Fashion beyond identity: The three ecologies of dress
Breuer, R.L.A.

Citation for published version (APA):

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A Delineated Fashion

We’re told businesses have souls, 
which is surely the most terrifying news in the world.

Gilles Deleuze¹

People are being trained by the media to be perfect consumers of mass manufactured rubbish.

Vivienne Westwood²

Whereas Hume, Nietzsche and Deleuze argued that what fashions and bodies may do is essentially open-ended, unlimited and revolves around experiment, the mass fashion industry seems to mainly promote fashion as a means with which we can represent our identities. Rather than opening up a multi-faceted perspective upon what fashion may do, mainstream fashion brands hence encourage relating to fashion for what it may signify, and how we can deploy these significations to communicate our being. Relating to fashion for its representational powers, however, does not stand on its own. As examined in Chapter 1 most,

if not all, fashion theories examine fashion for its representational qualities. In popular thinking a similar view upon fashion as a means to represent identity is adopted. To illustrate this common concept of fashion, it is of interest to briefly turn to *The Language of Clothes* (1981), in which novelist Alison Lurie sets out to develop a vocabulary and grammar of dress. Although I have argued, aided by Elizabeth Wilson and Malcolm Barnard, that dressing is too complex and ambiguous to be put into a neat system of interpretation, Lurie’s writing reflects the way we act and interpret on a *daily basis* well. Think about the following:

> Long before I am near enough to talk to you on the street, in a meeting or at a party, you announce your sex, age and class to me through what you are wearing – and very possibly give me important information (or misinformation) as to your occupation, origin, personality, opinions, tastes, sexual desires, and current mood.  
> (Lurie 1981: 3)

While emphasising that there is more to fashion than it being a system of communication, I am nevertheless interested in how this idea became so persistent, as any scholar is curious about the world around them as a found object. We do think about what we wear and whether our attire suits the occasion and renders us in a representational manner. We also do judge others by their appearances.

Looking good for whatever occasion you are faced with has, in addition, never been as easy and cheap as it is today. By simply walking into one of the ubiquitous fast fashion chains, such as ZARA, H&M, Forever 21, Urban Outfitters, Gap and Primark, you are bound to find a representable item of clothing to your taste for very little money. Since fast fashion companies do not invest in designing the clothes they sell, but rather copy the latest trends from the catwalk shows at an amazingly fast pace, one no longer needs to spend the now relatively high price for a fashionable designer item but may look as if one did.3 However, cheap fashion does come with its costs. By examining what British waste operators coined as the ‘Primark effect’ it becomes clear that the low prices paid for

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fast fashion clothing also result in the items of clothing being regarded as disposable (House of Commons 2010: 20). With an increase in consumers that have a primary interest in receiving value for their money and turning to fast fashion to fulfill their needs, one point thirteen billion kilograms of clothing are discarded per year in the United Kingdom alone (Wrap 2012: 11). Apart from wanting to purchase cheap clothes without much trouble, most consumers value novelty over durability and generally part with their clothes as easily, and to some extent as thoughtlessly, as they obtained them (Wrap 2012:11).4

Philosopher Simon Blackburn argues that brands actively promote overconsumption and encourage vanity, self-esteem and pride. L’Oréal’s “Because I’m Worth It” catch phrase not only contributes to identity politics, but also appeals particularly to the post World War II generation that “has so shamelessly implemented the idea that greed is good” (Blackburn 2014: ix). Consumers, in other words, are not only encouraged to emphasise their being, they are convinced the more ways of doing so the better it is and as such believe that “because they are worth it, their predations of the common good give them no more than they are due” (Ibid.). Mainstream fashion branding hence does not only help us to forget there is more to fashion than representation of identities, it also actively reinforces the idea that communicating our identities through fashion, changing them frequently, and having fun while doing so is regarded the norm of society. Through these practices fashion brands indirectly help us to forget at what costs cheaply produced goods are possible. Since we are worth it the urgency to think about related issues, such as whether the people that produce our clothes and cosmetics, the generations to come and our environment are of equal worth, seems to diminish or at least becomes bearable.

Canadian author and social activist Naomi Klein regards post-World War II branding responsible for encouraging us to increasingly think in the power of communicating identities through fashion (Klein 1999: 23). In addition, other members of what Barthes has named the fashion group, such as magazine editors, style-advisors and forecasting agencies, may contribute to shaping the habit of our thoughts (Barthes 1967:

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4 The Wrap report (2012) shows that only one-third of consumers indicate that they value durability over low costs.
We may question how we have internalised and as such naturalised the idea that fashion can represent our being, much like Judith Butler showed how this process works in relation to gender identity (1990). In order to do so, I suggest examining the ‘languages’ spoken by the fashion industry. Moreover, the motives behind slogans such as ‘We is Me’, ‘Play with Fashion, Play with Yourself’ and ‘Be whoever you want to be’ can be questioned. Mainstream fashion brands are obviously not truly concerned with aiding us to perform our identities in a free and playful manner and one may question whether there can be more to fashion than their incentives based on the gaining of capital.

The seriousness of the problems caused by overconsumption in the form of fast fashion products asks for a profound criticism of the related communication strategies that dominate the ways we think about fashion. On the other hand, one may question where and how fashion’s creative and open-ended potential may be detected and where the system erected by the fashion industries is transformed. As said, I suggest we turn to fashion’s commercial promotion of representational practices first, after which we may begin to detect where and how its spiritual, experimental, creative and transformative capacities may be found and thought. A diagnosis first must be made before one may begin to find a cure.

Selling Fashionable Representations

Fashion branding and marketing revolve, at least partly, around deciding upon which specific target group a brand wants to reach. Subcultures, clothing- and lifestyles, style-personalities and consumer behaviour are analysed in order to connect the brand’s communication strategies – ranging from retail environment, visual merchandising, (print-) advertising to all sorts of online communication – with the intended, typical customers. Often a fictive brand character is created, and even named

See Chapter 1 for a more elaborate description and illustration of these fashion slogans.
and visualised, to assist magazine editors in directing their articles and images to the tastes and preferences of the typical reader. This character can either be a completely fictional ideal customer created by a brand engineer, or is assembled out of the average characteristics of the existing customers. Descriptions about sex, age, education, income, marital status, reproduction, hobbies, interests and brands used, are all included to represent a larger target group and to make sure a reader or customer recognises himself or herself in the articles, images and communication sent out.

While some brands will employ brand managers to discover what their typical consumers want others, typically larger, global brands, may turn to market research companies of which the Nielsen Company is the largest in the world with a revenue of almost US$5,000,000,000 in 2011. Nielsen provides its clients with the information that enables them to ‘read’ their consumers and does so through measuring media engagement; consumer neuroscience (“responses at both the conscious and subconscious levels”); and global consumer confidence (“who’s ready to spend and who’s just window shopping?”). Although the costs for brand specific advice are substantial, in the Nielsen Company Online Store packages informing clients about the media landscape, local and global market reviews can be purchased for between US$500 and US$1,500.

6 See, for example, the 2011 Dutch Documentary about a popular women’s magazine Aldus Libelle – Juul Bovenberg (VPRO). The editors say they write for someone that they imagine being their girlfriend; which appears to be 35+, female, white, wearing heals, not too sexy and not too petty. She used to be called ‘Ellen’ and even though they have ceased naming such a specific typical reader, the practice remains stereotyped.

7 Dutch magazine specialist and former creative director at Sanoma Publishers, The Netherlands, Rob van Vuure claims to have coined the term ‘IJKpersoon’, which translates to typical customer. See: <www.ijkpersoon.nl>, accessed September 2013.

8 From the 2011 Honomichl Top 50 Report, by Jack Honomichl, retrieved online September 2014 through: https://www.ama.org/Documents/Hono.pdf

The market research company aids brands to grow on the basis of gaining knowledge of their typical and potential consumers, or as Nielsen states: “We help you identify and build a custom view of your most profitable consumers so that we can then help you innovate, communicate and activate with those consumers in mind”.\(^\text{10}\)

Apart from making use of ‘typical customer profiles’, fashion magazines regularly present their readers with an overview of several typical style personalities. These categorically arranged representatives advise readers on what to wear and what to buy to suit their personal style. Ranging from relatively simple categorisations and names to more eccentric ones, all type profiles in fashion magazines select a limited number of different dress styles that suit the type-descriptions. An insight into what to wear to suit one’s personality cannot only be found in fashion magazines. A growing number of personal style advisors inform their clients along the same, somewhat shifting, line of several different fashion types. These personal style advisors either operate from large retail brand stores such as Top Shop and, more recently, H&M; from their private businesses; or as corporates through the Web and social media. Fashion brands, magazines and life-style advisors seem to know us better than we do.

**Brand Identities, Best Friends we Take for Granted**

Fifteen years after the publication of Naomi Klein’s *No Logo*, with which she wanted to sow “the seeds of a genuine alternative to corporate rule”, Starbucks has opened a laboratory for coffee experience in their new concept store in Amsterdam; McDonald’s has replaced its red and yellow looks for more environmentally friendly looking green, yellow and woodwork; fast fashion retailers Forever 21, Topshop, and Primark have opened their shops in Amsterdam to compete with the twelve H&M stores already present. The suspicion and rage towards multinational corporations, Klein saw developing at the time, seems to have vanished or is at most stuck in its infant phase, particularly when it comes to the young people she counted on to initiate change. Whereas consumers are

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free to choose differently and turn away from multinational corporations in favour of smaller, more local products, the masses seem to conform to a “because I’m worth it” mentality.

Klein assigns branding an important role in this process. She sketches a brief history of branding and locates its birth at the end of the 1940s when companies moved from the creation of products to the creation of brand-images (Klein 1999: 20-23). Additionally she differentiates between advertising and branding by emphasising that although advertising can conjure feeling, branding entails corporations embodying a more complicated meaning of their own. Brand strategist and author of Designing Brand Identity (2009) Alina Wheeler likens a brand identity to that of a person when she names the four most important questions a brand should take into account: “Who are you? Who needs to know? How will they find out? Why should they care?” (Wheeler 2009: vi). The idea of a brand identity being similar to that of a person becomes even more powerful in her description of what a strong brand identity may do for a brand:

As competition creates infinite choices, companies look for ways to connect emotionally with customers, become irreplaceable, and create lifelong relationships. A strong brand stands out in a densely crowded marketplace. People fall in love with brands, trust them, and believe in their superiority. How a brand is perceived affects its success, regardless of whether it’s a start-up, a non-profit, or a product.

(Wheeler 2009: 2)

In the quotation above a brand becomes a person one may fall in love with, that is irreplaceable and trusted. Brands, of course, are not people. They are carefully created to bear characteristics similar to those we attribute to people. Wheeler, however, implies that in order for products to sell they require a person-like brand identity with which consumers can identify and which they are encouraged to befriend. Moreover, Wheeler’s ‘brand imperatives’ indicate that we must “acknowledge we live in a branded world” and brands need to “build on perceptions, preferences, dreams, values and lifestyles” by means of a brand identity that may be used “to create sensory magnets that attract and retain consumers” (Wheeler 2009: 11).
Say you are in search of a new pair of jeans and faced with the task of choosing one pair from at least sixty different brands present. In order to simplify the complex task to choose a particular brand companies create a brand identity. This brand identity is representational of the brand. It directs all its communications from the labels attached to the clothing to the website design and is presented as the *surplus value* of the items of clothes being sold under the brand’s name. The brand identity design must differentiate and embody the intangibles that matter to most consumers so they can connect emotionally with the brand. According to Moira Cullen, senior director global design at The Hershey Company, these intangibles are: emotion, context and essence (quoted in Wheeler 2009: 6). Marketing expert Rohit Bhargava says that the essence Cullen refers to is the brand’s personality: “the unique, authentic, and talkable soul of your brand that people can get passionate about” (quoted in Wheeler 2009: 82). Although the intents of Cullen’s ‘essence’ and Bhargava’s ‘soul’ are not ontologically formed, they do remind us of Plato’s essence present in the ideal Forms and the soul. In this light brands may be regarded as functioning the way Platonic Ideas do: all representatives of a brand need to relate to this essence to ensure effective communication of its singular identity.  

