Fashion beyond identity: The three ecologies of dress

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Citation for published version (APA):

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The Three Ecologies

The task of schizoanalysis is that of tirelessly taking apart egos and their presuppositions; liberating the prepersonal singularities they enclose and repress; mobilizing the flows they would be capable of transmitting, receiving, or intercepting; establishing always further and more sharply the schizzes and the breaks well below conditions of identity; and assembling the desiring-machines that countersect everyone and group everyone with others.

Deleuze and Guattari (2004 [1972]: 396)

As examined throughout this dissertation, Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical concepts can be characterised as inseparable conceptual pairs of which one orders, measures, fixes and organises whilst the other extends, opens and expands the notions established by the former. The conceptual pairs of smooth and striated spaces, molecular and molar realms, minoritarian and majoritarian forces appear in mixture, are entangled and as such exist in productive assemblages that determine their functioning. Whilst ‘What fashion may do’ is coded through organising its matter into a pragmatic system, it is at the same time open to a limitless potential through experimenting and creative lines of flight and deterritorialising forces that disrupt established notions of what fashion’s capacities may be. In addition, ‘What fashion may say’ is being over-coded by erecting semiotic systems of signs that determine its expression whereas molecular and nomadic forces destabilise assigned meanings.
By developing a perspective upon fashion through Deleuze and Guattari’s ontological philosophy, this dissertation proposes an analysis of fashion in which its dynamic, ambiguous and open character is connected with its affective and signifying traits. Apart from predominantly examining fashion through a homogeneous prism in which representation of identity becomes the overarching structure of thought, I have argued it may also be regarded through a heterogeneous perspective in which no specific or dominant organising principle prevails. As described in the former chapter, it is an examination of fashion through the latter perspective which may contribute an insight that delves not solely into the scope of fashion’s ethical and environmental problems, but also facilitates a discussion of how these can be connected to the relentless focus upon the ego that often determines fashion’s theoretical and practical focus.

As the title of this dissertation suggests, it has been my contention that extending our thinking about what fashion may do beyond the limits of representation and identification may open up a perspective upon its infinite and experimental affectual qualities as well as contribute to the fully scoped mapping of its socio-ethical and environmental problems. Viewing fashion through a heterogeneous prism enables one to regard the machinic character of the involved elements, entities and ethics which lead to a perspective in which overcodings by fashion brands can be dismantled as offering ‘false depths’ revolving around representation as the all-important character of fashion. In this concluding chapter, I will therefore seek to further open up traditional and representative models of fashion and examine how these can be extended and expanded by relating Guattari’s *The Three Ecologies* (2000 [1989]) to fashion’s ethical and environmental problems as well as to its affective potential.

The aforementioned text by Guattari opens with the following sentences: “The Earth is undergoing a period of intense techno-scientific transformations. If no remedy is found, the ecological disequilibrium this has generated will untimely threaten the continuation of life on the planet’s surface” (2000 [1989]: 27). Two and a half decades later,

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1 Also see Figure 4.1, *The Tetravalence of Assemblages*, as presented in the former chapter.
politicians are still to reach universal agreement as to which goals they will legally bind themselves to in an effort to prevent further disastrous climate changes occurring in the future. The focus lies upon reducing greenhouse gasses to halt global warming – of which carbon dioxide is the most important. Although the emission of carbon dioxide must be linked to fashion through the production, transportation and selling of clothing in shops that are heated, there are many more issues at hand that become apparent when we critically examine the fashion industries, as I have demonstrated in the previous chapter. Life on earth is not only endangered by global warming but also by polluted wastewaters, contaminated soil, infected animals and ultimately poisoned humans.

It is not only the environment that urgently needs protection from further destruction; an unethical approach in which Western consumption is regarded more important than the conditions of workers in developing countries (which is as much part of the deadlock with regard to the climate conferences as it is in relation to fashion), and a relentless focussing upon fashion as a means to represent identities prove to be problematic. Guattari underlines the incapability of political groupings to understand the full implications of the issues at stake when he emphasises that they “are generally content to simply tackle industrial pollution […] from a purely technocratic perspective” (2000 [1989]: 28). The core business of climate conferences revolves around reducing carbon emissions by decreasing the usage of fossil fuels and increasing awareness with the people. For more profound social changes to take place, obviously more is needed.

