Fashion beyond identity: The three ecologies of dress

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Introduction

No theory or history of fashion fails to take personal appearance as its starting point and as its central object of investigation.

Gilles Lipovetsky (1994 [1987]: 16)

This study of fashion fails. It declines to foreground an essentially human, cultural, or socio-historical perspective. It does not predominantly examine fashion as a practice deployed to express, perform, or represent identities whether fluid or not. And it does not seek to primarily understand what the clothes we wear may signify. There is, however, no reason to regard the above as a negative stance towards fashion, its theories, or this dissertation itself. Failing to follow accepted and familiar paths of thinking introduces new and experimental possibilities, and may bear more potential than one may be inclined to think at first. To fail, in this context, also means to venture out in a radically different manner without ignoring or disabling existing theories about the clothes we wear. I will hence question what may precede and supersede personal appearances, rather than taking them as a starting point.

What more may be detected about the clothes we wear than what they may signify about the wearer? How do these significations come about and what may be said about fashion’s capacities before one assigns them
a representable meaning? And can we think about fashion in a manner that succeeds to address the multiple levels in fashion theory, ranging from the relation of clothing to the body to fashion’s ethical problems? It were these initial questions that led to the idea that fashion theory may benefit from a radically different approach. Let me, however, commence with a telling, yet also rather personal, anecdote that may very well reflect the essence of this dissertation, after which I will return to a more systematic and academic manner of exchanging its major corpus.

**Wearing a School Uniform**

The onset of adolescence more often than not comes with experiencing dramatic changes in self-esteem and self-consciousness. My personal experiences seemed unique at the time, yet were not any different from those of other adolescents through time. All my peers, like me, experimented with identity performance and tried different styles of clothing in order to find out where we could connect with others. I recall dying my hair, black, then blonde, then henna orange and back to brown. I also adopted clothing styles that could be categorised as being ‘preppy’, ‘new wave’, ‘arty’ and ‘hippy’ to name but a few. At secondary school, lunch breaks were used to discuss and comment on the styles and items of clothing worn, and in doing so we tried to make sense of our changing bodies and attitudes. However, much of that changed when I moved to Australia, aged sixteen, and enrolled with Sacred Heart College, a Catholic girls school near Melbourne. From then on, I needed to wear a school uniform and since my cousin had just completed secondary school, I was offered her woollen blazer, skirt, jumper and tie, and all I needed to buy were two blue shirts and two pairs of grey stockings and socks.

As one can imagine, this was quite a transition. The uniform was mainly navy-blue and attending school during those first weeks meant encountering over one thousand girls dressed alike. My world became navy-blue. I vividly remember a dream I had during the first week of college. In this dream the world appeared to me solely in shades of blue. I still recall the image of blue strawberries that, even though I was dreaming, has never left me. After a few weeks I grew used to wearing
The school uniform and even thought it was quite convenient not having to think about what to put on in the morning. Casual clothes were worn after school hours and during the weekends, times at which I would not often see my peers. I had fewer clothes, did not change my styles much any longer, and settled for jeans or shorts and a plain top. Apart from the blue-coloured dream, I cannot recall feeling deprived of the chance to express myself through the clothes I used to wear.

The debates for and against school uniforms are manyfold, but one of the major reasons for the introduction of school uniforms is to create a levelling of social statuses, which can be communicated through clothing, and a sense of belonging to and unity of the shared community of the school. In order to ensure unity within the community uniform policies are designed and – more or less – monitored through set rules. The rules that came with the wearing of my former school uniform were clearly stated and most probably differ little from the general rules: ‘College skirt – mid calf length’, ‘Blue Summer dress – no shorter than 5 cm above the knee’, to name but a few. These rules ensure rigidity by creating clear codes to which all students must abide. In addition, the wearing of a uniform creates a clear territory to which all the students attending a particular school must conform and which differs – since each school or college has their own uniform – from all other school territories. Monitoring the rules is, however, not an easily accomplished task when one is confronted with more than one thousand girls that apparently look alike.

