarcastic remark. Aside from sarcasm, Nigel's comment reflects the opinion that high fashion is only available for a select few: determined by income, social status, and body type. Hence, the concept of high fashion tends to become abstract and unattainable, but at the same time fashion provides, as Entwistle puts it: 'the "raw material" of daily dress', pointing to the transformation of fashion into dress by individuals (Entwistle 2000: 1ff.). In this section, the concepts of both fashion and dress will be considered, applied, and combined. Furthermore, the quote from the film articulates the connecting threads (fishing wire) between the articles of this section: the intricate business of appearance, fit and materiality. As clothing is lived and experienced, the encounters with fashion in everyday life involve not only the apparent questions of personal taste and aesthetics, but relate to more diffuse ideas concerning our own body and identity.

Clothing in the most unproblematic sense is used as protection against the elements and, basically, garments embellish the body, conceal the body, or

display the body. In the cultural and social contexts of everyday life however, conventions of dress transform bodies into recognizable and meaningful entities acceptable within specific contexts (Entwistle 2001: 33). Dressing the body consequently concerns dressing the social self, trying out different looks, and, furthermore, different identities. Similarly to the use of dress to hide or reveal the body, fashion can be deployed to conceal or display an identity. By dressing in a particular way something is said about the individual: about gender, age, social status, and in certain cases referring directly to a subcultural affiliation, for instance regarding music or sport. To dress fashionably and/or in accordance with the codes of particular affiliations is simultaneously to stand out and to stick with the group and as Elizabeth Wilson puts it: 'to lay claim to the exclusive and to follow the herd' (Wilson 2003: 6), pointing to a contradictory mode of fashion.

As the body is a site for identity, clothing has a key function in a non-verbal communication process where appearances are negotiated. For instance, Judy Attfield calls attention to clothing and textiles as having 'a particular intimate quality because they lie next to the skin and inhabit the spaces of private life helping to negotiate the inner self with the outside world' (Attfield 2000: 121). The materiality of garments, the cuts and compositions, are regarded as signs in communication: as expressions of symbolic meanings whether it is about football strips, branding the nation, or interpretations of characters in a screenplay. Clothing and textile also have the quality to evoke and mediate emotions (Attfield 2000: 121), for instance the denotations of mourning attire are grief and loss. But, in a more complex sense, garments have in their immediacy an influence on how the wearer feels about herself; for instance, clothes could make one feel totally confident or totally wrong. From this angle emerges the interplay between fashion and emotions: the affect of materiality traces back to opinions and experiences of one's own body.

Hence, as Yuniya Kawamura points out, an understanding of fashion also involves 'an analysis of consumers who adopt fashion and their consumption behaviour because the consumers participate indirectly in the production of fashion' (Kawamura 2005:89). For instance, the practice of shopping is an immediate engagement between consumers and fashion, either as an experience visiting a store on location, browsing and touching actual garments, and taking advantage of the possibility to try on the favoured attires and decide if they fit or not; or visiting an on-line store, browsing through static images of garments and trying to estimate the fit before purchase. Without the act of reception, as Kawamura argues, the cultural production of fashion is not complete (Ibid 2005:89). Consumption behaviour and experiences of clothes due to body type are further discussed in 'Materialised Ideals: Sizes and Beauty' by Ingun Grimstad Klepp, Kirsi Laitala and Benedicte Hauge. Klepp, Laitala and Hauge have studied today's sizing systems. Their research was based on a web survey of Nordic consumers; complemented with in-depth interviews, market analysis of clothing

sizes, and in-store trouser size measurements. At present the clothing industry is based on systems where clothes are made in ready-to-wear sizes and meant to fit most people. However, as previous studies have pointed out, many consumers are discontent with the use of these sizing systems; quite simply size designations are not accurate enough. In their study Klepp, Laitala and Hauge identify which consumer groups fall within these designations, and which do not. The results of this investigation of consumer behaviour indicates that a higher proportion of the consumers who have a body shape that diverges from the existing beauty ideals express discontentment with the sizing systems and the poor selection available.

Shopping and fashion retail as such opens the doors of visual as well as spatial accessibility to designer garments, and Christopher Breward describes the store as a significant staging post in 'the trail of the product from design and manufacture to the intimate realm of the wearer'. (Breward 2003: 143). In her article 'Retail and Fashion – A Happy Marriage? The Making of a Fashion Industry Research Design', Cecilia Fredriksson sets out to analyse the Swedish fashion business as a narrative of different social and cultural processes. She focuses on the narratives surrounding fashion storeowner Helena Svensson and fashion designer Filippa Knutsson. These are used to examine the symbolic status and oppositions between the creative entrepreneurship of fashion retail; opening a store of one's own; fashion design; and starting an own-name line of clothing. In the cases of both Svensson and Knutsson, fashion is presented as a passion, the realisation of a dream come true, and success in a tough business. But Fredriksson points out that the road to success differs, depending on whether you have to work and succeed on your own like Svensson, or if you are born into an entrepreneurial family with established connections as was the case with Knutsson. Fredriksson argues that: 'The inherent paradoxes between design, fashion and retail have to be analysed as different logics within different systems. These cultural systems produce and reproduce different stereotype identities that the fashion industry has to manage.'

Stores offer, as mentioned above, experiences of fashion staging in everyday life; nevertheless, the showcasing of fashion is inevitably associated with the spectacle of the fashion weeks and the runway shows in major cities. As media saturated, high profile events, the concepts of designer collection are broadcasted, in conjunction with a wider promotion of the culture and creative economy of the host cities (Breward 2006: ix). The spatial point of departure for the article 'Catwalking the Nation: challenges and possibilities in the case of the Danish fashion industry', by Marie Riegels Melchior, is Copenhagen Fashion Week 2010. Due to the event a large runway – named 'The World's Greatest Catwalk' – was built for showcasing Danish fashion design. Riegels Melchior understands the case of 'The World's Greatest Catwalk' as a materialization of, and culmination of, several years of joint industry engagement in Denmark aimed at strengthening the Danish fashion industry, as well as an opportunity for the Danish Government to invest in nation-branding. In the context of Danish fashion Riegels Melchior

then examines the mobilization of the nation for fashion, based on how the relationship between fashion and nation unfolds in contemporary fashion research and in practice, drawing attention to a current emphasis on national identity in fashion design as a mark of difference and collective identity.

Issues of national identity are also implied in the discussion of competitive sport and high performance textiles, as international success in championships clearly belongs to the arena of nation branding. The difference between gold and bronze medals could, in the case of swimming, be the reduction of friction drag by just 4 per cent (Clarke & O'Mahony 2005: 144). In her article 'The Fastskin Revolution: From Human Fish to Swimming Androids' Jennifer Craik follows the debate during the last decade surrounding the fastskin swimsuit – well known from the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games – starting from the dichotomy in perception, as to whether the body suit was a performance altering apparatus or a swimming costume. The story of fastskin swimsuits, Craik argues, reflects some of the challenges facing the impacts of technology in postmodern culture. As large investments have been made in researching performance enhancing techniques and equipment, competitive sport has been placed at the cutting edge of new technologies that have 'produced new fabrics and textiles based on state-of-the-art knowledge about ergonomics, aerodynamics, anthropometry, biomechanics, and other specialisations'. Craik asserts that new kinds of sports clothing such as the fastskin has been one product of this research and that this has transformed the nature of sportswear for competition, recreation and as casual wear. The article then deals with different dimensions of the image of the sport of swimming, as it has been 're-mapped as a technical artefact and sci-fi spectacle based on a radically transformed concept of the swimming body as a material object that has implications for the ideal of the fashionable body'.

As pointed out above, many of the developments that have been made in technical materials – such as neoprene – were originally designed for sports. Textile companies continue to invest in research and development; marketing fabrics that combine an attractive look with good feel, where design and tactility are integrated with properties designated to protect the wearer from the elements and which are beneficial to health and well-being (Clarke & O'Mahony 2005: 108f.). Tactile experiences of sports clothing are also discussed by Viveka Berggren Torell in her article 'As Fast as Possible Rather than well Protected: Experiences of Football Clothes'. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological view: 'that we "take in" the world and experience ourselves, as subjects through our bodies', constitute the theoretical point of departure. Berggren Torell has interviewed Swedish football players – in both men's and women's teams – coaches, kit men, buyers of clothes, and sport directors, about their perceptions and experiences of football clothes. Since the body is both a feeling and knowing entity, Berggren Torell holds clothes as 'components of body techniques, facilitating or restraining body movements in a material way, but also as creators

of senses like lightness and security; in both ways influencing the knowledge in action that football playing is'. The content of the interviews is further discussed in relation to health issues concerning both bodily and psychological well-being.

Tactile experiences of dress also play a part in 'Costume Cinema and Materiality: Telling the Story of Marie Antoinette through Dress' by Therése Andersson. Instead of examining how certain films have influenced the fashion scene, or studying film stars as fashion icons, or considering how dress operates in relation to stardom (Moseley 2005: 1ff.), Andersson experiments with a materiality based approach for analysing film narratives through costumes. Sofia Coppola's film *Marie Antoinette* (2006) serves as the empirical starting point and Andersson argues that costumes, on a symbolic level, work as agents: focusing on the interdependence between costume and interpretations of the screenplay's main character. Crystallizing costume as a significant feature for reading the movie, a theoretical notion of costumes and materiality is explored. This notion is further developed in relation to stylistics constituted as emotions materialised in costume. As costumes are the main object for analysis, the discussion immediately centres on costumes created by professional costume designers for the two-dimensional format of the film frame; costumes made for the moment: for a specific narrative and aesthetic expression.

The different takes on fashion and dress in these articles, the varying topics analysed and the research questions discussed, demonstrate the multi-faceted subject of fashion and materiality; the continuous interrelationship between the global and the local, between the exclusive and the mundane, between high fashion and everyday practices of dress. And, as the opening quotation from *The Devil Wears Prada* illustrates, the sometimes all too familiar dilemma: adoration of a fabulous dress, and the harsh knowledge of non-fit. Because clothing is lived and experienced it generates feelings and emotions in the wearer. As a consequence the contradictory mode of fashion tends to bring about ambivalence in responses to dress:

Fashion is ambivalent – for when we dress we wear inscribed upon our bodies the often obscure relationship of art, personal psychology and the social order. And this is why we remain endlessly troubled by fashion – drawn to it, yet repelled by fear of what we might find hidden within its purposes, masked by the enigma of its Mona Lisa smile. (Wilson 2003: 247)

Do you dare to open the doors and step into the wardrobe?

**Therése Andersson** is currently employed at the Department of History, Stockholm University. Her doctoral thesis in Cinema Studies is entitled *Beauty Box: Film Stars and Beauty Culture in Early 20th Century Sweden* (2006). Andersson is currently working on the research project *Velcro, Button, and Zip: Power and Materiality during Styling and Dressing*, funded by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation. E-mail: [therese.andersson@historia.su.se](mailto:therese.andersson@historia.su.se)

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## Materialised Ideals: Sizes and Beauty

By Kirsi Laitala, Ingun Grimstad Klepp & Benedicte Hauge

### Abstract

Today's clothing industry is based on a system where clothes are made in ready-to-wear sizes and meant to fit most people. Studies have pointed out that consumers are discontent with the use of these systems: size designations are not accurate enough to find clothing that fits, and different sizes are poorly available. This article discusses in depth who these consumers are, and which consumer groups are the most dissatisfied with today's sizing systems. Results are based on a web survey where 2834 Nordic consumers responded, complemented with eight in-depth interviews, market analysis on clothing sizes and in-store trouser size measurements. Results indicate that higher shares of the consumers who have a body out of touch with the existing beauty ideals express discontentment with the sizing systems and the poor selection available. In particular, large women, very large men, and thin, short men are those who experience less priority in clothing stores and have more difficulties in finding clothes that fit. Consumers tend to blame themselves when the clothes do not fit their bodies, while our study points out that the industry is to blame as they do not produce clothing for all customers.

**Keywords:** Clothing sizes, beauty norms, labelling, finished goods, obesity, clothes shopping, clothing norms.

## **Introduction**

Dressing requires finding clothes that fit our bodies and the way we look, as well as the society and occasions we are part of (Entwistle 2000: 8; Klepp & Bjerck 2010: 94). The fit of a garment contributes, among other things, to the confidence and comfort of the wearer (Alexander et al. 2005: 52; Klepp 2008: 13). As we will show in this article, a complex interplay between physical and mental structures is critical for the possibility to appear well dressed.

Today's apparel industry is based on a system where clothes are made in ready-to-wear (RTW) sizes. The industry faces challenges as RTW clothes are supposed to fit a variety of bodies while at the same time balancing economic and practical limitations in production and profitability. It is costly to produce clothes in several different sizes, and therefore the industry concentrates the selection of sizes to fit the target customer groups. This means that the apparel industry has to prioritize some customer groups over others. Thus, it is of interest to study which consumer groups have the most trouble finding clothes that fit their bodies and preferences. Further, we want to explore the reasons for apparel manufacturers' priorities and resulting consequences for the consumers. In order to investigate this, a web survey was conducted in three Nordic countries, supplemented with qualitative interviews with selected consumers. To obtain information about the clothing sizes, trousers were measured in a variety of clothing stores and market analysis on the availability of different sizes was performed.

## **Development of Size Designation Systems and Ready-To-Wear Clothing**

Ready-To-Wear clothing has existed since the industrial revolution. Previously, clothes were made to fit each individual either by the wearer themselves, family members or professional dressmakers or tailors. The first grading systems were the proportional dressmakers' systems used between 1820 and 1838. They used a single body measurement, such as bust measure, from which the other pattern dimensions were then graded in equal proportions (Kidwell 1979: 20). These were based on tailors' experience and not on scientific anthropometric studies. Wars during the eighteenth century resulted in expanding armies and the production of large quantities of uniforms, which created the need of systemized size grading and resulted in statistical information about men's body measurements (Aldrich 2007: 6). Between 1939 and 1940, the first large-scale scientific study of women's body measurements was conducted in the US (O'Brien & Sheldon 1941). During the first half of the twentieth century, British sizing was often organized by 2 inch division in the bust, waist or hip size and sets of size designation codes such as SW (small woman), W (women's size), OS (outside) and XOS (X-outside) were used. Average women's size W would be fitted for 36-38 inches bust. Some British manufacturers adopted American methods of number coding, such as women's sizes 10, 12, 14. Already then the different size designation systems were considered confusing, and efforts were made in the later part of the twentieth

century, both in the US and Europe, to develop standardized sizing through body measurement surveys and the use of statistical methods (Aldrich 2007: 41). The first scientific size charts were published by the British Standards Institution (BSI), including a set schedule of code sizing related directly to body measurements in 1953. In the US, the first standard clothing sizes, CS 215-58, were published in 1958 (US Department of Commerce). Development of an international sizing system for clothing started in 1969 and the first international standard for clothing size designations, including definitions and body measurement procedures, was finally published in 1977 (ISO 3635). The European committee for standardization has adopted a modified version of this standard in to their work (EN 13402-1 2001) and is now working to develop a new European size designation system (prEN 13402-4). They have experienced problems in reaching a common size code; it has to be informative and indicate sizes accurately, but at the same time not too complicated for the consumers from different nations to understand or for the apparel industry to use.



Figure 1 Clothing size labels use several different size designation systems

### Fit Problems with Size Designations

Several studies have shown that there are disparities within clothing sizes used today. The most obvious disparities are the national labelling differences between countries. Chun-Yoon and Jasper (1993: 28) and Ujevic et al. (2005: 75) found that there were significant differences even though clothing would have the same size designation. To overcome this problem, international clothing chains often give several size designations in the same label (Figure 1). The sizing differences are not only a problem within the international markets, but also on a national level, as great disparities can be found within sizes. Several studies have demonstrated this by measuring both women's and men's trousers (Sieben & Chen-Yu 1992: 80; Kinley 2003: 23; Faust et al. 2006: 77; Laitala et al. 2009: 21). Schofield & LaBat (2005: 25) have studied 40 graded patterns and size charts for women from 1873 up to the year 2000 in the US and found out that they were all different. Rather than taking into account the results from anthropometric studies, they mainly use the proportional grading systems, similar to the ones tailors used before anthropometric data was available. Some of the problems are, for example,

that the different height groups recommended by anthropometric data are not taken into account and the vertical and length measurements increase as the girth dimensions increase. Therefore, short or tall women are forced to select a fit based on either their vertical or horizontal measurements (*ibid.*).

More than ever before, the apparel industry is faced with customers occupying a larger spectrum of sizes due to both migration from different cultures and an increase in weight and height of the average western consumer. Today, more people are considered overweight or obese than in earlier times (WHO 2006: 1). In the later years several comprehensive, national anthropometric sizing surveys that utilize the new body scanning technologies have been conducted (Meunier 2000: 715; Ashdown & Dunne 2006: 123; Bye et al. 2006: 74; Connell et al. 2006: 84). According to Meunier (2000), the use of three-dimensional landmark coordinates for body type is superior to the use of circumferential measurements in predicting clothing sizes. The studies indicate that the population has changed considerably during the last decades; for example, the average waist girth of British women has increased by 15 cm since 1952 (Bodometrics 2005: 3), and 38% of women and 44% of men are either overweight or obese. This means that most old size charts are out dated, and the international clothing industry is in demand for more international, standardized solutions (Chun-Yoon and Jasper 1994: 81; Stylios 2004: 135).

Today, many consumers express frustration over the sizing systems and the incorrect use of the system. Several consumers report the need to actively seek out different apparel brands in order to identify brands that sell clothes that fit their body size and type (LaBat 2007: 103). Such frustration is typical of how sizing systems are experienced today; it is complicated to find clothes that fit the body.

Two contradictory explanations for intentional sizing variations are offered: The most common is so-called 'vanity labelling', which means that the garments are labelled smaller than they actually are in order to flatter the customers as they fit into a smaller size than their 'real' size (Kinley 2003: 21; Ennis 2006: 30). The opposite to this is the claim that fashion manufacturers only produce clothing in small sizes and mark the sizes too large as a marketing advantage for clothes that should only fit thin 'trendy' bodies.<sup>1</sup> Other explanations give more coincidental disparities, such as the use of different size fit models, size statistics from different resources, and the grading from the fit model to the other sizes (Workman 1991: 34; Ashdown 1998: 324; Kinley 2003: 20). The anthropometric data that may be used as a base for size tables can come from many different sources. There are variations between the decades, nations, as well as company specific adjustments to fit for a specific customer target group.

The fit of the garment is dependent on more details than the basic size. As Ashdown (1998: 324) points out, the size tables are often based on two or three body dimensions such as bust, waist and hips. The proportions and distances between these body measures vary greatly between the individuals. It has been

shown that only 47% of the US female population fit the medium hip category, which is defined as hips being 2 inches greater than the bust (Cooklin 1990). According to UK's national sizing survey performed in 2004, 60% of shoppers have difficulty finding clothes that fit (Bodymetrics 2005: 3; Treleven 2007: 113). It has been shown that the customer groups that have most problems are mainly women, especially those who need larger sizes, and the elderly (Chowdhary and Beale 1988: 783; Peura-Kapanen 2000: 22; Colls 2004: 593; 2006: 537; Salusso et al. 2006: 96; Hauge 2007: 65). A study of senior citizens showed that 61% expressed a definite need for special sizing, and 92% mentioned at least one body location that caused fitting problems with ready-made clothing (Richards 1981: 265). Attention has also been drawn to disabled users who have problems to find suitable clothing, not only due to sizes and fit problems but also regarding shopping possibilities and service at the stores (Thorén 1996: 389). Wearing the right clothes with a good fit contributes to the confidence and comfort of the wearer both physically and socially. Being inappropriately dressed for an occasion can cause feelings of awkwardness and vulnerability (Entwistle 2000: 7). Therefore, everybody should have a possibility to dress appropriately.

The contemporary western female beauty ideal is characterised by facial attractiveness, thinness, and fitness (Freedman 1984: 39; Hesse-Biber 1996: 4; Lennon 1997: 63; Thesander 1997: 201; Rudd & Lennon 2000: 152). This is described as 'the cult of thinness' (Hesse-Biber 1996: 11) or 'tyranny of slenderness' (Chernin 1981: 83; Bordo 2003: 33), which are reported to increase the stigma of being obese and to create body dissatisfaction in increasingly younger age groups (Williamson & Delin 2001: 80). In addition to the importance of female beauty ideals, an increased attention has been reported on male bodies (Mishkind et al. 1986: 112; McCaulay et al. 1988: 381; Dworkin & Wachs 2009: 33). Professor of law Deborah Rhode writes about 'Beauty bias': discrimination and prejudices based on appearance, especially against overweight people (Rhode 2010: 29).

As the review of beauty ideals has shown, some groups in particular rely on good clothes in order to achieve confidence, comfort, and respect. The studies of sizes have indicated that some consumer groups are more exposed than others and more often encounter trouble when trying to find suitable clothing. It has also been documented that there are variations within clothing sizes. However, we are lacking information concerning the connection between these themes, a further analysis of the reasons, and the consequences for the consumers. Also, most of the cited literature is based on studies made in the US or in the UK; therefore, we wanted to study this in a Nordic context.

## Knowledge Sources for Sizes, Clothes, Labelling, People's Thoughts and Bodies

Our research questions are: Which consumer groups have most trouble finding clothes that fit their bodies and preferences, and what are the implications of today's sizing systems for consumers? Figure 2 illustrates the approach we have applied for answering these questions. Consumers' ideas, experiences, and opinions are symbolized by the thought bubble. The human symbolizes the physical body, the trousers indicate garments, and the size labels indicate the size designation given for garments. We have examined the relationship between these four elements by several different methods: a consumer survey supplemented with in-depth interviews, market analysis on availability of sizes, and in-store clothing size measurements. The consumer survey gave information on the relation between clothes, body, and labelling as the consumers experience it. In addition, some in-depth interviews were conducted in order to obtain more profound data than could be supplied by the web survey. Market research of size selections and in-store clothing measurements contributed with information about the relationship between size codes and clothing measures, as well as on the availability of sizes. The on-going standardization work focuses on the same four elements, but the working group concentrates on the size designations and the results from anthropometric studies.

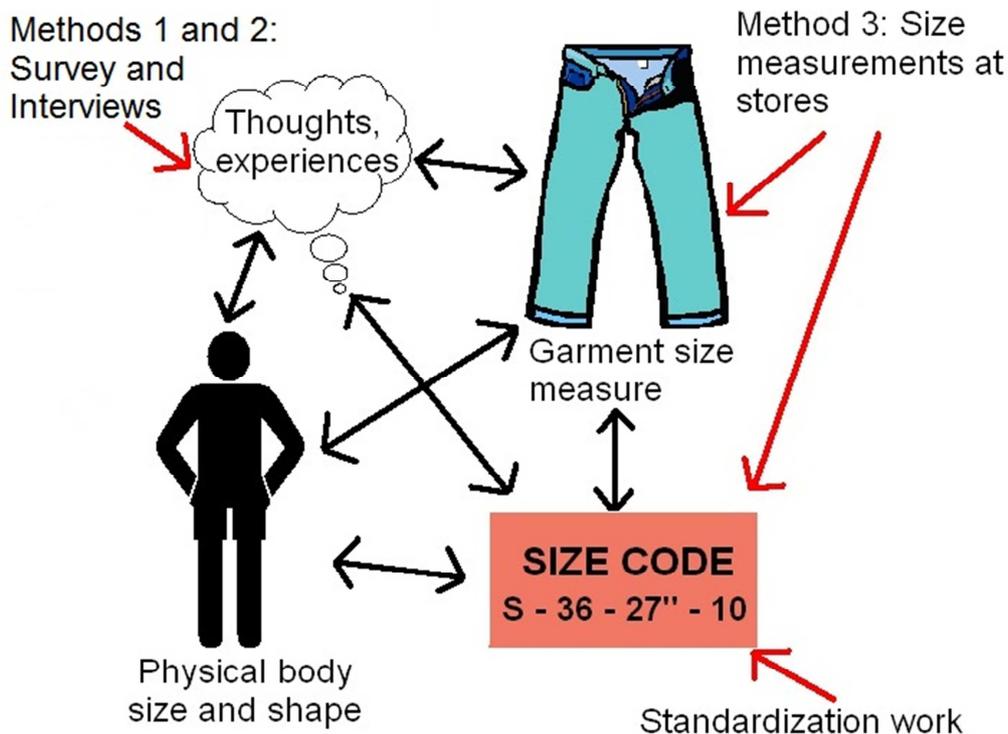


Figure 2 Relations between the four research areas and the research methods used to study them

This paper discusses mainly the first methods described, the consumer survey and in-depth interviews, giving information on how the consumers relate to clothing sizes and size labelling. In addition, some findings from the trouser size measurement study are given. More information about the project can be found in Laitala et al. (2009).<sup>2</sup>

### **Method 1: Quantitative Data**

Data of consumers' experiences and opinions concerning clothing sizes, size labelling, and perception of the body was collected through a web-based survey in three Nordic countries: Finland, Norway and Sweden. The questionnaire included respondents' social background, information and personal opinions of their body types, experiences with clothing purchases including the search for the correct size, fit and style, as well as experiences with different size designation systems. All of the questions had alternative answers that the respondent could tick off, complemented with a comment field. Each quotation from the survey is presented with a code that gives information about the respondents: Nationality, gender, age and reported letter size; e.g., Norwegian female, 25, size XL.