Brands need to differentiate and compete with other brands and the intangibles that differentiate one brand from another must be communicated rapidly and effectively. Consumers are not willing to spend much time deciphering the messages sent out by the many different brands and consequently need to be able to grasp complex qualities the moment they are confronted with them. In order to get their message across to the consumer, a brand, and likewise the items of clothing presented by the brand, will adopt *representatives* the consumer can easily relate to. When in search of a new work coat a businesswoman will most likely be attracted more by a high-end fashion label such as Jil Sander with its

11 The critical review by blogger Jong-Moon Kim of Apple’s introduction of the iPhone and the Apple Watch are of interest here. Kim criticises the many shapes, colours, and wristbands consumers may choose from, and writes: “[t]here should have been just The One that people call “The Jesus Watch” like the second coming. It’s easy to fall in love with The One” [original emphasis]. See: http://jiggity.com/steve.html, accessed September 2014.
minimalist brand identity, than by that of more adventurous outdoor brand The North Face. The brand identity design will ensure her an easy task – once she has found her appeal in Jil Sander, the businesswoman is likely to engage in a lifelong relationship with the brand, as Wheeler emphasises (2009: 2). While a consumer is encouraged to regard oneself as a representational being of a certain type that identifies with the brand, he or she is also encouraged to see the brand as an authentic representative of the related essence. One may conclude that fashion brands are constructed and communicate with consumers, encapsulated in a focus on representatives that relate to an essence reminiscent of the Platonic Idea. From beginning to end the fashion brand, the items of clothing and the consumer centre upon identity and representatives.

Klein reserves the term ‘lifestyle philosophers’ for the branding teams of companies that were so strongly “branded to the bone”, that they successfully survived the 1993 Wall Street declaration of the “death of the brand” (Klein 1999: 28). She names Nike, Apple, the Body Shop, Calvin Klein, Disney, Levi’s and Starbucks. Fifteen years later we may expand the list with internationally renowned fast fashion lifestyle brands such as H&M, Gap, Abercrombie & Fitch and Jack & Jones. The importance of providing consumers with a lifestyle they will emotionally embrace as if it were a best friend forever has taken over the focus on the product itself. As Klein writes:

12 See Klein 1999: 23-28 in which she describes what is known as “Marlboro Friday” in marketing circles: the day (2 April 1993) on which Phillip Morris announced a price cut of 20 cents for its cigarettes and therewith indicated that the name of a product alone was not sufficient to maintain a leading position in the market. Many other household brands saw their stock prices fall and realised promoting their products did no longer suffice for maintaining the position of a successful brand.

Tommy Hilfiger, meanwhile, is less in the business of manufacturing clothes than he is in the business of signing his name. The company is run entirely through licensing agreements, with Hilfiger commissioning all its products from a group of other companies: Jockey International makes Hilfiger underwear, Pepe Jeans London makes Hilfiger jeans, Oxford Industries make Tommy shirts, and the Stride Rite Corporation makes its footwear. What does Tommy Hilfiger manufacture? Nothing at all.
(Klein 1999: 34)

The brand identity, exemplified by Tommy Hilfiger’s signature in the quotation above, expressed through the lifestyle that is communicated is that which lends the products their representational character, rather than the actual product. We are encouraged to identify with the advertised lifestyle and the Hilfiger logo and invited to use them as representatives of our own lifestyles. Since the clothes we wear are considered representational of our identity and are so closely and intimately related to our body, it is no surprise fashion serves as an excellent vehicle for the emotional adoption of designed styles of living and meanings we believe in.

An interesting development in this area is the phenomenon of brand extensions, or brand stretching, which entails that a brand develops a product line not normally associated with the product(s) the brand sells. Car brand BMW has launched the BMW collection under the name ‘BMW Lifestyle’, implicating that the representational value of the car brand may be used for more than selling cars alone. If you identify with the brand and are willing to spend your money on a car perhaps you will also identify with the clothing and accessories BMW has to offer. As BMW writes in the introduction to its 2013-2014 lookbook:

Driving a BMW conveys the true excitement, at any time on any surface. The BMW Collection is just as versatile. From comfortable casual wear to smart business accessories, enjoy the variety, the comfortable tailoring and the sophisticated design of the BMW Collection. [...] BMW quality and attention to detail make a product a Lifestyle item.
(BMW Lifestyle 2014: 04 [emphases added])
Representing yourself by choosing to drive a BMW car, because you may regard yourself a smart businessperson who values good quality and sophisticated design, can now be extended to what you wear. The items of clothing sold by BMW are designed to fit travel, business-class work activities and upper-class leisure such as yachting and golf, which feature in separate categories in the catalogue; the Men’s Jacket and the Ladies’ Trench Coat are presented as “ideal companion[s] for leisure and travel” (BMW Lifestyle 2014: 06).

Apart from BMW, there are many more strong brands that have started to sell clothing and accessories: Samsonite sells Outerwear; National Geographic offers adventure wear; perhaps most notoriously the tobacco companies’ bypassing of advertising prohibitions through selling shoes (Camel boots) and clothing (Marlboro, Philip Morris). Vice versa successful high fashion brands extend their brand identities to furniture, interior decorating (Christian Lacroix, Rick Owens and Martin Margiela), or hotels and resorts (Armani). It does seem we live in a branded world in which lifestyle branding, rather than the actual products a fashion brand sells, provides us with the representations of our identities. However, one may question what an alternative approach could be, and I therefore propose examining a brand that has approached things differently, in the following. After having done so, I will return to research where and how fashion’s persistent relation with representation of identity is reinforced, and what may be the main motive to do so.

Do

In the spring of 1996 Dutch communications agency KesselsKramer initiated a brand they called do. In the introduction to the book One Hundred and One Things to Do (2006), they explain that traditional brands increasingly want to “do it all for you” (2006: 5). Based on the brand’s personality, services are hence extended, as described above: BMW and Mini offer clothing, bags and accessories; ZARA offers curtains, tableware and related interior decorating items; H&M has extended its main brand to up-market fashion with COS, Monki (for young fashionistas), Cheap Monday (high fashion for low prices) and & Other Stories (focusing on ‘the complete look’ and offering cosmetics, shoes, accessories
According to KesselsKramer these brand extensions or innovations are “not interesting thought[s] on the world but rather [...] an extra way to earn” (Ibid.). The extra services or product-lines offered need to obey the original brand, rather than operating along the lines of intuition. It is here KesselsKramer locate the moment brands depart from their human characteristics; brands are carefully constructed to resemble human traits, but unlike humans, lack intuitive decision-making. KesselsKramer’s answer to this hiatus is ‘do’, a brand without specific products, focused around people taking participative action and transforming any product offered under the brand’s name. It is a brand that does not measure its success by the profits made, but by the value of collaborations, ideas and participations: “[Do,] the ever-changing brand that depends on what you do” (2006: 7 - 9).

Apart from organising a workshop for art and design students, KesselsKramer challenged marketing and product managers to question given formats with their book do84. In collaboration with Dutch design network Droog and a number of designers they initiated do create which features a series of products that share the common trait of being incomplete. Designer Marijn van der Poll created do hit, a hollow metal cube that comes with a sledgehammer, which must be used to hit the cube into a chair. Jurgen Bey created a kitchen chair of which one of the legs is considerably shorter than the other three and to which a support must be added before one can use it: do add. And designers Frank Tjepkema and Peter van der Jagt created a porcelain vase, lined with rubber that must be smashed before use: do break. But the item that adheres most to fashion is KesselsKramer’s do shirt, a shirt acclaimed about 400 times too large for anyone to wear, which encourages owners to use it for other purposes than wearing alone. Or as they put it:


16 The do shirt measures 135 cm across and is 175 cm in height, whether the acclaimed “400 times too large” is accurate may hence be disputed, it is nevertheless much too large to wear as a T-shirt.
do shirt transforms the humble tee. Much, much more than just an ordinary item of apparel. do shirt has dozens of potential applications: picnic blanket, straightjacket, bridal gown, baby bib, mop, headdress, and duvet. It is especially recommended to maximum-security prisoners – simply knot several do shirts together to create a handy rope, allowing you to clamber from your cell and break for freedom. In fact, one of the few things do shirt isn’t very good at is being a t-shirt. (KesselsKramerpublishing.com)\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Figure 3.1} \textit{Do hit} for Droog, Marijn van der Poll (2000) Photograph: Gerard van Hees

\textbf{Figure 3.2} \textit{Do break} for Droog, Frank Tjepkema and Peter van der Jagt (2000) Photograph: tjep.com

\textsuperscript{17} From: http://www.kesselskramerpublishing.com/catalogue/doshirt/, accessed October 2014.
KesselsKramer’s approach to branding exemplified in the range of unfinished products and initiated projects under the name of ‘do’ brings a fresh creative way of thinking to what consumers may do with the products offered, rather than providing them with ready-made signifiers.
and objectives. The emptiness of the brand, the absence of a well-defined product range, and its insistence on the actions and creativity of the consumer all break with the way brands commonly operate. Do focuses on what a brand and its products may become after consumers engage with them, whereas most brands are focussed upon communicating and maintaining their designed identity.

Even though the *do shirt* can still be purchased through the Droog design web page and store, KesselsKramer have ceased working on the brand itself. The dosurf.com website can no longer be visited and, although the agency continues to work for commercial parties as well as on non-profit campaigns, there is little to be found about *do*, apart from
the publication of their 2006 book One Hundred and One Things to Do. Perhaps the 2008 financial crisis has played its part in seeing off a brand that focussed on experimentation and participation, rather than ensuring solid revenues and aiding the rebuilding of the economy. The latter is more effectively achieved by brands with clear identities with which consumers can identify. Although brands play an important role in emphasising fashion’s representational character, there must be more than brands alone for this aspect to have become so paramount. It is therefore of interest to examine in which other instances the predominant focus upon representation of identity is emphasised to ensure consumers have little trouble finding items of clothing to which they may identify.

Adventurless Advice

In September 2011 Vogue US published an editorial photographed by Steven Meisel titled Playing to Type. The introductory lines of the five full-spread pages read as follows: “Exquisitely captured by designers closely identified with a certain aesthetic, five distinct personalities emerged from the fall [2011] collection”.18 The fashion types presented by Vogue are intended to communicate with more fashion conscious consumers but, nevertheless, rely on representational categories to organise the large amounts of designs that feature the complete fall collection of that year. Four of the five personality types come with a further explanation of the category: the Bourgeoisie are “daring social swans”; the Artisans form the “eccentric crowd”; the Subversives are “true individuals”; the Modernists are “chic urban minimalists”. Only the Romantics can rely fully on the actual clothing (which features light colours, lace, and fine knits) to identify themselves with the representational category.

Figure 3.6 ‘Playing to Type. The Romantics’ *American Vogue*, September 2011 Photograph: Steven Meisel

Figure 3.7 ‘Playing to Type. The Modernists’ *American Vogue*, September 2011 Photograph: Steven Meisel

Figure 3.8 ‘Playing to Type. The Bourgeoisie’ *American Vogue*, September 2011 Photograph: Steven Meisel
Whether fashion conscious Vogue readers will actually identify with one of the five representational styles remains in question. It seems that Vogue’s editors Grace Coddington and Michael Philouze, in collaboration with photographer Steven Meisel, saw the need to categorise the designs according to what they thought they represented. The readers may recognise themselves in one of the styles and descriptions they are provided with, and find it easier to choose for one of the related items of clothing, rather than having to examine the complete autumn 2011 collection by themselves.