I write ‘apparently’ because after a few weeks of wearing the uniform, I noticed that there were many differences to be detected which would either not be noticed by the staff or were regarded as being too small to cause a problem. Being taller than most, the uniform skirt that was handed to me by my cousin did not meet the required length, for instance. No teacher ever commented on this fact, and what is more, fellow students labelled a skirt under the required length as ‘cool’. Jewellery would be worn under shirts, popping out at times; hair would be worn loose; a sock would drop; a shirt would get untucked – small instances in which we would succeed at bending the strict rules and as such created our own

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little secretive territories.

Breaking with the uniform rules would most often happen outside school premises. Although the uniform rules applied in all instances where it is being worn, hence also outside school premises, we took our blazers off when it was hot as soon as the school’s gate was out of sight. I even recall hiding under the fire stairs of the mall where cigarettes were smoked whilst still in uniform, an action that would certainly have severe consequences when discovered. A friend being picked up by her boyfriend in his car, immediately kicked her socks down, pulled the shirt out of her skirt, and loosened her hair when leaving the premises. I am not sure whether she did or did not stick her middle finger into the air before jumping into the car, and perhaps it is not important whether she actually did; the whole scene breathed the air of breaking loose and escaping to life outside of school, regardless of the fact that a uniform was being worn.

**Fashion and Appearance**

Before introducing a perspective upon fashion that moves beyond representation of identity, and presenting my main questions and aims, I will discuss and question common views and theories in which fashion is regarded as a means to represent identity. This enables one to develop an understanding of what I am attempting to move beyond, and indicates why such a perspective may be particularly suitable for studying fashion.

Since the turn of the century, within what one may call ‘fashion theories’, fashion has gained significant academic attention, especially among sociologists. Joanne Entwistle, for instance, writes about fashion as an embodied social practice (2000). Diana Crane, furthermore, examines the ages (2000). And Yuniya Kawamura addresses fashion as an institutionalised social system (2005). In addition, the subject has been picked up by anthropologists, such as Daniel Miller and Sophie Woodward, while fashion’s ecological problems are, for instance, addressed by Kate Fletcher (2008), to name but a few.

In her seminal work *Adorned in Dreams, Fashion and Modernity,*
scholar Elizabeth Wilson, however, emphasises that in order to overcome overtly simplistic interpretations of fashion, one must attempt to study the phenomenon from several perspectives at once (2003 [1985]). If we want to avoid “the reductive and normative moralism of the single sociological explanation” whilst seeking “to go beyond the pure description of the art historian” one, according to Wilson, must combine aesthetics, social theory, politics, and psychology to explain fashion (2003 [1985]: 11).

There is, however, one aspect that is left unchallenged in the theories mentioned above. All scholars regard fashion an essentially cultured human practice, and as such comply with the words of French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky, quoted at the start of this chapter, in which he emphasises the fact that all fashion theories start with, and centre upon, a focus upon personal appearance. Fashion hence is studied for the ways in which it is worn and embodied to reveal information about the individuality or identity performances of the wearer. In addition, and as Wilson pointed out, fashion must also be characterised for its contradictory, irrational, ambiguous, and paradoxical nature. Or as Wilson writes: “fashion, the child of capitalism, has, like capitalism, a double face”, with which she emphasises that fashion can, for instance, be liberating and constraining at the same time (Wilson 2003 [1985]: 13). Fashion may, furthermore, be experienced as an obsession with false and surface expressions, whilst what we wear may also connect to our intimate emotions and can succeed in expressing individuality. And lastly, fashion allows us to adorn ourselves with pleasure, whilst this is done at the cost of exploiting workers in developing countries (Wilson 2003 [1985]: 13-14).

The challenge is therefore to adopt yet another take on fashion, which allows us to view it from a multitude of perspectives at once, and which is able to take the open-ended, essentially ambiguous, and double-faced character of fashion and dress into account. Before introducing such a dynamic perspective to fashion, I would like to illustrate the ways in which we more commonly think about the clothes we wear and how they may represent the identity of a wearer. Doing so does not only clarify a dominant or common perspective upon fashion and its relationship with representation of identity, it also illustrates how I arrived at the idea that existing theories about fashion may be in need of radical elaboration.
Fashion is commonly viewed as revolving around representation of identity, and as such what we wear is regarded as indicative of who we are, or represent ourselves as being, at a certain time and place. Some representations of identity in fashion are clear and susceptible to little change. Wearing a uniform, for instance, may signify authority, belonging, and rank, and although uniforms do change in style, their significance remains evident. Other fashionable representations of identity are subtler, change more frequently, and may be predominantly recognised by peers, fellow (sub)cultural members, or connoisseurs alone. Wearing a certain brand, cut or style of clothing, for instance, may be recognised by some, but not by all others one comes across. Fashion’s relationship with identity is, in addition, ambiguous and meanings are never settled; they may be paradoxical or even ironical. Wearing an army jacket, for instance, may just as well signify a passion for the military as it may indicate the opposite: a deep contention that peace is what we need to strive for.