Guattari coins the term ‘ecosophy’ in order to introduce a thinking in which social, mental and environmental issues are regarded as operating in an interconnected, rhizomatic structure (2000 [1989]: 28). Only the implementation of fundamental changes in social, mental and


environmental attitudes may arrest the destruction we are inevitably faced with, as is Guattari’s contention. In this dissertation I have elucidated how a radical change of our mental stance towards fashion has the potential to change our social attitudes regarding fashion from a means to represent our identities with to viewing it as being in an affective and creative connection to our bodies. In order to arrive here, I have demonstrated that in fashion theory, society at large, in particular fashion branding and marketing, people are constantly reminded of – and thrown back upon – a thinking in representations. Rather than examining fashion’s capacities through one overarching system such as identity, profitability or global warming, I have argued that viewing it through Deleuze and Guattari’s heterogeneous perspective of interconnected, rhizomatic machines enables one to view both the destructive as well as productive processes and forces one may relate to fashion.

In Chapter 1, *Fashioning Identities*, we saw that fashion theory displays a thinking in which the focus predominantly lies upon the ways in which one may use fashion to construct and communicate a desired identity. Whereas Elizabeth Wilson’s idea of fashion as ‘unspeakably meaningful’ may still stand, it has been my endeavour to create a philosophy of fashion that allows one to think the unspeakable. Apart from extending fashion theory beyond notions of ambiguous identity performances, and as such attempting to rethink traditional notions of selfhood, it has been my contention that doing so may not only enrich our concept of fashion but may also contribute to resolving the ethical and environmental problems associated with the current methods in which we engage with fashion.

In the second chapter of this dissertation, *Undressing Plato*, I therefore examined those philosophers that encourage a thinking beyond ‘being’ and representation thereof, in order to arrive at a concept of fashion that is open-ended, creative and emphasises the limitless potential which accounts for its ambiguous and affectual qualities. Moving beyond representation opens up a perspective of fashion that challenges traditional notions in which expression (What fashion may say) receives foremost attention. With David Hume, I have argued and elucidated that sensational experiences precede and inform rational concepts. Friedrich Nietzsche encouraged an examination of fashion’s innovative aesthetical forces that may challenge existing concepts and thinking about dress. Gilles Deleuze
and Félix Guattari provided me with the conceptual pair of the smooth and the striated, which lead to emphasising the interconnectedness of fashion’s creative and representational forces.

Henceforth, after extending the concept of fashion with what one may name its limitless and open-ended ‘breeding ground’ that accounts for change, ambiguity and unlimited innovation, I turned to questioning how a perspective upon fashion’s representational qualities became to prevail over its affective aspects. In the third chapter I coined the concept of a ‘delineated fashion’ to indicate the limited potential of fashion as a representational phenomenon and demonstrated that fashion’s branding and marketing mechanisms may be regarded as emphasising and maintaining such a perspective. In addition, confining fashion to its representational aspects adheres to the capitalist value system which, according to Guattari, tends to flatten out all other potential forms of aesthetic creativity (Guattari 2000 [1989]: 64, 65). He emphasises that we are being “manipulated through the production of a collective, mass media subjectivity” (Guattari 2000 [1989]: 33) and are in need of what he names a mental ecology.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Clothed Connections, an alternative mode of thinking through connections and their potentiality or more precisely, potential machinic assemblages, reveals the transformative processes apparent in both fashion’s ecological and ethical relations as well as enabling an alternative for a dominantly capitalistic subjective approach to fashion. In other words, by taking the ego out of fashion, ecology and ethics are also bound to change since it is no longer solely for representative functions that we dress. Creative experiments, interdisciplinary research and speculative aesthetics in which representation of identity is no longer the main point of focus reveal the potential of creating new connections, as was the case with Suzanne Lee’s BioCouture. Furthermore, realisation of all the machinic assemblages and their related processes at work whilst items of clothing are created may awaken social responsibility and create awareness for the idea that we need to pay more and buy less. Lastly, and more difficult to accomplish, is to encourage politicians, fashion professionals and consumers to start thinking about potential alternative approaches and innovation of industries centred around the affective relations one can experience with fabric and clothing, which move beyond those common in an advanced capitalistic perspective.
With this dissertation it has therefore been my aim to initiate a different stance towards fashion, and as such I have also contributed to setting wheels in motion for much welcome and needed changes within society and politics. As said earlier, I do not think people will walk about clad in Lee’s outfits grown from fungi, sugar and green tea any day soon. However, her still largely non-utilitarian experiments are not merely utopian and do provide us with an outlook upon potential alternatives that operate below conditions of overcoding, identity politics, and problem solving technologies in fashion. In addition, I see the need to expand my thoughts on the basis of the findings presented and thus suggest concluding this dissertation by examining existing practices that are adjacent to my views of a fashion that is connective, transformative and affective, which may indicate where we can begin to start changing our actions. In the following, I will therefore connect Guattari’s mental, social and environmental ecologies to those experimental and creative innovations in fashions that are already here.