Another means of making an easier choice between numerous options offered by fashion brands can be found via the Web. Online personal style service and web store StyleSetGo writes that the founders created the website because they realised they were lacking time to carefully think
about what to wear, they wasted money on clothes they never wore, and, perhaps most notably, because “[they] love the idea of online shopping, but retreat after a few minutes realizing that there are THOUSANDS of apparel sites on the web”. The choices one is offered when wanting to buy new clothes are so abundant one no longer knows where to begin. Personal style advisors, such as StyleSetGo, make choosing easier, quicker and more effective since they base their advice on your personality type, often taking the styles of the actual items of clothing you have purchased through their website into account when suggesting new items.

On the StyleSetGo blog wardrobe consultant Sandi Mele reveals that she started by selecting five fashion personalities: alluring, feminine, sporty, classic and dramatic. She, furthermore, suggests specific cuts, colours, styles, prints and fabrics that suit each style. Put into a table the basic StyleSetGo indicators of style personality appear as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Alluring</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Sporty</th>
<th>Classic</th>
<th>Dramatic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cut</td>
<td>Low cut / revealing</td>
<td>Draping</td>
<td>Loose / comfortable</td>
<td>Tailored</td>
<td>Structured / geometric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colour</td>
<td>Sensual (black)</td>
<td>Soft, muted</td>
<td>Basic (pale yellow)</td>
<td>Crisp white</td>
<td>Bold, bright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>Lace-up</td>
<td>Bow-tie</td>
<td>Polo</td>
<td>Button up</td>
<td>Peplum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print</td>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Floral</td>
<td>Stripes</td>
<td>Polka-dot</td>
<td>Graphic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabric</td>
<td>Lace</td>
<td>Silk</td>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>Cashmere</td>
<td>Leather</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.11
Table of StyleSetGo indicators of style personality.
Source: StyleSetGo.com, table is the author’s own.

The method behind choosing these particular characteristics for the different categories is not explained. It seems, however, as if the paring of

19 From: http://www.stylesetgo.com/contents/content/1, accessed September 2014.

floral prints with a feminine type and graphic prints for a dramatic type is the result of a common sense idea or deductive practices. The representatives hence are what most people would regard appropriate for a certain personality. There does not seem to be a sound foundation for the meaning adhered to the different cuts, colours, styles, prints and fabrics, other than a habitual practise of fixing and simplifying a diversity of people into a limited amount of types. It is, however, rather paradoxical that you may discover your personal fashion style by relying on several fixed types.

Mele describes herself as a feminine fashion personality but emphasises that combining all the characteristics named under the category at once would create an overstatement. She thus recommends we mix characteristics from different categories. She writes that her awareness of the fact that she is a feminine fashion personality enables her to challenge herself by adopting elements that would normally represent another personality. As Mele phrases it:

> Being aware of my tendency to buy all the same types of clothing enables me to consider the image I am portraying (dainty, soft, and delicate) versus the image I WISH to portray (energetic, driven, fun-loving). Layering my favorite lace blouse with a bright, structured blazer allows me to combine the clothing I love with clothing that communicates the way I want others to perceive me.

*(Sandi Mele, wardrobe advisor at StyleSetGo: 2013)*

What StyleSetGo therefore does is combine the way you would normally dress, with a more challenging style and advice. In addition, they provide you with advice as to which new items they can offer that will suit your existing preferences.

The main website of StyleSetGo offers visitors the opportunity to register and find out which fashion personality they are. After registration, and having provided basic details about height, body size and age, you are asked to rate fifteen photographs picturing different dress styles and different items of clothing on the basis of whether you would or would not wear them. Consequently, you are designated your personal fashion style and offered a ‘mix and match’ wardrobe from which the suggested

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21 Ibid. (see previous note).
items can be bought online directly. Although the website does not state with which brands they collaborate, in the ‘frequently asked questions’ section they do state they are affiliated to “a small group of top-quality retailers”. StyleSetGo’s main goal is not to make women feel better, to make choosing outfits easier, or to save time, but to make them buy more effectively from the selection of brands that are affiliated to the website. Since subscribers receive weekly personalised style advice they are indirectly encouraged to update their wardrobe regularly. Moreover, because the style advice is based upon your personal taste and includes influences or details from other styles and as such resembles the way you would normally shop and dress, one may conclude that an utmost effective personal relationship with several brands is potentially developed.

Websites that base the communication of products upon your personality, such as StyleSetGo, work differently than brands do, but do ‘speak’ the same ‘language’. Rather than creating one brand identity which must communicate with a number of different, but still basically resembling consumers, lifestyle websites claim to offer truly personal advice as to what you will most probably want to purchase. Take Archetypes.com they claim “[t]he philosophy of archetypes is recognised by scholars worldwide as the definition of our persona and our story”. The main idea of the website seems that it will enable you to discover who you are, what your pattern of behaviour is and, as such, will make your life easier. Or as Archetypes writes:

Once you know your archetypes, the world becomes much easier to navigate. Based on your archetypes, you can make more inspired choices about everything from relationships to excelling at work to choosing a piece of clothing. Through the prism of those archetypes, the world is clearer. You can live a truly empowered life knowing which doors you should walk through and which are best left unopened. Knowing your archetypes gives you the vocabulary to help you understand yourself and others better.  
(Archetypes/about/theconcept: 2014)

Similarly to StyleSetGo you are asked to register through providing your

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e-mail address. You then complete a test that determines which combination of archetypes defines you. There are twelve archetypes in total: intellectual, caregiver, visionary, creative, athlete, rebel, royal, performer, spiritual, tastemaker, explorer and advocate. Say you are a visionary, caring intellectual then you are invited to explore the so-called families of these archetypes. In the family of intellectuals we find the philosopher, the scholar/student, the judge, the geek, the scientist, and the more shadowy members such as the know-it-all, the liar and the misanthrope. So far the website’s intentions seem genuine; perhaps we do learn more about our behavioural habits by reading about related types and connecting with other members with similar archetypes. The subject matter you are offered on the basis of your archetypes ranges from relationship advice, meditation, dreams and inspirational quotes, to which television channels you may want to watch. You can connect to other members of the Archetypes community and view their posts and the articles and images they have ‘liked’ through placement of a ‘me’ icon under the item. The possibility of purchasing lifestyle products based on your archetype(s), ranging from fashion to products to enhance your beauty, health, fitness, home and living, seems to be only one of the possible ways to get to know yourself better.

A little more research, however, indicates that Archetypes is not primarily here to help us to get to know ourselves, but rather it is the other way around: they are interested in what interests us. Archetypes has an affiliation with approximately 200 companies that sell products which represent one or more of the featured archetypes. For every purchase made through the Archetypes website, the affiliated company pays a commission fee.23 By gaining knowledge of what represents me, Archetypes is thus able to address me in the utmost personal and dynamic manner. Once again, as was the case with StyleSetGo, Archetypes has developed a manner of offering its members highly personalised advertising messages. That commerce is Archetypes’ main goal, and that the manner in which its members connect with each other helps them to offer the right products to the right people, may also become clear when taking

a closer look at the *content* of the website. For example, when reading the entry placed under the intellectual family member ‘The Philosopher’ Archetypes writes: “Aristotle was the original Intellectual Philosopher and the first to look at the causes of existence. Plato, who followed, argued that material abstractions possess the most fundamental kind of reality”.24 This quote makes no sense at all. It was obviously not Plato who followed Aristotle but vice versa.25 Their ideas considering philosophy hence appear as clichés without real references that are subsequently easily confused.

Apart from providing inaccurate – or plainly wrong – content, the modus operandi displayed by personal style websites does not stand on its own. As emphasised in media theory, our online behaviour is of increasing corporate value (van Dijck 2013; boyd 2012; Lovink 2011; Pariser 2011; Schäfer 2011).26 The brands and events we like on Facebook, the fashion items we pin on Pinterest, and the images we post on Instagram are just some of the examples through which our preferences can be measured, monitored and eventually monetised through offering us highly personalised products to purchase. Whereas membership of platforms such as Archetypes is voluntary and one may opt out whenever one likes, it is unlikely we will quit or lessen our online activities in the future. Similar to Archetypes, Facebook and Google give us the impression they are just catering for the things we are interested in, but

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25 In addition, consider the description of The Misanthrope by Archetypes: “They tend to love facts and information more than friends and members of their own families, who they see as obstructions to the pursuit of their passions, whether they’re scientific experiments, hobbies or marathons of intense study”. From: https://www.archetypes.com/article/shadow-archetypes-misanthrope, accessed September 2014.

26 The name ‘boyd’ is not capitalised because danah boyd has officially changed her name to be written without capitals. She regards the capitalisation of names and the ‘I’ as too foregrounding of being someone, which in her opinion obscures other factors that are in play. More information can be found on her website, here: http://www.danah.org/name.html, accessed November 2014.
meanwhile their main incentive is to satisfy their advertisers by encouraging us to visit their websites. As Internet activist Eli Pariser points out, the problem lies in the inductive, algorithmic method used to measure our online behaviour (2011a: 7). Based on algorithmic calculations all human actions are organised into predictable patterns, whereas the true revelations, adventures and ideas in life are often the result of unpredictable incidents. As Pariser phrases it by quoting from Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground* (1864):

> All human actions will then, of course, be tabulated according to these laws, mathematically, like tables of logarithms up to 108,000, and entered in an index ... in which everything will be so clearly calculated and explained that there will be no more incidents or adventures in the world.  
> (Dostoevsky 1864: VI)

Whereas individuals may be wanting to find out who they are and what moves them, turning to the Web for answers will – no matter how personalised, calculable and ultimately limited – lead to an unadventurous, riskless account of who you may be.

Fashion brands and magazine editorials that emphasise a relation between fashion and representation reinforce a concept of fashion that indeed lacks a perspective upon intuition, invention of the new and adventure, as KesselsKramer emphasised. Fuelled by motives of increasing profit, a focus upon what fashions and bodies may do, is hence neglected in favour of what they may signify. Brands, as such, generally dislike adventure and risk-taking and invest in images, clothing and representations that will attract a large number of people rather than a few. Individuals, however, may dress to their liking and are free to experiment, create their own clothing, and can be as adventurous as they dare. The question remains whether they actually do so and provide us with an alternative to the ‘safe’ looks promoted by the fashion industry.