Respondents were recruited through three channels: media publicity, a Finnish consumer panel, as well as private and work-related contacts through e-mail lists and web pages. A total of 2834 people completed the web questionnaire, but the distribution between the three countries was very uneven. Most respondents were Finnish (1958), followed by 497 Norwegians, 331 Swedes and 48 replies from other countries. The Finnish dominance may be caused by the use of a Finnish consumer panel and a high level of media publicity.

The background variables for the respondents are presented in table 1. The values are given as percentage for each country. The cases are not weighed. The distribution of respondents is uneven and evidently dominated by females (81%). The two youngest age groups are overrepresented in comparison to the average of the adult population, and the oldest age group is underrepresented. The 60+ group constitutes 27% of the total population, but only 7% of the respondents. The majority of respondents has higher education and lives either in the capital city or another large city.

Due to the selected recruitment methods, the received data is not representative of the whole population. All of the respondents volunteered to take part in the research, and it is assumed that their participation may be caused by a special interest in the subject, with the exception of the consumer panel in Finland. In addition, a web-based questionnaire excludes respondents that do not have access to the Internet. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized for the entire population of each country or for comparison between the countries. However, the large number of respondents can be compared with each other in the sample and the sample can be viewed as an example of consumers in the Nordic countries.

BACKGROUND VARIABLES	Finland N=1958		Norway N=497		Sweden N=331	
	Sample [%]	Population [%]	Sample [%]	Population [%]	Sample [%]	Population [%]
<b>GENDER</b>						
Male	21	49	16	49	9	49
Female	79	51	84	51	91	51
	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>AGE GROUP</b>						
15-24 years	21	15	17	16	16	16
25-39 years	41	22	49	26	42	23
40-59 years	30	35	28	33	33	32
>60 years	8	28	6	25	8	29
	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>EDUCATION</b>						
Primary and lower secondary school	10	33	6	28	4	24
Upper secondary education	37	40	17	43	25	50
Higher education (university or college)	49	27	76	26	65	24
Other	4	0	1	4	6	2
	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</b>						
Employed (full or part time)	62	69 <sup>1</sup>	73	75 <sup>1</sup>	74	75 <sup>1</sup>
Unemployed	2	6 <sup>1</sup>	1	3 <sup>1</sup>	1	2 <sup>1</sup>
Non working (retired, homemaker etc)	13	-	7	-	5	-
Student	22	19 <sup>2</sup>	17	15 <sup>2</sup>	18	18 <sup>2</sup>
Other	2	-	3	-	3	-
	100	-	100	-	100	-
<b>AREA OF LIVING</b>						
Capital/large city	66	-	56	-	60	-
Medium/small city	25	-	23	-	26	-
Village/countryside	9	-	21	-	14	-
	100	-	100	-	100	-

1) Figure gives percent of employment status of total population aged 16-64 years.

2) Figure gives percent of students of total population aged 15-74 years

Table 1: Respondents divided by background variables given as a percentage of each country and compared to population (15 years and older) (Nordic Council of Ministers 2007: 61, 63, 124, 128, 138)

## Method 2: Qualitative Data

The survey was subsequently supplemented with in-depth interviews in order to gather information about Norwegian customers' experiences with the size labelling systems: How do the customers keep informed and how do they comprehend today's labelling systems? What is regarded as problematic when it comes to buying clothes and how do they adapt their own shopping habits to the size labelling system?

A half-structured interview guide was used where the topic was fixed but not the order of the questions. The questions were formulated in a manner that made the informants describe and reflect on their experiences with the size labelling system in the form of a conversation. We were looking for comprehensive descriptions and experiences from customers who have met challenges when shopping for clothes. The informants' experiences with the size labelling system

will be presented together with the quantitative material in order to better understand and to exemplify the survey results.

Our intention was to interview people with atypical body types, which may constitute an additional challenge when shopping for clothes. Two examples would be large or unusually tall persons. We were especially interested in talking to men because 81% of the respondents to the quantitative survey are women; consequently, men's experiences have been less illuminated by the web questionnaire. First informants were recruited in stores that specialized on clothing for large and tall men, but this turned out to be unpractical as the customers did not have the time to talk, and loud music made it difficult to record the interviews. Therefore, the scope was widened and informants were recruited through colleagues and friends by 'word of mouth'. The qualitative material consists of interviews with eight people aged 21-78 years.

### **Method 3: Market Research and Clothing Size Measurements**

59 clothing stores in the capitals of Finland, Norway and Sweden were visited in order to study the availability of clothing in different sizes and to measure the relationship between clothing size designation and the actual measures. In order to find out which sizes were available in the different shops, we asked sales personnel at most of the visited stores, and checked by studying the clothing selection available. The dimensions of 152 different trousers were measured in two sizes, giving a total of 304 trousers. Trousers were selected for measurement because their form is more homogeneous than most other garments, such as shirts that come in many different shapes and fits, which would make it very difficult to find points of comparison. Trousers are also used by both men and women, and they are easily found in most clothing stores. Most of the earlier size and fit related studies also refer to trousers; these are the garments that consumers report having most trouble finding a suitable fit (Sieben & Chen-Yu 1992: 76; Kinley 2003: 22; Shin & Istook 2007: 142). We collected information on actual sizes, sizing systems, the relationship between these elements, and the sizes that were available in the stores. We aimed for a balanced distribution of different store categories and selected stores based on several parameters, such as country of origin, type of chain, client target age group, gender, and price level.

The measurements include trousers in size categories small (S) and large (L), or in matching sizes in corresponding size designation systems. This was done in order to see the difference between the sizes within the same model, as well as to be able to compare different models with each other. Measurement points for trousers were waist, length of the leg (both inner and outer seam), thigh (measured at the widest part of the upper leg), and length of seat seam. Some of the trousers are excluded from the size comparison because not all models were found in correct sizes, and some materials were flexible, and therefore, the measurements became too uncertain.

## Availability of Clothing in Different Sizes

During the market research the personnel of visited clothing stores were asked which size range they had available. Often, the personnel had problems answering due to several reasons. One was that they used several different size designation systems and did not know which system to refer to. The three most common size designations systems for trousers in Nordic stores were numbers such as 36, 38, 40, waist measure in inches (especially for jeans), and letter sizes such as S, M and L. In addition to these three, we found several other designation systems, such as centimetre sizes for men, codes like 1, 2, 3, or the numbers used in the UK or the US. Another obstacle for the store personnel determining exact smallest or largest size was that the stores took in different sizes in different clothing brands and could have a small selection of clothing that was sold in larger sizes than most of the assortment. For example, some jeans stores for young women had only up to size 30" in basic assortment (corresponding to approximately number size 40), but had some jeans types that were sold in a couple of sizes larger than any other jeans in the store. According to the store personnel this limited selection was not a problem because larger sizes were available in the boys' section where bigger girls could choose some trousers that were considered to have a unisex fit.

The availability of sizes varied, especially according to the store size. Smaller stores do not usually have a large stock of each trouser type and not many sizes are included in the selection. The largest available size in these stores for women was often 42. Some stores for women had a clothing selection for larger sizes (usually starting from size 44) located in a separate section of the store. These were typically the Nordic chains such as *H&M*, *KappAhl*, *Lindex* and *Seppälä*. The models that are sold in these sections are not the same as those sold in the section for sizes 42 and below. Some stores, such as *Cubus*, had a different approach and a wider size selection up to size 46 of the same garments that are sold in small sizes.

Sizes between 36 and 40 are easiest to find for women. Size 34 can be found in some places, whereas size 32 is quite rare. For bigger sizes it is quite easy to find size 42, and 44 is not too difficult either, except for high-fashion stores where these sizes were often not available. Size 46 and bigger are mainly sold in specialized stores or separate departments within the chain stores. Mail-order companies often have a wider selection in larger sizes. When the sizes are labelled with letter sizing, it is often easy to find sizes between XS and L for women, a bit more difficult to find XL, and even more rare to find sizes XXL or larger. For men, it was more rare to see size XS than XL, and XXL was quite common too, at least in stores targeted for adult customers above the age of 30.

Survey respondents selected which size they usually use. The distribution of sizes is given in Figure 3. The same figure indicates which sizes are usually available at stores; the red limits are used for women and the blue for men. This shows that, particularly, the availability of large sizes is a problem. This figure

does not take into account the different fits that might be required in addition to the basic size. A large athletic male informant with broad shoulders described his problems for finding fitting clothes:

Well you're talking to us big guys, so for us it is not always easy to find sizes that fit in Europe, so I buy most of my clothes in the U.S. An XXL in the U.S. might fit me, while XXL in Europe is far too small. [...] When it comes to large sizes here, they are not intended for the body shape I have... If I'm going to buy clothes they are too narrow on the shoulders and very big here (around the waist). [...] Also, I use a tailor, a Thai tailor who makes suits, and shirts. Who measures me. [...] If the sizes were more uniform and predictable, I would like to buy clothes online. (Norwegian male, 39, size 3XL)

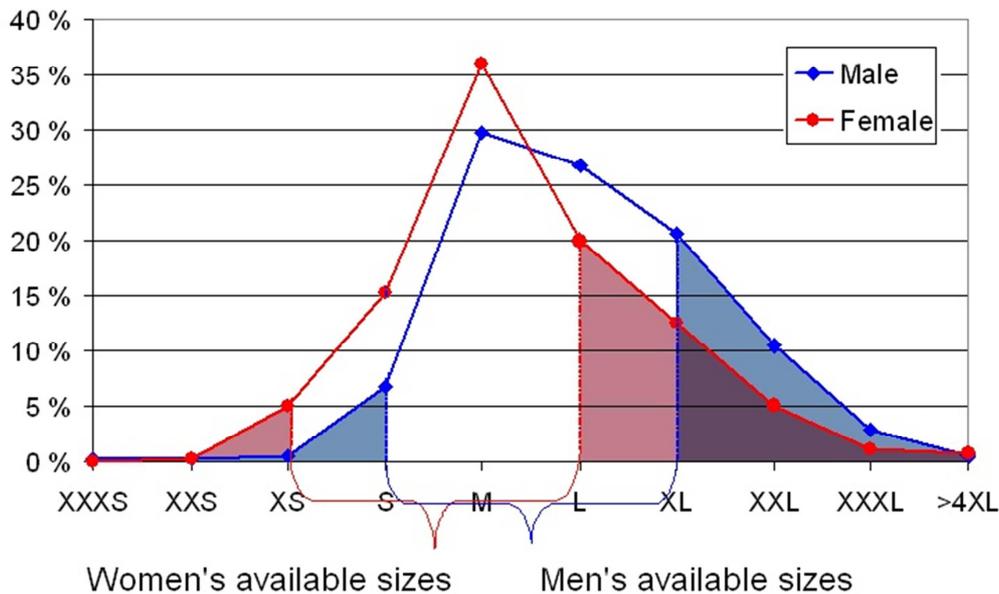


Figure 3 Respondents' reported size in letter code and the most typical size availability at stores. N=2733

We saw clear differences between the genders when the respondents reported their ease of finding clothing that fits. Figure 4 highlights that men and women have different opinions when it comes to the possibility of finding clothes that fit their body sizes and body shapes, as well as their desired styles. Over 50 percent of the men think it is very or quite easy to find clothes, while 37 percent of the women think the same. However, there is a great difference between respondents with a BMI below and above 25. As depicted in figure 4, men's experiences are similar to those of women's: men with a BMI below 25 consider it easier to find clothes that are in accordance with their own style, body shape and size. When looking at age-related experiences, older women find it more difficult to find clothes that fit their style than young girls. For men, there is no significant difference between the age groups. The 22 % of overweight women that have trouble finding their size corresponds well to the division in Figure 2, where about 20% falls outside the basic size selection of stores.

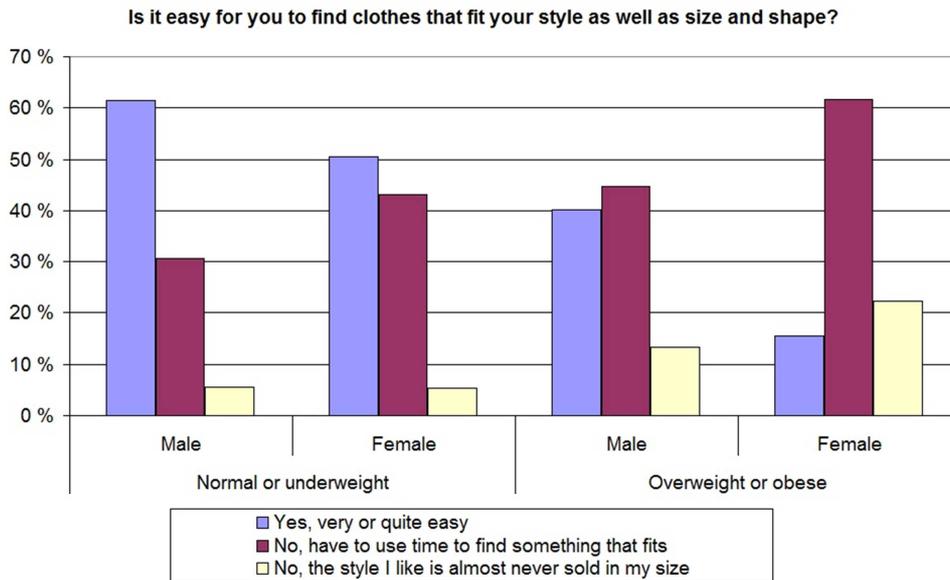


Figure 4 Ease of finding clothes that fit desired style, as well as body shape and size by gender and BMI. Percent. (N = 2567)

Body mass index is used as a criterion for medical intervention for obese people and has been criticized for being inaccurate as it does not differentiate between fat and muscle (Jensen 2007: 53). With this in mind, we have in addition to body mass index also worked out another way of estimating body types. We asked the informants to report the clothing size they usually use and to describe their bodies' height and build (weight) in comparison to average build and height.

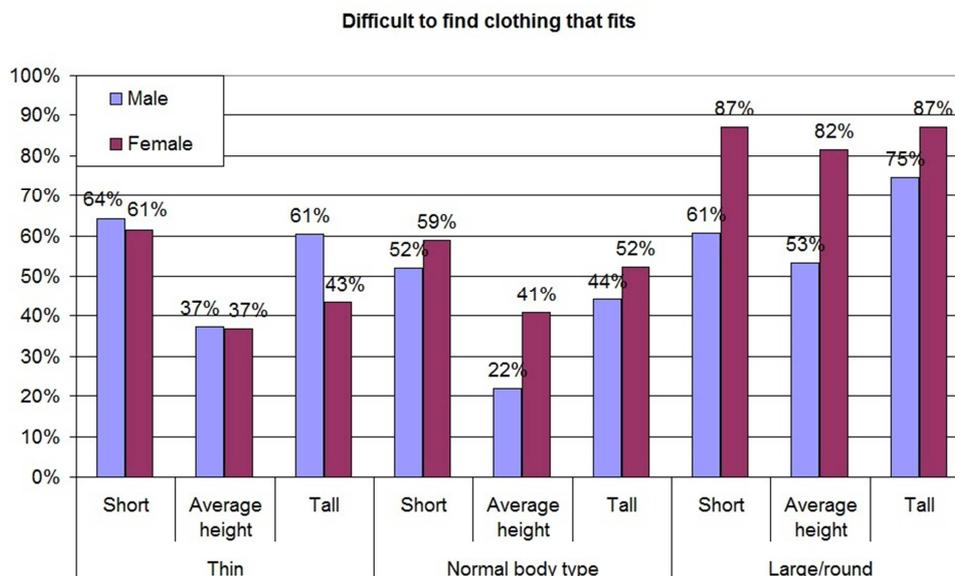


Figure 5 Percentage of respondents that have difficulties finding clothes in desired size and style. Percentage of each body type category by gender. Percent. (N = 2770)

Figure 5 emphasizes a correlation between ‘normal’ body type and ease of finding clothes according to style, body shape and size. Males with normal weight and height and women that are thin with average height report finding clothes the easiest. Over 80% of the females who describe themselves as larger/rounder than average do not consider it easy to find clothes, independent of height. We also see a similar tendency with large males, but in addition the tall men stand out. Another category of men that report difficulties in finding clothing are thin and short men. The highest percentages of dissatisfied men are among those who are either short or tall. Women are, in general, more dissatisfied, and the most dissatisfied are the ones that have round or large body types regardless of whether they are short, average height, or tall.

Many of the respondents on the web survey had chosen to write in the comments fields. The comments show with all possible clarity that many are provoked by the difficulties to find clothes that fit both due to bad labelling or because the fact that the size is not available at all. The comments also made it clear that the location where the clothes can be found has meaning for consumers. This is true whether it is adults who need to buy kids’ clothes or women that have to buy men’s clothing. Separate departments or shops for large people increase availability but does not necessarily make the purchase situation pleasurable:

My size is exactly the smallest size in the chain stores’ ‘fat-department’, which gives, to say the least, a very limited range. I can just forget about the brand and youth stores. Unfortunately, it seems that all have forgotten that women have breasts. I never fit in the clothes and I’m so tired. (Swedish female, 32, size varies).

The others implied that they can find their sizes but not in the styles they want due to poor selection. One Norwegian respondent described he had trouble finding clothes for special occasions, especially ‘...Other party outfits except dark suits. No cool clothes are produced for fat people.’ (Norwegian male, 50, size XXXL). The shopping will affect the mood and body image negatively when customers are not able to find any clothing that fits. This was described by several respondents.

Clothes are used to highlight and decorate the body, as well as to hide it. Clothes have a double purpose as they reveal and display at the same time (Hollander 1993: 3). However, when clothing advice is given for dressing large or round bodies the clothes’ ability to hide and reduce the body is emphasized. Dark colours and matte surfaces combined with vertical lines are the techniques for achieving this (Klepp 2010).

I often end up feeling like having a style of an old hag, because I’m plump around the middle and there are no sexy clothes in bigger sizes! If you’re fat, you must look awful, it seems! (Norwegian female, 43, size XXL)

While ‘everything is permitted’ on the thin and trendy bodies, larger people are discouraged to use many different types of clothing including certain colours, contemporary styles and fashion items, as well as clothing that reveals the body

(Klepp 2010). What the magazines and etiquette books portray as good advice is materialised in the limited selection in the ready-to-wear market.

Also big women want beautiful clothes, not just some ‘beer barrel covers’! For example, in Prisma [Finnish department store] they are supposed have big sizes. When you see the selection, you get really disappointed. In smaller sizes you can find a lot of colours, but in my size only gloomy browns. (Finnish female, 58, size XL)

In clothing advice literature an equal sign is placed between young and slim. A similar assumption affects the market. This makes it particularly difficult for the young and large. They can choose between two ways of being ‘wrongly dressed’; either wrong in relation to their age or wrong in relation to their body (Klepp and Storm-Mathisen 2005: 337). Young women may then feel that the only correct thing to do is to change one’s body, as the following respondent concludes:

Especially when buying jeans all seem to be too small, and I have to look for my size at the big girls’ department together with the sales personnel. At that point, the only option seems to be dieting. (Finnish female, 27, size S with wide hips).

The problem of finding clothes that fit does not only have a practical dimension; it also has deeper effects and influence on the consumers’ self-esteem. The frustrating search for appropriate clothing and use of unflattering garments are a constant reminder that the individual does not meet the expectations of what is considered a beautiful and successful body type.

Another point of dissatisfaction concerns the size labelling systems’ lack of relevant information. Numerous respondents commented on this matter, saying that the length of trousers should be included in the size code more often, indicating whether they are short, normal or long. Also, indications for different body types were highly desired.

## **Problems with Size Designations**

The results from in-store trousers’ waist girth measurements show great variations in waist size between trousers that should be the same size according to the size designation. A variation of over 15 cm in circumference was found in all four categories (small and large sizes for women and men). The greatest variation can be found in large sizes for women; a total of 21 cm. In some cases trousers labelled size small have wider waist girth than trousers labelled size large. It shows that a size medium will overlap both small and large sizes to a great extent. These results are similar to the findings of Kinley (2003), who reported 21.6 cm variations within a size 4 trousers’ waist measurement.

Measurement results correspond well with the survey results. Over 98% of the respondents experience variations in clothing sizes, either very big differences or a least some variations. Less than one percent of the respondents say they can always use the same size. The majority of women (65 percent) say they find big size differences between different brands or stores, whereas the majority of men

(51 percent) only find some variations. Most respondents don't care which size designation system is used, as long as the clothing sizes are consistent. There is a lot of frustration over the sizes and sizing differences, and several consumers comment on the impossibility to buy anything without trying it on first; some even say the size designation is not even instructive when trying to find clothing that fits. Many respondents also comment that the sizes vary even within the chain/store:

I always try clothes on. I can never go into a store and look at the size and then know that it will fit. And it's also because I think that the same number is not the same... Even within the same brand and same store. Not the same pants, but like if I take one pair of pants, and another next to it, different model, then one of them fits and the other does not. Even though they have the same 38 or 36 or 40 or whatever. (Norwegian male, 38, size XL)

Another point of discontent is the confusion between the different size designation systems. Consumers feel that it is often difficult to interpret or distinguish the different codes from each other, and it is very confusing when one garment is labelled with several different systems.

### **A wish to be Thinner**

It has been reported that some consumers use clothing as a tool to measure and control the body size (Colls 2004: 588; 2006: 536). Therefore, it is likely that they prefer to use small size designations rather than large ones. In order to study this, we asked if the respondents have sometimes bought clothing that was too tight because they are planning to lose weight. The division of answers is presented in Figure 6.

These results show that women are more likely to buy a smaller size than needed, as well as the overweight and obese respondents. We did not specifically ask the reasons for these purchases, but based on the comments there were two main categories; psychological and practical reasons. The psychological reasons included respondents that preferred to select the smaller size when possible in order to feel slimmer or smaller: 'When the big is big and the small is just a bit too small, you get tempted to buy a smaller one, especially if the clothes at big girls' stores are too big and too expensive'. (Finnish female, 42, size XL). Other respondents reasoned the act as a goal to lose weight: 'I sometimes buy a bit tight garment (especially if it is a really nice one) to get a goal for losing a couple of kilos' (Finnish female, 56, size XL).

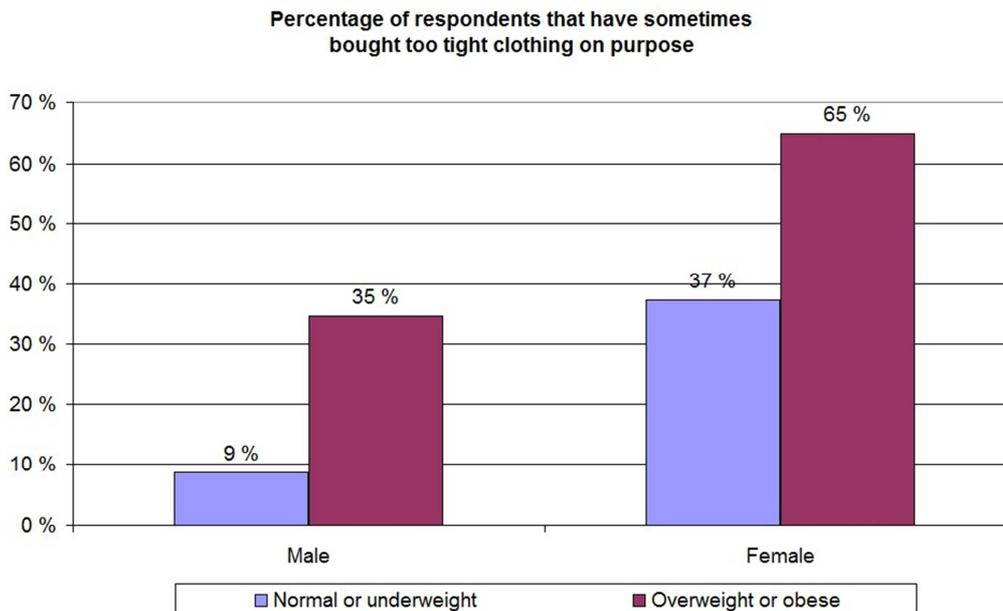


Figure 6 Respondents that have sometimes bought too tight clothing on purpose. Answers divided by gender and BMI. Percentage. N= 2561

Some respondents said they felt they had no option, as their own, bigger size did not exist: 'I have, but because it has been the biggest size. One size bigger would have fitted better, but I did not find anything else' (Swedish female, 53, size varies).

Several respondents also commented that they had done it before, but had learned from that mistake and did not do it anymore. Some, also, had too small clothes from before: 'Why would I buy too tight clothes when my wardrobe is full of them from before?' (Finnish female, 44, size XL). These comments indicate that several of the consumers wish to fit into a smaller size, and even retain their old clothing that is too small in case they manage to lose weight.