**Fashion and Mental Ecology**

Rather than complying with the overcodings suggested to us by the fashion industry, which leads to serial representations of identities through fashion, Guattari’s *mental ecology* advocates a perspective upon subjectivity that includes and liberates singularities (2000 [1989]: 12). As emphasised by Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense*, singularities are not necessarily tied to individuals or persons, but can be regarded as the impersonal and pre-individual potential that *produce* ideas of self and ‘I’ through actualising them (Deleuze 1990 [1969]: 103). Hence, for Deleuze and Guattari a subject is constantly in the making, or becoming, and involved with an ‘outside’ of singularities which overflows representation.\(^4\)

\(^4\) Also see Gabriel Tarde’s idea of having properties or relations rather than being someone (Chapter 1), and David Hume’s idea of a subject as a bundle of perceptions (Chapter 2). These two concepts resemble Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of subjectivity by emphasising the constantly changing constellation and relation with outer events and intensities, rather than suggesting a stable, unchanging and interior unity and concept of self.
These singularities are processual and event-centred, and as such can be both unique to a particular body as well as bear the potential of connecting everyone with everyone.

Thinking about yourself as belonging to a certain style category in dress or identifying with a mainstream fashion brand obscures a perspective upon productive singularities also present. The manner in which Dick Hebdige describes the emergence of the British punk subculture in the extremely hot summer of 1976 perhaps provides one with the range and extensive qualities of the singularities that may be involved (1979). Apart from the extremely long heatwave, which turned into a drought in late August of the year, Hebdige discusses the large number of musical influences ranging from rock and roll to soul and reggae that were combined in punk (1979: 25). In addition, he describes the influence of the Caribbean Notting Hill Carnival, traditionally a happy and harmonious festival, which exploded into violence and lead to riots between the angry youth and the police. Hebdige writes “Apocalypse was in the air and the rhetoric of punk was drenched in apocalypse” and therewith indicates that the birth of the early British punk subculture was the result of several elements that occurred together. Dressing in what Hebdige names punk’s reproduction of “the entire sartorial history of post-war cultures in ‘cut up’ form” can then be regarded for the combination of ‘liberated singularities’, rather than representations (Hebdige 1979: 26).

In a more individual manner, one can also rethink the notions of selfhood presented to us by fashion’s commercial branding and marketing and choose to focus on the physical connections we experience when wearing clothes. In addition, one can note and reflect upon the changing relations our body, the items of clothing worn and the surroundings undergo and can potentially create, rather than subordinating them to the idea that what we wear is representative of who we are or pretend to be. Replacing identity and representation thereof through fashion by heterogeneously thinking about intensive connections furthermore enables one to take the ‘I’ out of fashion that has become so predominant in western commercial communication. Hence changing the attire of our thought may very well enable a change in the fashion system as it is currently perceived and practiced.