*Looking Alike*

K-HOLE, a group of five New York based creatives that call themselves a ‘trend forecasting group’, has since May 2011 published four reports on
their website (khole.net). Each report resembles the reports actual trend forecasting bureaus create; featuring artistic and clear-cut imagery, short slogans and analysis of actual and predicted changes in society. Trend forecasters, however, do not publish their reports for free, let alone make them publically accessible through the Internet.27 Then there is the name of the group: K-HOLE. The term is associated with the effect large doses of Ketamine may cause: “a state of wildly associated experiences in which other worlds or dimensions that are difficult to describe in words are said to be experienced” (Pai and Heining 2007: 62-63). K-HOLE does appear to be something different than what it says it is. Some further research reveals that the group, founded by Greg Fong, Sean Monohan, Emily Segal, Chris Sherron and Dena Yago, consists of artists that use the language, design principles and ideas of the corporate world for their projects.28 Combined with the “wildly associated experiences” to which their name refers, this may indicate how to approach their work. Perhaps they can be regarded as diagnosticians of society; resembling the visual appearances of trend forecasting agencies, the content they provide us with is not so much a forecast, but rather an interpretation of what is already happening. Similarly, they do not intend to reveal which trends will be in fashion the coming year. They provide the reader with their interpretation of what they call “the crisis of being special” in a tongue-in-cheek manner of speaking.29

In October 2013 K-HOLE released its fourth report entitled Youth Mode: a Report on Freedom in collaboration with Box 1824, a Sao Paolo-based research organisation. In this report they argue that youth

27 In this light the announcement of the ‘Death of Fashion’ in March 2015 by trendwatcher Lidewij Edelkoort is exemplary. She wrote an anti-fashion manifesto that was only to be shared during her expensive trend seminars, and as such not publically accessible. For my analysis of, and comments about her action see: https://fashionunited.uk/news/fashion/is-fashion-dead-the-discussion-continues-a-lecturers-response/2015032715993, accessed March 2015.


has little to do with age these days, “it’s about being youthfully present at any given age” (K-HOLE 2013: 7). That is to say, no matter what age someone is, each and everyone is interested in engagement with newness, experiment, being critical of the past, changeability, avoidance of groups, rebelliousness and freedom (K-HOLE 2013: 11). These are all still rather obvious characteristics one associates with an attitude of youthfulness. K-HOLE, however, examines two recognisable lifestyles in society and questions whether they meet the criteria for the *Youth Mode* they want to promote. First ‘Mass Indie’, a style of dressing and living that can be characterised by independence (the ‘Indie’), is explored. K-Hole recognises the celebration of difference by those that may meet the criteria of leading independent lives, but points out that the presumed independence is still actually a group activity, a subculture and one that is practised on a large scale (the ‘Mass’). They remark that the celebration of difference by so-called independent minds has in fact become a mainstream activity. Everyone considers him or herself unique and strives for individuality. Fashion retailers are aware of the fact and offer it pre-packaged to their consumers. As K-HOLE writes: “[w]hether you’re soft grunge, pastel goth or pale, you can still shop at Forever 21” (K-HOLE 2013: 15). Since the act of dressing differently has been picked up by fast fashion retailers such as Forever 21, Top Shop and H&M, whether or not aided by marketing research companies such as Nielsen, one may indeed question how independent the “Mass Indie” style is. This leads K-HOLE to conclude that:

There’s a limited amount of difference in the world, and the mainstreaming of its pursuit has only made difference all the scarcer. The anxiety that there is no new terrain is always a catalyst for change.

(K-HOLE 2013: 16)

What does K-HOLE mean by “a limited amount of difference”? It is important to note that K-HOLE is referring to life-styles; the way you communicate your personal identity through what you wear, what you eat, and which music you prefer, for instance. Dressing in accordance with an independent life style then does not comply with such a style being available on a large scale (through fast fashion retailers) and being adopted by many people at the same time (the mainstreaming). The large-scale
adoption and availability of the ‘Mass Indie’ lifestyle may be characterised by a limited amount of difference since ultimately the adoption of the Indie lifestyle is a group activity of which the members of the group will recognise what falls within and without the limits of what it means to be Indie. The items of clothing that represent an Indie lifestyle are available through fast fashion retailers and although they provide a wide range of products that may fit into an Indie lifestyle, the range remains limited. Hence, K-HOLE ridicules the Indie lifestyle, since rather than negotiating the idea of lifestyle itself, calling oneself Indie is precisely pertaining to existing expectations and not as independent as it seems.

K-HOLE’s first answer to the question of moving beyond the independence of the Indie lifestyle is found in ‘Acting Basic’, or as they write: “If the rule is to Think Different, being seen as normal is the scariest thing” (K-HOLE 2013: 23). In other words, Acting Basic becomes an effort, something that takes courage, when surrounded by people that are trying to be exceptional. According to K-HOLE, the initial courage, however, too often ends up becoming a routine in which the narration of who you are is rather the denial of complexity than a true resolution and mastering of sameness (K-HOLE 2013: 25). The problems K-HOLE sees in a not-so-independent ‘Mass Indie’ lifestyle and a routinely performed ‘Acting Basic’ way of life, leads them to the introduction of their solution: “The New World Order of Blankness” called “Normcore” (K-HOLE 2013: 27). The term ‘Normcore’ may sound much like acting basic, being normal at your core, or simply dressing like most others. There is, however, more to be said about K-HOLE’s youth mode lifestyle. Several of the slogans they present us with under the heading of ‘Normcore’ direct towards a move away from representing oneself through a lifestyle altogether. “Consumption has never been a chance for absolute self-actualisation”, and thus we are better off opting for a certain blankness in dress, in the way we speak and in the communication of our beliefs which leaves space for other ways of expression. K-HOLE:

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30 K-HOLE is obviously referring to Apple’s (misspelled) slogan ‘Think Different’ and its products that have (ironically) also become ubiquitous.
In terms of boring conversations that have the potential to be interesting, Mass Indie is like talking about the dream you had last night, whereas Normcore is like talking about the weather. Both allow significant emotions to be revealed in casual settings. But no matter how vividly you describe it, your dream ends with you, while the coming storm affects us all.

(K-HOLE 2013: 32, emphases added)

A non-deterministic lifestyle hence leaves room for adaptability, connection and misinterpretation. To illustrate this point, K-HOLE features a man dressed in a dark suit, seen from the back, with a pink Mickey Mouse backpack across his shoulder (K-HOLE 2013: 33). One can only guess whether he is waiting for his young daughter to return, could not find any other bag in the morning, or is making a statement. Would one want to find out what his intentions may be, one would have to ask him, and as such connect with him through other means than the more directly visible styles of ‘Mass Indie’. This, according to K-HOLE, opens up a perspective of “true freedom, the grace of maybe and an unconcerned attitude towards being authentic” (K-Hole 2013: 30-34).

The above may sound interesting as an exploration of fashion beyond representation of identity, but one must question whether non-representational attitudes and style of dress will really lead to freedom, connection with others on the basis of indeterminable details in dress and thinking about oneself beyond the perspective of an ‘authentic’ ‘I’? K-HOLE is a group of artists and not a true forecasting agency, perhaps they are indeed foremost diagnosticians of society; they reveal what is going on in society and provide the movement with a positive twist. K-HOLE’s Normcore echoes Llewellyn Negrin’s appeal to focus on deeds rather than looks. However, it may also be seen as a sign of “taking anonymity to a next level”, as Fashion Blogger for The Guardian Lauren Cochrane argues. Moreover, the way the fashion industry reacts to the phenomenon of dressing ordinarily is of importance. As Swiss fashion journalist Jeroen

31 See Chapter 1.

van Rooijen writes in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, brands selling clothing that would fit the description of Normcore are – not surprisingly – mainstream fast fashion brands, such as Vero Moda, Jack & Jones, Superdry, Abercrombie & Fitch, Gap and Esprit that produce their clothing cheaply in Asia and as such contribute to the exploitation of workers. Van Rooijen also argues that Normcore should not be regarded a trend, but rather a warning towards the ever accelerating changing of trends implied by the mainstream fashion industry:

Normcore may nowadays truly be a phenomenon of the Zeitgeist – it is not yet a trend, but foremost an Art Backlash. Normcore is the result of oversaturation and success of the textile desertification by discounters granting credit; causes a more aggressive bargaining and robs fashion of all senses of enchantment. Foremost Normcore is a warning to the fashion branch, that with its enormous tempo and ever-shorter living trends has lost its connection with the people.

(Van Rooijen 2014 [my translation])

Van Rooijen contrasts K-HOLE’s optimistic stance with the more serious one of reality. We do indeed increasingly look alike, but rather than gaining interpersonal connectivity while doing so, we lose much of the enchantment fashion has to offer. In addition, it can be concluded that in the act of trying to represent as little as possible, we are still occupied with representation. Or as Elizabeth Wilson wrote: “[t]o be unfashionable is not to escape the whole discourse, or get outside the parameters” (Wilson 2003 [1985]: 5). The American multinational fashion brand Gap launched their 2014 campaign with the slogan: ‘Dress Normal’, in which they, obviously, advise consumers to buy Gap products to do so. To dress in a Normcore style hence still entails all the problems that were associated with fast fashion at the start of this dissertation: exploitation of workers and the environment, and a limited self-conception. In addition and equally important, it takes much of the creative potential one may associate with the practice of dressing away.

Figure 3.12
*Dress Normal*, featuring actress Zosia Mamet
Photograph: Gap Inc.

Figure 3.13
*Dress Normal*, featuring actress Elisabeth Moss
Photograph: Gap Inc.
For his photographic project, *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts (People of the 20th Century)*, created between 1910 and approximately 1940, German photographer August Sander developed a cyclic model of society. He photographed people from different classes of society and arranged his series of portraits accordingly. The peasant class forms the basis of society, “hence his title for the series of 12 peasant portraits, *Stamm-Mappe I*” (Misselbeck 2009: 1). The group of skilled workers represent the foundation of civic life and depicts lawyers, bankers, soldiers, shop-owners and members of parliament. Thereafter come the intellectuals: musicians, artists and poets. “The cycle closes with the *Letzte Menschen*, the insane, gypsies and beggars” (Ibid.). Sander’s images show that during the first half of the twentieth century one’s profession and class could more often than not easily be drawn from the way you dressed. Master craftsmen are portrayed with the tools of their trade, in aprons, or work attire; a member of parliament wears a black overcoat and holds an umbrella; the farmers, sometimes portrayed in their Sunday best, are recognisable through their somewhat worn or creased suits. Many things have changed since. Economics and politics have become globalised and based on knowledge rather than (manual) labour. Work takes place in office parks. Socio-political and religious barriers are increasingly being lifted. Traditional crafts and folklore costumes have largely disappeared. Sander’s *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts* may be regarded a visual preservation of passed sartorial practices.

As examined in the former section, fashion has not ceased functioning as a tool for recognition, a means of representing one’s identity. We, however, no longer primarily need to identify with our professions. And if corporate wear forces us to dress according to the rules of the workplace people can still exert their freedom to dress to their likings outside work time. It seems impossible to distinguish between farmers’ wives, professors, artists and crafts people on an average Saturday afternoon in a city. As I have shown above, occupational dress has, to a large extent, been

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34 The term “Stamm-Mappe” is Sanders’ and would literally translate to “tribe-portfolio” or the more common “archetypes” in English.
replaced by dress that represents a selected lifestyle. Brands carefully chart the preferences of their intended target group, so that consumers, on the basis of their preferences and lifestyle, develop a friendship-like relation with the brand. Brands can thus represent who we are, or at least how we want to be perceived by others. When we are unsure which style fits us most, we can make use of the help of style-advisors or lifestyle advising platforms on the Web. What has also changed is the fact that brands, market research companies, lifestyle advisors and trend watchers are fuelled by the mechanisms of advanced capitalism. A successful brand needs to reach and sell its products to a large amount of people. Advisors make a living out of selling items of clothing a consumer had perhaps never thought of and trend forecasting agencies, whether prank or true, are only granted success insofar their predictions hold.

The problem with representational categories, as much in Sander’s times as it is now, is that they are necessarily limiting; not all farmers, lawyers, nor insane dress alike. Moreover, to be represented through dress entails conforming to known and as such existing types of presentation. On the other hand, new presentations (looks or styles of dress) will be named and labelled in order to function as possible re-presentations for future identifying practices. This is a fashion based on determination, in which for certain represented meanings to become recognised, that of a certain style of dress representing a certain type of personality, for instance, the meaning must first be signified. In Sander’s time the signified came before the sign. That is to say, farmers dressed in a certain way and hence the type of dress became significant for most farmers. In our times, however, what is signified, or how we want to represent ourselves, can be purchased, readily made into signs by the mainstream fashion industry. Our class or occupation no longer exclusively or predominantly determines how we should dress. Choices have multiplied and so have representations. However, we primarily make use of the representations offered to us by popular fashion brands, perhaps alter them slightly to

35 The *Exactitudes* project, as described in Chapter 1 illustrates the representation of lifestyles through dress well.

36 I am referring to Gabriel Tarde’s “The signified comes before the sign”, see Chapter 1.
our liking, but, generally speaking, tend to judge others and ourselves by way of the constructed signs of the industry – which thereafter have become our signifieds. The sign has thus not been decided upon by a group of people themselves, but rather by the clever marketing mechanisms of the fashion industry. Or to rephrase K-HOLE’s remark: whatever you want to represent, you will find it at Forever 21, Primark, H&M, and the like.