## Double Pressure

There is a striking correlation between the ideals of beauty and the findings of the survey. The results reveal that women in general have a harder time finding clothes that fit their style, body shape and size than men do. Older women find it more difficult to find clothes that fit their style than younger women. However, Tiggemann (2004: 38) has shown that the importance of appearance including body shape and weight decrease as women age, although body dissatisfaction remains rather stable up to an old age. The focus on beauty is stronger for women than for men and visible aging is interpreted as negative in relation to female beauty (Rhode 2010).

The availability of sizes varies between clothing stores, but there is a very clear tendency that an increase in body size makes it more difficult to find clothes that fit, more so for women than men. For men, the categories with most trouble finding suitable clothing are small men using size XS/S, the very tall, and the very large. The consequence of poor clothing selection is that consumers can't get adequate clothing in many clothing stores. Women using sizes 44 or larger often have to go to special stores for large sizes or separate departments in chain stores. Girls that use over 32" jeans size may have to buy their jeans in men's department if they wish to buy their trousers in jeans stores aimed at young people. These findings support the earlier studies that the respondents who use bigger sizes are less satisfied with the available clothing selection and existing sizing systems, and hope for a better functioning system (Chowdhary & Beale 1988: 783; Colls 2004: 593; Hauge 2007: 67).

When observing the consumer groups that reported finding clothes the easiest, significant differences between the genders can be seen. Women who are thinner than average found it easier to find clothing than women of average weight, whereas for men it was easier for those in the normal weight category. The beauty ideals of today are different for men and women (Grogan 2008: 9; Rysst 2010: 22). As for the height, the opposites of tall men and short women are favoured as ideals when selecting partners (Nettle 2002: 1920). Short men are considered less attractive and regarded as having a lower status (Jackson & Ervin 1992: 441). Several studies have shown that the female beauty ideal has moved toward an increasingly thin standard (Garner 1980: 489; Silverstein et al. 1986: 895; Groesz et al. 2002: 2; Cortese 2008: 36). The ideal body for men is different, as men should be normal weight but preferably well toned (Mishkind et al. 1986: 105; Mort 1988: 201; Wienke 1998: 255). These results indicate that it is easier to find clothing that fits for consumers whose bodies more closely resemble the beauty ideals.

When examining the beauty ideals and gender stereotypes it seems the fact that small men and large women have a poor selection of clothes is not a coincidence. The poor clothing selection could be interpreted as giving lower priority to large female consumers who differ from the ideals, since the clothing selection is narrower and models are different than clothes sold in smaller sizes. The groups concerned are also those who have the greatest difficulties in appearing well-dressed even when they find clothes that fit their size. Dressing a body that deviates from current beauty ideals is more difficult than dressing the ideal body (Entwistle 2000). Appearing well-dressed, modern, cool, etc., is problematic even if the clothes in themselves are 'right' and fit their body size. In today's women's fashion the relationship between the body and the clothes is crucial. It is on the slim female body that clothes appear 'right'. At the same time, a body in accordance with current body ideals will easily be perceived as beautiful and modern, regardless of whether the clothes are (Klepp & Storm-Mathisen 2005:

327; Rysst 2008: 119). Ideally, then, it should be the other way around: big women have the greatest need for a wide selection of clothes.

Both the qualitative interviews and the commentaries in the web questionnaire show that size labelling not only acts as a tool to find clothes that fit the body. The relationship between bodies and clothes is not strictly a question of body sizes or a size code but involves deeper individual and social questions (Nettleton & Watson 1998: 1-20; Entwistle 2000: 6-12; Howson 2004: 118; Shilling 2004: 87; Turner 2004: 82; Fraser & Greco 2005: 1-36). For some consumers the size code in itself is important, beyond finding clothes that fit the body. The clothes measurements refer to the measurements of the body, which again are measures of beauty and self-control, particularly for women. Women can, for instance, quantify the size of their bodies by determining if a garment fits their body or not (Borregaard 2004: 36; Colls 2004: 588). Statements such as 'If I don't fit into size medium, I refuse to try on a larger size. I am not large!' (Norwegian female, 68, size M), shows the size code in itself has a value. Not only does it represent the size of the garment but also the size of the person wearing it. However, this is not only a feminine property, as one of male respondents described:

The size is not important, but it is not funny to go from 38 to 40 for example... Of course you want to be even smaller, when I was active in sports I used size 36, and in a way that feels like the correct size for me. (Norwegian male, 39, size 3XL)

This has also been found in other studies, for example Rysst (2010), where one informant tells of the discouraging feeling of finding her 'own size' to be too small to fit her. Getting into a particular (smaller) size thus becomes a goal in itself. LaBat and DeLong (1990: 47) suggest that it is inevitable for women to compare their bodies to an ideal when they try to fit their body to available clothes, and it is, therefore, inadequate to base sizing systems on ideal proportions. One consequence of this is vanity labelling, where the producers can use the labelling to appeal to consumers' wish to be thinner. The shift of focus from body weight to a toned and correct body shape indicates that clothing sizes will remain crucial in the struggle to obtain the perfect body (Guendouzi 2004: 1644).

## **Conclusions: Materialised Norms**

Size labelling is a communication system between manufacturers and consumers. The purpose of the system is to make it simpler for the consumers to find clothes that fit. That presupposes three things: the manufacturers must label the sizes correctly, the consumers must understand and trust the size labelling, and the clothes must fit the consumers' bodies. The material revealed flaws in all these three areas. Producers label the clothes incorrectly; one pair of trousers labelled Large can be smaller than another one labelled Small. They produce too few selections, especially in the big sizes, and large women, small men, and very large

men have the most trouble finding their sizes at stores. Consumers, on the other hand, do not trust the labelling system for good reasons. Less than 1% of the respondents could always use the same size. In addition, they attribute intrinsic value to the symbols used to indicate clothing sizes. A system that was developed to indicate the measurements of clothes has become a normative system connected with body ideals. Results indicate that higher shares of the consumers who have a body out of touch with the existing beauty ideals express discontentment with the sizing systems and the poor selection available. Consumers tend to blame themselves when the clothes do not fit their bodies, while our study has pointed out that the industry is to blame, as they do not produce clothing for all customers.

Developing a new labelling system that works better thus entails challenges on several levels. It should be based on the newest anthropometric studies and correspond to the given body dimensions providing possibilities for larger variety in size selections with different fits. A main challenge is, of course, to systematize information and make it easily available. This must be done in a way that does not reinforce the stigmatizing aspects of the sizes that do not fit the prevailing beauty ideals. The associations connected to the existing size designations will break first, but it is likely that this will only be temporary and the new designations will obtain similar associations. However, as the newly suggested size designation system includes a wider selection of body measures and a more complex code, the users may relate it to different parts of their body. Thus, the identification between size codes and body ideals becomes more complex and it will, therefore, take longer for the numbers or letters to receive such a double meaning, and at best, it will not happen at all. It is a paradox that those who really need good clothing to make their bodies socially acceptable are those who have the least choice and the greatest difficulty in finding something that fits. Notions of beauty ideals, according to which women should be small and men large, do not only exist in our imagination but also in the material structures that surround us. Failing to find clothes that fit supports the further stigmatization and materialization of the judgmental gaze cast upon people whose bodies do not conform to beauty ideals.

**Kirsi Laitala** is a PhD Student at Department of Product Design, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, and principal engineer, textiles at the National Institute for Consumer Research (SIFO). She has researched on areas related to clothing quality and size issues, and is currently working with sustainability of clothing concentrating on the use and disposal periods. E-mail: [Kirsi.Laitala@sifo.no](mailto:Kirsi.Laitala@sifo.no). For more information, visit <http://www.sifo.no/page/Ansatte/10037/48263.html>

**Ingun Grimstad Klepp** has a Ph.D. in Ethnology from University of Oslo. Klepp is head of research at SIFO, where she has been working since 1999. During these years she has researched clothing, clothing habits, and laundry habits. E-mail: [ingun.g.klepp@sifo.no](mailto:ingun.g.klepp@sifo.no). For more information, visit <http://www.sifo.no/page/Ansatte/10037/48249.html>

**Benedicte Hauge** has a Master's degree in Sociology from University of Oslo. Her main area of research is related to body ideals, dieting and body culture. She worked at SIFO until 2009 and is now continuing her studies at BI Norwegian School of Management, taking a MSc in Leadership and Organisational Psychology. E-mail: [benedicte\\_h@hotmail.com](mailto:benedicte_h@hotmail.com).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See discussion of thin, trendy bodies in Neumann (2010: 33) and Rysst (2010: 18)

<sup>2</sup> Report is available at <http://www.norden.org/sv/publikationer/publikationer/2009-503>

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# Retail and Fashion – A Happy Marriage? The Making of a Fashion Industry Research Design

By Cecilia Fredriksson

## Abstract

Fashion and retail ought to be a happy marriage. Yet several entrepreneurs in the field of fashion speak of a climate that is difficult to penetrate because of economic and cultural factors. For example, the chain store concept is an expression of the specific and current fashion situation in Sweden: democratic fashion that is cheap and accessible. At the same time, customers now demand personal, unique and ethical fashions. However, there are few possibilities in this climate for low cost development in progressive Swedish design. This article addresses the questions of how special trade conditions are reflected in the relationship between fashion and retail, and how different interests and values are expressed in the culture of Swedish fashion. To gain a deeper understanding of diverse working conditions and strategies, this article analyzes the culture of the Swedish fashion business as a narrative of different social and cultural processes. A conclusion drawn is that a cultural perspective on the oppositions between different practices and logics in the fashion business may contribute to mapping and managing these oppositions.

**Keywords:** fashion, retail, design, consumption, cultural economy, narrative, theme analysis

## Setting the Scene I

When Helen Svensson opened her own fashion store in February, a dream was at last fulfilled. Clothes, shoes and swimming had been important factors in her life. The girl from Höganäs, who was a swimmer in her youth, always had a great passion for clothes. After working in the fashion industry for her whole life, this store will be her greatest challenge. (*Helsingborgs Dagblad*, Spring 2008, my translation)

Fashion and retail ought to be a marriage as happy as the one in this story, which describes the dream many women have of opening a fashion store of their own. However, in reality, such an entrepreneurial business undertaking may more likely end in failure than success. Several entrepreneurs in the field of fashion speak of a climate that is difficult to penetrate because of economical and cultural factors. In Sweden, there are some important developments in the fashion industry, and fashion today has a strong position in Swedish contemporary culture. First, while there is little evidence of higher education among practitioners in the retail field, the science of fashion has even entered academia and most people in fashion design today have an academic degree. Second, reflecting standardisation and concentration, the chain store concept, with its cheap, accessible and democratic styles, has gained wide acceptance in Sweden.

Fashion studies is a new theoretical academic field that calls for constant development of knowledge and legitimacy. The world of fashion has often been described as an 'institutionalised system' (Craik 1994; Entwistle 2000, 2009; Kawamura 2005). In the fashion industry, there has been a clear development from powerful fashion influences on standardized ready-made clothing to a more diffuse contemporary fashion market where consumers have the freedom to make choices. The possibility of identity building through consumption also implies expectations for active and creative self-fulfilment (Douglas & Isherwood 1993; Fredriksson 1996; Brembeck & Ekström 2004; Johansson 2006; Mörck & Pettersson 2007; Ulver-Sneistrup 2008; Gradén & Peterson McIntyre 2009). The sociologist Diana Crane (1999) claims that the former, centralized fashion system has been transformed into a more decentralized fashion system, where fashion editors, consultants and consumers rule fashion to a far greater degree. And far from being simple distributors of goods, shops and other retail sites are active makers of goods, enactors of consumption worlds (Shove & Pantzar 2005; Warde 2005) and producers of value (Penaloza 1999; Kozinets, Sherry et al. 2002, 2004; Crewe 2003; Pettinger 2004). How will these new directions affect the actors in the retail and fashion industry? What cultural, societal and economic conditions are required to meet these increasing demands by the fashion market and by consumers?

In the fashion industry, the encounter between different oppositional forces and social positions is obvious. Fashion is a dynamic field of power that is connected by constant storytelling and conversations that define the present. How are these stories incorporated in the fashion organization? What story does the entrepreneur, the fashion journalist, the fashion photographer, the frontline worker or the

fashion manager tell? How do these stories connect to each other and how can the actors' increased awareness concerning different strategies develop the traditional structures of the fashion industry?

One significant trend is that the necessities of low cost development in the fashion industry allow little possibility for the growth of progressive Swedish design. In an industry where a few major players dominate the Swedish fashion culture, most newly graduated fashion designers begin their careers at the large retail chain stores, ruling out the possibility of owning a business of their own. The result is a fashion industry where new design seldom breaks through (Sundberg 2006).

Two general research issues of interest in this connection are the ways in which special trade conditions are reflected in the relationship between fashion and retail, and how different interests and values are expressed in the marketing of fashion. In order to gain a deeper understanding of these issues – the diverse working conditions and strategies in the fashion industry – I will analyze the Swedish fashion industry culture in connection with fashion and retail as scenes of various social and cultural processes. As empirical data for this study, I investigate some of the necessary conditions for entrepreneurship in fashion and design. From a starting position in cultural analysis, I examine the possibilities of a suitable research design.

### **Framing the Picture: The Market of Fashion**

The fashion market is constructed of various oppositional forces. These oppositions are the required conditions for, and the result of, fashion as an industry that is in constant change. The spread of oppositions is reflected in a constantly growing lifestyle industry where the very specific organisation of the fashion industry can illuminate contemporary working conditions. Therefore, an empirical focus on the interaction between the actors in the retail industry and the fashion industry is an important research avenue.

One method of studying such interaction is to use a narrative perspective in which narrative methods, as a research tool, assume that stories are useful for communication and sensemaking processes (cf; Adelswärd 1996; Boje 2001; Corvellec & Holmberg 2004; Boje et al. 2005; Johansson 2005; Mossberg & Nissen-Johansen 2006). From a management perspective, there is also widespread interest in mediating messages and strategies through storytelling (Czarniawska & Alvesson 1998; Czarniawska 1999). General fashion business narratives and specific sensemaking fashion stories offer an empirical basis for understanding the specific conditions of the fashion industry. Such narratives and stories are part of a constant sensemaking process as actors, in their ongoing dialogue, make reasonable interpretations of events in the organisation and its surrounding world (Weick 1995).

As already mentioned, in the last twenty years, the consumption of fashion and style trends has been viewed as a sensemaking, everyday life activity in lifestyle production, identity building and communication. Much individual activity concerns negotiations about the innumerable free choices available in the market. Furthermore, the market of fashion is considered an important arena for contemporary identity expression and identity construction. As a result, this close connection between identity and consumption increasingly expands the interactive lifestyle industry and changes the working conditions of actors who must transform commodities into individual lifestyles and fashion experiences (Sennett 1999; McRobbie 2003; Salomonsson 2005). In the so-called experience society (Pine & Gilmore 1999; O'Dell 2002), design has become an important key symbol of the change in the production of goods and services.

In Sweden there is a great confidence in the future growth of the design and lifestyle industry. The Swedish government proclaimed the year 2005 a *Year of Design* with the intention of showing how design could contribute to cultural development, economic growth, social welfare and ecological sustainability (Fredriksson 2005). In 2008, Stockholm University created the first Swedish professorial chair in Fashion Science and designated fashion as an academic subject.

The recent investments in fashion and design are the result of a new and strategic cooperation between culture, trade and industry. This cooperation may be interpreted as a symbolic union between culture and economy (Löfgren & Willim 2005), a cultural economy (du Gay & Pryke 2002; Amin & Thrift 2003) or an economization of culture (Fornäs 2001). Even in 'the new economy' of the 1990s, metaphors from the world of fashion were used. For example, the 'Catwalk economy' links the cultural aspects of business to the puffed-up fashion industry (Löfgren 2003), both of which are preoccupied with predicting the future. This design discourse is also an important tool for the transformation of traditional work into new trends in labour and production (Warhust, Thompson & Nickson 2009). Thus, given the consumption aesthetics of the experience society, it is important to develop a more critical attitude towards these aesthetics and toward the consequences of the new work ethics (Bauman 1998). How can these changing working conditions be connected with a general narrative of fashion industry discourse?

## **The Story of Fashion Industry**

While fashion is often analyzed as cultural practice and social processes (Steele 1997; Crane 2000; Aspers 2001; Kawamura 2005; Nilsson 2005; Frisell Ellburg 2008), it has more rarely been studied from an organization perspective. According to Bourdieu (1991, 1993), however, it is important to examine perspectives of production as well as perspectives of consumption. The connections between fashion as a social system, a cultural practice and a symbolic product are essential

components in the consumers' identity construction and in the working conditions of the fashion industry. One of the most basic transactions in the fashion industry is the encounter between frontline service workers and customers. Here, the purchase transaction transforms the abstract fashion system into specific and critical factors where service encounter, customer interaction and experience can be studied (Grönroos 2005; Corvellec & Lindquist 2005; Bäckström & Johansson 2005).

In the general media and in popular culture, fashion sensemaking processes are shaped as scenes that carry a specific meaning. A current example of such a scene is an episode in the well-known film, *The Devil Wears Prada*, where the tyrannical fashion magazine editor (Miranda, played by Meryl Streep) verbally punishes her new assistant. The very unfashionable assistant (Andrea, played by Anne Hathaway) giggles scornfully when the editor and her consultants struggle to choose between two identical blue belts. Miranda lectures harshly:

'This stuff'? Oh, okay. I see. You think this has nothing to do with you. You go to your closet and you select, I don't know, that lumpy blue sweater, for instance, because you're trying to tell the world you take yourself too seriously to care about what you put on your back, but what you don't know is that that sweater is not just blue. It's not turquoise. It's not lapis. It's actually cerulean. And you're also blithely unaware of the fact that in 2002, Oscar de la Renta did a collection of cerulean gowns and it was Yves Saint Laurent who showed cerulean military jackets.

I think we need a jacket here.

The cerulean quickly showed up in the collection of eight different designers. And then it filtered down through the department stores and then trickled on down into some tragic Casual Corner where you, no doubt, fished it out of some clearance bin. However, that blue represents millions of dollars and countless jobs. And it's sort of comical how you think that you've made a choice that exempts you from the fashion industry when, in fact, you're wearing a sweater that was selected for you by the people in this room from a pile of 'stuff.'

This film scene impressively summarizes the encounter between different structures of meaning as well as legitimizes the processes of the fashion industry. By explaining all the knowledge behind the blue of Andrea's sweater, Miranda is simultaneously justifying the huge cultural and economic importance of fashion. The message is that no one should believe that he or she is indifferent to fashion, or is better than those who take fashion seriously. The scene also shows how the fashion industry works as it constantly struggles for respect and exclusivity. Guardians of the industry, including fashion magazine actors, play an important watchdog function. Additionally, although the fashion industry is a star system where the creative designer has the starring role (Kawamura 2005), there are social processes and collective agreements that award charismatic authority to designers in their stereotypical roles as creative geniuses. What happens when such a star system interacts with the retail side of the business?

## Fashion Business as Theme Analysis

My methodological approach to the fashion industry is based on an analysis of a number of cultural themes represented in business material, magazines and popular fiction like the empirical case above. Classic cultural analysis often takes as its point of departure the basic sensemaking themes in a culture or a phenomenon (Spradley 1980; Ehn & Löfgren 2001; Sunderland & Denny 2007). David Boje (2001) has developed this eclectic method into a well-established qualitative research method in management and organization research. The print media often publishes exclusive fashion reports, new fashion magazines constantly appear and new fashion books are published. What is the subject of those public conversations? How do these conversations reveal the interaction between the fashion industry and retail business?

After a brief scanning of the research field I identified the striking element of different success stories in relation to fashion and retail industry. Despite the rather minimal academic interest, I also found that fashion today is a common topic of public conversation in Sweden. Through a discursive reading a number of basic cultural themes, expressed as ‘statements’ in the Swedish fashion industry discourse were traced from a number of non-linear and fragmented common narratives. Together with 7 indepth interviews with fashion shop keepers (Fredriksson 2010), these statements became the empirical and theoretical starting point for the research design. The isolation of cultural themes resulted in a pattern of storylines presented below; units of cultural meaning that constitute empirical material for research. The statements reflect briefly some cultural values in the public conversation on fashion, design and retail business in Sweden today. The statements, which in further research will be turned down or developed into ‘microstoria analysis’ (Boje 2001), are as follows:

- 1) Taste is often disgust with the taste of others.
- 2) Style is about the things I do every day and can be incredibly varied. The main thing is that I’m true to myself.
- 3) Good design will last for a lifetime.
- 4) Fashion has always been the art of intuition.
- 5) Fashion and style have no roots in Sweden.
- 6) Retailers are mainly ruled by the stock market.
- 7) The fashion industry is a dirty industry.

### *1) Taste is often disgust with the taste of others (Pierre Bourdieu)*

Pierre Bourdieu (1991, 1993), who taught us the logic of distinction, has partly written the meta-narrative of fashion. According to Bourdieu, fashion and design depend on making distinctions. The ability to make distinctions is one of the most important assets in a consumption society. The market’s concern with the cultural status of trademarks that grow out of distinction projects leads to increasing prices

and stimulation of demand, while at the same time, cultural status is based on a contradictory relationship with the commercialism of selling.

*2) Style is about the things I do every day and can be incredibly varied. The main thing is that I'm true to myself. (Siemens' kitchen advertisement)*

We often describe ourselves in terms of style, taste and identity. The aesthetization of everyday life is a modern competence, which, in comparison with evaluative aesthetics, can be analyzed as individual skills (Featherstone 2007). Aesthetization skills are established in a society that offers individuals many ways to design and express their own lives. The aesthetization of everyday life includes our attitudes to our surroundings, to our homes and the people and objects we live with. Old hierarchies are turned upside-down, knowledge transforms into experiences and nothing is really good or bad any more, but rather a matter of interest.

*3) Good design will last for a lifetime. (Year of Design 2005)*

'But it shouldn't be possible to buy an identity today', the Swedish Minister of Culture argues.

Today, design is often described as something you could have more or less of. Good taste is harder to price. The cultural capital required for making the 'right compositions' can't be purchased as a lifestyle kit without reflection. Instead, contemporary consumption culture offers different possibilities for turning life into an aesthetic total project where clothes, habits and experiences together create an entire lifestyle. The possibility to *create* a lifestyle to *enjoy* presupposes an ability to *choose* from the offered abundance. These possibilities shape some of the cultural imperatives that modern consumers must handle.

*4) Fashion has always been the art of intuition. (National Council for Architecture, Form and Design)*

Fashion processes are often understood as present in a more or less glamorous obscurity, and no one seems to understand how and why different trends occur. However, the longing to reveal the secrets of fashion are not new since the magic of fashion has been in the focus of disclosure for a century. The Intuition Story is a specific gendered story, following the discourse on passionate consumption practice. Fashion is a phenomenon for predictions and forecasting, and this inherent dynamic is a crucial part in the forces of fashion structure.

*5) Fashion and style have no roots in Sweden. (Swedish fashion journalists)*

Some fashion journalists claim that the connecting link between our clothes and our creative history is missing in Sweden. Since the 'people into design' clarified that design is just a question of form, fashion was categorized as ornament and

decoration. When clothes turn into design, fashion has to be something that is 'fair, rational and non-commercial'.

'People in fashion have to stop apologizing for doing fashion', a journalist says.

*6) Retailers are mainly ruled by the stock market. (National Council for Architecture, Form and Design)*

Small entrepreneurs in the field of design indicate they have total exposure to market forces. Retail business fails as a channel for communication with consumers. Fashion is unfortunately regarded as a matter for market forces and this idea persists in the marketing area. It is almost impossible to establish a smaller design business, and fashion entrepreneurs are constantly reduced to the chain store concept. A turning point for 'fast fashion' is often discussed, as well as the lack of foresight and planning in the retail business.

*7) The fashion industry is a dirty industry. (Swedish fashion journalists)*

'Sustainability issues are not trendy, they are forever', says fashion researcher Mathilda Tham. The Sustainable Fashion Academy has an executive division for educating Swedish fashion and textile companies in sustainable branding. The explosion in over-design will, according to some trend analysts, be replaced by simplicity and quality.

'But consumers want more and more', says a retail manager, and adds: 'We can't know what consumers are thinking, but we measure how much we are selling.'

## **Setting the Scene II**

After this presentation of some cultural themes in the fashion and retail industry, I next focus on some of the the research questions. The sociologist Patrik Aspers (2001) has exhaustively analyzed markets from a phenomenological perspective. In a study of Swedish fashion photographers, Aspers shows that the fashion market consists of two different logics: 'the logic of arts' and 'the logic of economy'. The cultural meaning of these two logics is the basis for my interpretation of the isolated themes. I return to the opening quotation in this article and in accordance with my chosen research method, I trace a narrative from the newspaper article on Helen Svensson's passion for clothes and her dream of her own fashion store:

*A dream was fulfilled when she opened her own fashion store.*

This story describes a young woman's success in a tough fashion market. Several of the cultural themes are present in the story that communicates the meta-narrative of fashion and its mechanisms. In spite of the tough climate for entrepreneurs, Helen Svensson dared to realize her dream. In using a dream metaphor,

the implication is that this goal is unattainable for most people; such a success story, achieved in such a climate, shows the exclusivity and impact of fashion. This distinct gender-narrative (Mörck & Pettersson 2007b; Gradén & Petersson McIntyre 2009) also has to be analyzed in the context of the feminization of the fashion industry and the image of fashion as a ‘woman’s trap’ (Kawamura 2007).