In this light the designs by Canadian professor and fashion designer Ying Gao come to mind. Gao uses wearable technology in her garments
to mobilise a view upon the perception of the garment itself. Whereas we commonly relate to clothing insofar as it represents us, Gao questions and estranges this relation by “mobilis[ing] flows [a garment] would be able of transmitting, receiving or intercepting” regardless of the wearer (Deleuze and Guattari [2004] 1972: 369). Her 2011 interactive project *Playtime* for instance features two dresses with implemented wearable technology that prevents them from being photographed. The garments react to the light of a camera flash and appear blurred or over-exposed and clear photographic recording is obstructed.

Gao’s 2006 *Walking City* project features three dresses of which the pleated fabric changes shape when the inflatable pneumatic technology sown into the fabric comes into contact with moving air. And her 2013 project titled *(No)where (Now)here* consists of two dresses of which the embedded eye tracking technology activates the photoluminescent thread to light up and move when a spectator gazes at the dress. All examples of Gao’s work presented above are what Deleuze names “objects of an essential encounter rather than of recognition” (Deleuze 2004 [1968]: 356), and as such provide us with a perspective upon, and an experience of, an experimental fashion that moves beyond representational categories. Furthermore, Gao’s dresses materialise immaterial assets such as a gaze, light, and air. And lastly, they do not predominantly revolve around

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5 This project was inspired by Jacques Tati’s 1967 film *Playtime*, which “presents a world where modern architecture and urban surveillance are overtly present, while using stylistic techniques to fool the viewer, such as *trompe l’oeil* and mirror effects” (from: http://yinggao.ca/eng/interactifs/playtime/, accessed November 2014).


7 “The best word to desinate these [objects]”, Deleuze writes, “is undoubtly that forged by Samuel Butler: *erewhon*” (Deleuze 2004 [1968]: 356). “Butler’s *Erewhon* seems to us not only a disguised no-where but a rearranged now-where” (Deleuze 2004 [1968]: 380, n7). Perhaps Gao’s designs can also be regarded as coming from no particular place, but, more importantly, empha-sise the fact that they are suddenly, and under influence from external forces, there for a little while.
the representation of the wearer, but rather connect him or her to outer intensities such as those of a look, luminescence or wind.

With Deleuze and Guattari one can distinguish between wearable technologies that emphasise the subjectivity of the wearer and those that – like Gao’s designs – surpass such a subjectivity and experiment with what future fashions may do in relation to external influences. Whereas the latter extends fashion and relates it to an infinitive and inventive ‘outside’, the former emphasises a biometric stance towards fashion and processes happening within or upon the body. Monitoring bodily processes through wearable technology largely centres on solving problems rather than creating new expressive qualities for fashion. Silver infused socks that overcome unwanted body odours to occur, for instance, reinforce a focus upon the self, rather than extending fashion’s expressive potential. In addition, the idea that wearable technologies that monitor the body may also turn it into a database that can be used to define, interpret and control individuals and society entails a return to representative identities.\(^8\)

Wearable technology that monitors the body may very well control what Guattari names the ‘dominant capitalistic subjectivity’ of the near future (Guattari 2000 [1989]: 68). In other words, it can operate much like the ways in which data collecting agencies work today by monitoring online behaviour to grant people a segmented subjectivity. It is not difficult to imagine that measuring movement, heartbeat and temperature, and offering consumers wearable solutions for improvement of their bodies, is of interest for increasing profits for the corporations that develop the technologies. As mentioned in the former chapter, new media scholar Susan Elizabeth Ryan has analysed such corporative motivations for implementing wearable technology. She argues that Philips’s *New Nomads* (1997–2000) prototypes, of which some designs feature technologies that monitor the wearer’s health or location, display a controlling ambition (Ryan 2014: 116). Furthermore, Ryan argues that corporate industries such as Philips, Google (Glass), and Apple (Watch) are motivated by commandeering new markets, rather than experimenting with affective

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and spiritual potential.  

Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton, translators of Guattari’s *The Three Ecologies*, take on a similar stance towards new technologies when they write that “[n]ew technological and scientific advances that could be used to liberate human potential remain instead in the service of a capitalist drive for profitability” (in Guattari 1989: 5). Whilst Pindar and Sutton suggest new technologies could be used to contribute to help the poor and vulnerable, one may also exchange the word ‘human’ for ‘fashion’ in the quotation above. That is to say that leaving the implementation of wearable technology in corporate hands rather than in those of imaginative designers entails a focus upon profit and problem solving, and a return to fashion’s representative function rather than expanding fashion’s creative potential.

In order to make creative usage of the ways in which technology can enhance fashion’s affective potential it is therefore in the interest of designers to combine their creative design skills with the possibilities offered by an ever expanding field of technological developments that succeed in overcoming a commercial subjective emphasis in dress. In addition, it becomes possible to replace the idea of ‘I want it now, because it makes *me* look good’ with a mental stance in which fashion is regarded for its connective ideas, affects and relations in which expression and experiment appear as important as those of the workers that have created the garments one wears. I therefore propose examining the manner in which Guattari’s mental ecology is related to the social ecology in the following.

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9 An interesting example in which new technologies and affective and spiritual qualities are combined can, for instance, be found in the work of Dutch designer Daan Roosegaarde. Together with fashion designer Anouk Wipprecht he created *Intimacy White* and *Intimacy Black*, two dresses made out of “opaque smart e-foils that become increasingly transparent on close and personal encounters with people”, form: https://www.studioroosegaarde.net/project/intimacy/info/, accessed March 2015.
Although regarding fashion as more than a means to represent one’s identity can be (and actually also is) done individually, more than scattered dissidents are required for a different attitude towards fashion to be adopted at large. Guattari therefore emphasises that a social ecosophy in which people work together is required to counter consumerism as it is experienced today. Such a reconfiguration of social relations does not stand by itself but is obviously related to the mental reinvention of subjectivity described above (Guattari 2000 [1989]: 34). Guattari writes that in order to cultivate dissensus with the current capitalist system we are in need of ‘dissident subjectivities’ that reject consumerism (Guattari 2000 [1989]: 50). In relation to fashion, this dissidence was perhaps most obviously felt during the emerge of the punk subculture and its anti-establishment expressions in the 1970s. There are, however, more contemporary examples to be found in which the dominant capitalistic subjectivities offered by the fashion industry are collectively undermined.

One may say that the concept of fashion has become a label herself, printed on helmets, diaries, and pink toys, and deployed by bloggers that primarily seem to want to display themselves as being ‘in fashion’.10 Fashion as such can be regarded as revolving around the representation of being someone in fashion. Chief editors of magazines, bloggers at fashion weeks, and celebrities on red carpets decide what fashion is through their appearances, influence and comments. As examined in Chapter three, the fashion industry encourages consumers to identify with their brands and represent being fashionable through frequently changing styles which are, however, mostly successive changes of existing themes.

During the past years, criticism is being expressed towards this dominant image of fashion; designers and other fashion professionals

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10 See, for instance Suzy Menkes 2013 article *The Circus of Fashion* is which she writes that bloggers, unlike journalists, judge fashion according to their own personal taste. “Look at me wearing this dress! Look at these shoes I have found! Look at me loving this outfit in 15 different images” (see: http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/02/10/the-circus-of-fashion/, accessed January 2015).
are increasingly distancing themselves from the concept of fashion as described above. Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto, for instance, said he no longer wants to be regarded a fashion designer after his 2013 ready-to-wear show in Paris:

*I am a dressmaker; I am not a fashion designer. From 10 to 15 years ago the fashion market became shit. My role is to get the value of clothing back for everyone: cutting, draping, tailoring. There was no real theme to this collection, I just wanted to make dresses, to tailor and enjoy the value of clothing.*

(Yamamoto interviewed by Furniss, 2013)

During that same year at the Fall New York Fashion Week, online vintage retailer Byronesque launched their #outofhand campaign by spreading posters throughout New York with quotes by Andy Warhol, Vivienne Westwood, Johnny Rotten, and singer Ian Curtis, whose 1979 song *Disorder* featured the lyrics “It’s getting faster, moving faster now, it’s getting out of hand” that inspired the title of their campaign.