On a daily basis, however, we tend to adhere some more or less rigid meanings to the appearances of those we come across, and we do monitor our own looks. When entering a new workplace, one will most likely assume that the only man present that goes dressed in a suit and tie is the owner or director. When dressing for a special occasion, we will often think more carefully about what we wear, and we perhaps even avoid wearing the same outfit to occasions where we are likely to come across people that have seen us dressed in it before. While on the street, we tend to label people according to their dress, often without lending them more than a glance, let alone speaking with them to find out whether our initial assumptions are right. And adolescents are extremely aware of their looks and the ways in which their peers relate to those. The wearing of a certain fashion brand may, for instance, grant one a membership of the popular group at school – or not.

I found myself in a situation in which clothing was associated with

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the identity of the wearer a few years ago, during a seminar at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute. Several speakers had been asked to address the public about their ‘passion for fashion’. One speaker said that she loved fashion because she regarded it a tool with which people communicate their identities and she enjoyed ‘reading’ these. “Creatives, like photographers, architects, and designers, for example, most often wear black”, she said.3 There I sat, dressed in black from tip to toe and admittedly regarded myself as a creative person. The words spoken nevertheless puzzled me and an intuition occurred that there must be more to fashion than representation of identity. The idea that the way we dress is (or may be) telling about who we are (or pretend to be) is omnipresent and often regarded a prerequisite for studying fashion, as described above. The idea that creatives wear black, however, is also a cliché, and as such may be questioned.

If identity can be represented through the clothes that are being worn by someone, one must also question what the concept of personal identity entails. What does ‘being someone’ encompass? Who are you? Is there an ongoing unity or core to your being that can consequently be represented by the clothes you wear? Those are philosophical questions we do not think about often, and it seems that existing theories of fashion presume the idea that there is a ‘self’ that can consequently be represented. But what if there does not happen to be such a core to our being? What if the idea of an ongoing identity is an image of thought that is mainly convenient, reassuring, and helps us to make sense of the world surrounding us? Then we may, at least in thought, also undo the belief in an ongoing unity of being and think about what we are left with. Doing so is admittedly complicated and may even seem an ‘unnatural’ endeavour. It will, however, also allow a radically different perspective upon what the clothes we wear may do and say apart from – or even before they are assigned the task of – communicating who we are.

In addition to complicating the idea that we have an identity, the

3 Although I have tried to retrieve whom exactly spoke these words, I have not succeeded in doing so. Since the idea that fashion is indicative of the identity of the wearer is such a persistent one, and the idea that creative people wear black clothes may be regarded as a cliché, I believe this information is not crucial for the line of my argument.
identity of items of clothing and that of a colour can then also be ques-
tioned. Ideas about certain outfits representing certain character traits
or personal affiliations can then be opened up and rigid explanations
can make place for more ambiguous and extended ones that take into
account that items of clothing, their brands, styles, or colours do not
stand by themselves but appear in contexts that influence perceptions of
what something represents. The schoolgirls leaving the premises dressed
in uniform, presented at the beginning of this chapter, for instance,
exemplify the multitude of contexts and perceptions one may experience.
What someone or something is, is hence dependent upon the context in
which and by whom or what it is perceived. Businessmen or mourners at
a funeral dressed in black will most likely not be primarily regarded for
their creativity. A perception of colour is, in addition, dependent upon
the light source and the visual organism that views it.\(^4\) What something
or someone is, can hence also be superseded by how a colour, an item
of clothing, the body on which they are worn, and a perceiver function
gether temporarily. Meanings would then become less stable, less uni-
versal and subject to constant change, depending upon where and how
they appear in conjunction with each other, which may be regarded as
characterising fashion.