Another story has the same theme. In the recently founded Swedish magazine, *Passion for Business*, a magazine for career women, the ‘queen of Swedish fashion’ Filippa Knutsson (Filippa K) expresses her thoughts about ‘the crisis, the new family and her plans for conquering the world’:

I have always been looking forward, aiming at the next level, and then I have worked hard to get us up there. To me, it has always been a matter of course that we should establish ourselves in Europe.

Filippa K, as a trademark, is often described, as the Swedish ‘wonder of fashion’. The trademark and Filippa Knutsson herself are inspirations for many women entrepreneurs in the fashion industry. Filippa Knutsson describes herself as a ‘barefoot designer’, meaning she is not a traditional designer. In the context of Swedish fashion, Filippa Knutsson combines the different logics of fashion and retail business. As one of the fixed stars in the Swedish fashion heaven, she is an important success story for design, fashion and retail. Her long-term thinking is part of her success story. The ‘dirty fashion industry’ is cleansed by her personal confessions of how she ‘lost her foothold during the fashion boom’. But with the advantage of an international background in a family of entrepreneurs, Filippa K is as an unattainable icon for most young women in Sweden with an interest in fashion. Filippa Knutsson describes her entrepreneurial spirit:

To me, it has always felt strange to apply for a job. For people with an entrepreneurial background, doing things in their own way is just something that runs in the blood. That’s just the way things are.

The contrast in these two different success stories – Helen Svensson and Filippa Knutsson – is evident in these narratives. The road to success differs, depending on whether you are born in an entrepreneurial family or if you have to succeed on your own. The success dream in these two stories is quite different as well: Helen Svensson dreams about her own fashion store and Filippa Knutsson dreams about European expansion. However, both women share the common attitude of passion. For example, the article about Filippa Knutsson is illustrated with a red development curve labelled ‘Filippa’s line of passion’, which is an illustration of the gendering of stories. Filippa Knutsson also states the importance of an active attitude towards the feminization of the fashion industry:

And I’m honest when I tell you that I have never felt that I was in an inferior position as a woman. Maybe it has something to do with the women-orientated fashion business. The world of fashion is after all a bit special.

There is a constant interaction between art, culture and the economy in contemporary fashion industry. The culture of retail business is a traditional and bureaucrat-

ic service organization that is often forced into self-reflection because of the relationships between results and tensions (Korszynsky 2002; Korszynsky & Lynne Macdonald 2009). Although the changing culture of work into the 'creative industry' produces new possibilities for self-expression, this industry is still characterized by low wages and insecure terms of employment (Fredriksson 1998; Leslie 2002; Mc Robbie 2004; Åmossa 2004).

## **Looking for the Microstoria of the Fashion Industry**

In the world of fashion, a cultural and creative identity is often more highly valued than money earned; it is obvious that the fashion industry produces a specific practice of self-expression. A cultural perspective on the interaction between different practices and logics in the fashion industry contributes to mapping and managing these oppositions.

In this article I have identified some of the cultural themes that will guide the continuing research process. When choosing the informants, designing questionnaires, preparing observations and collecting other empirical material, it is important to isolate and problemize the emerging themes. The inherent paradoxes between design, fashion and retail have to be analyzed as different logics within different systems. These cultural systems produce and reproduce different stereotype identities that the fashion industry has to manage.

In practice, those cultural stereotypes that produce claims on natural inherent characteristics, are often expressed in fashion design as 'the art of creation' and in retail as 'the art of selling'. Those characteristics represent two opposite logics that, as mentioned earlier, Aspers defines as 'the logic of arts' and 'the logic of economy'. But those characteristics imply even more meaning. As noted above, from a consumer perspective the art of creation can be interpreted as both a possibility and a cultural imperative. A cultural understanding of creation and selling as competences requires some contextualization because of the fact that the act of creation and the act of selling produce different practices in contemporary consumption culture. A positive pre-understanding of the idea of creation is connected to a more negative pre-understanding of the idea of selling. In the process of examining an appropriate research design, it is important to reflect on this relationship.

**Cecilia Fredriksson** is a Professor of European Ethnology at the Department of Service Management, Lund University. Her research and teaching has revolved around new directions in the cultural theory of consumption, fashion and retail management. She is also in charge of several research project on sustainability, retail and tourism. E-mail: [Cecilia.Fredriksson@ism.lu.se](mailto:Cecilia.Fredriksson@ism.lu.se).

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## **Catwalking the Nation: Challenges and Possibilities in the Case of the Danish Fashion Industry**

By Marie Riegels Melchior

### **Abstract**

This article discusses the mobilization of the nation for fashion, based on how the relationship between fashion and nation unfolds in the case of fashion design practice and the fashion industry in Denmark. The otherwise globalized fashion industry is equally involved in what I term “catwalking the nation,” both as a way to construct a cosmopolitan nationalist discourse for the post-industrial nation and as a strategy for local fashion industries to promote collective identity in order to strengthen potential market share, which is the focus of this article. What may at first appear in the Danish case as an absurd and non-productive relationship is actually significant, I would argue, despite its complexity. It has the potential to stimulate critical fashion design practice and give fashion designers a voice, allowing them to take an active part in contemporary public debates on important issues such as nationalism and cosmopolitanism in the age of globalization.

**Keywords:** Fashion, design, nationalism, cosmopolitanism, Denmark.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

“Ladies and gentlemen! Welcome to the World’s Greatest Catwalk”  
(speaker at the fashion event on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010)

The built stage rising from City Hall Square in the center of Copenhagen is totally pink – shocking pink, as the legendary 20<sup>th</sup> century fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli would say. Thousands of people have gathered in the square on a Saturday afternoon in mid-August 2010 during Copenhagen Fashion Week. Despite the rainy weather forecast, people have come to get a close-up view of next season’s fashion, hip celebrities, and the glamour of the fashion industry, paid for with local tax money to promote Denmark through Danish fashion design.<sup>2</sup> It is a true day of celebration. The Copenhagen Fashion Council – a joint committee of the Danish fashion industry’s major organizations and independent fashion fairs – is about to break a world record. According to the World Records Academy, the longest catwalk to date had been 1.3 kilometers in length, at the Centro de las Artes Centenario in San Luis Potosi in Mexico.<sup>3</sup> The World’s Greatest Catwalk is 1.6 kilometers long. It presents more than 200 fashion models walking on the elevated, pink-carpeted catwalk on Strøget, the pedestrian street running between Copenhagen City Hall and Kongens Nytorv. It is indeed a high-profile event of artists, politicians, celebrities and professionals connected to the local and international fashion world.

Following a live music performance, the show begins as the Danish Minister of Economic and Business Affairs, Brian Mikkelsen (from the Conservative party in Government) enters the center stage, sharply dressed in a cosmopolitan, tailored black power suit, crisp white open shirt and no tie. His attire signals that this is a fashion event, not a formal event. Broadcast internationally by CNN and on huge screens in New York’s Times Square, Mr. Mikkelsen welcomes everyone by praising the success of the Danish fashion industry. He calls it one of the country’s most visible export and creative industries: “Copenhagen Fashion Week and World’s Greatest Catwalk bring fashion to the street and bring unique opportunities to Denmark’s fashion businesses.”<sup>4</sup> Helena Christensen, the former international supermodel and patron of the event, follows on stage and expresses her pride in Danish fashion and its recent developments. Helena Christensen declares that Danish fashion is “functional and unique, democratic fashion, built on values in many ways characterizing the Danes.”<sup>5</sup> Next, the stage is given to another personality of the international fashion and celebrity world – Ali Hewson, the founder of the ecological and ethical fashion brand Edun and wife of U2 lead singer Bono. She is in Copenhagen not only to celebrate the fashion week, but also to express gratitude for the donation of one percent of Saturday’s revenue by a large number of Copenhagen fashion boutiques to her Chernobyl Children’s Project International Foundation. With her voice full of enthusiasm she salutes the cat-

walk event by declaring, “Let’s make fashion change the world!”<sup>6</sup> The first fashion model enters the catwalk dressed in fall-winter 2010 Danish fashion, to the sound of the legendary 1974 Danish pop song hit “Smuk og dejlig” by singer Anne Linnet and the band Shit & Chanel. Despite the rain, Denmark is making a fashion statement – not only at home, but just as importantly, to the rest of the world!

To me this event is the literal materialization of what I term “catwalking the nation.”<sup>7</sup> The World’s Greatest Catwalk is the culmination of years of joint industry engagement in Denmark aimed at strengthening the Danish fashion industry, following its deindustrialization during the 1980s and 1990s. Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the fashion industry has been of key interest to the Danish government’s creative industry policy, which promotes the economic development of the postindustrial nation through design and innovation by supporting the creative industries, improving conditions for business innovation, and promoting investment in nation-branding (Melchior, Skov & Csaba 2011). Still, it is a relatively small industry, consisting of approximately 620 companies as whole-sellers of clothing and approximately 11 000 local full-time employees. Yet, in combination with the textile and leather goods industries, the significant export revenue of the fashion industry makes it Denmark’s fourth biggest exporter among the country’s manufacture industries.<sup>8</sup>

It would be misguided to perceive the World’s Greatest Catwalk event as a traditional way of flagging the nation in the manner practiced at World Fairs for more than 150 years. Indeed, the August sky is filled, not with red and white national flags, but rather with pink balloons! The World’s Greatest Catwalk is a performance informed by a cosmopolitan nationalist discourse of the Danish post-industrial nation. On one hand, it can be seen in the context of nationalist movements currently emerging in numerous countries worldwide. At the same time, it should not be conflated with the fierce nationalist movements orchestrated in Denmark by the right-wing nationalist party, Dansk Folkeparti (English: The Danish People’s Party), whose political agenda is driven by an anti-immigration stance and a defense of what they consider true Danish values. Nationalism has many faces, as Michael Billig demonstrates in the book *Banal Nationalism* (Billig 1995), and its broad scope encompasses more than ethnocentrism. In Denmark, through the lens of fashion, two contrasting versions of contemporary nationalism stand out – a cosmopolitan nationalist discourse and an insular nationalist discourse. The first version has evolved Denmark’s self-perception beyond that of a distant country in the north of Europe, proud of its 20<sup>th</sup> century social democratic welfare state, its dairy export, and cultural icons such as Hans Christian Andersen, Karen Blixen and the Tivoli Gardens. Denmark may be small, but on the day of the World’s Greatest Catwalk, it perceives itself as internationally important and trendsetting beyond national borders in the areas of fashion, lifestyle and design. It demonstrates an interest in fashion consumers and a desire to invite tourists,

knowledge workers and investors to spend time (and money) in Denmark. Of course, this vision could be seen as hypocritical in light of the recent strict Danish immigration law – “green light for the tourist, red light for the vagabonds,” to borrow Zygmunt Bauman’s slogan for the current social mobility across borders (Baumann 1998: 93). At least the invitation is limited to resourceful individuals ready to spend money, share their knowledge and pay a high tax bill to redistribute wealth in the characteristic manner of the Danish social democratic welfare state.

Returning to the term “catwalking the nation,” though, my intention here is to emphasize the double meaning of cosmopolitan nationalism unfolding with the globalization of the fashion industry and the political interest of governments in the fashion industry. This process of globalization and how it is locally negotiated is taking place not only in countries recognized as key international fashion centers for creativity and trade, but also in countries like Denmark with no distinct or commonly acknowledged fashion history (Melchior 2011). In order to increase market share and sales figures in a highly competitive international market, the articulation of cultural distinctiveness has become a pivotal business strategy for many fashion brands and local fashion industries (e.g. Skov 2003, Palmer 2004; Brand & Teunissen 2005; Goodrum 2005; Skov & Melchior 2011). The Danish fashion industry is no exception, exemplifying the complexity of and challenges to this strategy.

When Copenhagen Fashion Council stages fashion through the nation on the pink catwalk, the purpose is to attract the attention of local and international buyers and consumers. The 220 fashion models, dressed in the Autumn-Winter 2010 collections of mainly Danish fashion brands, have been styled by design agency Femmes Regionales to communicate unequivocally, “Look, it’s Danish!” The overall look is attractive and appealing, consisting mostly of streetwear crossed with the latest 1950s retro style, popularized by television series such as *Mad Men* from the U.S. Yet, apart from the soundtrack of the show (highlights from the last fifty years of Danish pop music history), the uniformed Danish navy officers escorting a number of models, and several icons of the Tivoli Gardens universe (Pierrot, Harlequin and Columbine) taking the catwalk between the models, it is actually difficult to pinpoint the Danishness of Danish fashion design on display. One can only wonder what the foreign spectators get out of it; can they see the cultural distinctiveness in the fashionable clothes on the catwalk? It is almost ironic that, in mobilizing a new image for the nation through fashion (as in fashionable clothing), the government intends to distance the identity of the nation from the very national icons needed to communicate the particularity of Danish fashion on the catwalk! The concluding song of the catwalk show – “Copenhagen Dreaming”<sup>9</sup> – says it all, perhaps. The Danish fashion industry is still dreaming about – and searching for – what makes its products particular, in order to create a sense of place as a key selling point. This is a central dilemma to the Danish fashion

industry. On an institutional level, government policy encourages the promotion of a collective identity, but on the individual brand level, nationality is not addressed. The substance of the vision of Danish fashion appears to be unclear. It is called “democratic fashion,” but the meaning of this is rather generic for international fashion brands in the mid-price range, making it ineffective as a mark of particular Danish distinction.

The effort to “catwalk the nation,” put forth by the Danish fashion industry’s institutional bodies, highlights the challenges posed to the industry and especially to the work of its designers. It refers to the global-local nexus arising within the globalization process. The view of fashion as belonging to some “far-flung cosmopolitan sites elsewhere,” as Jennifer Craik (2009: 409) describes the popular understanding in Australian culture, is no longer the norm in the traditional periphery of global fashion centers. However, I want to stress that when mobilizing the nation for fashion, the so-to-speak “nationalization” of fashion, is not aimed at creating uniform looks and forcing fashion designers to channel their creativity into strictly defined design formats. If treated as such, its potential to boost the industry would be short-lived. Instead, it is directed at a reflective form of nationalism that I, together with Lise Skov and Fabian Faurholt Csaba, have termed cosmopolitan nationalism (Melchior, Skov & Csaba 2011). It enables fashion designers to use their awareness of cultural heritage for creative inspiration, enabling openness towards others and the negotiation of contradictory cultural experiences. The mobilization of the nation for fashion encourages “having ‘roots’ and ‘wings’ at the same time,” to quote Ulrich Beck on the characteristics of cosmopolitanism (Beck 2002: 19). My argument, considering international examples of fashion designers engaging with and questioning their cultural heritage, is that current Danish fashion designers are not sufficiently aware of this possibility; if they embraced it, they could have a meaningful voice in constructing an alternative discourse to the dominant insular nationalism that thrives not only in Denmark but also elsewhere (in the U.S., the Netherlands, France and Sweden, for example). This voice is needed from such a significant part of popular culture as the fashion world, as it already has the attention of many people (is there anyone who honestly has no interest in fashion and clothing whatsoever?). Fashion design need not merely respond to political issues – as in the idea of fashion mirroring society – but could just as well take an active part in shaping those issues via the clothes on offer.

To clarify my argument, the following text will unfold the challenges presented to the Danish fashion industry by the government’s vision that the creative industries hold the key to the country’s future. From there I will discuss the possibilities of mobilizing the nation for fashion, from the perspective of cosmopolitanism. That is to say, this article uses the case of the Danish fashion industry to call for a more activist and idealist fashion world.

## **The Problem of Belonging – Danish Fashion, Past and Present**

The development of the Danish fashion industry since the late 1950s has been characterized by a constant struggle to stay in business for many of the industry's companies, with different causes over the years. This has led to arguments within the industry for strategic moves to improve the design of the clothing produced. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the increased import of clothing threatened the Danish producers' leadership of the home market. Tage Vangaard, the leading manufacturer of women's dress in Denmark and chairman of the clothing manufacturer's trade organization, made it clear in the industry trade journal that the competitive resources of the Danish fashion industry's future were quality and design, not price (Klæder Skaber Folk 1970: 39-40). Tage Vanggaard was an example of a company collaborating with a professionally trained fashion designer, Margit Brandt, to give an edge to a range of his production aimed at young women. However, from the perspective of the government, today's call for design is intended to promote place-making, not dress-making.

The paradox and complexity of the Danish fashion industry is evident: although the industry's dominant argument revolves around design, the current three largest Danish fashion companies in terms of market share and revenue – Bestseller, BTX Group, and IC Companys – focus instead on competitive prices combined with fashionable designs, as well as on the integration of fashion retailing for two of the companies. Their role models in this respect are Sweden's H&M or Spain's Inditex. The three companies that define the Danish fashion industry in terms of size have limited engagement with the industry's institutional activities, which instead concern the many small companies and fashion brands that define the industry in numbers.

As the World's Greatest Catwalk event demonstrates, the current ambitions for Danish fashion are high. The Danish fashion industry is subject to the government's policy of stimulating the country's creative industries, using innovation and design to boost the "experience economy" – to some extent informed by the American economists Pine and Gilmore (1999) – hopefully leading Denmark through otherwise tough prospects as a postindustrial nation. In 2005, the Danish fashion industry received its first specific fashion policy, built on the vision of Denmark/Copenhagen as the fifth global fashion cluster, after the four existing centers of Paris, London, New York and Milan (FORA 2005; Melchior 2011). Previously seen as a diminishing sunset industry left to its own devices, the fashion industry was called upon as never before. A 2005 report recommended the increase of internal industry collaboration to bridge the original divisions between, on the one hand, manufacturers in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century textile and clothing production center in the provincial town of Herning, and on the other hand, manufactures of the predominant design-based fashion companies located in the Copenhagen area. In other words, the policy would unite the industry around a single vision by erasing the history and culture that built its internal myths and beliefs. It

suggested that so-called network architects be introduced to the industry, leading to the establishment of the Danish Fashion Institute shortly after the launch of the government's 2005 fashion policy. The report argued further the importance of user-driven innovation in the fashion industry, though it did not explain what that actually meant in a fashion design context, apart from the integration of the fashion industry in the overall Danish industry policy of the time. This policy focused particularly on user-driven innovation – not only as an innovation method, but also as a characteristically Danish consideration of the user/consumer when making things and solutions. User-driven innovation was believed to strengthen the competitiveness of local industries in global markets, calling for more focus on specificity and projecting a stronger and more independent image of Denmark (Christensen 2006). In reality, it is debatable whether the government fashion policy was intended *for* the industry or if the nation merely wanted to be associated with the luster of fashion (Melchior, Skov & Csaba 2011).

With this in mind, one of the first initiatives of the new Danish Fashion Institute was to commission a report on what it called the “DNA of Danish fashion.” Due to the doctoral research I was doing at the time on the concept of Danish fashion and the Danish fashion industry from 1950 to the present, I was asked to take part in writing the report, summarizing the history of Danish fashion, formulating the conclusion, and identifying the common denominators of Danish fashion design as accessibility in terms of wearability and moderate prices (Rasmussen 2006). Both now and historically, it is actually difficult to define Danish fashion in terms of specific style preferences, design methods or clearly defined cultural values that inform the design. To put it another way, Danish fashion has had an identity problem, a problem of belonging, historically and in an increasingly global world. Taking into account the sum of the industry's output, Danish fashion does not seem very distinctive. Danish fashion designers practice a rather silent creative endeavor, which has no tradition for outspoken ideology among designers, manufacturers or company owners. A common ground in accessibility is hardly enough to differentiate Denmark internationally, posing a challenge when the government demanded nation-branding through the creative industries and indeed the fashion industry, as the World's Greatest Catwalk event demonstrates. Part of the difficulty could also be that the economically dominant companies of the industry relate more to the image of Danes as good trades people, linking to the era of the Vikings (800-1050 AD) as traders and not just brutal fighters. In heated discussions during Copenhagen Fashion Week in February 2010, the diversity of the industry's companies was publicly exposed when the head of communication of the industry's trade union stated in a radio interview that Denmark is a rather a trades nation, not a couture nation, as she felt the Danish Fashion Institute was claiming (P1 Business, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010).

Perhaps for the same reason, a collective branding strategy has never officially been made since the 2006 report on the DNA of Danish fashion. Even though it

remains on the agenda of the Danish Fashion Institute, it is continuously postponed due to a lack of money and time. Yet the Danish Fashion Institute and other spokespersons of the industry continue to label Danish fashion as “democratic fashion” in the sense given in the report, while the industry itself is rather silent on the issue of the cultural distinctiveness of Danish fashion (Melchior 2008).

In other similar “second-tier” fashion centers, Lise Skov observes that fashion designers often find themselves in a dilemma when forced to focus on cultural distinctiveness. She suggests, based on a tripartite model of culture, that fashion designers are often at ease when engaging with high culture (e.g. the inspiration from art on fashion) and popular culture (e.g. the inspiration of street style on fashion), but uneasy when it comes to folk culture.

For many fashion designers, this brings out a fear of overdoing cultural stereotypes, exacerbated by the common perception that folk culture is the opposite of fashion – rural, static, backward and soaked in nationalism. The discomfort many Europeans feel with this kind of self-exoticization is ironical because fashion in the twentieth century, with its long-standing tradition for exoticism, has had no qualms about incorporating all kinds of colorful elements from non-Western, including Russian, folk culture. The new demand is that designers engage with their national culture and dress tradition, but in such a way that it can be attractive to outsiders. (Skov 2011: 149)

Fashion designers should pay attention, I argue, to the cosmopolitan nationalist discourse invoked by the Danish government when addressing the fashion industry as important for the branding of Denmark. As Skov further stresses, it has proven creatively productive to international fashion designers such as Alexander van Slobbe of the Netherlands, who adopted the notion of abstraction from Flemish art and crafts into his then Dutch-informed fashion design (Skov 2011). Fashion researcher Alison Goodrum’s study of British fashion is also relevant, showing how fashion brands like Vivienne Westwood, Paul Smith and Mulberry, each with their own image of Britishness, use their cultural heritage productively to stimulate creativity, make critical comments on nationality (particular in the case of Vivienne Westwood) and consequently produce cultural distinctiveness (Goodrum 2005).

The question, then, is what causes the hesitation towards articulating cultural distinctiveness in Danish fashion design and the revitalization of cultural heritage? One answer can be found in the history of fashion in a Danish context. To begin with, fashion was not considered to have roots in Denmark until the late 1950s. Until then, new fashions in clothing were seen as exclusive imports from great cities abroad. This perception was strengthened by the 19<sup>th</sup> century National Romantic movement and the building of the independent democratic nation-state in Denmark since 1849. The contemporary public discourse saw fashion as the antithesis of the nation-building process, in contrast to particular local peasant festive wear, viewed as static in style and therefore consecrated as national folk dress (Lorenzen 1987, Stoklund 2003). This distinction between fashion and folk dress fed into an understanding of two kinds of clothing coexisting in Denmark; the first

was oriented historically backwards, while the second was future-oriented and neutral in terms of national significance, and connected Danes with the rest of the world (Melchior 2011).<sup>10</sup> For the same reason, the living use of folk dress today is limited to the minor folk dance community – in sharp contrast to Denmark’s neighboring Scandinavian countries, where many people still dress up in folk dress for National Day celebrations as well as private festive occasions (particularly in Norway).