I suggest we call the focus upon representation of identities in fashion, ‘A Delineated Fashion’. Such a perspective upon fashion is curtailed by representative signs, and does not encourage one to take fashion’s open-ended, affective qualities that may also be experienced into account. Style categories, archetypes, brand identities, and personality style types, furthermore, offer an organisation of the general meanings attached to the clothes we wear that can be measured – as the Nielsen Company emphasises – in the pursuit of increasing revenues. The idea behind a delineated fashion is hence closely related to obtaining information about consumer’s preferences; his or her behaviour both offline as well as online; and translating this information into person-like emotions that will move the senses. We-fashion’s “We is Me” commercial may be moving in its representation of many different character traits that may be adhered to one individual, but it is mainly so designed that we befriend the brand, rather than one would experience this emotion when actually wearing an item of clothing purchased at the store.

In the former chapter it was argued, aided by Hume, Nietzsche and Deleuze, that what arouses our senses or affects us cannot be (or does not lend itself to be) exactly pinpointed. What fashion and bodies can do is open-ended, rather than to be measured and translated into an experience related to the actual clothes we wear. Facebook’s ‘people-based marketing’ which tracks all online activity, including those on mobile

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37 Also see Chapter 4, in which the concepts of ‘desire’ and ‘assemblages’ are discussed and the process of overcoding is related to the fact that what clothing, material and bodies represent appears distinct from their affective qualities.

38 See: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGHey7uWzNY, or turn to Chapter 1 for a collection of film stills from this video.
devices such as our phones and tablets, may translate this information into preference categories and personalised advertising, it can only guess what intimately motivates people.\(^{39}\) Although the director of monetising product marketing of Atlas (the qualification company which provides their services through Facebook), Brian Boland states that measurement is a key tool to reach potential customers, there must be more than measurables to account for complex emotions.\(^{40}\)

Measuring, identifying, re-presenting and signifying practices presuppose a standard, a unity to which the analysed relates. Since the fashion industry is primarily interested in what makes people buy clothing this will most likely be the standard market research companies such as Nielsen and Atlas use. In order to analyse which people, characterised by which activities and preferences, will most likely be influenced by which advertising strategies to purchase certain brands of clothing, one must simplify their motives into a standard. Our activities and preferences, our emotions and the way we relate to clothing are all translated into a system that measures what we buy, for what traceable reason, and how often we do so. Such a simplified system does, however, not reveal how we relate to the items of clothing we wear on a more personal and intimate level. What is measured is what can be signified, fixed, and systemised.

What fashion and bodies can do, however, does not lend itself to be limited and extends infinitively. Certain advertising, branding and marketing techniques may lead us to buy certain brands of clothing; they reveal very little about the intimate affects we may also experience when wearing clothes and which do not lend themselves to be systemised as easily.

I will elaborate on the idea of moving beyond a delineated fashion in the remainder of this dissertation, here, to conclude this section, one may say that the mainstream fashion industry, in pursuit of more revenue, has offered us so many variations of – essentially the same – choices at such a frequency, that consumers seem to have grown tired from the sheer amount of options available. Representational dress comes to its own limit in Normcore’s blank, non-descriptive uniform of jeans and


\(^{40}\) Ibid., see previous note.
chino’s, t-shirts and hoodies for men, and skinny-jeans, plain tops and practical jackets for women – for which they, nevertheless, shop frequently at Abercrombie and Fitch, Esprit, Gap, or Superdry. One may, however, question whether difference is as limited as K-HOLE stated in their Normcore pamphlet. I therefore suggest turning to Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy of difference to examine what may underlie and precede representational aspects related to fashion in the following.

**Dogmatic Thought and Creative Potential**

In the third chapter of his dissertation, titled *Difference and Repetition* (1968), Deleuze examines what he names “the Image of Thought” (2004 [1968]: 166-7). This image, which presupposes our thinking in general and traditional Western philosophy in specific, is based on a negative concept of difference, identification and representation. In order to identify what or who someone is, we distinguish it (or the person) from what it is not. Determining that this is a dress, that is a jacket, this is a woman or a man, in other words, entails differentiating *between* men and women, dresses and jackets by means of taking into account what something or someone is *not*. Such a binary opposition in thought and language, according to Deleuze, refers to the traditional philosophies of both Kant and Descartes in which the words ‘I think’ found the basis of all our thinking without themselves referring to an origin (2004 [1968]: 169). The thinking subject, its identifying and representational practices and reasonable thinking, is thus presupposed without further proof. The focus upon ourselves as unified subjects, furthermore, leads to the recognition of the identities of objects; we unify our perceptions, memories, imaginations, and understandings through the ‘I think’ presupposition in order to recognise other people and objects as being either identical or (negatively) different.41

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41 Note that Deleuze’s argument here echoes Nietzsche’s who also regards personal identity the cause for viewing reality for its representations. See Chapter 2.
According to Deleuze, the foregrounding of both a continuous being (‘I’) as well as the primacy of thought (reason above senses) has resulted in the erection of a world in which intelligible knowledge rules our experiences. He, furthermore, names four characteristics (postulates) of representational thought, namely: we seek for identity in concepts (1), opposition in predicates (2), analogy in judgements (3), and resemblance in the perception of objects (4) (2004 [1968]: 174). We, in other words, commonly ask ourselves what something is, what it is not, what it is like, and what else resembles it on the basis of a groundless presupposition (the ‘I think’). Traditional philosophy, in addition, also operates on the basis of this dogmatic image of thought, and “is left without means to realise its project of breaking with doxa” (2004 [1968]: 170). That is to say, although it is inherent to philosophy to question everything that seems natural and obvious, it has no tools to break with the presupposed ‘I think’, precisely because it founds the basis of philosophy itself. Deleuze, however, has set himself the task of creating a philosophy without any presuppositions and takes as his “point of departure a radical critique of this Image [of thought] and the “postulates” it implies” (2004 [1968]: 167). His philosophy is a philosophy that seeks to move beyond the limitations the presuppositions of a thinking subject implies. Deleuze is interested in that which precedes thought and identity.

On a more practical level, and perhaps directly connectable to the way we commonly relate to fashion, Deleuze points out that operating along the lines of recognition, we do not solely recognise objects as being of a certain kind, we also learn to recognise the values that have been attached to those objects. Recognition hence becomes a recognition of (hierarchical) values, such as that a golden ring is more valuable than a silver one; a pair of Louboutin shoes is more valuable than a pair from Primark; acclaimed art is more valuable than that of an unknown artist. Deleuze emphasises that this recognition of objects and their values leads to a struggle for honour, wealth and power (2004 [1968]: 172). One may also think about the fashion industry, its brands and consumers in relation to struggles for honour, wealth and power as ‘a delineated fashion’ dependent on identification, signification and representation. Brands strive for wealth (revenues), honour (loyalty) from their consumers and power over other brands and its consumers (competition). Individuals may also strive for honour through fashion by wearing certain brands.
that are regarded honourable or rare (vintage) items that will be recog-
nised and envied by their peers; power may be represented by wearing a
(power) suit or a uniform; wealth is perhaps one of the foremost charac-
teristics which can be signified by the clothes we wear.42

What is Deleuze’s alternative to the dogmatic image of thought and
how may this affect the concept of a delineated fashion, based upon
representation and identity? As explained above, difference in the light
of representation always also implies a negative; it is this and not that.
Deleuze, however, suggests the concept of positive difference, a difference
that cannot be identified, recognised, or represented and is not subor-
dinated to sameness or what things are. Deleuze’s concept of difference
hence is a ‘difference-in-itself’, which scholar Cliff Stagoll describes as
“the uniqueness implicit in the particularity of things and the moments
of their conception and perception” (Stagoll 2005: 75). Difference, rather
than subjectivity and thought, is what all aspects of reality evidence, “and
there is nothing ‘behind’ such difference: difference is not grounded in
anything else” (Ibid.). Thinking about difference as the foundation of
reality opens up a whole range of new potential perceptions, perspectives,
and a plurality of sensations. Or as Deleuze writes:

\[
\text{Representation fails to capture the affirmed world of difference.}
\]
\[
\text{Representation has only a single centre, a unique and residing per-
spective, and in consequence a false depth. It mediates everything, but}
\]
\[
\text{mobilises and moves nothing. Movement, for its part, implies a plurality}
\]
\[
\text{of centres, a superposition of perspectives, a tangle of points of view, a}
\]
\[
\text{coexistence of moments which essentially distort representation.}
\]
\[
\text{(Deleuze 2004 [1968]: 67)}
\]

The single centre that Deleuze presents in the quotation above may be
seen as an identity to which all related representatives refer in order to
determine who or what someone or something is. It is, in addition, remi-
niscent of the way in which brands operate through referring all their
communications back onto the single centre of their identity. Deleuze

42 Also see Chapter 1, in which ancient sumptuary laws that prevented lower
classes from wearing certain expensive materials, and Thorstein Veblen’s
conspicuous consumption were discussed.
designates this single centre - in my research brand identity – a false depth that merely mediates between the essence, or identity and its representations. Instead, he advocates viewing the world through a prism of affirmative differences-in-itself that implies many potential centres and perspectives which all exist at the same time and appear entangled in each other.

Deleuze suggests that apart from identifying someone or something and determining who or what we are faced with, one may detect other, more open and less identifiable ‘smooth forces’ that also play their part. Identity and representation can be regarded as constructing striated, organised and definable realms. As discussed at the end of the former chapter, if one thinks along the lines of what fashion’s capacities may be, representational thinking is necessarily limited for it foregrounds and emphasises one way of analysing fashion: through what it is and what this may mean. Adopting a plurality of centres, on the other hand, entails questioning what fashion may become, what it may do in connection with other elements and, as such, incorporates non-representational affects, forces and intensities that appear differently in each case, rather than conforming to a neat system of organisation.

Viewed through a prism of affirmative differences-in-itself, one may, furthermore, regard fashion for its plurality of centres. Such a plurality would alter the idea – and main discourse – of there being only one fashion at a certain time and place, and would open up a perspective upon a multitude of fashions existing alongside each other. The super-positioning of perspectives enables viewing one way of looking at fashion besides other ways, which are not neatly organised but appear tangled and mixed. Apart from thinking about how to dress, for instance, we also dress ourselves intimately and may be moved by a colour, a material, and the weather all at once. In addition, the difficulty to define what fashion is, may very well be the result of the actual existence of a multitude of perspectives, which prevent representation. Fashion, so occupied with representatives, cannot be represented itself in a neat and single definition. What fashion is, and the way we dress ourselves, changes constantly which makes the concept of representation a poor tool for analysis. A question remains how we relate to fashion, its industry and where one may discover a motor for change, which characterises fashion. I will therefore turn to Deleuze’s concept of ‘being made up of lines’ for a
“Whether we are individuals or groups, we are made up of lines and these lines are very varied in nature” (Deleuze & Parnet 1987 [1977]: 124). With these words Gilles Deleuze and his former student Claire Parnet start the fourth part of their book titled *Dialogues*. They discuss three kinds of lines and their different natures that form us; the first are called ‘rigid segmentary lines’, the second ‘supple segmentary’ and the third is the ‘line of flight’ (*ligne de fuite* in French) (Ibid.). These lines are entangled, yet in order to understand their status and characteristics I will follow Deleuze and Parnet and discuss them one by one. Moreover, I suggest connecting the three types of lines to fashion, to the ways in which dress codes come about and change, and to fashion branding and marketing through the media. Although fashion brands and items of clothing are not individuals, brands are considered to possess human-like qualities and items of clothing are often seen as potential identity markers (Wheeler 2009: vi, KesselsKramer 2006: 5). Studying the lines in relation to what fashion may do, can, reveal where and how the transformative and creative forces that have the potential to change fashion can be found. Such a study can be regarded a *schizoanalysis* of how fashion functions, or as Deleuze and Parnet write: “[w]hat we call by different names – schizoanalyses, micro-politics, pragmatics, diagrammatism, rhizomatics, cartography – has no other object than the study of these lines, in groups or as individuals” (1987 [1977]: 125). A schizoanalysis of fashion hence allows for taking the dynamics involved in the way we relate to fashion into account.