Back to black. If black has no definite meaning but is dependent upon
which other entities it appears with in time and place, one may question
how wearing black clothing became to signify creativity.\(^5\) It is then most

\(^4\) I am indebted to Arjen Kleinherenbrink for this example, see Kleinherenbrink

\(^5\) Scholar Elizabeth Wilson argues that due to the many casualties of the First
World War, wearing black to signify mourning ceased to be demanded since
it was regarded pretence. Wilson, furthermore, writes that “[s]ince we have
ceased to wear mourning, black has established itself as the colour of anger
rather than of sorrow, the signal of aggression and revolt. It has been associ-
ated not only with the fascists but with the anarchists too; not only with exis-
tentialism, but with the Dutch and Danish radical ‘provos’ of the early 1960s,
while the continental equivalents of teddy boys were known as ‘blousons
noirs’.” (Wilson 2003 [1985]: 189). She, in addition, emphasises that revolu-
tionaries, such as the groups mentioned above, turned to wearing black »
likely to conclude that people who are regarded creative have dressed in black more often or more obviously than people who are not considered creative. Why these people have done so is difficult to say, we may only guess as to what the cause may be and it may even differ from individual to individual and from situation to situation. What can be said is that once it became noticeable that creatives dressed in black more often than in other colours, the colour has become associated with – and as such coded to represent – creativity. Once advertisers or film makers, for instance, choose to dress actors in black for a commercial or movie that is intended to reach a creative public, the association between black clothing and creativity is reinforced, becomes widespread, and may even turn into a cliché. If, however, photographers, designers and architects started predominantly wearing another colour, say white, they would most probably eventually be successful at undoing – and thus decoding – the association between black and creativity, and new conjunctions of meaning are temporarily established.

The dynamic perspective presented above reveals fashion’s ambiguous nature well and leaves room for examining its characteristics without fixing them in more or less rigid meanings and beliefs. It, in addition, is useful for discovering how fashion works; it provides us with a concept that seeks to address the production of meanings and significations rather than focussing on the meanings and significations themselves. It is also a manner of thinking that may be said to be as dynamic as fashion itself, with its constant ephemeral change, its imitative character, and its relation with capitalism through constant commercial reinforcements of codes, images and practices that have come about more spontaneously, experimentally, and creatively. It may, however, be more complicated to develop a perspective upon ourselves that moves beyond the concept of an ongoing identity. But doing so will also open up a perspective upon our relation with the clothes we wear that is as multifaceted and ambiguous as we may be. Let me elaborate on the reasons why it is in fashion that such an attempt to move beyond identity must be made, and how one may accomplish such a perspective, in the following.

» since it is regarded dramatic and flattering, as well as subverting the bourgeois association of black dress with sobriety (Ibid.).
Fashion beyond Identity

The question of what more there may be to fashion apart from its signifying qualities does not stand on its own. Although it is perhaps a welcome change of perspective within a field of theory that has hitherto struggled between the more or less fixed nature that accompanies all concepts of identity and the essentially ambiguous and double-faced nature of fashion, there are other related and perhaps even more serious reasons for questioning fashion’s relationship with identity. Whilst we habitually think of ourselves as possessing an ongoing identity, the fashion industry reinforces such a thinking by emphasising that we can use clothing to represent who we are or how we would like to be regarded. Typically fast fashion retail chains such as Primark, H&M, ZARA, and Forever 21 offer their customers new items and styles of clothing every ten to fourteen days in limited quantities (Taplin 2014). The frequent change of inexpensive but fashionable items of clothing on sale, in its turn, caters for versatile representation of the self for little cost. We are, to put it briefly, encouraged to purchase a large quantity of clothing to cater for the different appearances and styles in which we represent ourselves to others. The items of clothing, however, are increasingly regarded as disposable, not because they have been worn out, but merely because new styles and items are available with which we can represent our being.

Although we may enjoy the versatility offered to us by the fashion industry, two accompanying problems must be associated with this practice. Firstly, and as widely known since the collapse of the Bengalese Rana Plaza sewing factory in 2013, the conditions of the workers, that fabricate the relatively cheap items of clothing one can find at fast fashion retailers, are everything but enjoyable. Dangerous facilities, long hours, child labour, and low wages are the prices paid for the manner in which the fashion industry operates. In addition, both the disposing of items of clothing in the West as well as poor monitoring of environmental regulations in developing countries where our clothes are produced lay heavy claims on worldwide ecology (Greenpeace 2012).