The nationalization process of fashion design is challenging for a reason. However, when the term “Danish fashion” came into use by the late 1950s and 1960s, this corresponded to general changes in the fashion world. Often described as the democratization of fashion, it was a time of change from “class fashion” to “consumer fashion,” to use the terminology of Diane Crane (Crane 2000), or from a monocentric fashion system to a polycentric one, according to Fred Davis (Davis 1992). The perception of fashionable clothing as something elite, socially exclusive and instigated by Parisian haute couture fashion houses was transformed into something youthful and mass-produced. The fashion world became decentralized (Lipovetsky 1994). Newspapers and magazines began to include popular writing on fashion, observing and acknowledging fashion design from many different places of the world (though mostly from the Western world). Danish fashion emerged in this context, and the export adventures of youth fashion brands appeared in newspaper headlines at home and abroad; this highlighted the independence of Danish fashion, no longer a copy of international fashion, but something new and independent. It is difficult to determine if any of the fashion designers at the time worked with the revitalization of folk dress or national cultural heritage. Instead, fashion design seemed more engaged with its present, creating a dress identity for the young international youth culture movement. At the time, the government noticed the growing visibility of Danish fashion and did occasionally use it to promote a modern Denmark abroad, but otherwise, as already mentioned; the government did not pay any specific attention to the industry.<sup>11</sup>

Another problem for the expression of cultural distinctiveness is that, generally, fashion designers communicate only a direct description of their designs in the context of upcoming trends and what the consumer can expect to find on the sales racks in the coming season. There is no tradition of public speaking or even debates on design values among Danish fashion designers, which I think feeds into the hesitation to handle issues such as cultural distinctiveness. In complete opposition, the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century environment of Danish modern industrial design included very outspoken designers and architects, who expressed their view on the power of everyday design to foster the good life in the young social democratic welfare state. It is remarkable how silent the young fashion designers were at the time. Perhaps, though, the two are related, as Danish modern design was perceived as the antithesis of fashion (Davies 2003). What could the fashion designers have to say? A critical newspaper article from 1969 quite accurately compared

the Danish fashion scene to a silent film, showing that the industry capitalized from image-making and creating lifestyle dreams, not challenging the consumers to listen, learn or reflect, but to absorb and spend (Kistrup 1969). Some designers might have had something to say, but it was difficult for them to get a word in the heated political climate between socialists and liberals that took place at the time. The fashion industry was strongly associated with capitalism, and the success story of the new Danish fashion told in newspapers and magazines centered on the sales and earnings of the fashion companies. In the 1971 book with the telling title *De nye millionærer* (English: The new millionaires), the couple behind the (at the time successful) fashion brand Dranella is interviewed and, by exception, speak of their views on money, politics and society. They declare, though, minor interest in earning money, support for equal earning in all jobs, and their conscious choice to produce collections at small manufacturing sites in provincial Denmark in order to support the local work force; but they also make it clear that they feel typecast (as liberal capitalists) and therefore have limited options to express themselves without being misunderstood (Elleman-Jensen 1971: 180-196).

Though 1971 is a long time ago and the political climate and public views on millionaires and people earning money has (at least in the Danish case) changed dramatically, the silence of the fashion industry has prevailed. It is a problem when the goal is “catwalking the nation,” as on the day of the World’s Greatest Catwalk. But what could the solution be? In the following I shall try to provide an answer to that question.

## **Making Danish Fashion Cosmopolitan Danish**

It is of utmost importance that the fashion industry realizes its voice for a cosmopolitan nationalism. It would thus avoid being “soaked in nationalism” or producing souvenirs of “cultural stereotypes,” to quote Lise Skov. Let me therefore first explain what should be understood by cosmopolitan nationalism.<sup>12</sup>

In the last ten to fifteen years, many philosophy and sociology scholars have taken an intense interest in cosmopolitanism. It is seen as a new world order, meaning a new moral and ethnic standpoint, suitable for contemporary global life, but also as a descriptive way to distinguish between cosmopolitans and non-cosmopolitans (Roudometof 2005). To sociologists like Ulrich Beck, the interest in cosmopolitanism is twofold. Firstly, as a methodological concept, it has the ability to overcome the methodological nationalism that has dominated social science studies until recently; it can do so by building on a so-to-speak “dialogic imagination,” as opposed to the “monologic imagination” characteristic of methodological nationalism (Beck 2002: 18). This analytical approach is suitable for understanding what Beck terms “internal globalization,” meaning how globalization is experienced in the everyday lives of people, institutions and national governments engaging in transnational activities. Secondly, Beck campaigns for a

“cosmopolitan nation” built on the idea of a society that is open and tolerant and embraces the otherness of others. The idea of cosmopolitanism should not to be mistaken with multiculturalism, as the latter does not acknowledge the individual, instead positing him as “the epiphenomenon of his culture,” whereas cosmopolitanism “presupposes individualization” (Beck 2002: 37).

Using the term “cosmopolitan nationalism” draws on the ideas of Ulrich Beck, but puts a stronger emphasis on the fact that nations matter, and still have an influential “afterlife” in the age of globalization. Craig Calhoun is a social science scholar representing such a view, as he suggests cosmopolitanism and nationalism are mutually constitutive:

Globalization has not put an end to nationalism – not to nationalist conflicts nor to the role of nationalist categories in organizing ordinary people’s sense of belonging in the world. (...) Nationalism still matters, still troubles many of us, but still organizes something considerable in who we are. (Calhoun 2007: 171).

Fashion may seem more appropriately linked to cosmopolitanism than to nationalism. As a catalyst of material change (change in style of clothing), fashion is decidedly fluid and border-crossing in character; as the Danish case demonstrates, it has produced an understanding of Denmark positioned in the fashion periphery of fashion centers. With globalization, particularly from a Western worldview, the fashion industry is now generally seen as a globally interdependent, transnational operation. Design is conceptualized in one country, produced in another country, shipped to a third country and perhaps even consumed in a fourth country, though international and bilateral trade agreements still regulate these flows. Because outsourcing has been ingrained into the Danish fashion industry for decades, it is no longer realistic to nationalize fashion through the label “Made in Denmark” or the idea that certain production qualities reveal the national identity of clothes. Of course, a few exceptions exist, and, significantly, they are perceived as beacons of Danish fashion, though solely in a Danish context. One example is a very plain, cotton jersey long-sleeved T-shirt made by Nørgaard paa Strøget, included as a Danish design icon in the Danish Museum of Art & Design. First made in 1967, it has been in production ever since, the design rarely changing beyond the selection of colors and their combinations; it was sold by one of the first youth fashion shops in Copenhagen, which has become an institution in itself, due not only to the T-shirt but also to its selection of avant-garde local and international fashion brands. Another example is a range of so-called fisherman sweaters of bubble-pattern knitted wool, made by the company S.N.S Herning since the 1930s. These sweaters achieved international acclaim when Rei Kawakubo, the cult Japanese fashion designer of *Commes des Garçons*, discovered the sweaters and collaborated with S.N.S Herning to sell their sweaters in her shops – not because they were Danish, but because they were retro chic.

For the majority of Danish fashion brands with neither local production nor a long heritage, however, cultural distinctiveness can be expressed through the design of clothing and the values that inform the clothes. Again, significantly for the

situation, the label “Designed in Denmark” has not yet caught on, though it frequently occurs among fashion brands in other countries. The trade organization of Danish fashion and textile industry may be to blame in this case, as until 2007 they did not recommend that Danish fashion companies use the label; they saw it as a vestige of the domination of the industry by manufacturing companies, and likewise were reluctant to confuse the consumer who hoped to buy Danish-made, as labor unions had fought endlessly to keep jobs in the country. Again, the history of the industry can be seen as adversarial to a sense of belonging, the desire for the future. A national awareness and engagement of Danish cultural history will hopefully strengthen the cultural distinctiveness and brand value of Danish fashion design, but the fashion industry will have to transform its self-perception and designers their way of working.

Cosmopolitan nationalism argues for reflective knowledge of one’s cultural heritage, not cultural diversity within one’s country, in order to understand and appreciate the cultural heritage of others. It is precisely not either/or, but allows the individual to appreciate the rootedness of cosmopolitanism, the participation in a national context, and the shared past that constitutes a ballast for understanding what Beck terms the “otherness of others” (Beck 2002). From this perspective, the hesitation of designers towards cultural distinctiveness is ultimately a choice for ignorance. To strengthen the cosmopolitan Danishness of Danish fashion, I ask Danish fashion designers to be more reflective towards their cultural heritage, to discuss and define it. Distinctive national fashion design can do more than gain market share; it can also become an ethical-political project, taking part in the public debate of nationalism and providing an alternative to the publicly dominant discourse of insular nationalism in Denmark and other places in the world. Numerous Danish fashion designers seem to have the potential for such an ethical-political engagement. Brand names such as Henrik Vibskov, Vilsbøl de Arce, Baum und Pferdgarten, Wood Wood and Soulland show a strong sense of creativity. As I see it, this goes beyond wrapping beautiful naked fashion models in the national flag for the purpose of image. The national flag should not be seen as a necessary design solution or color-code. British fashion designers have a habit of using the red, blue and white Union Jack in many contexts – as fabric, decoration, and lining – to the extent that it becomes banal and confuses the intent. Fashion designers need not address national identity in this limited way. Their approach must be more intellectually sophisticated – or avant-garde. It should identify and study dress traditions in order to revitalize them, make new eclectic mixes, and critically and outspokenly address what the Danishness of Danish fashion is.

It would be fair to ask why this is not already the case. From a researcher’s point of view, I think that the explanation lies in the way fashion designers are educated and the resources to which they have access in cultural institutions such as museums. Again, there is no tradition in Danish fashion design education of studying local fashion and dress history. Fashion and dress history is allowed to

play the role of international narrative, perhaps supplemented by an elective short course on 19<sup>th</sup> century Danish regional dress.

When asked, the heads of fashion design departments at the main design schools admit that local dress history has not been a priority; they aim to educate fashion designers to respond independently to industry needs, and hopefully to strengthen the individual student's creative, artistic and professional skills.<sup>13</sup> Students should, in other words, feel free to find inspiration, and through their education they will learn how to achieve good and, if possible, experimental design solutions in terms of process, method and appearance. In the past ten years, the design education in Denmark has gone through an academic upgrade, entailing a stronger emphasis on design theory and intellectual reflection throughout the education. The education has changed dramatically, but in this case it has yet to take into account local fashion design history as distinct from general design history. Furthermore, good reasons for this can be found in the current scholarship in the field. Who should teach and what should be included in the curriculum? Academic fashion and dress research at universities is still young. In the past, it has existed in museum contexts, but for that reason it has mostly been limited or restricted to the collections, of which none could be said to have a convincing fashion focus thus far. But as the interdisciplinary research environment gradually matures, the situation may change. The future is promising, and the latest initiative to develop a fashion museum (in relation to the Danish Museum of Art & Design), the first of its kind in Denmark, has the potential to make a difference. Not only will it give students access to its collection, but it will also provoke critical debate on Danish fashion and dress history through exhibitions and educational programs. If fashion designers are asked to critically engage in important discussions of our time of nationalism, cosmopolitanism and globalization, I believe they must develop a culture of discussion, with the support of important institutions, such as the design schools and museums, in their endeavor.

## **Conclusion**

Upon the World's Greatest Catwalk, Denmark made a fashion statement to the world, calling for the support of the fashion industry and encouraging its consumers to make "fashion change the world." That day carried a big message. It challenged the Danish fashion industry and particularly its fashion designers to fulfill the well-intentioned ambitions of the industry and the government supporting the fashion industry – mostly out of self-interest, notwithstanding the donation of money from *Fonden til Markedsføring af Danmark* (English: The Foundation for the Promotion of Denmark). I have framed the event as the materialization of what I term "catwalking the nation" and focused on how fashion designers must engage with cultural distinctiveness in order to mobilize the nation for fashion. However, my argument goes further; such engagement should not be misinter-

preted as promoting insular nationalism or guarding Danish values as if they were static and could be protected from any kind of outside interaction or possibility for transformation. Instead, by understanding the government's motivation to align with the fashion industry as stimulating a cosmopolitan nationalist imagination of Denmark, I argue that fashion designers should think of their design endeavors in a cosmopolitan nationalist context. It is essential to know one's local roots before setting off to engage and understand the outside world and make one's statement. Nations matter. In politics, they sustain and develop democracies. In popular culture, the nation can be a back-drop for developing, among other things, a cultural critique within fashion design. But a cosmopolitan and enlightened outlook must not be forgotten. In the case of Denmark, the market for fashion goes beyond national borders, and it is big, complex and competitive. One must make a difference with what one offers for sale. Yet, as I have argued, it is equally important to make a difference by taking part creatively and vocally in current debates on vital topics such as nationalism, cosmopolitanism and globalization. Otherwise, fashion merely lends its luster to the nation and not the other way round, which is equally necessary to succeed in "catwalking the nation" on an August summer day.

**Marie Riegels Melchior** is a part-time lecturer at the Department of Ethnology, University of Copenhagen, and Research Fellow at Designmuseum Danmark. In 2008 she did her PhD on Danish fashion 1950-2008. Currently she is engaged in a study of fashion in museums. E-mail: [mrm@dkim.dk](mailto:mrm@dkim.dk).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The article is primarily based on research conducted in relation to my PhD dissertation – a cultural analysis of the Danish fashion industry and the concept of Danish fashion 1950-2008 (Melchior 2008).
- <sup>2</sup> The cost of the World's Greatest Catwalk is estimated at 2.5 million DKK, paid by *Fonden til Markedsføring af Danmark* (English: The Foundation for the Promotion of Denmark) a cross-cutting initiative launched in 2007 in the action plan for the global marketing of Denmark.
- <sup>3</sup> [http://www.worldrecordsacademy.org/society/longest\\_catwalk\\_world\\_record\\_set\\_by\\_The\\_Copenhagen\\_Fashion\\_Week\\_101822.htm](http://www.worldrecordsacademy.org/society/longest_catwalk_world_record_set_by_The_Copenhagen_Fashion_Week_101822.htm), August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2010.
- <sup>4</sup> Field notes August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010.
- <sup>5</sup> Field notes August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010.
- <sup>6</sup> Field notes August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010.
- <sup>7</sup> Orvar Löfgren has introduced the concept of "catwalk economy" as a contemporary mode for many kinds of businesses, as well as in the regular public discourse of packaging and launching novelties (Löfgren 2005). I find great inspiration in this way of thinking and drawing attention to the technology of the catwalk as a metaphor for the production of the new and the fashion industry.

- <sup>8</sup> In 2010 the total revenue of the Danish fashion industry was approximately 24.1 billion DKK (3,23 billion Euro). 93.5 percent was gained from export ([www.dmogt.dk](http://www.dmogt.dk), February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2011).
- <sup>9</sup> “Copenhagen Dreaming” by the Danish pop-band Love Shop, 2004.
- <sup>10</sup> This distinction resembles Joanne Eicher and Barbara Sumberg’s notion of “world dress” as opposed to “ethnic dress,” the first transnational in nature, the second informed by the traditions and dress practices of ethnic groups (Eicher & Sumberg 1995).
- <sup>11</sup> This was particularly significant in 1969 when the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs published its magazine *Denmark Review* dedicated to celebrating and promoting young Danish fashion designers and the quality of Danish fashion design (Melchior 2008).
- <sup>12</sup> I try to develop this concept further from its inception in the article I wrote with Lise Skov and Fabian Faurholt Csaba. In analyzing the fashion industry’s involvement in the Danish government’s creative industry policy, we introduced the concept to describe the new way of representing the nation through a cosmopolitan nationalist discourse via the connectedness of the fashion industry and government policy (Melchior, Skov & Csaba 2011).
- <sup>13</sup> As part of my research for my PhD I made interviews with key persons at The Danish Design School, Designskolen Kolding and Teko in Herning (Melchior 2008).

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# The Fastskin Revolution: From Human Fish to Swimming Androids

By Jennifer Craik

## Abstract

The story of fastskin swimsuits reflects some of the challenges facing the impact of technology in postmodern culture. Introduced in 1999 and ratified for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, fastskin swimsuits were touted as revolutionising competitive swimming. Ten years later, they were banned by the world's swimming regulatory body FINA (the Fédération Internationale de Natation), with the ban taking effect from January 2010 (Shiple 2009). The reason was the controversy caused by the large number of world records that were broken by competitors wearing polyurethane swimsuits, the next generation of the original fast skin suits. These suits were deemed to be providing an artificial advantage by increasing buoyancy and reducing drag. This had been an issue ever since they were introduced, yet FINA had approved the suits and, thereby, unleashed an unstoppable technological revolution of the sport of competitive swimming. Underlying this was the issue about its implications of the transformation of a sport based on the movement of the human body through water without the aid of artificial devices or apparatus. This article argues that the advent of the fastskin has not only transformed the art of swimming but has created a new image of the swimmer as a virtual android rather than a human fish. In turn, the image of the sport of swimming has been re-mapped as a technical artefact and sci-fi spectacle based on a radically transformed concept of the swimming body as a material object that has implications for the ideal of the fashionable body.

**Keywords:** Bodysuits, swimming, technology, sportswear, consumer culture, spectacle, fashion.

## **Introduction: Re-fashioning the Swimming Body**

The development of the fastskin swimsuit coincided with the lead-up to the Sydney Olympic Games held in 2000. It was also the year of the new millennium and considerable debate about the consequences of that transition had dominated the previous decade. This produced a conjunction between public interest in developments in sporting excellence and public debate about the representation of Australian identity in staging the Games. Of particular concern was the re-working of the traditional concept of the Australian body as emblematic of national identity and character. During 2000, three competing concepts of the 'Aussie' body came to the fore: the fastskin swimmer, the embodiment of Australian identity in fashion, and the popularity of 'outback' or rural dress globally. Each concept involved the intersection of the body, clothing and gesture to produce different ideas about the truly Australian social body – the body of the nation. Perhaps because of the pending Olympics, of the three concepts, the fastskin body became enshrined as the quintessential Australian body of the moment, building on the stereotype of the surf-loving Australian. As fashion journalist, Maggie Alderson, observed: 'If there is a positive stereotypical image of Australian style it is spunky Bondi life-savers in small Speedos and way-cool salt-bleached surf dudes in cord board shorts and wild printed shirts' (Alderson 2000). This longstanding image of the true Australian body exemplified the relationship between body and space in Australian culture, but this was challenged by the advent of the fastskin. As swimming commentator, Brent Rushell noted:

No swimsuit has made this kind of splash since [pop singer] Brian Hyland immortalised a certain yellow polka-dot bikini in the 1960s. And, unlike that itchy-bitsy number, Speedo's fastskin isn't raising a ruckus because it risks anyone's modesty. A throwback – at least in silhouette – to the era of genteel seaside bathing, the new suit encases swimmers from neck to knee. (Rushell 1999)

Instead of revealing more flesh, as successive controversies about swimwear had agonised about, the fastskin covered most of the body – although this supertight cocoon in fact produced an equally provocative silhouette that highlighted muscles and genitalia. The suit attracted widespread controversy – partly about its technical attributes and partly about its creation of a new body. The fastskin unsettled commentators, whether professional or public. Swimmers largely embraced the suits as enhancing their performances and transforming the sport of swimming: "You feel so streamlined through the water. It's like you're cutting through the water like a hot knife through butter," [Grant] Hackett said. "This suit is a real advancement and evolution for the sport" (quoted by Kogoy 2008).

Some swimmers, though, expressed reservations about whether the fastskin created an unfair advantage and turned the art of swimming from a sport to a technical performance:

Australian swimming star Libby Trickett told the BBC: 'It [the fastskin] has taken the limelight from people's performances and that's not right. I don't think the sport should have headed in the direction it has, in terms of neoprene and polyurethane suits. I don't believe that is right for our sport at all and it's disappointing it's gone in that direction and it's disappointing that FINA allowed it to progress the way it did.' (quoted by BBC Sport 2009)

However, it could be argued that the horse had well and truly bolted and that the sport of swimming had been changed forever. This, of course, was to be expected. In recent years, competitive sport has become increasingly more competitive as athletes and their minders seek new ways to improve performance and gain that extra edge on opponents. As a result, considerable investment has been made in researching performance enhancing techniques and equipment, putting sport at the forefront of new technologies that have produced new fabrics and textiles based on state-of-the-art knowledge about ergonomics, aerodynamics, anthropometry, biomechanics, and other specialisations. A new kind of sports clothing has been one product of this research and this has transformed the nature of sportswear for competition, recreation and as casual wear (O'Mahony & Braddock 2002). In short, sportswear has become centre stage in the pantheon of fashion.

Since the invention of nylon, there have been considerable improvements in the design of swimwear for competition but, whereas swimwear had been getting briefer and briefer, experiments with designs that covered most of the body revolutionised the sport (Craik 1994). In 1992, at the Barcelona Olympic Games, Speedo introduced the S2000 which it promoted as the world's first 'fast suit' followed by the Aquablade for the 1996 Atlanta Games and worn by 77% of winners (Parnell 2008). However, the real revolution came with the Fastskin that was approved in November 1999 by the international regulatory body, FINA, for use in the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games (Farlex 2000; Craik 2005).

The Fastskin suit was modelled on the way a shark's skin aids its propulsion through the water via tiny ridges. By designing a suit made of Teflon-coated lycra that was moulded to streamline the body's contours, performance was promoted as improving by 3 per cent. The full body suit was designed to streamline the body's silhouette, cut down drag and resistance through the water, compress the muscles into performance and control bodily deviations from maximum performance (O'Mahony & Braddock 2002: 119-124; Natural History Museum 2008).

### **The Controversy: Equipment or Performance Enhancer?**

In the lead up to the 2000 Olympic Games there was a heated international furore as to whether these suits broke FINA's own regulations that banned any 'device' or equipment that aided a swimmer's performance as defined in the regulations:

FINA rule SW 10.8: 'No swimmer shall be permitted to use or wear any device that may aid his speed, buoyancy or endurance during a competition (such as webbed gloves, fins, etc). Goggles may be worn.'

The issue was whether the body suit was a performance altering apparatus rather than a swimming costume (Coach Sci 2000; Fastskin 2010b). Indeed, Adidas explicitly advertised its suit as: ‘the EQUIPMENT BODY SUIT a recognition that it is not a costume but equipment that falls into the same category as fins, paddles, etc. ... allowing swimmers to be faster and more efficient through the water’. Speedo also advertised the fastskin as ‘customised performance-enhancers that give a swimmer a competitive edge’ (Rushell 1999).

Four criticisms were levelled at the fastskin. First, the mimicking of shark skin by ridges designed to reduce drag and turbulence by directing water flow over the body was deemed to constitute a device. Second, the super stretch fabric and super tight fit compressed muscles and reduced muscle vibration artificially. Third, the effectiveness of the suit depended on whether it was a generic suit or customised by using body scanning technology to determine the placement of seams and contours. And fourth, a ‘gripper’ fabric was inserted into the forearm to mimic the skin and maximise the swimmer’s feel for the water.

Outstanding issues about the type of fabric, fabric coatings, bodily compression and buoyancy were central to the question of whether the suits were the key to improved performances and thus in breach of FINA’s own rules (Shipley 2009). Many leading swimmers and coaches were convinced that it constituted ‘a piece of equipment’ rather than a ‘costume’ (coach Paul Bergen quoted by Coach Sci 2000). American swimmer, Bill Pilczuk lobbied for a ban, saying:

‘The whole suit floats you. The more buoyancy you get, the less you have to pull through the water,’ he said. ‘When you put material that floats on people who have more muscle, they can float better. I don’t think it’s a very level playing field.’  
(quoted by Coach Sci 2000)

The manufacturers defended the suit with Speedo’s Vice president, Stu Isaac arguing that the suit constituted the ‘management of existing forces rather than generating active forces’ (Speedo 2000). The international debate intensified during the Australian National Swimming Titles and Olympics selection trials held in May 2000 with debate about whether the suit contravened national regulations about costumes and specifically whether the difference between Speedo Fastskins and generic fastsuits exacerbated the hierarchy of ‘star’ versus ‘squad’ swimmers. By the time the Sydney Olympics took place, the controversy had abated and the smashing of numerous world records proved the effectiveness of the new swimsuits. Overall, times were faster and 83% of record-breaking swimmers wore the new suits (Fastskin 2010c, d, h, i).

Despite the furore, swimmers were quick to adopt the suit and they quickly became the norm for competitive swimming. However, the suits were not the robust costume some might have wished for. They were very tight – two sizes less than a swimmer’s usual size – and difficult to put on. They were also prone to tearing or filling up with water. Opinions were divided as to the full length design and soon other models were devised – sleeveless, topless and knee-length – to suit the needs of different swimmers. Despite initial controversy, the suits quickly trans-

formed the sport of swimming. Fastskins had arguably created a new body technique and inevitably, perhaps, the controversy continued to simmer away. Researchers around the world performed studies aimed at determining whether the suits did in fact reduce drag and create buoyancy though the results have been indeterminate (eg. Toussaint 2002).

While scientific testing continued, fastsuits became adopted by amateur swimmers too and the technology adapted for leisure swimwear. The new look of the swimming body had become normative. This in turn produced new ideas about the ideal swimming body with some commentators lamenting the trend towards full body suits as ‘very sad for the viewing public ... [who] love seeing the healthy bodies of the sports stars – they’ve got sensational bodies. Why would you go and hide them?’ (Max Markson quoted by Katrina Beikoff 2000). In other words, the cultural debate centred on the loss of ‘sex appeal’ or the ‘perve factor’ – that is, the desire of spectators to gaze voyeuristically at the bronzed, toned and oiled athletic bodies of competitive swimmers (Harari 2000). The new body was less recognisably human – more like a fish or perhaps an android – a shiny capsule gliding through the water like Mr Condom or Darth Vader (Harari 2000), or, as American swimmer, Amy Van Dyken quipped ‘like spacemen’ (quoted by Brooks 2000). A new swimming body was born.