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43 A similar description is being made in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980]: 215). I have, however, chosen to use the text by Deleuze and Parnet for reasons of conciseness and accessibility.

44 The ‘entangledness’ of the lines must be related to Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of assemblage (*agencement*) (2004 [1980]). For reasons of clarity and comprehensibility, however, I concentrate on examining this specific concept in the following chapter.
When we speak of ourselves as belonging to a certain category whether this is characterised by our profession, sex, or otherwise fixed and widely recognised, we are defining ourselves along the line that Deleuze and Parnet characterise as the line of rigid segmentarity. It is perhaps the most common and easily detectable manner of organising the complex society surrounding us into clear-cut segments. I am a woman, mother, lecturer, Dutch-Australian, Amsterdam-based individual, and as such ‘belong’ to different and already fixed territories in which I can find recognition and reassurance in relation to other individuals. Apart from the several groups one belongs to, the course of a life can also be divided into several segments; one is born, grows up to be a toddler, a child, a student, joins the workforce, and finally retires. We all recognise the segments used, as well as the apparent phases in life, and can map them through the way we speak about them: “Make sure you behave yourself at school”; “I do not speak about private matters when at work”, are just some examples. Deleuze and Parnet, furthermore, write about the three characteristics of what they call ‘molar lines of rigid segmentarity’ and although it is tempting to immediately connect rigid segmentary lines to fashion, perhaps developing a more complete picture before doing so enables a more thorough understanding.

First, the molar lines of rigid segmentarity create segments that depend on what Deleuze and Parnet name ‘binary machines’. These binary machines can be connected to varied aspects and points of view. Such as that I am a woman and not a man from a gendered point of view, and in the perspective of race I am white, not black, in that of age I am an adult, not a child. In a similar vein, from a perspective of subjectivity something is mine or not mine, and I function either in private or in public spheres. The binary machines thus operate in a dichotomist manner, dividing the segments in two opposed parts: one is either man or woman. What is more, Deleuze and Parnet write that the binary machines also operate diachronically and thus are capable of changing over time whilst offering us “successive choices; if you are neither black nor white, you are a half-breed” (Deleuze and Parnet 1987 [1977]: 128). In short, these binary machines ‘cut us up’ into clear segments that in their turn cut across each other, and if there is no suitable segment a new one is created.

Second, the clear-cut segments that are being created are characterised by various devices of power that code them and fix a certain segment
into a specific territory. Physical appearance can, for instance, be seen as the device of power that has coded the segments of man and woman, which are fixed in the territory of gender. Apart from devices of power, Deleuze and Parnet distinguish what they name ‘abstracts machines’ that overcode the diverse segments and regulate their relationship. Taking the different segments of male and female as an example, biology forms such an abstract machine that “organizes the dominant utterances and established order of a society” (Deleuze and Parnet 1987 [1977]: 129). Deleuze and Parnet follow Foucault in their referral to the apparatus of the State as the concrete assemblage that realises the abstract machine. It is thus not the State that overcodes the rigid segments, this is realised by abstract machines such as that of biology and its study of physical appearances mentioned above. The State, as Deleuze and Parnet write, is in an interdependent relationship with the abstract machines and realises its effectiveness in a social field. In continuing the example of male and female segments, the State apparatus strengthened the focus upon the separated male and female segments by, for instance, disqualifying women apt to vote till the late nineteenth century, or by regulating that public spaces must have separate toilets for men and women.

In a certain sense this second characteristic of rigid segments seems needlessly complicated. Why distinguish between devices of power, abstract machines and the apparatus of the State for detecting rather obvious – rigid and fixed – segments apparent within society? The answer may lie in the fact that Deleuze and Parnet write that they are not so much interested in how things are or should be ideologically, but all the more in how things are organised (Deleuze and Parnet 1987 [1977]: 145). The analysis of the organisation of how segments come about through the powers that code the diverse segments, the over-coding abstract machines and realisation by the State allows them to show the dynamics involved in these nevertheless fixed categorisations. Since the overcoding abstract machines ensure the organisation of dominant perspectives, they produce molar aggregates: “the segments which prevail over the others” (Deleuze and Parnet 1987 [1977]: 129). Deleuze and Parnet write that perhaps information sciences and the humanities are such overcoding machines that provide the State with their services.45

45 An important question that I will address in the next section is whether »
The final point Deleuze and Parnet make about rigid segmentarity is that all the lines involved *enclose a plane of organisation*. That is to say that there is no room for uncut, undetermined, unplaced or molecular fluxes. Under the regime of segmentarity everything is cut into segments that can be signified, pointed out, defined and consequently organised. The organisational aspect, furthermore, entails the *territorialisation* of the segments. They are given a fixed point and are addressed accordingly. As a matter of fact, the majority of custom practices work along the line of the organisation of segments. One finds the need to cut things, groups and subjects into clear and signifying segments. Yet Deleuze and Parnet seek to move beyond this rigid segmentarity in order to discover where mutations take place and creative transformation may occur. Therefore, the concepts of two more lines are created: lines of supple segmentarity and lines of flight. Before examining their characteristics and status, I suggest examining the lines of rigid segmentarity one can detect in fashion. The ‘map’ that can be drawn by following these lines of rigid segmentary will enable a perspective upon the way fashion is organised in its most rigid sense. Once an understanding of the powers that benefit from maintaining rigidity has been established, we also know more precisely what and where we would need to move beyond in order to encounter the more creative potential of fashion.

*Rigid Segmentarity in Fashion*

At first glance it is not difficult to relate the concept of rigid segmentation to the wearing of clothes and to the way fashion brands operate. One generally dresses differently for work than during the weekend. Men do not appear in dresses whereas women do and many people save their best clothing for special occasions. Dress codes hence pertain to the concept of rigid segmentarity; the divisions are clear, well adopted and understood by most people. Breaking with these codes in situations one is not expected to will most likely result in awkward reactions from onlookers. In addition, there is clothing which is regarded appropriate for certain

» one can detect abstract overcoding machines in the way fashion is being organised within society.
stages in life. Babies are often dressed in soft pastel colours, infants in louder ones, businessmen appear in blue, grey or black, and many brides dress in white. This is a territory in (and socio-cultural practice of) fashion where little to no changes occur. The question remains, however, whether these segments that can be recognised and related to the wearing of certain items for certain occasions or stages in life actually enclose a ‘plane of organisation’. One can dress babies or brides in black; some infants look like mini versions of their parents and do not wear bright colours; men may choose to wear a dress. Dress codes can hence also be decoded and new codes may come into being, as such dress codes are less rigid than they appear.

Apart from the coding of the segments, Deleuze and Parnet write about abstract machines that they regard as overcoding these segments:

The abstract machine of overcoding ensures the homogenization of different segments, their convertibility, their translatability, it regulates the passages from one side to the other, and the prevailing force under which this takes place.

(Deleuze and Parnet 1987 [1977]: 129)

If we now look at the fashion industry, we may question which ‘abstract machines’ overcode existing ideas related to fashion and what the prevailing force under which this takes place may be.

Regarding fashion brands, one notices that in stores the diversity of clothing on offer is divided into different sections. Take H&M, apart from creating the rather obvious segments that are labelled ‘women’, ‘men’ and ‘kids’, as well as the different size categories, the ‘kids’ section is divided into five further segments being ‘dressed up’ (divided in boys, girls and babies), ‘masquerade’ (dressing up clothes), ‘cartoons and comics’ (featuring Disney figures, Hello Kitty et cetera), ‘basics’ and ‘conscious- sustainable style’: segments that enable parents to make a selection they identify with for their children. In addition, there are sections for sportswear, business wear and nightwear. The manner in which clothing is displayed hence echoes Deleuze and Parnet’s example of rigid segmentarity.

Brands must differentiate themselves. As researched in the first part of this chapter, fashion brands communicate the value of the items of clothing grouped under the umbrella of the brand’s name through their brand identity. This brand identity encourages customers to identify themselves with a certain brand. As such, brands can once again be seen as creating rigid segments and occupying different territories, through their brand identities; both Nike and Adidas sell sportswear but invest their brands with different person-like characteristics and in doing so create separate segments. It is this distinguished segment that they encourage consumers to identify with. Fashion brands can hence be regarded as ‘abstract machines’ that overcode and reinforce the diverse segments through communicating their identity as an identity the wearer may adopt through the wearing of the branded clothing.

Take a simple white T-shirt. The design of such a T-shirt is not likely to stand out from all the other white T-shirts that are being offered in the market. Whether the logo printed on the inside of the T-shirt reads Target, Hugo Boss, or Comme des Garçons motivates respective prices on the attached tags ranging from €4.95 to €49.95 up to €99.95. Or as Malcolm Barnard writes, using a similar example: “[f]ashion, the ‘product itself’, takes a back seat in the account of fashion [...] and graphic design, the label, the packaging and advertising enable the shirt to communicate something that these members of cultural groups will be interested in, [...]” (2007: 514). Hence, a businessman that identifies with Hugo Boss’ branding (the graphic design, label, packaging and advertising) is likely to pay ten times more for a T-shirt than someone who does not identify with Hugo Boss. Likewise, the branding and label of Comme des Garçons might cause an architect to pay twenty times the amount of money for a plain white T-shirt. Brands thus overcode certain and distinct segments in order to enable fast and easily recognisable choices.


48 T-shirts for many fast fashion companies are produced in Bangladesh, as are those for Armani, Hugo Boss and Ralph Lauren (see: http://online.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323998604578567522527553976, accessed November 2014). Comme des Garçons’ T-shirts are made in Japan, which may account for some extra costs and better quality amounting to a connotation of luxury.
for their consumers.

What Barthes named ‘the fashion group’, consisting of professionals in fashion such as stylists, visual merchandisers, personal shoppers for celebrities and bloggers overcode the segmented lifestyles. Take the binary opposition of male and female clothing. A successive choice to these segments would be a more or less androgynous look, such as high fashion brands Saint Laurent (designer Hedi Slimane)⁴⁹ and Loewe (designer Jonathan Anderson) presented.⁵⁰ While Saint Laurent and Loewe overcode the concept of androgyny by presenting more feminine looks for men and the iconoclastic Le Smoking for women (Yves Saint Laurent), or unisex styles that can be worn by both sexes (Loewe), the trend is also overcoded by magazine and newspaper articles, blog entries and fast fashion stores, amongst others, that communicate the looks to a wider public.

Apart from the brands that overcode representational segments and take up their distinct territories, it remains a question where to detect the ‘apparatus of the State’ – the third aspect Deleuze and Parnet distinguish as characteristic of the rigid segmentary line. Even though the state will have its say when it comes to the designs of, for instance, police uniforms, it does not seem likely that the ‘apparatus of the State’ has much interest in the way brands, magazines and people choose to represent their identities. Although there may be economic aspects related to the fashion business of interest for the State, I here want to suggest the ‘apparatus of the State’ within fashion may be detected by questioning what or who constructs and maintains the identity segments in fashion. Deleuze and Parnet write that:

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⁴⁹ When Hedi Slimane was appointed as YSL creative director in 2012, he rebranded the brand as Saint Laurent. Le Smoking, however, is a design from before Slimane’s rebranding and as such part of the Yves Saint Laurent brand name.

[the abstract machine of overcoding] does not depend on the State, but its effectiveness depends on the State as the assemblage which realises it in a social field (for example, different monetary segments, different kinds of money have rules of convertibility, between themselves and with goods, which refer to a central bank as State apparatus).