With this knowledge, the question of what more there may be to fashion apart from its signifying qualities can be extended to incorporate

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6 See Chapter 3.
the associated problems and one may conclude that the way in which fashion operates today entails not only a relentless focus upon the ego; its economic motor also amounts to ecological destruction and an ethical approach which favours the appearances of Western consumers over the conditions of the workers in developing countries. The question I endeavour to clarify in this dissertation therefore becomes threefold:

How may one think about fashion differently and incorporate its essentially ambiguous nature to move beyond a perspective that focuses upon representation of identity? And how may such a thinking allow one to address fashion’s problematic relation with ecology, as well as its exploitative ethical approach?

Since this dissertation aims to examine a perspective upon fashion that does not solely or predominantly concentrate on what fashion may signify, it also seeks to consider fashion’s capacities beyond that of communicating the identity of the wearer. The ‘beyond’, however, should not be regarded as a denial or dismissing of a concept of identity per se. Even though the simple idea that there first is an identity marking interiority that can be reflected through the clothing one wears is contested, the endeavour of opening up a fuller, more complex, and more dynamic perspective is essentially affirmative. Moving beyond representation hence also allows a focus upon those corporeal and material connections that create new expressions and extend the concept of fashion. It, in addition, enables fashion to be regarded through a heterogeneous prism in which existing representations do not determine the principle examination. And lastly, freeing fashion from representation in favour of the connections that are being made, allows one to include the problematic relations with the environment and workers, which are established before and after we dress ourselves in popular Western fashions.

In order to come to a radically different way of thinking about and relating to the clothes we wear, the insights offered by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925 – 1995) and his fellow author and French psychoanalyst, Félix Guattari (1930 – 1992) prove most productive. Their rhizomatic, philosophical system declines to view reality through one overarching structure, such as viewing fashion specifically through language, identity, history, or psychology, et cetera would entail. Deleuze
and Guattari instead encourage a thinking in which reality emerges from interconnected elements in endless movement, interaction, and transformation. They are hence not focussed upon what is, but upon which capacities may be detected when elements temporarily connect and produce affects which can be coded but also decoded and connect elsewhere.\(^7\) Such an interconnected, dynamic, and rhizomatic style of thinking, in addition, foregrounds what happens and what the involved elements can potentially do, rather than labelling them and subordinating them to one distinct and homogeneous perspective or system of thought.

Thinking fashion through Deleuze and Guattari’s prism then entails adopting a multifaceted perspective that allows one to think about what fashion may do, and question what its potential capacities are. As such it may be regarded a heterogeneous manner of thinking in which distinct perspectives and structures that order a specific view are overcome, and one is enabled to examine the numerous interactions and transformations that occur between the elements that comprise fashion. Wilson’s claim that fashion must be regarded from several different perspectives at once, is hence multiplied to such an extent that no longer specific perspectives order an inquiry, but on the contrary, fashion may be thought in all its complexity, ambiguity, and contingency for its capacity to create new expressions, and to affect and be affected. Such a perspective beyond the distinct and limited perspectives of specific (academic) disciplines not only allows one to think about differences that precede identity, but is also a philosophical system that enables one to incorporate all potential capacities, processes, and forces that may be related to, and are at work within, fashion.

As such fashion’s affective dimension can be regarded as appearing interconnected with its socio-ethical and environmental issues through what Guattari has coined as ‘the three ecologies’: mental ecology, social ecology and environmental ecology (Guattari 2000 [1989]). That is to say, it is my contention that the manner in which we relate to fashion mentally – whether or not we regard it a means for representing our identities – is inseparable from fashion’s socio-ethical effects and its environmental issues. Focussing on fashion’s affective dimension, rather

\(^7\) In this context Jean Cocteau’s famous words “La mode, c’est ce qui se démode” reflect the coding and decoding dynamics inherent to fashion well.
than foregrounding its representational capacity, may hence very well prove to be an effective manner to address all processes one can relate to producing, wearing and discarding items of clothing.