### **Raising the Stakes: How Fast is too Fast?**

Speedo – quickly joined by other manufacturers – continued to experiment with improvements to the design, releasing the Fastskin FSII for the 2004 Athens Olympic Games (Fastskin 2010g; Swim-Faster.com 2010). This drew on computational fluid dynamics to follow the flowlines around the body; different suits were designed for women and men, and for different strokes. Speedo promoted the suits through an aggressive advertising campaign that featured leading swimmers portrayed as human fish with shark gills simulated on their necks. This proved to be a promotional coup and the majority of swimmers at Athens wore this Speedo. Body suit, although it was not as performance improving as hoped – more a revision than a revolution in design. In 2007, Speedo launched the FS-Pro and in 2008 the LZR Racer.

The LZR heralded a major improvement in design (incorporating 50% polyurethane) using fused panels that streamlined the body rather like a corset to keep the body high in the water and reduce drag and turbulence (Dayton 2008; Swim Info 2008; Kogoy 2008; Fastskin 2010e, f). Prototypes were tested in NASA’s wind tunnel and the water flume at the University of Otago. Some were impractical and even the final design required 15-20 minutes to put on and could ‘only be worn half a dozen times before the compression is gone and it loses its effectiveness’ (Parnell 2008). Bizarrely, the new suit was likened to a corset which ‘improved posture and buoyancy’, ‘better use of oxygen’, ‘repelled water and had the psycho-

logical effect of making swimmers feel ‘they could swim faster’ (Parnell 2008). Australian swimmer Alice Mills said: ‘these suits make the Fastskins feel like a normal pair of training togs. These ones are incredibly smooth and fast’ (quoted by Parnell 2008).

Despite the enthusiasm of swimmers for the LZR, the suit was denounced by rival brand, Arena, as ‘technological doping’ (Parnell 2008). Other brands (including TYR, Nike, Mizuno, Asics, Blueseventy, Descente and Adidas) soon matched the LZR and a fierce advertising war ensued while new brands proliferated keen to capitalise on the potential benefits of gold medals and sponsorship deals.

By 2009, brands other than Speedo were the winning suits. ‘Rapidly evolving swimsuit technology [was] influencing results so much that sports newspaper *L’Equipe* listed the French team for the world titles by suit when it was announced this week’ (Jeffery 2009). At the same time, manufacturers and national swimming bodies lobbied FINA to ban the suits or at least clarify the guidelines for permissible suits in the light of FINA’s existing regulations in order ‘to avert an irrecoverable loss of credibility for swimming sports’ (Cristiano Portas, head of Arena, quoted by Parnell 2008).

The issue came to the boil at the 2008 Beijing Olympics when a record number of records were broken mostly by swimmers in the LZR (Matheson 2008). The manufacture of 100% polyurethane suits – especially the Italian Jaked J01 (Jaked 2010) and Adidas Hydrofoil suits – inflamed the debate still further and led most national swimming bodies to ban polyurethane suits in their competitions (Moloney 2008a, b; Moloney 2009; Jeffery 2009; Swim Coach Tools 2010). Further pressure was put on FINA to ban the suits. Australian swim coach, Forbes Carlile commented that: ‘All FINA sees is the glamour and world records. They see themselves as entrepreneurs, not as the custodians of the sport’ (quoted by Parnell 2008).

The stakes were high with the growing number of manufacturers and the extensive investment in research into refining the design (Fastskin 2010a-j). Advertising and marketing campaigns strove to bleed market share from rival brands and secure sponsorship deals with swim teams and high profile swimmers. Myths and counter-myths were rife while the public (aided by spectacular media coverage) remained mesmerised – if somewhat sceptical – about the wonder suits and the record breaking feats of swim celebrities.

Even the swimmers were critical of the implications of the new generation suits. British swimmer, Rebecca Adlington commented:

I think it’s a shame to be honest. Swimming always used to be a level playing field. I can remember watching when they were just in trucks and 100% textile suits, whereas now it’s very, very different. The technology has just taken off in the last year, it’s come from nowhere. We need to go back to putting rules in place, just to make it a fair playing field for everyone. (Adlington quoted by BBC Sport 2009)

## **The Ban: Putting the Genie Back in the Bottle**

After more than 130 world records had been broken in less than a year after the launch of the LZR, FINA's congress, comprising representatives from national swimming bodies – as opposed to FINA's bureau – voted to ban suits that were full length and/or made from polyurethane (Shipley 2009). Permitted were waist-to-knee suits ('jammers') for men and shoulder-to-knee suits for women, however these must be made from 'allowable textiles' (although that was not defined) (BBC Sport 2009; see also Shipley 2009; Swim Coach Tools 2010). In 2010, almost 500 suits that met these conditions were approved (FINA 2010). Critics have responded that by focusing on the length of the suits and not defining 'textiles', FINA has 'circumvent[ed] vexing questions of fabrics, impermeability and buoyancy' as issues that still need 'to be hashed out' (Shipley 2009). So, rather than ending the controversy, another debate has ensued about whether the sport of swimming has been irrevocably changed and lamenting the ineffectiveness of the international regulatory body (Fastskin 2010a, j).

A study of the use of fastskin swimsuits by elite male swimmers at the 13<sup>th</sup> FINA World Championships in 2009 shows that swimmers preferred to use swimsuits that covered the torso and the leg "probably contributing [to an] extended body compression and a higher drag decrease" (Neiva et al. 2011: 91) and mainly chose two types – the Powerskin X-Glide Full and the Jaked01 Full which they thought produced a better performance (Neiva et al. 2011: 92). However, the authors concluded that "further investigation could be done to know the mechanisms of performance related [to] the polyurethane swimsuits" (Neiva et al. 2011: 92).

Of course, FINA is in a bind since it realises that the health and wealth of the sport of swimming is inter-linked with the fortunes of the swimwear industry which makes a significant contribution 'to the federations and athletes in terms of promotion and financial support' (Cornel Marculescu of FINA, quoted by Parnell 2008). FINA also faces the enormous task of testing new suits as they come on the market to determine whether they meet the new rules 'if only to stop manufacturers acting like snake-oil salesmen as they spruik the hidden powers of their suits' (Parnell 2008). And, of course, the suits are not the only technological development changing the face of swimming; there are also calibrated cameras, computer simulations, and various types of monitors, scanners and sensors. Swimming as a sport is undergoing major transformations of which the body suits are just a visible symbol.

## **Conclusion: The Technical Body versus the Humanised Android**

The impact on swimming as a sport has been to create a gulf between elite and non-elite competition swimmers, as well as between these and recreational swimmers. The fastskin suits have also fuelled a whole new market segment of

high tech swimwear and accoutrements that has trickled down to the design and look of swimwear for everyday consumers, using new fabrics such as 75% polyester and 25% elastane to create 'a fashionable look' (Fastskin 2010c; see also O'Mahony & Braddock 2002; Salazar 2008). Increasingly, too, consumers want everyday sportswear 'to be manufactured in performance materials that were easy to care for, stretchable and comfortable' (Quinn 2002: 186). Sportswear has become 'so chic it is virtually indistinguishable from casual wear' while performance sportswear has been influenced by everyday sportswear and become increasingly stylish (Quinn 2002: 186). Quinn concludes that:

As sportswear and fashion slowly fuse together, the work of [Fashion Active Laboratory and Nova USA] and other designers reveals a complex relationship between them. While we question where the boundaries between them now lie, the axis between the two reveals a mutual concern for aesthetics and performance, and an appreciation for new design methods. (Quinn 2002: 186)

So, while the debate appears to have been about technological and biomechanical matters, computer aided design and inter-disciplinary research, it has also become a cultural debate about body techniques, the relationship between the body and clothing, the power of promotion and marketing, the dynamics of consumer culture, the agenda-setting role of the media, the role of spectacle (and voyeurism) in contemporary society, and the politics of performance and success. Swimmers in body suits look excessively streamlined and segmented into pieces – a little like the recommended cuts for a carcass in a butcher's shop. Bodies have become a collage of body pieces and a play between the concealment and revelation of the natural body. The suits also create androgynous bodies with the aim of 'smoothing out' bumps and lumps, especially of female swimmers. Photographs of the suits posed swimmers in heroic stances like science fiction super humans; the naked body squeezed into a shiny sausage skin or condom. Photos of swimmers underwater emphasised the efficiency of the suits as measured by the extent to which they assisted the body to be propelled through the water like a mechanical plesiosaurus.

Implicit in this debate has been assumptions about how swimming bodies should look as much as rules as to how the body should work as a swimming device. Until the fastsuit, debates about swimming and swimwear had focused on the tension between revelation and concealment – the naked versus the clothed body. Swimwear had become more and more brief over time with accompanying moral panic about how far could this trend go? The fastskin suit however was based on the reverse logic, namely using the new fabrics to cover up as much skin as possible. As American swimmer, Jenny Thompson, observed: 'People thought that the less material the better, the skimpier the swimsuit the faster. Now it's the opposite. Now because the material is so fast, it's the more material the better' (quoted by Brooks 2000). Spectators have been divided in their reaction to this trend with some denouncing it but others embracing the suits as enhancing 'all their bits. These are completely full on. They're as tight as can be, really' (quoted

by Harari 2000). The resulting look is slightly androgynous although the compression of bodily lumps and bumps also signals gender attributes as imprisoned rather like S & M gear or transvestite costumes. This ambiguous look inevitably has provoked a revised set of guidelines about swimwear design and its relationship with the body. The concept of modesty has been one casualty as a 'warts and all' silhouette has become the norm.

While the spectacle of the swimming body has remained a potent symbol of contemporary culture and its discontents, this symbol also references other cultural discourses such as the obsession with winning in western culture, the power of marketing and lobbying, and the emerging development of new techniques of swimming produced by the efficacy of the body suit. Yet, these issues have been strangely muted in the decade-long controversy about the fastskin. The understanding of bodysuits as a voyeuristic – if not erotic – *habitus* for the iconic post-modern body demands further attention. Nonetheless, there is evidence that there have not only been applications of the body suit to other sports (such as athletics, gymnastics, football, basketball) but there are new concepts of swimwear design and its relation to the body as a consequence of the fastskin revolution. The jury remains out as to whether the fastskin has been a positive or negative development for the sport of swimming and images of the ideal human body.

In the context of Australia national culture, the image of the swimmer as national icon has been re-worked to accommodate the fastskin body. Once the bastion of the image of masculine prowess, sun worshippers and outdoors healthiness, the new Aussie body is now encased in neck-to-knee swimming costumes – whether children, life-savers or beach go-ers. Fear of sunburn, melanoma, and sea stingers has re-invented the Aussie body that is clothed in globally successful surf wear brands like Mambo, Billabong, Ripcurl, Quiksilver and Brothers Neilsen. These have created a new 'image of freedom, health, fitness and a frisson of rebellion' (Alexandra Joel quoted by Rhonda Payget 1999).

In the national celebration of the body in the outdoors, casual and irreverent environment, the Aussie body has long been regarded as the locus of personal identity whose body techniques are elided with the sense of self. Champion swimmers have always been national heroes in the pantheon of Australian icons. They epitomised the migrant nation's control or mastery of the land. As well as more recent champions, the success of long distance champion swimmer Annette Kellerman in Hollywood cemented this national obsession. In this mission, the natural body is given precedence over the artificially-aided one. As swimmer, Susie O'Neil said after breaking the 200 metre butterfly record in 'normal togs':

I really wanted to do it in short swimmers just for my own piece of mind. I thought that if I got it in the longsuit I might just have maybe thought it was the suit that swam the time. Now I know it was me. (quoted by Sports News 2000)

In short, the swimsuit is an extension of the body surface due to the play between flesh and fabric that creates a tension between revelation and concealment as well

as orchestrating the performance of the body. Fastskin suits manipulate how the body feels and behaves – both in and out of the suit. According to swimmers who have worn the fastskin, this is both a sensory feeling and a sensual one, once again raising the dynamic between partially revealed or concealed bodies, on the one hand, and sensuality and sexuality, on the other. The history of swimming and swimwear is a history intertwined with conventions of, and discourses about, modesty, manners and sexuality and how these are conveyed, embodied or exaggerated by the partially clad body and the wet body in the complex process of constructing different versions of the social body. In this sense, the fastskin suit has become a decisive technique of the postmodern body and role model for cultural discourses about the body of the future. Indicative of this, the updated version of Speedo's TLZR Pulse used nylon and spandex micro-fibres that are super-lightweight and water-repellent in a collaboration:

With one of the most forward-looking fashion designers, Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garçons. She transferred a calligraphic painting by Japanese artist Inoue Yu-ich onto the suit; the graphic print reads *Kororo*, which means 'heart, mind, spirit, feeling' (Calderin 2009: 246).

If confirmation that the fastskin suit has involved the transformation of the human body, this is surely proof.

**Jennifer Craik** is Professor Research of Fashion and Textiles at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia, lecturer in the Bachelor of Fashion Design at Canberra Institute of Technology, and Adjunct Professor of Cultural Heritage at the Australian National University. She researches fashion and dress, and arts and cultural policy. Publications include *The Face of Fashion* (1994), *Uniforms Exposed* (2005), and *Fashion: The Key Concepts* (2009). E-mail: [Jennifer.Craik@rmit.edu.au](mailto:Jennifer.Craik@rmit.edu.au)

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## As Fast as Possible Rather Than Well Protected: Experiences of Football Clothes

By Viveka Berggren Torell

### Abstract

With Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological view that human beings 'take in' the world and experience themselves as subjects through their bodies as a starting point, players in both men's and women's teams, kit men, purchasing managers, sporting directors, and a coach from Swedish football clubs have been interviewed about their perceptions and experiences of football clothing. Since the body is both a feeling and knowing entity, clothes are seen as components of body techniques, facilitating or restricting body movements in a material way, but also as creators of senses, like lightness and security; in both ways, influencing the knowledge in action that playing football is. In this article, the content of the interviews is discussed in relation to health. When clothes are primarily related to a biomedical view that health means no injuries and illnesses, warm pants and shin guards are mentioned by players, who are rather ambivalent to both, since these garments counteract a feeling of lightness that is connected to the perception of speed. Players want to be fast rather than well protected. If clothes, instead, are interpreted as related to a broad conception of health, including mental, social, and physical components, the relation body-space-in-between-clothes seems to be an important aspect of clothing. Dressed in a sports uniform, unable to choose individual details, the feeling of subjectivity is related to wearing 'the right-size' clothes. Also new textile technology, like injury-preventing and speed-increasing tight compression underwear, is perceived by players based on feelings that they are human subjects striving for both bodily and psychological well-being.

**Keywords:** Interviews, phenomenology, football clothes, conceptions of health, subjectivity

## Introduction

### **Signs Creating Unity and Belonging – But Also Materiality Sensed by the Body**

Match kits and training tracksuits are sports uniforms (Craik 2005a: 140). Analysed with semiotic theories by which garments or articles of clothing are seen as signs of communication and expressions of symbolic meanings, they can be interpreted as tools for symbolizing group identity, unity, and belonging.<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, a rather loose jersey, shorts, and knee-high socks are the garments for football.<sup>2</sup> That combination has probably been maintained since it is important for each sport to uphold a specific dress code with clothes of a certain style and iconography in order to be recognized (Burgoyne 1998). This underlines that semiotic aspects are relevant. But to grasp the full impact of clothes, it is necessary to go further and research material and embodied aspects of dress as well (Beward 1998; Entwistle 2000: 4–5; Miller & Kuchler 2005; Woodward 2007: 23). How clothes are cut and made or how different textile materials touch the skin must be considered to understand how dress shapes the body and what meanings clothes convey to the body in a material way. Then, specific garments can be interpreted as components of body techniques (Craik 2005b: 12) and the way players dress for football can be seen as situated bodily practice (Entwistle 2000).<sup>3</sup>

### **Research Based on Qualitative Interviews**

This article aims at contributing to such clothing research ‘beyond semiotics’ by discussing aspects of how football clothes are experienced by players and others active within top-level football clubs in Sweden today. Players from seven men’s teams and five women’s teams in the Premier Division (Allsvenskan) – in total, twenty-four players (twelve men and twelve women) – have been interviewed. I have also spoken to four sporting directors, five kit men, four purchasing managers, and one coach.

An equal number of male and female players were interviewed, but the starting point of the research was that if they, irrespective of their sex, were allowed to speak, first and foremost, as football players, then the theme ‘football and clothing’ could lead away from discussions about gender differences. Thus gender issues regarding football clothes will hardly be elaborated here.<sup>4</sup> Mostly the sporting directors or purchasing managers suggested which players should be interviewed. There were, however, various reasons for proposing certain players. One sporting director mentioned that one player was known to be frank and talkative. Some players said themselves that they probably were chosen since they were interested in fashion and clothing, while others were suggested since they were able to stay after training for the interview. This means that a broad range of players were interviewed, some rather new members in the first teams of the clubs, and others who had been elite players for many years. One exception in the variation though is that only Swedish-born players have been interviewed.

But, in other respects, the players do not represent any different groups. Their stories about football clothing can be seen as personal, yet not individual, since as the sociologist Joanne Entwistle (2000) tells us, dress as an embodied practice is always embedded within social relations, and clothing practices are formed in the intersection between discourses ascribing specific meanings to bodies in different contexts and embodied experiences of dress. In other words, personal talk about clothing practices and clothing experiences conveys cultural themes and is influenced by the person's social relations. Thus, in this article, quotations have been selected to discuss some perspectives which have appeared in several interviews. The quotations express rather clearly, or, in some cases, in an especially interesting way, things that also others spoke about in similar ways. But even if the article is based on common traits in the interviews, it still conveys qualitative research which aims at presenting many different aspects of experiences of football clothes and understanding how such experiences are made through bodily perceptions. The intention is not to make statements about how general these experiences may be among players today.

### **Phenomenology of the Body as the Starting Point**

The research is phenomenological in the sense that the interviews aimed at getting thorough descriptions of perceptions on football clothes and understanding experiences of the clothed body from the interviewees' perspectives (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 26–27). The same themes were discussed in all of the interviews, but not in the same order and only some questions were identical from one interview to another. I tried to be open-minded and listen to what the respondents wanted to talk about and posed lots of follow-up questions to learn more about their perspectives. But rather than keeping my prior knowledge to myself in every instance, I sometimes shared it with the respondents instead. The rather sophisticated method Hammersley and Atkinson (1989: 115) propose, which is to pose questions that lead in an opposite direction from where you expect the answer to be, was not used. But reading their text made me less hesitant to pose leading questions. Thus, this was sometimes done when trying to confirm that I had grasped what the respondents meant in ways they could recognize. At this point, we were already having a good exchange of views, and the interviewees were straightforward enough to tell me if they thought I had misunderstood them.

The research is also theoretically informed by phenomenology. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's view that human beings 'take in' the world and experience themselves as subjects through their bodies is the starting point. The body is the acting complex from which perception, and thus existence in the world, emanates. Humans perceive themselves as subjects related to the surroundings by what they do with their bodies. The body itself is both a feeling and knowing entity. Human subjectivity is not best understood based on the Cartesian claim that what makes us human beings is that we think, because even if the body is where thinking resides, it also has sensomotoric abilities which make it possible to treat 'being in the world' without cognitively conceptualizing and categorizing it (Merleau-Ponty 1997, 2004; Entwistle 2000: 28–29; Engelsrud 2006: 30–34; Allen-Collinson

2009: 282–283). All of us have stored bodily experiences. Our bodies can perform tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1983).

A sportsperson often has to limit the time between thought and execution to zero so when it comes to a series of movements, he or she ‘. . . reduces the thought required between individual movements to habits, that is to nonreflective actions’, according to the sociologists of knowledge Joseph Bensman and Robert Lilienfeld (1973: 62–63). Thus, body movements execute a person’s know-how, for instance knowing how to play football. And as parts of body techniques, clothes can either facilitate or restrict body movements and thereby influence such ‘knowledge in action’ (Molander 1996).

These phenomenological perspectives were starting points when I began to interview. But theoretical lessons from Entwistle (2000) also influenced the research. She suggests that to understand dress as a situated practice, what is needed is a combination of phenomenological perspectives and insights into representations and discourses of body and clothes (Entwistle 2000: 39). Thus, when analysing the interviews, I connected things that were said with the growing medialization and the aesthetization of everyday life – two sociocultural processes going on in society today. Listening to the interviews, and, at the same time, thinking about the medialization and aesthetization of sporting bodies, I understood that aesthetics, achievement, and health are three important related categories involved in shaping experiences of football clothes today.

### **Skilful, Beautiful, and Healthy Sporting Bodies in Consumer Culture**

As visual consumption has become more and more predominant (Schroeder 2002: 4–5), the importance of unique actions by individual athletes has grown when it comes to producing sport stars (Smart 2005: 196). Spectators want to see the stars express competitiveness, joyfulness, and strong emotions, but also body power, speed, and technical skill (Smart 2005: 194). Lotta Schelin, a forward for the Swedish national football team, confirmed this when photographed by a Swedish tabloid. Doing stylish volleys in a photo studio, modelling Puma underwear, she said: ‘You cannot be just a footballer today, but an acrobat as well’ (Mravec 2007).

Highlights from matches can be seen over and over again on TV, and when attending an Allsvenskan game, you can see replays on big screens. Since photographers often try to catch moments of ‘the beautiful game’, these practises of highlighting skills, at the same time, contribute to the aesthetization of the body in contemporary consumer culture (cf. Featherstone 1994). And it’s worth noting that the skilful, beautiful body also very often is portrayed as healthy. Healthy and beautiful bodies construct each other in much of the talk about the body today.<sup>5</sup> For instance, the expression ‘radiant with health’ implies that a person looks dynamic and therefore beautiful. Clothes can help shape bodies according to prevalent norms of beauty and materially construct sporting bodies as healthy and/or high achieving. The accentuation of the body’s skill and look during the game makes football clothes more important than ever before as a functional ‘working outfit’, allowing players to perform to the best of their ability.

Both aesthetic aspects of sports clothes and, to some degree, the impact of clothes on achievement have been discussed in design literature and in ethnology and cultural studies (Andrew 1998; Busch 1998; O'Mahoney 2002; Craik 2005a, 2005b; Petersson 2005). In particular, 'Fastskin' swimsuits have been discussed as an example of performance-enhancing garments blurring the border between body and clothing (Craik 2005b). But when it comes to health, protection is only occasionally referred to within qualitative research as one function of sports clothes. Instead, the impact of protective garments while playing football has been discussed in medical research conducted using quantitative methods (Sandelin et al. 1985). How well shin guards made of various materials protect against a tibia fracture (Fransisco et al. 2000) and the effect of adolescent players' use of protective headgear (Delaney et al. 2008) have, for instance, been studied. However, neither in medical research nor in the humanities have experiences with football clothes ever been interpreted from the point of view of how clothes can contribute to health if a broad understanding of that concept is applied.

In order to cover this gap in the research, the focus of this article will be interpretations of how football clothes relate to health, both medically and broadly (cf. Andersson & Ejlertsson 2009): What views on football clothes, as expressed in the interviews, can be discussed if clothes are primarily interpreted as related to a biomedical view that health means no injuries and illnesses? What aspects of football clothes, as mentioned in the interviews, are accentuated if the clothes are, instead, seen as related to a broad conception of health, which includes mental and social as well as physical components?<sup>6</sup>

## **Protection against Injuries and the Cold – Clothes Seen from a Medical Conception of Health**

### **Connections between Lightness and Speed**

When one player was asked if he had ever experienced football clothes as obstacles stopping him from achieving, he suggested changing subjects, namely from clothes to boots:

No . . . yes, clothes if you include boots. Then, some boots are made of material that tears more easily, like if they are a little thin. So, of course, in that case, it can be like that – it can be an obstacle. . . . And maybe a stud can fall off too. And then you get a worse grip. So you have to go and change.

From that moment, I decided that, based on the players' own emphasis on boots, my research, which initially was meant to be just about clothes, would also discuss boots.

One prominent feature of both the Adidas and Nike football boot ads in the Swedish magazine *Goal* during 2008 was the idea that boots can help improve precision when shooting. The players interviewed in 2008 and 2009, on the other hand, spoke more of lightness than of precision when discussing boots. One of them said: 'If you compare boots today with those ten years ago, there's really a big difference; first of all, when it comes to weight, thickness of the leather, and

all that . . .'. Some made a connection between the use of lighter boots and the feeling of speed.<sup>7</sup> For example, one male footballer said: 'You want a boot as light as possible. You feel a little faster and you feel it's a little easier to run'. That clothes made of thin, light fabric often felt nice when training was also discussed: 'You must not feel that your clothes are chocking you; instead, they must be loose fitting and can sort of breathe . . . fairly light fabric and thin!' One kit man said that already in the 1980s some players wanted thin socks. He particularly mentioned one of the club's stars: '. . . he had to wear very light ones if he was to run faster, he thought'. The trend has been towards thinner socks, so most players are content today, the kit man explained.<sup>8</sup>

The combination of lightness and speed that players sense is an example of the important point in Merleau-Ponty's theories that the senses simultaneously let in different perspectives on the world, and together they constitute a totality of perception. Introducing a series of Merleau-Ponty's lectures, Baldwin (2004: 19) makes this clear when he writes: '. . . our perceived world is structured by a plurality of overlapping perspectives within which different aspects are somehow seen together, as aspects of just one world'. Thus, the footballer's lived bodily experience is made up of mixed sensations. In the same instant as he perceives his body moving faster than ever before from one point on the pitch to another, he also 'brings in' the (compared to earlier models) decreased weight of his very light boots (and his thin socks).<sup>9</sup> Sensations go together and they are blended, but since one statement comes after the other in language, which is linear, the wholeness of a bodily experience is not easy to express in words. When interpreting the interviews though, now and then I sensed that a player was returning to a totality of aspects on clothes, which she or he has experienced through the body. This was manifested as a rapid change of subject, from discussing one sensual impression to instantly talking about another sensual perception; as if the interviewees brought additional perspectives of their embodied experience into our conversations to make me understand the totality of their bodily experience better.<sup>10</sup>

Most players saw the combination of lightness and speed, which the lightweight material of many football boots nowadays seems to contribute to, as a positive experience. But when a midfielder brought up the importance of speed in his performance, some negative health-related aspects regarding boots also came up. He emphasized that lightweight boots lack other properties:

. . . they may not give as good support to the foot and the risk of injuries may increase a little. [They are] not as sturdy if you get a whack. Then it's like you get it full on, the whack . . . instead of the boot perhaps taking a little bit of the load otherwise when it is the bigger, sturdier boots.