Curtis’ words were not directed towards the fashion business at the time, however in the context of a fashion week and presented alongside Warhol’s “I never think that people die. They just go to shopping malls”; Rotten’s “Your future dream is a shopping scheme”; and Westwood’s “Buy less, choose well”, these clearly are dissident voices amidst the growing influence of fast fashion retailers upon the concept of fashion. In a declaration published on their website, Byronesque affirms the fact that they hold the industry responsible for the excavation of the concept of fashion, the disappearance of sub-cultural expressions and the homogeneity of looks. Or as Byronesque writes:

11 A similar statement was made by Dutch trendwatcher Li Edelkoort during her trend presentations for autumn/winter 2016-2017, in which she declared fashion to be dead and celebrated the life of items of clothing. See: https://fashionunited.nl/nieuws/mode/li-edelkoort-de-mode-is-dood-leve-het-kledingstuk/2015021623031, accessed January 2015.

Fashion has become so driven by mass consumerism that everyone looks the same and it’s hard to be inspired anymore. [...] Our dominant culture is ‘fast’. Designers create too many collections each year, only to be copied in mass quantities by the high street. The pillaging of vintage archive looks and designers’ ideas has become the accepted order of business. We should take inspiration from the people who did things better the first time around and create something authentically new. Instead, we’re going around in fast creative circles rather than making progress. Fashion week should be a privilege. Only for the most creative, inspired minds. Who push our imaginations. And challenge today’s overly commercial fashion mediocrity.¹³

Byronesque argues that fashion weeks should be reserved for the truly innovative who actively contribute and change the concept of fashion. As examined in the second chapter of this dissertation, designer Rei Kawakubo proves to do so, but she is obviously not the only designer that actively challenges what fashion may do.¹⁴

Apart from advocating originality in design, Byronesque features an online vintage store from which original designer items of clothing from the late 1970s and 1980s can be purchased.¹⁵ Purchasing vintage or second hand clothing is a social activity that undermines the capitalist system of the fashion industry. Using the Web to couple designers and consumers is another way of doing so. While there are many ways

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¹⁴ Think about Dutch fashion designer Iris van Herpen, for instance. Her 2015 Magnetic Motion collection revolved around visualising magnetic fields that are always present but hardly thought about. Her work, furthermore, encourages thinking about the ways in which bodies and fashion’s material relate to external forces and processes, and as such enables one to change our thinking about fashion for its intensive powers, rather than for how we may use it to represent our identities.

to exchange and purchase used or unique items of clothing through the Web, ranging from Etsy to Ebay, the Dutch initiative called *Grannies Finest* is a good example of how several groups of people can work together to change the ways in which clothing is produced and consumed. A group of young designers, young photographers, writers, models and an array of over 300 elderly with an average age of 71 have teamed up and formed a collective in which the elderly meet up in weekly knitting clubs to knit the designs developed by the young designers. The young photographers consequently portray the items for the lookbook and website, which enables them to build a portfolio and create visibility.

In addition, the elderly enjoy getting together as a group, which in turn overcomes feelings of loneliness often experienced by them. *Grannies Finest* is a social enterprise and as such focuses upon connecting people in order to benefit all participants. The young designers develop the patterns together with the elderly from which they learn, and as such preserve the skills they possess. The elderly in turn create those items that the public will prefer, since the young designers have a solid sense of societal and fashionable trends. All materials used are from fair-trade sources and organically produced and anyone purchasing an item from *Grannies Finest* is encouraged to send an e-card to the granny that has knitted or crocheted the item. Whilst the young creatives are enabled to build a name for themselves, the elderly are rewarded for their tasks by a trip to the museum, a high tea or a beauty treatment.