In the context of fashion theory, such a way of thinking about fashion encompasses a different approach and breaks with the tradition mentioned by Lipovetsky at the start of this chapter in which personal appearances are the starting point for an examination.\(^8\) It is, in addition, a way of thinking about fashion that incorporates the idea that Deleuze and Guattari draw from Dutch philosopher Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677). Whereas Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari emphasise that we do not know what a body can do, we may extend that idea to fashion, and emphasise that we do not know anything about fashion until we know what fashion may do (Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980]: 284). Rather than aiming to reach an understanding of all of fashion’s capacities, I thus follow Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari’s idea that the capacities of bodies and fashions are unlimited, open-ended and as such always open to development and innovation. We may think we know what fashion is, but since we do not know what it can do, a limiting of fashion to representation also places limits on the consideration of its capacities and potential expressions. I will hence examine what can be said about fashion’s capacities, how they relate to, or exist apart from, other elements and their capacities and create compositions that can create new fashion realities that can be destructive as well as constructive, depending on the actions and passions that are exchanged or composed in conjunction.

This is therefore a heterogeneous study of fashion that succeeds to overcome viewing fashion as being bounded by one restricted model of thought, whether it be sociological, historical, aesthetical, economic, or psychological. It, in addition, seeks to foreground what fashion’s capacities may be, and what they may do before (and apart from) what fashion may signify or represent. As such it is a study of fashion without bounds,

\(^8\) During the completion of this dissertation the forthcoming publication of Thinking Through Fashion. A Guide to Key Theorists (2015) by Agnès Rocamora and Anneke Smelik (eds.) was announced. This publication features a chapter entitled ‘Gilles Deleuze: Bodies-without-Organs in the Folds of Fashion’ by Anneke Smelik, which may adopt a similarly different approach to traditional fashion theories.
limits, and ‘ends’ that examines and highlights the never-ending ongo-
ing connections, transformations, and experiments that characterise the
double-edged and dynamic phenomenon of fashion.

Method and Structure

Deleuze and Guattari do not stand alone in their alternative approach to
viewing reality on the basis of interconnectivity, focused upon transfor-
mation and transposition rather than, for instance, assigning traditional
rational thought, representational or rhetorical structures a prerequisite
for knowledge and insight. In order to develop a sound understanding
of their often complex philosophical concepts therefore a number of
what one may call their predecessors and the impact of their theories
on rethinking fashion are examined. French sociologist Gabriel Tarde
(1843-1904), Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) and German
philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) may be regarded
as important influences upon Deleuze and Guattari’s processual ontology
which precedes and surpasses larger representational structures one may
recognise in society.9

Furthermore, and after elaborating upon the approximation of the
ways in which the terms ‘fashion’ and ‘identity’ are being used within this
dissertation, the first chapter (Fashioning Identities) presents the reader
with an overview of classical fashion theories revolving around clothing
and dress as means to recognise, convey, or deceive identities. Through
a close literary analysis, the chapter chronologically examines how the
emphasis upon dress as identity marker originated in ancient Rome and
Greece where consumption was regulated by, and bound to, the social
rank of the wearer. A leap is then being made to the late nineteenth
century when the rise of industrial facilities caused a larger population
to be within reach of fashionable dress, and issues of class, differentia-
tion and imitation emerge. These issues will be examined by comparing

9 German mathematician and philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716)
and French philosopher Henri-Louis Bergson (1859-1941) must also be recog-
nised as having influenced Deleuze and Guattari. I, however, have chosen not
to include their theories in this dissertation.
the theories of sociologists Georg Simmel, the aforementioned Gabriel Tarde, and Thorstein Veblen. The first part of this chapter concludes with Roland Barthes’ famous, yet failed, attempt to systemise the meanings of fashion.

The second part of the first chapter focuses upon contemporary theories in fashion in which its ambiguous, contradictive, and irrational character is foregrounded and related to representation of identity. The seminal works of scholar Elizabeth Wilson and philosopher Jean Baudrillard are discussed and an overview of the ways in which fashion theories regard fashion as an essentially social, cultural, or psychological phenomenon is presented. The latter is elaborated with scholar Llewellyn Negrin’s argument that the fashion industry and its advertising and marketing campaigns are largely decisive in directing which identity performances are favoured, recognised, and generally adopted.