(1987 [1977]: 129)

What then is fashion’s ‘bank’, the apparatus that ensures effective communication of societal segments? Could marketing strategy companies such as Nielsen and Facebook’s Atlas be regarded responsible for maintaining the rules of convertibility, which enables categorising people on the basis of their characteristics, stereotypes and behaviour?

Through adhering to market research all different types of commercial fashion brands that have been characterised for communicating their own brand identities with which consumers are encouraged to identify can be regarded as ‘enclosing a plane of organisation’. Theories of market segmentation, as put forth by amongst others, Philip Kotler and Kevin Keller are supportive of the segmentary plane of organisation (Kotler and Keller 2012). They suggest dividing the market “into groups of consumers or segments with distinct needs and wants” and in order to “develop the best marketing plans managers need to understand what makes each segment unique and different” (Kotler and Keller 2012: 213). Based on four major segmentation variables – geographic, demographic, psychographic and behavioural segmentation – Kotler and Keller create a detailed scheme consisting of twenty-five segmentation variables which can be used to identify consumer markets (see Figure 3.14 below).

**Major Segmentation Variables for Consumer Markets**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic region</th>
<th>Pacific Mountain, West North Central, West South Central, East North Central, East South Central, South Atlantic, Middle Atlantic, New England</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City or metro size</td>
<td>Under 5,000; 5,000-20,000; 20,000-50,000; 50,000-100,000; 100,000-250,000; 250,000-500,000; 500,000-1,000,000; 1,000,000-4,000,000; 4,000,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>Urban, suburban, rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>Northern, southern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic age</td>
<td>Under 6, 6-11, 12-17, 18-34, 35-49, 50-64, 64+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family size</td>
<td>1-2, 3-4, 5+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family life cycle</td>
<td>Young, single; young married, no children; young married, youngest child under 6; young, married, youngest child 6 or older; older, married with children; older, married, no children under 18; older, single; other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male, female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>Under $10,000; $10,000-$15,000; $15,000-$20,000; $20,000-$30,000; $30,000-$50,000; $50,000-$100,000; $100,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Professional and technical; managers, officials, and proprietors; clerical sales; craftspeople; forepersons; operatives; farmers; retired; students; homemakers; unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Grade school or less; some high school; high school graduate; some college; college graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>White, Black, Asian, Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation</td>
<td>Silent generation, Baby boomers, Gen X, Gen Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>North American, Latin American, British, French, German, Italian, Chinese, Indian, Japanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Class</td>
<td>Lower lowers, upper lowers, working class, middle class, upper middles, lower uppers, upper uppers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychographic</td>
<td>Culture-oriented, sports-oriented, outdoor oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lifestyle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Compulsive, gregarious, authoritarian, ambitious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral occasions</td>
<td>Regular occasion, special occasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>Quality, service, economy, speed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User status</td>
<td>Nonuser, ex-user, potential user, first-time user, regular user</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usage rate</td>
<td>Light user, medium user, heavy user</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty status</td>
<td>None, medium,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readiness stage</td>
<td>Unaware, aware, informed interested, desirous, intending to buy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward product</td>
<td>Enthusiastic, positive, indifferent, negative, hostile</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.14
‘Major Segmentation Variables for Consumer Markets’
Market segmentation hence divides the fashion market into – what Kotler and Keller call – well-defined slices (2012: 214). The segments they provide us with resonate perfectly with Deleuze and Parnet’s examples of rigid segmentation and cut up society in life phases. Where Deleuze and Parnet use the example “Now you’re not a baby anymore” (1987 [1977]: 124), Kotler and Keller have created a more detailed segmentation for practical use and distinguish seven different age segments under the heading of ‘Demographic age’ in the table above. It becomes clear Deleuze and Parnet’s idea of diachronical operation (if you are neither a nor b, then you are c) – caused by the binary machines that cut across segments – is omnipresent in Kotler and Keller’s segmentation. See, for instance, under the heading of ‘race’: if you are not White or Black, you must be either Asian or Hispanic.

Whereas brands may be characterised by their rigid segmentarity they do evolve and change. Items of (branded) clothing may have different meanings in different contexts. And lastly people do not always dress according to the ruling dress codes. Dressing oneself, the behaviour of brands, and the meanings adhered to items of clothing hence require a more dynamic system of interpretation than through that of rigid segmentarity alone. I therefore propose taking the other two lines into account, lines of supple segmentarity and lines of flight (lignes de fuite), in the following section, to incorporate the complex and transformative characteristics one may associate with getting dressed.

Territories, Supple Lines of Segmentation and Lines of Flight

At the start of the fourth chapter of Dialogues (1987 [1977]), Deleuze and Parnet briefly discuss the three lines mentioned separately, after which they describe the rigid segmentary line in detail. The natures of the second and third lines, however, are seemingly treated as one and then distinguished by “the movements of de-territorialisation and the processes of re-territorialisation” (Deleuze and Parnet 1987 [1977]: 134). Before it can be decided whether one is faced with a supple segment or an experimental transformation through a line of flight, one thus needs to study the processes of territorialisation, re-territorialisation, and de-territorialisation as described by Deleuze and Parnet.
As concluded above, rigid segmentary lines form a plane of *organisation* and thus erect a territory in which items of clothing are overcoded and categorised as fitting particular needs of consumers wanting to represent their identity through that of the brand. Kotler and Keller’s table of market segmentation proved to be a striking example of such a rigid organisation since it dealt with many – if not all – of the categorisations Deleuze and Parnet characterise as being rigid. Where Deleuze and Parnet do not explicitly criticise rigid segments,\(^{51}\) novelist and philosopher Luis de Miranda does not restrain himself when he writes:

> Each molar line corresponds to a territory in which a code can be applied at almost no cost. This behavioural code that obtains gratification without superhuman effort comforts human laziness in the idea that there must be something good in the exterior order, the hyper-normed society, that overcoding is the only way to organise a society.  
> (De Miranda 2013: 113)

De Miranda’s emphasis on ‘the exterior order’ and on a society preoccupied with normativity, can be convincingly connected with the representation of identities through market segmentation and perhaps may even explain the emergence of a Normcore trend as examined in the first part of this chapter. Furthermore, de Miranda’s emphasis on ‘gratification without effort’ can explain why large groups of people adhere to what marketing theory expects them to do and fit into the segments and territories nicely. Rather than experimenting with the un-coded, unfamiliar possibilities that fashion has to offer, many people actually conform to the exterior order erected by marketing theorists. Albeit, this does not

\(^{51}\) Deleuze and Parnet do, however, emphasise that each line has its dangers, and remark that the danger of rigid lines must be tied to power (*pouvoir*) (1987 [1977]: 138). Deleuze and Guattari, furthermore, write that “[t]he man of power will always want to stop the lines of flight, and to this end to trap and stabilize the mutation machine in the overcoding machine” (2004 [1980]: 252). One could then say that market research companies, such as Nielsen, and marketing managers, such as Kotler and Keller, assert their power and overcode and simplify the complexity of emerging affects to ensure them a place within the segments.
mean that people remain on one territory or within one segment: they may marry, move, see their income increase or decrease and they may even change gender. In doing so, they nevertheless operate along fixed territories that can be easily recognized and coded.

With regard to fashion, fixed territories can also be found in the way consumers are encouraged to see their clothing as representative for who they are. By encouraging consumers to switch or combine several different ‘identities’ the fashion industry nevertheless makes use of similarly fixed and overcoded territories. The transformation proposed is only creative in a superficial sense, what really happens is a shift from one overcoded territory to another. Encouraging a shifting of territories can be regarded the core business of the mainstream fashion industry: buy more, change styles, follow trends and express yourself along the categories that fashion brands provide you with. In order to discover more creative, less rigid ways in which fashion also operates we must thus move beyond these territories and may even escape them altogether. Hence, rather than concentrating on the molar lines and their territories, I would like to move on to two other aspects related to territorialisation: those of reterritorialisation and deterritorialisation. In doing so, I follow Deleuze and Parnet’s advice and will compare “the movements of deterritorialisation and the processes of reterritorialisation” (Deleuze and Parnet 1987 [1977]: 134).

As said above, Deleuze and Parnet characterize the supple lines and the lines of flight by their combined qualities. Distinctions can only be made after one has examined whether the line succeeds in undoing – or escaping from – the molar territory (deterritorialisation) or only moves away briefly to be reterritorialised and overcoded after all. The successful un-grounding or effective deterritorialisation is characteristic of the line of flight, whereas the supple line of segmentation creates a territory anew: reterritorialisation after relative deterritorialisation. Deleuze and Parnet thus characterize the lines for their effects, which can only be determined after they have become actualised. Or as they write: “[p]olitics is active experimentation, since we do not know which way a line is going to turn” (Deleuze and Parnet 1987 [1977]: 137).

Detecting deterritorialisation in the dynamics of fashion would thus entail looking for those instances in which the coding and overcoding of identity categories experiences a mutation. A supple line, or line of flight
– depending on the effectiveness of the deterritorialisation – is at work
creating new expressions through dress that have not been overcoded
(yet) by fashion’s abstract machine: commercial fashion communication
channels (brands, magazines, celebrities, visual merchandisers, stylists).
A clarifying and concrete example of supple lines that deterritorialise and
consequently reterritorialise is found in the processes of appropriation
or **bricolage** (Lévi-Strauss, 1962a, 1962b; Clarke, 1976; Hebdige, 1979).
Most directly related and redirected to fashion is John Clarke’s partial
and eclectic use of Lévi-Strauss’ concept of **bricolage**:52

Together, object and meaning constitute a sign, and, within any one cul-
ture, such signs are assembled, repeatedly, into characteristic forms of
discourse. However, when the *bricoleur* re-locates the significant object
in a different position within that discourse, using the same overall rep-
ertoire of signs, or when the object is placed within a different total en-
semble, a new discourse is constituted, a different message conveyed.
(Clarke, 2006 [1976]: 149)

Both Clarke and Dick Hebdige’s adaptation of Lévi-Strauss’ concept of
bricolage is useful for examining the dynamics involved in respectively
subcultural approbation and approbation of style. When American
actress Katie Holmes appeared wearing what looked like her husband
Tom Cruise’s jeans in 2008, for instance, she deterritorialised the jeans
from her spouses body and reterritorialised it on her own. Some young
women picked up the idea and also started wearing their boyfriends’
jeans. The jeans are oversized, baggy and, whereas they signified nothing
remarkable while they were being worn by a male, they might now signify
comfort, belonging, or independence from female stereotypical dress.53

52 Clarke refers to Lévi-Strauss’ concept as follows: “the re-ordering and
re-contextualisation of objects to communicate fresh meanings, within a
total system of significances, which already includes prior and sedimeted
meanings attached to the objects used” (Clarke 1979: 149). Lévi-Strauss, how-
ever, emphasises mythical thought as bricolage and how through language
“ideological castles” are built, “out of the debris of what was once a social
discourse” (Lévi-Strauss 1966 [1962b]: 14).

I would, however, like to take the concept of bricolage one step further and include the extended concepts of re-appropriation or counter-bricolage as coined by communication and cultural studies scholars Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright (2001: 58-70). Sturken and Cartwright use the term ‘counter-bricolage’ to indicate “the way in which advertisers and fashion designers have become highly skilled at designing and packaging the style of subcultures and selling them back to the mainstream public” (2001: 69). In continuing the example of the boyfriend jeans, one can use the idea of counter-bricolage to indicate the vast range of jeans that are marketed as being boyfriend jeans, whereas they have never been worn by, nor were originally created for males to wear. Apart from the deterritorialisation of the original jeans that were taken from the boyfriend and consequently reterritorialised on the female body, commercial fashion industry has carried out a process of counter-bricolage and therewith has created a new, fixed and overcoded territory on the plane of organisation apparent in fashion.