### **Shin Guards: A Questionable Piece of Protective Equipment**

Another piece of equipment valued by players through their experiences of connections between lightness and speed is shin guards. Players claim that shin guards give a feeling of extra weight, and, therefore, the ones used by many elite players today are so small that they can be held in the palm of a man's hand. Today, the protective foot part, made of textile material and extra ankle padding, is

fastened with Velcro so you can easily rip it off from the hard part over the shin. One purchasing manager said: 'Since it [the foot part] makes their feet a little stiffer, it's nicer to play without them. It's virtually only youth players who use them'. A player told me: 'Well, having as small shin guards as possible has become a bit of an issue because . . . some players think it's annoying, too annoying, if your shins are covered a lot. Actually, I can understand that. It *can* be annoying sometimes. So we . . . well, usually . . . I always train without shin guards'. These sentences are interesting since the content goes from general observations and other players' possible thoughts to what this player thinks himself, and then, after some hesitation, finally, also to what he actually does. During the interview, I felt he sensed my astonishment that he and his teammates didn't consider this garment's protective function more. But he certainly didn't have to reveal to me his own habit of training without shin guards. I think he did it to convince me that, from his point of view, the natural standpoint is that ways of protecting the body must not interfere with the sense of the optimal ability to perform as a footballer.

He gave further arguments why shin guards are unnecessary, but when he continued talking, there was, nevertheless, some ambivalence:

Actually, it is very seldom you get a whack on the shin. Mostly, it is on the thighs and the feet. So, it's strange really . . . but probably these shin guards are a relic from the past. But certainly they are – the shins, I mean – they can get *badly* injured easily, break your leg and things like that . . .

Most likely, a nasty injury that a player in another club recently picked up was the reason for the last sentence. Another player said that in the injured player's club, the coach decided that shin guards had to be also used when training. Such a decision can be interpreted as an example of how a club cares about the employee's health, but the interviewed player was not that positive: 'Well, but we are not thirteen, you know. Actually, we have to take responsibility ourselves'.

My impression of the calm tone used when injuries were discussed in the interviews is that taking risks and getting injured are seen as a necessary part of the game if you want to be successful. Both the demand that you shall be individually responsible for your body but also the habit of exposing your body to rough treatment and giving little consideration to health have been linked to constructions of masculinity (Whannel 2002: 68–70, 157). But hardly any difference between male and female elite players' attitudes was noticed.<sup>11</sup> 'I suppose you don't think much about protection. Instead, it's more about that it must be small. You have to be light', one female player, for instance, said about her shin guards. She continued: 'It is impractical and a little bulky. We don't see it as if they have to protect us; instead, it is more that it is a little impractical'. And what she said echoed what the male players thought. According to one male player, the habit of not thinking much about protection had to do with demands for speed made when playing at the elite level:

The higher the level of football you play . . . well, there must be no obstacles for me to be as fast as possible. And nothing annoys me as much as large shin guards, which don't feel comfortable; instead, as small as possible and as light as possible. And you must be as fast and as flexible as possible. Then you may have to cope with injuries later.

Shin guards are obviously different from ordinary clothes since they are meant for protection. So I asked one player: ‘But do you think of *clothes* as protection for the body when you play?’ He took his time and hesitated a bit before answering:

No . . . well . . . it is . . . yes, actually. On . . . when you play on artificial turf, like in the winter, at least when you train, then you can have long underpants underneath your shorts and socks because it hurts quite a lot if you slide tackle. Then, you can really get huge burns. So then you do [think of clothes as protection] . . . well, you can get such burns. Also, wearing shorts, you get them when training indoors on those parquet floors.

Then he was asked if he ever wore long underpants during matches on artificial turf: ‘No. It’s strange really. You don’t’. He laughed and seemed confused, maybe because he felt that I found it a bit odd that he wanted to incur injuries when he actually knew of a way to protect his body. (Even though, I, of course, didn’t say that, maybe my facial expression told him so.) He concluded by saying: ‘Well . . . you probably feel that you can sacrifice yourself a little more during a match. That’s probably the way it is’.

### **Warm Pants for Protection**

The garment players themselves first mentioned as protection against injuries was warm pants. In Sweden, they are called *ljumskbyxor*, which includes the name of the part of the body this garment is meant to protect (*ljumske* is the Swedish word for groin). *Ljumskbyxor* are a broad category since the term can denote both thick and thin warm pants, totally or partly made of synthetic rubber material (neoprene), and thinner polyester tights. ‘I think it was in the 1990s they started wearing those’, a kit man said, and he continued: ‘At that time, often everyone used so-called Vulcan pants, such really thick, disgusting warm pants . . . but nowadays not many use them. Today, they’ve got these pants . . . some of them want these tights all the time’. When I said that sometimes it would be very warm wearing them, he answered: ‘It has to be warm!’ He meant that warmth protects the muscles against injuries. One player didn’t mention the need to protect his muscles by keeping them warm as a reason for wearing leggings though. He said he uses them instead of ordinary underpants because they are nicer, more elastic, and simply feel better.

Vulcan pants are also still used today. Both players and others see them as a protective garment that helps prevent injuries. Wearing them can create a feeling that you are taking care of yourself; you are doing what you can to avoid injuries. They produce warmth, but none of the players said the pants give a feeling of well-being. On the contrary, the thick warm pants restrict movement: ‘But these very thick underpants, in them you feel a little inhibited. It is rather hard to move in them and so on. So I don’t use them much. But there are those who do’, one player said. Another man always used warm pants for training, but never during a match:

I take them off because you become a little lighter when you don’t wear those thicker pants. They are a little heavier . . . hardly noticeable, but, to some extent, it is psy-

chological. You take them off for a match and feel a little lighter because you don't wear that much.

This is another example of a player who is ready to sacrifice more during matches, and, at the same time, his statement is proof that the sense of lightness must be there if he is to feel that his capacity is at the maximum level.

### **Dressed to Keep Warm**

Talking about the need to protect the body against the cold to prevent injuries draws on the biomedical view of health. But when players mention that you must dress warmly for your own well-being, it is, rather, connected to health in a broad sense. And, actually, players talked more about protecting themselves against the cold in order to feel good rather than to avoid injuries. A noticeable change of materials came during the 1990s. A female player, when asked about functional changes to football clothes, said the following about match jerseys:

You sweat a lot and they absorb it so you don't get that wet and cold. That has become better, it really has. . . . They breathe in another way and it is somehow another material, so you notice a difference, yes, you do.

Clothes soaked with sweat were highlighted as a greater problem in cold weather than in warm.

That Swedish elite players, above all, think about protection against the cold is, however, not surprising. Cold, rain, ice, and snow are weather conditions that even players in the south of the country mention. A male player had been testing special underwear also used by hockey players. It was a long, tight-fitting, sweat-absorbing turtleneck jersey. He described the fabric as equivalent to 'wetsuit material' and stated that he certainly didn't feel chilly in it:

In the winter, when you get sweaty and it [the ordinary thermal top] gets soaking wet, then actually you get very cold. If you were to stand still for a little while, well, you would become kind of cold. As long as you are moving, there's no harm. But that jersey actually made you feel dry, and your skin was dry all the time. And I suppose that's really the purpose with . . . well, with clothes, that you will feel as dry as possible.

### **Cold Feet with Blue Nails**

The thought that you must protect yourself against the cold apparently does not apply to the feet. Instead, players' choice of boots seems to be determined by the idea that the sock and the boot must be thin layers, with as little space in between them as possible so that the foot can easily interpret the tacit knowledge, conveyed by the tactile sense, when the foot meets the ball. It seems they see the foot, just like Merleau-Ponty might have seen it, as part of the sensing and knowing body. Thus, the boots are very tight: 'Because of the feeling, they want boots that are virtually too small. So, if you see a football player, he always has blue nails!' a kit man said, and laughed a little, as if he knew it was an exaggeration, even though there was also some truth to it.

A twenty-nine-year-old male player explained that when he was young, he always wore very tight boots, but now, a bit older, he had changed his habit:

Well now, I use one size larger so that some more air can perhaps get in and it becomes a little warmer. Because if you have very tight boots, then you often get ingrown toe nails, and especially in the winter it gets extremely cold.

This shows that experience can be important for players' decisions about how to dress for training and matches. As a child, you often in accordance with the dress code within youth football have to fully protect yourself by, for instance, using big shin guards. When you become a junior player, the willingness to dare to take any risks seems to increase. After some years at the elite level as a well-established professional player, knowing that you 'are someone' in the Swedish world of football, the players interviewed seem more anxious to take care of themselves, to 'still be going strong', but also more anxious about their well-being, about feeling good. And maybe years of practise can train the ability of the foot to interpret the meeting with the ball, so you can experience the same feeling even though the shoe is a little bigger?

## **Being 'Me' in the Right Size – Clothes Seen from a Broad Perspective of Health**

### **Absent Clothes for an Absent Body**

The difference between heavy warm pants and lighter underwear during matches was felt by some and when asked about the importance of colour, a few mentioned that the colour of their teammates' socks could be helpful when they were surrounded by opponents and needed to pass the ball without looking up. But, otherwise, most of the players didn't say anything about experiences of clothes related to their performances during matches. An explanation for this can be that it has to do with the disappearance of our body from awareness, which occurs now and then in everyday life. This is an important aspect of embodiment elaborated by Leder, working in the phenomenological tradition of Merleau-Ponty (Leder 1990). That the body 'disappears from awareness' means that it ceases to be an object that awareness is directed towards, and, instead, it is used to 'bring in the world' (Toadvine & Lawlor 2007: 86). It functions as the perceiving subject and a tool for action-oriented existence – a function of being-in-the-world (Csordas 1994: 12). It is open to the world so impressions from the senses flow through it and changing sensations are balanced by body movements, even though people do not think (cognitively) about what they are doing (cf. Polanyi 1983).

From what was said in the interviews, it seems that football is at its best when every player's own body has disappeared as an object from his or her awareness. Then, instead, perception can be directed at all the movements and events on the pitch. And because clothes are so closely connected to the body – since textile fabrics touch the skin – clothes that are not obtrusive in any way are a material condition that must exist to make 'the disappearance of the body' possible. Your clothes have to be so comfortable that they do not remind you of your body.

The early 'backstage' work when players tried on that season's kit later made them confident in their clothes. For example, a female player said:

So on match day, when you dress, you do your routine, taking your clothes . . . you have your exact size, you know what you will be wearing for training or matches. And, at that time, you will not be focusing on that. Then we just know it is perfect, everything is the way it ought to be, and we have what we want. So when you start the game, you really do not focus on that.

A male player said the same: ‘You try everything on, you are comfortable in it and so you order it. So you know what you get. . . . It has never been an obstacle for me, nothing too tight and nothing else’. But when we continued talking, new aspects of clothes occurred when he seemed to stop thinking of material garments as physically stopping him from doing different movements, and, instead, expanded the meaning of the concept of comfort so it, rather, denoted the immaterial psychological state of well-being that clothes can contribute to. Then he discussed comfort as something that had to do with subjectivity:

I think it is important that you are comfortable in what you wear and that you feel, well somehow, this is *me*. I really wouldn’t want to wear a very baggy match jersey. . . . That might restrict my performance because I don’t feel comfortable and I don’t like what I am wearing.

Design researcher Judy Attfield (2000: 121) writes: ‘Clothing and textiles have a particular intimate quality because they lie next to the skin and inhabit spaces of private life helping to negotiate the inner self with the outside world’. This player gives an example of that negotiation. To make it possible for him to accomplish top performances, a feeling of ‘being me’ must also be realized when he starts the game and enters the (discursive) position of ‘being a football player’. In this negotiation between (outer) materiality and (inner) feelings, the size of the clothes is very important. He probably could move well in a baggy jersey; the garment would hardly be a material obstacle to moving. But because of the interplay between material and immaterial aspects when processing his being-in-the world, he would be dissatisfied anyway with the size of a baggy jersey since he has made a habit of wearing quite figure-hugging garments a part of his subjectivity – his sense of ego.

### **Problems with Sizes and Brands**

In May 2008, one purchasing manager said that he would soon be going to a meeting with the sports brand his club had a contract with. At this meeting, they were going to discuss clothes for the next season (which in Sweden started in the spring of 2009). Just a little while after that, before he knew which players were in the squad for next season, he had to order the clothes. Some players would be sold and others bought during the transfer windows. And those leaving and coming do not always have the same body sizes. So the importance of getting the right-size clothes was seen as a problem from this purchasing manager’s point of view.

In connection with the transfers of players, problems with boots were also mentioned by some of the players and the coach interviewed. One man said: ‘Well, you can say that boots are really our tools.<sup>12</sup> So they play a great role. You really have to be happy with them. And it’s like the feeling is there when you hit the ball. So it’s very important’. The words some players use are that they are secure

or safe in their shoes, which accounts for a psychological state of well-being. Thus, suddenly being forced to play in another brand of boots than what you are used to can be experienced as a problem:

Some players like a specific brand. Then they change clubs and get a totally different brand which, for example, doesn't make boots that fit their feet. Then it's a strange situation because you have to learn to play in them. And it may sound like a luxury problem, but it isn't. Because to play well, you really have to feel good.

Only some successful players can get individual contracts with a football boot manufacturer. And if you can show that you have your own contract when you change clubs, you can continue to play in that brand of football boots. But, otherwise, you just have to accept switching to another brand. I asked if exemptions can be made:

Yes, you can probably get it if you have a doctor's note and medical reasons, etc. . . . But I think it's rather difficult anyway, because nowadays even every brand has a fairly good selection of different sorts of boots.

Since it leads to some players being insecure, hesitant, and frustrated, and thus to their well-being deteriorating, the demand to use boots from only the brand the club has an agreement with doesn't go very well with the spirit of the broad definition of health, which includes psychological factors. But if football clubs were to carefully consider every player's health in a broad sense by letting them choose which boots to wear, this would have economic consequences. For instance, the clothing sponsor of one women's team discussed whether it should take back some of the money because not all of the players followed the contract to the letter. Some of them played in another brand of football boots: '. . . and that may be because they don't think they are comfortable, they don't have enough models that fit us', a player explained, and added: 'Our coaches claim that our players must be able to perform. They cannot have sores on their feet'. Her statements about boots show that apparently not all medical problems which are the result of playing in boots of the brand the club has chosen lead to exemptions.

### **The Compressed Body**

Now back to clothes again: more or less aware of it, players use the categories 'body', 'space in between', and 'clothes' to comprehend the feeling of comfort. Every player seems to have a preferred experienced relation between body and football clothes, and for him or her to feel comfortable, it has to be sensed. Nowadays, however, when it comes to the design of creating functional sportswear, questions about the dissolution of boundaries between body and clothing are relevant. More and more sportswear is no longer being worn loosely, allowing the body to move in a 'natural way' underneath. Instead, sports clothes affect and shape the body and with such clothes the category 'space in between' loses its meaning.

Earlier in this article, for instance, it was mentioned that clothes function as a second skin, absorbing the sweat and thereby helping to ensure that the cold is not felt so often. Synthetic fibres created from scratch are used to make such close

connections between body and clothes possible. According to the anthropologist Kaori O'Connor (2005: 46), making these fibres is not 'culture being laid on the surface of nature' as when textiles are made from natural fibres, like cotton or wool. Instead, culture and nature are intertwined at the more fundamental level, where certain characteristics are built into the fibre.

Being able to feel lightweight and sufficiently warm is apparently valued positively by players today. But textile technology for football clothes also goes further than just creating a second absorbing skin that lets sweat through to the surface of the fabric. Some textiles nowadays even affect the internal biological functions of the body. According to the Adidas advertising campaign launched in September 2008, using football players as models, its version of so-called compression underwear, Adidas Techfit TM, speeds up the process by which energy is created in the muscles by compressing muscles and tissues and thereby making the blood flow faster. This is said to prevent muscle injuries and also improve footballers' performances, especially their speed. The other major sports brands, like Puma, Nike, and Craft, have their own forms of compression underwear too.

A footballer dressed in compression underwear is, of course, nothing like the picture of the Cyborg – the man-machine hybrid – as portrayed in Puma's marketing campaign for football boots in conjunction with the 2008 European Championship, where Fredrik Ljungberg's upper body was joined with artificial legs looking like the robots from the Star Wars film. But actually these compression garments are a real example of clothing technology that creates a human-technology symbiosis which wouldn't have existed if there were only natural fibres available. They are also an indication of the trend that medical health today is often created through connections between the human body and artefacts. But while the popular culture Cyborg is driven by technological mechanisms and programmed to be a sharpshooting, effective, and insensible creature, footballers in their clothes are still 'taking in' events around them through their sensing and knowing bodies. And even if Adidas ads tell us that objective measurements show that they increase the player's speed, it seems that the very tight compression clothes don't create the feeling of air touching the skin, which some players associate with the desired sense of lightness and thereby with the perception of rapid movement.

When one player was asked what compression underwear felt like, he said: 'First of all, it is very tight, it really fits like a snakeskin!' The snakeskin is an outer layer that sometimes when you see a sloughed skin laying in the road can be understood as separate, but usually belongs to the body. So, in all its ambiguity, it seems to be an excellent metaphor for very tight clothes that influence the body's internal processes! This player said that at his club a majority used this type of underwear. A kit man at another club said that initially players were a little dubious, then they tried wearing it for matches and now four or five on his team used compression underwear regularly. This was in May 2008, in a squad of about twenty players. So this kind of underwear was only recently being used in Swedish top level football clubs in 2008.

One player at the same club kept an open mind to accepting the new underwear, but his first impression of it was not positive and it was not totally clear to him what it was supposed to be good for: 'There are now some new jerseys which are very tight. And I don't know if they are designed to pull up your chest so you can breathe better in some way'. He explained that the brand of jersey used at his club pulled the shoulders back so that you had a straighter back and chest. He also confirmed what the kit man had said by adding that he didn't think many players used them. He was asked how it felt to wear these jerseys and he stated:

Well, they are *very* tight. It almost feels like you get a little confined in it. I don't like it when it's too tight during matches, etc. . . . It is probably to do with the fact that when I feel terribly confined I almost feel a little panicky.

For this player at least, dressing in compression underwear – however medically healthy – cannot be seen as a situated bodily practice contributing to health in a broad sense, which includes psychological well-being, since wearing it creates a sense of discomfort. But when asked if he wouldn't use it a lot then, his answer revealed an interesting ambivalence between the negative sense of the garment's materiality and a positive attitude towards new training clothes: 'I don't know. I think it's a little bit of a habit too. If you wear it for a while, then maybe you will start to like it. But instinctively it was not nice'.

### **Brief Concluding Remarks**

The anthropologist Thomas Csordas underlines that we live in a historical moment when 'we are undergoing fundamental changes in how our bodies are organized and experienced' (Martin 1992, cited in Csordas 1994: 1). The borders of the human body are questioned by plastic surgery and the manufacture of artificial body parts and organs (Wilson 1995). But also feeling new injury-preventing and speed-increasing compression underwear against your body can be seen as a tangible example of these changes. Interpreted by post-human theories, these clothes could, first of all, be discussed as items taking part in dissolving 'the human' since they blur the borders between technology and 'human nature'. But the interviews in this project show that new textile technology is experienced by players based on the feeling of being a human subject striving for bodily and psychological well-being. Therefore, I hope that the phenomenology of the body – Merleau-Ponty's theories – will be used for further studies of the experiences of technological changes, including future development of clothing (cf. Allen-Collinson 2009).

The textile technology 'revolution' goes on (Farren & Hutchinson 2004; Quinn 2002; Shishoo 2005). So maybe those hoping for a long career as a professional football player today will have to remain receptive to the continuous changes to whatever sensations and feelings new body-altering, performance-enhancing textile technology may bring about in the near future, just like the pragmatic player interviewed who thought he would get used to the clothes. But there's also the possibility that manufacturers of football clothes will take players' experiences of clothes and their perceptions of relations between body and clothes as starting points for products that, to a greater extent, combine health-related medical alter-

natives, like functions that prevent or protect against injuries, with features, like lightness, thinness, and airiness, which means well-being for players. Wearing such clothes, players would probably individually decide to protect themselves even if their clubs didn't regulate what they wear. That would strengthen the connections between football clothes and health in the broad sense, including medical, social, and psychological factors.

**Viveka Berggren Torell**, Ph.D. in Ethnology, is working on a project about football and clothing at the Department of Food and Nutrition, and Sport Science at the University of Gothenburg. She also works at the Swedish School of Textiles at the University of Borås, where textile craft and contemporary children's clothes are research subjects in two different projects. Previously, she has studied discourses on children's clothing in twentieth-century Sweden. E-mail: [viveka.berggren\\_torell@hb.se](mailto:viveka.berggren_torell@hb.se)

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In the interviews, travel tracksuits worn when going to an away game by bus are also mentioned as a means of creating team togetherness. One male player said regarding the reason for having travel tracksuits: 'Everyone must wear the same clothes. Look like a team!'
- <sup>2</sup> To avoid confusion, it must be said from the start that football in Sweden is called soccer in American English.
- <sup>3</sup> When Craik discusses body techniques, she draws on Mauss, who uses the term 'techniques of the body' (Mauss 2006: 77–96).
- <sup>4</sup> Different experiences that were actually discussed during the interviews and can be interpreted as related to gender will be dealt with in another article. A draft of a text regarding constructions of femininity related to football clothes was a distributed paper in the Research Committee on Sociology of Sport (RC 27) at the XVII ISA World Congress of Sociology in July 2010, held in Gothenburg.
- <sup>5</sup> Anorexic supermodels are, of course, a remarkable exception to this.
- <sup>6</sup> According to the World Health Organization definition from 1948.
- <sup>7</sup> This seems to be a perspective that the sports brand Adidas has picked up on in its advertising in 2011, where the football boot F50 Adizero is shown together with the text 'all light, all fast'.
- <sup>8</sup> Three of the interviewed female players were not happy with the socks though. They especially complained that they were not elastic enough and that the feet were too big. One male player had had problems with his shoes rubbing. The rapid turns he performed repeatedly during a game gave him blisters on the bottom of his feet. To avoid this, he used both an orthopaedic sole, which stabilised the position of the foot in the shoe, and special socks. 'Running socks' suited his needs better than ordinary football socks since they had two layers of fabric that move towards each other, and the movement between the foot and the sock caused no friction. He cut the feet off of his football socks and wore his special socks underneath. Most of his special sock was hidden in the shoe, and he fastened the tops of the rib-knit football socks with tape to make it look as if he had the same socks as all the other players.

- <sup>9</sup> It could just as well be a she. What is written here is valid for both men and women. But the person quoted is a man. Therefore, I have written 'he' and 'his'.
- <sup>10</sup> Another example of such a blending of sensations was given by one player who very quickly went from talking about smell to weight. When speaking about his T-shirt, soaked with sweat, he said it was both nasty smelling and heavier than a dry one.
- <sup>11</sup> Opinions, however, were not expressed in the interviews with the female players about whether it is good or bad if the use of shin guards during training is regulated by the club.
- <sup>12</sup> Someone else, instead, claims that legs and feet are the tools of a football player.

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# Costume Cinema and Materiality: Telling the Story of Marie Antoinette through Dress

By Therése Andersson

## Abstract

In 'Costume Cinema and Materiality: Telling the Story of Marie Antoinette through Dress' a materiality-based approach for analysing film narratives through costumes is examined. Sofia Coppola's film *Marie Antoinette* (2006) serves as the empirical starting point and the theme of dressing and redressing is pursued throughout the film, crystallizing costume as a significant feature for reading the movie. The article argues that costumes, on a symbolic level, work as agents. It thus focuses on the interdependence between costume and interpretations of the screenplay's main character. A theoretical notion of costumes and materiality is explored, and the idea is further developed in relation to stylistics constituted as emotions materialised in costume. As costumes are the main object for analysis, the discussion immediately centres on costumes produced by professional costume designers for the two-dimensional format of the film frame. In other words, costumes made for the moment: for a specific narrative and aesthetic expression.