The second chapter (Undressing Plato) problematizes a philosophical perspective upon identity by briefly recalling Plato’s concept of ideal forms or ideas, the self, and their eternal and unchanging character. It is argued that Platonic principles are unfit for studying fashion, which is characterised by change, invention of the new, and ephemerality. First, the empiricist philosophy of David Hume is examined as an alternative prism through which one can view fashion. His emphasis upon bodily sensations, preceding mentally constructed ideas, is related to fashion’s materiality and its relation with the body. In addition, Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophical appraisal of art, intuition and experiment is examined and related to the avant-garde designs of, for instance, contemporary Japanese designer Rei Kawakubo. And lastly, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s philosophical concepts that distinguish delineating, identifying and representing forces from those that extend, open up, and liberate, are introduced. It becomes clear that, with Deleuze and Guattari, fashion can be examined for all its corporeal, material, technological, and experimental creative aspects without needing to fall back upon the identity of the wearer. In addition, phenomena characteristic of fashion, such as change, ambiguity, affect, and paradox are shown to be major aspects of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy that make it so appropriate for the study of fashion.

In the third chapter (A Delineated Fashion), the fashion industry will be researched phenomenologically for its emphasis upon
representational identity through the construction of brand identities, and the communication thereof through the Web, magazines, and in stores. Fashion brands are examined for the ways in which they (as well as magazine editors, personal shoppers, and online style profiles) encourage readers to discover their style types through identifying with a limited number of style categories. The change or alteration of the appearances of items of clothing with which certain styles can be represented, and with which consumers are encouraged to identify, is studied for its limitations and its contribution to overconsumption of clothing. In addition, Deleuze’s concept of difference in itself is contrasted with those of identity and representation as deployed by the fashion industry. It is suggested that Deleuze’s concept of societies and people as being connected through three types of lines opens up a way out of a predominant focus upon identity and enables a perspective upon creativity, multiplicity, and a constant becoming, which precedes, transforms, and interacts with more or less rigid and representational forms of identity.

Through an analyses of fashion’s systems, the ethical and ecological problems associated with its traditional preoccupation with representation of identity will be foregrounded in the fourth chapter (*Clothed Connections*). By comparing Deleuze’s concept of desire, which is productive and transformative, to the common idea of desire which is characterised by the experience of a deficiency, Deleuze and Guattari’s adjacent concept of assemblage (*agencement*) will be deployed to analyse the connections that are being made and the processes involved in the production of a pair of jeans. Whilst following the molecular connections that are established with, for instance, the water used during the cultivation, spinning, and weaving of cotton, to the dyeing, washing, and finishing of a pair of jeans, the full scope of fashion’s environmental damaging can be portrayed. In addition, the ethical problems of exploitation one must relate to fashion surface when focussing upon the risks workers are faced with during the entire production process. As such fashion’s affective dimensions are inextricably linked to its ecological and ethical downsides.

The second part of this chapter explores the potential future

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10 See Chapter 4 of this dissertation for an elaboration upon the concept of affective assemblage in which fashion’s capacities are foregrounded.
trajectories that fashion may take, guided by a thinking in connections. It is, furthermore, suggested that what items of clothing may represent needs to be tied to (and appears entangled with) what they may potentially do. Through a focus upon what happens when elements form connected assemblages, a method is suggested for analysing fashion for all processes and forces involved. Within this system, fashion’s unactualised (and as such virtual) potential functions as the fertile ground for fashion’s ambiguous character. And lastly it is demonstrated that it is here that fashion’s new expressions and functions arise.

In the concluding chapter, Félix Guattari’s *The Three Ecologies* (2000 [1989]) will be deployed to interconnect the social, mental, and environmental issues related to fashion. It will be argued that changing our mental stance towards fashion by opening up a thinking that moves beyond the representation of identities can mobilise a change in the way fashion is perceived socially and fully map its environmental problems. Having recaptured the answering of my threefold main question, attention is, furthermore, given to visionary designers that draw attention to new material, experimental, creative and productive connections that are accomplished by the garments they have designed. As such a rhizomatic analysis is suggested in which fashion’s problems, desires and future creative potential appear interconnected, and are approached in a manner that conceptualises the multiple levels of fashion theory.