The examples related to the boyfriend jeans above indicate that firstly the girlfriends take the jeans out of the binary oppositional and rigid segments by appropriating them for their own bodies. They succeed in ‘suppling’ the segments by means of deterritorialising the pair of jeans from their original male position within the organisation of fashion. This deterritorialisation of the pair of jeans, however, was relative (or migrant) for it was compensated by the reterritorialisation on the female body. In addition, the jeans were territorialised by the overcoding abstract machines – the fashion group – into fashion when they were re-appropriated by the fashion industry, labelled, fixed and overcoded as being ‘in fashion’ and sold to the masses. The dynamics in which a deterritorialised and decoded item of clothing is ultimately territorialised by the fashion industry ensures a constant renewal of what is regarded ‘in fashion’.

A similar example of lines of flight that find themselves reterritorialised onto supple – and possibly even rigid – segments can be found in the formation of subcultures within fashion. According to Deleuze and Parnet all segmentations emerge from what were originally lines of flight “barred under a despotic regime” (1988 [1977]: 137). This suggests that before a subculture is identified, named and associated with certain attributes and signs, it appears as a spontaneous and chaotic departure
from what we knew hitherto. Or, as Hebdige writes in relation to the punk subculture:

Punk reproduced the entire sartorial history of post-war working-class youth cultures in 'cut up' form, combining elements which had originally belonged to completely different epochs. There was a chaos of quiffs and leather jackets, brothel creepers and winkle pickers, plimsolls and paka macs, moddy crops and skinhead strides, drainpipes and vivid socks, bum freezers and bovver boots – all kept ‘in place’ and ‘out of time’ by the spectacular adhesives: the safety pins and plastic clothes pegs, the bondage straps and bits of string which attracted so much horrified and fascinated attention.
(Hebdige 1979: 26)

The ‘cut up’ form and the chaos mentioned by Hebdige, combined with styles that had belonged to opposite signification categories indicate that the group was – at least when Punk started out in the 1970s – dynamic, open to transformation and thus, although recognisable, not easily defined. A similar description of a subculture has been put forth by fashion designer Deborah Lloyd (1988: 104). Lloyd researches the Casuals, a mainly British subculture consisting of stylishly dressed football hooligans. She comes to the conclusion that the Casuals cannot be pin-pointed through the clothes they wear, since ongoing changing of brands, styles and details lie at the core of the movement: “As soon as more than the few catch on to this, the initiators change to another ‘fad’” (Ibid.). In addition, the Casuals are secretive about their dress codes and they cannot be defined through their apparel because, despite them being in constant style wars, they appear as an undifferentiated mass to the untrained eye.

Deleuze and Guattari name such dynamic groups – that one cannot define by the sharing of fixed beliefs, set appearances, or adherence to more or less rigid behavioural codes – subject groups (2004 [1972]: 71, 72). Unlike subjugated groups – in which “what a member is refers back to a distinct identity or substance [– subject groups] are not governed by an image or identity” (Colebrook, 2002: 60). The distinction between subcultures that more or less adhere to fixed and easily recognised dress codes to which a new member would need to adapt, and more dynamic subcultures that can be chiefly characterized by ungraspable
change, reveals a more complex dynamics within the field of what one calls subcultures. I would like to suggest that subjugated subcultures are characterized by segmentation, whether this is rigidly or more supply, they construct a territory to which members must adhere. Or as Hebdige writes: “as soon as the original innovations which signify ‘subculture’ are translated into commodities and made generally available, they become ‘frozen’” (1979: 96). Contrarily, subject groups operate on a line of flight, constantly deterritorialising and therefore their ways of dressing are untranslatable into commodities that can be made readily available for purposes of consumption. Subject groups, such as the early Punk movement or the Casuals described above, actively resist subordination to identifiable segmentation and show lines of flight at work in fashion.

The fashion industry, however, is constantly in search for new expressions to overcode. Punk style was discovered by commercial parties and hence overcoded as early as 1979, when advertisements for “punk clothing, badges, and T-shirts” started appearing in music papers such as NME and Sounds (Cartledge 2005: 68). Today one can purchase a The Ramones T-shirt for six-month old babies. As such, punk has become an overcoded style segment which displays none of the horrification and fascination Hebdige described at the time (Hebdige 1979: 26). Although there is little expression to be found in Normcore dress, even such a ‘youth culture’ has been picked up and commercialised, as was described in the first part of this chapter. Many potential lines of flight hence become swiftly reterritorialised unto supple or rigid segments.

A line of flight must, however, not be regarded as a fleeing from more or less segmented fashion identities. One, in addition, need not think in terms of replacement, reaction, or revolution when trying to grasp a rupture; when examining what an effective deterritorialising line – a line that wanders, creates and transforms rather than customises – does. And lastly, flight is not to be regarded an idealist concept of fashion, as expressed by, for instance, the current focus upon fashion and sustainability. See, for instance, Dialogues (1977) where Deleuze and Parnet write:

One might say in a certain sense that what is primary in a society are the lines, the movements of flight. Far from being a flight from the social, far from being utopian or even ideological, these constitute the social field,
trace out its graduation and its boundaries, the whole of its becoming.
(Deleuze and Parnet 1987 [1977]: 135)

By writing that the movements of flight are primary, Deleuze and Parnet emphasise that segmentation is effected from those lines of flight and not vice versa. Perhaps ‘flight’ is best characterised for its tenuousness, which consequently condenses and produces fluid, supple segments from which solid (molar), rigid segments may result. The process, however, does not entail a one way, linear movement. Rigid segments constantly change, lines of flight can be absent or suddenly come into effect and supple segments are dynamic. Deleuze and Parnet write that flight is not an anti-movement nor is it to be regarded as an ideal; it is what underlies and underscores the social field. Rigid and supple segments hence are the *result* of organising, territorialising, and fixing a ground that is open-ended, limitless and potentially perilous.

Such a perspective upon fashion does not only describe its dynamics well, it also enables one to distinguish where changes in fashion come about, how there may be ruptures (punk) and new fashion’s invented. Even though we seem to experience very little truly new designs in our every-day wear, a shoe may still function as a hat (Elsa Schiaparelli 1937-38), coats may be made out of wigs (Martin Margiela, 2009), dresses can be created out of meat (Franc Fernandez for Lady Gaga, 2010), or worn upside down (Viktor & Rolf, 2006). These examples are, of course, drawn from existing fashion designers and presented here to illustrate that lines of flight are present in avant-garde fashion. Designers often transform the ideas of what fashion can be and supply the public with previously unthought-of designs.

Within a more everyday sense of fashion, as that which is worn on the streets, one, however, does not come across many of such extravagant designs. People in general seem to settle for items of clothing that comply to a code of what is regarded acceptable, rather than experimenting with what wigs, meat or shoes may do when placed on the body in an unexpected manner. One could say the radical designs created along the principles of lines of flight are toned down, or overcoded into items of clothing that do fall within what society at large accepts and expects. On the other hand, the public does not seem to make much use of fashions’ potential and seems happy to remain within the representational
segmentations and overcoded styles offered by the fashion industry. As Deleuze and Guattari phrase it:

We flee from flight, rigidify our segments, give ourselves over to binary logic; the harder they have been on one segment, the harder we will be on another; we reterritorialise on anything available; the only segmentary we know is molar [...] 
(Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980]: 250)

Conclusion

Fashion revolves around representation in a fourfold manner. When getting dressed in the morning we firstly think about how we are to represent ourselves for the occasions the day will bring – unless a uniform is compulsory and there remains little else to think about than grooming oneself. As researched in this chapter, we dress out of habit and this habit is the result of cultural conventions and dress codes we generally do not think about extensively. As such, most people have internalised conventions and what is regarded normal is experienced as natural. Not thinking about how others will perceive us on the basis of what we represent through the clothes we are wearing, involves the risk of being ridiculed, scorned or even excluded. Dressing inappropriately for job interviews, for instance, may have crucial effects upon one’s future. People may exclude others on the basis of what they wear, as can be noticed in the way we may be repelled by a homeless person who has many other worries than thinking about what to wear, but also in more subtle ways where children at school are teased and bullied because of their clothing. We, obviously, do judge people by the way they look and hardly stop to think about what made us do so.

Mainstream fashion brands, secondly, further encourage us to think in representatives with which they overcode their items of clothing. They offer a wide range of different options to choose from, disguise themselves with people-like qualities that we will recognise as representative for whom we would befriend or like to be and represent themselves
through a brand identity that must ensure we recognise our ‘friends’ at all times. They encourage us to regard ourselves as being like them (a brand), which consequently can be managed by carefully maintaining an identity for which they will cater. These fashion brands want their customers to buy more than they would perhaps need to feel comfortable, even for representational purposes, in their clothes. They do so by offering us successive choices of items of clothing that may give the idea that we can represent ourselves anew, but which are factually mere variations of similar themes. As such, the fashion industry actively promotes over-consumption on the basis of a myth of change, whereas they are mainly offering a renewal of what we already had stored in our closets anyway.

Closely related to mainstream fashion brands the fashion group (magazine editors, stylists, advisors, bloggers et cetera) forms the third party involved in reinforcing and encouraging representational practices through overcoding. By addressing individuals as beings of a certain style, or combinations of styles, they further induce representational thought with their clientele and as such serve as the perfect ‘soldiers’ of fashion brands. However, perhaps it is the fourth member of fashion’s informational system that must be approached with the fiercest criticism. The increasing influence of not only market research companies such as Nielsen and Atlas, I have mentioned in this chapter, but also the growing influence of what new media theorists name Big Data on solely regarding people as representational beings through the monitoring of their online behaviour can perhaps be treated as a road we should not want to travel. Although critics such as danah boyd and Kate Crawford emphasise that behavioural networks (that which we do online) are not the same as personal networks (the true friends we exchange our thoughts and fears with) the unaware contribution that we make with every swipe, mouse-click, or Facebook-like to grasping us as consumers of a certain kind revolves around what Mirko Tobias Schäfer has named ‘implicit participation’ (boyd and Crawford 2012: 671, Schäfer 2011: 51-53). Without being aware of our contribution, production is exchanged for profit and where our online activities are monitored so that companies may make personal suggestions we did not realise yet would appeal.

Deleuze, however, emphasised that representational practices revolve around a single centre which lead to false depths (Deleuze 2004 [1968]: 67). We, as I have demonstrated in the two former chapters, are not
merely unchanging individuals with an identity that can be represented. Such an identity is essentially a social construct, a myth that does not take into account what more there is to our lives. It cannot motivate nor explain why we are moved and by what exactly, who we befriend and what makes us do so. We are, however, increasingly faced with and surrounded by commercial practices within the field of fashion that encourage us to think of ourselves as brands with a more or less unique identity that in return may be represented by fashion brands. I would therefore like to emphasise that the practices performed by the fashion industry, I described in this chapter, are in fact part of fashion’s false depths; they mediate fashion’s cash flow, but mobilise and move nothing. The mainstream fashion industry, moreover, actively reinforces – overcodes – the view upon fashion as a discursive and representational practice, whilst encouraging the changing of discourses and representations frequently, but never beyond representation. Since the majority of consumers favour frequent change for little money, the mechanisms of the fast fashion industries have contributed to the concept of disposable fashion, the blank expressionless uniform of ‘normal dress’, and to a society which accepts small changes in dress, but seems no longer interested in making use of fashion’s deterritorialising potential.

Viewing fashion through Deleuze’s prism enables adopting a perspective that on the one hand allows one to focus upon the pure difference that precedes the concept of identity and representation. On the other hand, his and Parnet’s concepts of coding, decoding, and overcoding enable one to develop a perspective upon fashion’s dynamic nature in which meanings and representations are also undone, carried away and altered. I therefore suggest moving beyond ‘a delineated fashion’, and leaving the molar, representational segments of fashion behind in the following chapter, in order to examine where the cracks that show a breaking with representation – and not in the least with exploitation of both the environment and workers, and a relentless focus upon the ego – may occur.