**Keywords:** Film, Costume design, Dressing, Materiality, Narration, Emotions.

I start with the original source: then move away – I am not a teacher.  
I am a Costume Designer.

Milena Canonero  
Costume Designer on *Marie Antoinette* (2006)

## Introduction

The opening scene of *Marie Antoinette* (Sofia Coppola, 2006) is set in Austria: a static image of a young Marie Antoinette (Kirsten Dunst) sleeping in a dark room. The darkness is driven away as an attendant draws the heavy curtains apart, letting the sunlight pour in. The establishing shot that follows shows Schönbrunn Palace in the early, grey morning light, before reverting to a close-up of Marie Antoinette waking up. The sequence is accompanied by a voice-over belonging to Marie Antoinette's mother, Maria Teresa, Archduchess of Austria (Marianne Faithful) announcing her plans for her youngest daughter: 'Friendship between Austria and France must be cemented by marriage /.../ My youngest daughter, Antoine, will be Queen of France'. Completely unaware of what the future has in store for her, Marie Antoinette allows the attendants to dress her just as on any other day. While she waits for them to lace the corset and finish her hair, she appears unconcerned and plays with her little pug. Dressed in a soft, velvety and lavender blue two-piece dress, she then meets with her mother, before being sent off to France.

The theme of dressing and redressing, which is accentuated in the opening scene, is pursued throughout the film *Marie Antoinette*, crystallizing costume as a significant feature for reading the movie. In this article I will argue that costumes, on a symbolic level, work as agents; focusing on the interdependence between costume and interpretations of the screenplay's main character. Thus, I will explore a theoretical notion of costumes and materiality, and further develop this idea in relation to stylistics constituted as emotions materialised in costume.<sup>1</sup> This is an approach not commonly used in cinema studies, as the study of dress often engages with how certain films have influenced the fashion scene, or studying film stars as fashion icons, or considering how dress operates in relation to stardom (Moseley 2005: 1ff.).<sup>2</sup> As costumes are the main object for analysis, the discussion centres only on those designed by professional costume designers for the two-dimensional format of the film frame.<sup>3</sup> For *Marie Antoinette* a stylised look for the movie was created, and the costumes were consequently worked through with both a historical understanding and with the vision to give them a distinctly modern flair. The costumes designed by Academy Award winner Milena Canonero, were based on 18<sup>th</sup> century originals and then further modified for supporting the narrative and creating a specific look for the movie: a look that only exists inside the frame. Exhaustive references to the dress-historical context of Marie Antoinette – as a historical figure and fashion icon – are thus not considered here.<sup>4</sup>

Clothes are a key feature in the construction of cinematic identities, and one of the tools filmmakers have for telling a story. Costume design is intentionally made to support the narrative, and everything that appears on screen is carefully selected – every costume and accessory is a deliberate choice made by a designer.<sup>5</sup> Hence, costumes are designed to appear on one actor, on one set, lit and framed in a most specific way (Kurland & Landis 2004: 3). Each costume designer's approach to designing clothes for filmic characters is of course individual, but they share one common objective: they study human character and then translate their observations into fabric (Wyckoff 2009). Furthermore, costumes provide features as colour, silhouette, balance and symmetry to the film frame. As Debora Landis puts it: 'each frame of the film provides a proscenium for foreground and background action; cinematographers, production designers and costume designers collaborate to fill those rectangular dimensions /.../' (Kurland & Landis 2004: 5). Actors' movement in the proscenium then alters the symmetry of the frame, emphasising the action and directing the gaze. The costumes, their colours and configurations intervene with the actors' movements, allowing further characterisation on a more associative level.

Clothing subjects the body to continuous transformation, and as Patrizia Calefato stresses, a garment can limit the body, 'condemning it to the forced task of representing a social role, position or hierarchy' (Calefato 2004: 2). As such, clothing can be a device for controlling the body, authorizing a system of correspondence between surface appearance and social order (ibid. 2004: 2). Applied to costume design and film, a character's story is visualised through clothing. At first glance the attire of a filmic character connotes time period, social status, and whether or not the cinematic world refers to fantasy or reality. A closer examination reveals more subtle details: a character's state of mind, motivations, and how the character wishes to be perceived (Wyckoff 2009). In this article I will explore this notion of character portrayals in relation to how the filmic presentation of *Marie Antoinette*, through the cinematography, mediates emotions. The narrative function of costumes is thus the starting point. The movie is not analysed as a transformation film,<sup>6</sup> even if this does have some affinity with dress. Instead the more complex theoretical notion of emotions materialised in costume will take centre stage.

*Marie Antoinette* is Sofia Coppola's third feature film, following *Virgin Suicides* (1999) and *Lost in Translation* (2003), and is based on Antonia Fraser's biography *Marie Antoinette: The Journey* (2001). Coppola's filmic style is in general fragmented and episodic, where symbolic and affective elements are left with scope: she is, in other words, using an approach that is reading affect through costume design and mise-en-scène. *Marie Antoinette* as such corresponds to the features of the filmic melodrama mode, referring to a somewhat loose category of films linked together by an engagement with emotional issues and dramatic register (Mercer & Shingler 2004: 1).<sup>7</sup> Coppola's objective to depict the inner experience of the teenage queen<sup>8</sup> corresponds neatly to the melodramatic sensibility

identified by Christine Gledhill as a mode with an 'intense focus on interior personal life' (Gledhill 1986: 46). The complete aesthetics of *Marie Antoinette* follows Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's view on melodramas as stories not primarily concerned with action, but rather with emotion (Nowell-Smith 1987:72). Julianne Pidduck calls attention to the stylistic devise of contemporary costume drama, as dramas of personal conflict, anguish, or desire, with an emphasis on intimate contained spaces (Pidduck 2004: 5). She refers to costume film as 'increasingly probing the folds and inner recesses of the boudoir' (ibid. 2004: 157). As a costume drama – enacted in a historical setting and filmed on location at Versailles – *Marie Antoinette* is not a standard period piece, rather an impressionistic and up beat take on the early years of the protagonist Marie Antoinette.<sup>9</sup> As Pam Cook points out, clothing is employed as creative reinvention in *Marie Antoinette*, where performance and personal style play a vital role. Costume and set design thus operate in various ways in this film: to capture an atmosphere of the period, to suggest mood, to reinforce and comment on character, and to project the state of mind of its heroine (Cook 2006: 38).

## Cakes and Colours

In *Marie Antoinette* colour is used in a nuanced way, not only to describe the characters,<sup>10</sup> but applied in order to facilitate a specific look for the whole movie. A colour palette with bright, light, pastels is utilized, and the range of colours goes from very pale and soft to more shocking, creating a vast pastel bubble surrounding Marie Antoinette.<sup>11</sup> Allusions to macaroons, pastries and sweets occur frequently throughout the film and through different cinematic features: costume, music, dialogue, and of course as actual props. For instance, in one of the early sequences from Versailles, during an endless dinner party, the allusions are applied both visually and verbally. The scene begins with a near shot of a plate with dessert, cut to a close-up of Marie Antoinette dressed in an apricot coloured gown, similar in colour to the dessert just shown. The camera then follows Marie Antoinette's point of view as she looks around at the people with an unsteady gaze. The filmic images are surrounded by a buzzing sound, with occasional gossip and cruel comments at the expense of Marie Antoinette, such as 'how's the little Austrian holding up' and 'she looks like a little piece of cake'. On a conceptual level, the cakes and colours composed are not only utilised to evoke equivalence, but also for telling a story. In this case, a story with an unhappy ending.

In this early stage of Marie Antoinette's time at Versailles the colours worn and applied are light and icy, more sorbet-like. In the middle of the film – depicting her party years – her gowns become the most dessert-like in their choice of colour and even in cut, with bright yellow, pink and blue combinations creating a macaroon effect with the ornamentation of petticoats and skirts. Her dresses are modified in configuration as well and become bolder, with the gowns showing deeper

square-shaped décolletage and more daring garnish. In the final sequences of Marie Antoinette's life at Versailles, the colours grow a bit darker, faded, and become stricter. The fabric seems to change as well, and the dresses look heavier and more formal. The whole *mise-en-scène* subsequently becomes darkened and the film ends with a frame of her wrecked apartment overlaid with the sound of the guillotine as it slices the air. The colour palette applied might be translated to a depiction of Marie Antoinette's inner journey. The range of colours are comparable to those of the seasons, beginning with the light, spring-like pastels for her youth; bright summer colours representing her party years; and the darker, autumn-like shades for the last period at Versailles. As such, the costumes have metaphoric meaning; they are symbols of a stage in life and a state of mind. The costumes for *Marie Antoinette* are thus understood as being designed in order to communicate the inner experiences of the characters, with an aesthetics that promotes feelings.

### **Dressing and Framing the Part**

Colour is in general a significant tool used to underline the narrative and create a cohesive fictional space (Kurland & Landis 2004: 5); the bright palette of *Marie Antoinette* works as connecting not only the different scenes, but connecting the symbolic level of the materiality of *mise-en-scène*, with emotions. The relationship between colour, costume and identity is thus significant for telling this story of Marie Antoinette. The impressionistic object of the narration is brought out through the *mise-en-scène* and the costumes focusing on non-verbal signs. As mentioned above, in the early stage of the movie Marie Antoinette's dresses are more sorbet-like in colour. Right at the beginning of the film, set in Austria, she is dressed in soft light blue, and the softness recurs in both the fabric and the cut, as if to underline her naivety. The light blue, innocent colour continues in her travel attire, which she wears on her way to the French border to meet her future husband for the first time. The scene is depicted as a crucial point in Marie Antoinette's life. She is subjected to changes beyond her control, and this is visually told through the change of clothes. When finally arriving at the border, she is completely dressed in white, almost like a bride. The scene is set in a cold and quiet landscape, surrounded by leafless trees. The frozen ground is covered with brown leaves, and Marie Antoinette is escorted to a temporary pavilion. When ceremonially crossing the threshold to the pavilion she is in effect leaving everything connected with her home and identity behind. She is stripped of all her clothes, while Comtesse de Noailles (Judy Davis) explains:

DE NOAILLES: 'It is the custom that the bride not retain anything belonging to a foreign court, an etiquette always observed on such an occasion'.

Marie Antoinette departs in French couture, tightly laced up in a corset and wide pannier, and with a new identity as the Dauphine of France. The light fichu is ex-

changed for a taut necklace. The childish hair ribbon is gone, and instead her hair is decorated with a neat tricorne, of which symmetry and regulated shape indicate her new role. Dressed in icy light blue she finally meets Louis (Jason Schwartzman) with his entourage, and they depart for Versailles.

The cinematographic qualities of the shot and its editing also promote and reinforce how the characters are perceived. For *Marie Antoinette* the static camera aesthetics, which fill every frame with both space and detail, contribute to theatricality encouraging contemplation and the absorption of the film image on the part of the viewer. The static images create a somewhat agoraphobic atmosphere, where the characters look small and lost. A case in point is the wedding scene. Set in Versailles, the hall has a wide expanse and, despite of the gilded and floral decorations, looks harsh and cold. Dressed in white, crème and gold, Marie Antoinette and Louis both appear chilled, uneasy and confused. The subsequent close-ups reinforce the feeling of unease, focusing as they do on eyes and empty glances. Onlookers surround the couple, making them seem even more uncomfortable. These static sequences, composing a large part of the movie, are at times intervened with fast montage sequences like the one accompanied by Bow Wow Wow's 'I Want Candy', which resembles the aesthetics familiar of a music video. Close-ups of shoes, fans, textiles, ribbons, gowns, jewellery, champagne, pastries, playing cards and counters, are edited with a fast flow in a graphic style, the separate objects are thus linked together by the colours. The sequence is immediate, depicting the experience of hedonistic fun as Marie Antoinette and her friends are partying and trying out new outfits. Hence, the long shots as well as the long takes are more fluent and allusive; the close-ups are instantaneous. The cinematography thus contributes to the constitution of an emotional unity, a cohesive fictional space of fluent pastels.

## **Boudoir**

The emphasis on the non-verbal, on interior life and affect, is further unfolded in the intimate space of the boudoir. Marie Antoinette's private apartment might translate as the boudoir, and it is the site for unembellished and undisguised depictions of anxiety and anguish. Stressing the costume drama as a tale of personal conflict, these emotions are visualised through clothing. An example of this is the scene that takes place at dawn, after one of many parties, in which Marie Antoinette wakes up amidst the detritus of the festivities. The innocent look from before is gone; instead a decadent look is reinforced by the fact that she has been sleeping in her gown and make-up from the night before. The sequence is quiet, without dialogue, and accompanied only by the instrumental 'Tommib Help Buss' performed by Squarepusher. The static images showing the park in front of the castle, which opens the sequence, are lit simply by the soft light of daybreak, intercut with images of plates and trays with leftovers, champagne glasses, both

empty and half-filled, and expired candles. Movement breaks the stillness as servants carefully start to clean up the mess. As the camera pans the remainders of the party are exposed: shoes and empty champagne bottles on the floor, shawls tossed over chairs, and flower arrangements all broken up. Finally the panning reaches Marie Antoinette sleeping in her party gown. She is awakening by the sunlight shining through the window; with dishevelled hair and smudged make-up, she sits down and stares at the surrounding mess. She has lost an earring, the turquoise dress is creased and a piece of the garnished bodice is loose exposing the corset. She pulls herself together, walks out of the room, struggling to keep her hair in place with both hands. The cautious composition of these material details, the stillness and lack of dialogue, taken as a whole, combine to convey an expression of complete emptiness. The next sequence continues and reinforces the feeling of void as it shows Marie Antoinette huddled up in a bathtub wracked with a hangover. The dark circles under her eyes denote vulnerability and cracks in the façade. The probing of inner recesses of the boudoir as characteristics of contemporary costume drama, as suggested by Pidduck (Pidduck 2004: 157), literally applies in the case of *Marie Antoinette*.

## Silhouette

Corseting is an apparent attire that alters an actor's gait and posture, while providing a distinct and readily identifiable silhouette (Kurland & Landis 2004: 5). The materiality of the corset thus restricts the physical depiction, as corsets control the actor's body and affect the breathing. These limitations function as tools in the portrayal of a character and thus offer further scope for analysis. One sequence, which is highly illustrative of how the themes of despair and disquiet are visualised and played out through *mise-en-scène* and costume, is when Marie Antoinette, dressed in a floral gown, is seen reading a letter from her mother, leaning towards a wall with a similar floral fabric. At the same time as the voice-over of Maria Teresa fills the cinematic room, the letter falls out of Marie Antoinette's hand. Maria Teresa admonishingly tells Marie Antoinette her concerns for her daughter's current situation. She is disappointed her daughter is not pregnant.

MARIA TERESA: 'Dearest Antoinette, I'm pleased to tell you how wonderful your brothers and sisters are doing in their marriages /... / All this news which should fill me with contentment is diminished by reflections on your dangerous situation. Everything depends on the wife /.../.'

In distress Marie Antoinette leans towards the wall and becomes lost in its floral pattern, slowly sliding down the wall and becoming one with it. At the same time the camera moves gradually in only to stop in a close-up of her tearful, red face. Her inability to meet the expectations of people around her, especially her mother's demands, causes her to lose her grip. Her sense of self is dissolved in the floral patterns of the walls of Versailles. At the same time her choking existence is

laced in the corset, making it hard to breath. She has to struggle to regain her own self again. By using a similar cluttered pattern for both the wallpaper and the dress the feeling of inadequacy, and – maybe even more – confusion is visualised. The entrapment is materialised through the suffocating, laced corset, as well as the impression of the shrinking space due to the use of camera movement and its ever-narrowing focus. The symmetry and controlled shapes of corsets and panniers, epitomizing the court life and her mother's expectations, are later on contrasted by the flowing lines and light fabrics of the dresses worn at Le Petite Trianon. The time Marie Antoinette spends at her sanctuary might as well be described as an escape into a fantasy world. The images from Le Petit Trianon show Marie Antoinette laughing and running around in the garden picking flowers dressed almost like a country girl. In the scene where the dressmaker shows her fabric samples, she lets go of the silks and turns to fine cottons.

MARIE ANTOINETTE: 'I want something more simple, natural. To wear in the garden'.

The new clothes show a less forced and more relaxed life style, her gowns are all in white and little of the ruffle and garnish remains. Thus, the actual changes in French fashion that began in the 1780s are in the film used as a way to visualise Marie Antoinette's state of mind. As the heavy hoops are exchanged for simple, sheer muslin dresses, the style of the whole movie shifts into more naturalistic colours and lighting. The shots are mainly taken outdoors showing the garden and the countryside, using natural light to depict an easiness and more serene existence. From time to time the camera is pointed directly at the sun, letting the back-light create a glare behind Marie Antoinette. The outdoor sequences have no additional music, and are accompanied only by the sound of twittering birds. As the scenes are laid outdoors, and as the flowing lines of the dresses are emphasised, airiness and lightness are indicated. Both these stylistic devices visualise a sense of relief: finally being allowed to move freely and being able to breathe. Even if that relief is destined to be only temporary.

## **Conclusion**

The concept of film costume accentuates a dressing situation of which the result becomes mediated and displayed, and where the clothes work as a key for understanding a particular movie. Film costumes are characteristic because they are made for the moment: for a specific narrative and aesthetic expression. As such they are designed for an individual actor or actress. Costume design thus involves conceptualizing and creating garments that capture and defines the personalities of fictional characters, and are therefore intended to embody the psychological, social and emotional condition of the character at a particular moment in the screenplay.

In *Marie Antoinette* the play with costume and style confronts the limitations of time and space; as such the style is well thought out and highly deliberate. For instance, one of the scenes in the 'I Want Candy' montage shows Marie Antoinette trying on new high-heeled shoes, and next to her on the floor lays a pair of well-worn, light blue Converse boots. The anachronistic feature is a cross-reference to today's fashion and youth culture, reminding the audiences that this is a film about teenagers and not really an 18<sup>th</sup> century period piece. This stylistic device generates a self-reflexive mode; making the construction of the movie visible, displaying the fact that this is fiction. The impressionistic approach and artistic license undertaken contributes to richness in texture and representation, making it original in the process. Instead of reproducing a cinematic version of classic portraits, a new picture is painted.

The aesthetics of the film might be described as an aesthetics of emotions, as it is fluent and impressionistic. The long shots and static camera mode interact with extreme close-ups, which gives a stage-like impression, operating on the level of the suggestive and allusive. The melodramatic approach, working with sensibilities instead of action, utilises an excessive *mise-en-scène* for revealing the non-verbal and non-explicit. I would suggest that the symbolism of the materiality of the *mise-en-scène* and of the costumes in *Marie Antoinette* works in part as an impressionistic key to an understanding of the movie, but foremost as an interpretation of the protagonist Marie Antoinette as an adolescent girl trying to survive. Hence emotions like despair and escapism are understood as being materialised in costume. For instance Marie Antoinette's despair is expressed through the play in floral patterns; her dress and the wall fabric are so similar she fades into it and becomes lost in it. The scene is palpable, depicting Marie Antoinette losing herself, her own identity and becoming one with Versailles. As the walls are closing in the intimacy and contained space of the boudoir is further thematised; for instance in the scene where Marie Antoinette wakes up in the remains of the party. She is depicted just as much in pieces as her messy apartment and her unkempt dress. The objects scattered around and the different pieces of fabric that compose her attire have a similar symbolic agency as the actor in terms of telling the story.

Altering the body through the materiality and aesthetics of dress might be a way of inscribing standards to appearance and performance given that clothes either limit or allow movements, and symbolise social roles. Applied to costume design and film, this notion becomes more apparent in *Marie Antoinette* due to their readability. It allows us to quickly grasping what the characters are all about. The actual changes in French fashion that began in the 1780s are in the film used as a way to visualise Marie Antoinette's state of mind. Depicting her time at Le Petit Trianon as a refuge visualised in costume through lightness in fabric and flowing lines, is quite the opposite of the entrapment of Versailles illustrated by symmetry, corsets and panniers. The costume conspires with the other cinematic features,

generating a symbolic network through the non-verbal and non-explicit, in accordance with the filmic melodrama mode, for telling a story through dress.

**Therése Andersson** is currently employed at the Department of History, Stockholm University. Her doctoral thesis in Cinema Studies is entitled *Beauty Box: Film Stars and Beauty Culture in Early 20th Century Sweden* (2006). Andersson is currently working on the research project *Velcro, Button, and Zip: Power and Materiality during Styling and Dressing*, funded by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation. E-mail: [therese.andersson@historia.su.se](mailto:therese.andersson@historia.su.se)

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The discussion is quite loosely inspired by Actor-Network-Theory and studies further applying and developing that approach. See for instance: Eva Knuts, *Något gammalt, något nytt - skapandet av bröllopsföreställningar*. Göteborg: Mara förlag, 2006. For an introduction to ANT see: Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005
- <sup>2</sup> See for instance: Rachel Moseley, *Fashioning Film Stars: Dress, Culture, Identity*. London: BFI, 2005, p. 1 ff. For a study on film stars as fashion icons, and dress in relation to stardom see for instance: Therése Andersson, *Beauty Box: Filmstjärnor och skönhetskultur i det tidiga 1900-talets Sverige*. Stockholm: Stockholms universitet / Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2006 / 2008
- <sup>3</sup> The work of couturières, which occasionally design for cinema, is therefore not considered here; nor are extra cinematic, non-narrative purposes of costumes. Film costumes can of course exist independently of, and outside a narrative. Garments from famous films have a life outside the moving image as they are perceived as icons, venerated and exhibited in museums, or auctioned at sky-high prices. Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies*. London & New York: Routledge, 1997/2004, p. xiii, and Patrizia Calefato, *The Clothed Body*. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2004, p. 96
- <sup>4</sup> For a study on Marie Antoinette as a historical figure and fashion icon see for instance: Caroline Weber, *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution*. New York: H. Holt, 2006
- <sup>5</sup> For a discussion on dress and stardom pointing to subliminal readings of and counter-narratives in clothing, see for instance Drake Stutesman's article on Marlene Dietrich as star in *Morocco* (von Sternberg, 1930) and *Shanghai Express* (von Sternberg, 1932). Drake Stutesman, 'Storytelling: Marlene Dietrich's Face and John Frederic's Hats', in *Fashioning Film Stars: Dress, Culture, Identity*, ed. Rachel Moseley, London: BFI, 2005, pp. 27-38
- <sup>6</sup> The story of transformation film refers to the successful change of appearance of the main female character, from an unappealing 'before' to an attractive 'after'; *Now, Voyager* (Rapper, 1942) and *She's All That* (Fleming, 1999). For a discussion on transformation film, see for instance Tamar Jeffers McDonald, *Hollywood Catwalk: Exploring Costume and Transformation in American Film*. London & New York: 2010
- <sup>7</sup> See also: Christine Gledhill, 'The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation', in *Home is Where the Heart is*, ed. Christine Gledhill, London: BFI, 1987, pp. 1-39. Melodrama films include, for instance; *Gone With the Wind* (Flemming, 1939), *All That Heaven Allows* (Sirk, 1956), *Dr. Zhivago* (Lean, 1965), *The Way We Were* (Pollack, 1973), *The Color Purple* (Spielberg, 1984), *Philadelphia* (Demme, 1993), *Far From Heaven* (Haynes, 2002).

- <sup>8</sup> See for instance: Production notes: <http://www.sonypictures.com/movies/marieantoinette/site/> 2006 (23 Nov, 2007)
- <sup>9</sup> As Julianne Pidduck points out: ‘...cinema can never offer an unmediated window onto the past, and historical fiction and costume drama alike depict the past through the stylistic, critical and generic vocabularies of present cultural production.’ Pidduck, 2004, p. 4. For a discussion on *Marie Antoinette's* kinship with the Dogma 95 Manifesto, and diversity to conventional cinematographic rules of historical film see for instance Elise Wortel, *Textures of Time: A Study of Cinematic Sensations of Anachronism*. Nijmegen: Radboud University, 2008
- <sup>10</sup> The costumes for *Marie Antoinette* played, as mentioned above, a central part in the whole design of the film; each character of the court has his or her own unique look. For instance, Comtesse de Noailles (Judy Davis) is elegant and her style stands out, she wears a lot of yellow, citrus and lime in order to represent her ‘acidic qualities’, as Canonero puts it. Madame de Barry (Asia Argento) is the opposite, and more ‘like an exotic bird, almost like a parrot’, wearing turbans, feathers and a lot of jewellery. The parrot-epithet reoccurs from time to time, and in one of the early scenes the court ladies call her an ‘exotic bird’ behind her back, referring to her gaudy way of dressing in deep red, purple and lilac, as well as the feather accessories. In a couple of scenes, Madame de Barry actually walks around with a parrot on her shoulder, making the connection unavoidable.
- <sup>11</sup> As such, the palette was inspired by Laduree macaroons, and Coppola called the colour scheme of the movie ‘a “cake and cookie” kind of thing’. Production notes, 2006 (23 Nov, 2007)

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