Combining forces to counter the dominant capitalist character of fashion, such as the *Grannies Finest* project described above, provides us with an alternative perspective upon our clothing. In addition, it may

16 There are many more similar initiatives to be found. In the United Kingdom alone one finds Grannies Inc., The North Circular, and Grannies Knits. I will, however, focus upon the Dutch initiative since its concept seems most complete and is communicated very clearly.


enlarge the relationship we have with our items of clothing. Whilst a three euro Primark shirt is generally easily replaced and discarded, and as such by all means is of little value, knowing who created your scarf and actually thanking the person for doing so, likely implies a different and more affective relation to fashion.

Apart from choosing what to purchase and where one does so more consciously, Guattari’s social ecology also enables a thinking about the people involved in producing our clothing. A true social ecology hence does not limit itself to western practices, but extends globally so that acknowledging the hands and lives involved in creating our clothing comes to the fore. For instance, United Kingdom-based Web store People Tree has realised that by changing the means of production, fashion can become a way for workers in developing countries to improve their lives. Apart from giving a voice to the farmers, artisans and local producers who are involved in the creation of the items of clothing they sell, People Tree actively promote hand skills such as weaving, knitting, embroidery and block-printing by displaying them on their website. As a result, the traditional skills of the people in developing countries are preserved. Furthermore, hand work is more environmentally friendly and enables families in developing countries to sustain a living in their rural environments, rather than having to move to overcrowded cities to work in factories.19

The question remains whether the initiatives mentioned above suffice to conquer the fast fashion industries and corporate power of large fashion brands. Apart from offering and cultivating collective dissensus and acknowledging a social responsibility that reaches beyond the West, it is therefore important to also change our mental stance towards fashion from a means to represent our identities to one of active and affective experiment and creativity. Or, as Guattari emphasises; mental, social and ecological ecologies must be regarded as being interconnected and entangled, and are as such ‘tri-ecological’ (Guattari 2000 [1989]: 67). I will therefore examine his concept of how the social and mental ecology relate to environmental ecology in the following section.

As researched in chapter four, *Clothed Connections*, following (often) microscopic and (always) multiple assemblages and their functions in relation to the environment reveals the true scope of destructive processes that must be related to the production of clothing. We more often than not have no idea where the raw materials our clothes are made from originate, let alone who contributed to the production process in which these raw materials are transformed into the final items of clothing.

Dutch designer Christien Meindertsma realised that developing such an understanding has become increasingly complicated due to globalised industrialisation and has set herself the task of “reveal[ing] lines that link raw materials with producers, products and consumers” in her projects.\(^{20}\)

Much like Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of assemblage, Meindertsma follows the steps that are undertaken to produce, for instance, a woollen cardigan or jumper.

Realising that one woollen item of clothing is made from the wool of numerous, untraceable sheep, Meindertsma initiated the *One Sheep Cardigan* project (2005) for which she, as the title suggests, used the wool of one sheep to create a cardigan. By doing this Meindertsma restores the material connection between a finished item of clothing and its source. As such the size and amount of wool the sheep gives is decisive for the end product rather than the identity or personal preferences of the wearer. Since the wool must be treated separately from those of other sheep in order not to mingle, the people involved in shearing, spinning and washing the wool can also be easily traced. And although the creation of the jumpers is more time consuming and can only be produced on a small scale, Meindertsma succeeds in “reshaping the objectives of production of material [the wool] and immaterial assets [the connection between sheep, workers, wearers]”, Guattari regarded prerequisites for radically different and revolutionary ways of thinking and living (Guattari 2000 [1989]: 28).\(^{21}\)

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21 Another project that rethinks the ways in which we connect with the »
Focussing on the way we connect with our clothing has been an important element throughout my research. This last chapter reveals that apart from relating to fashion as a means to represent our being, one may also regard our bodies, the fabric that covers it and the environment which it extends upon as being interconnected, affecting, and transforming each other. Since the time in which Guattari wrote *The Three Ecologies* (1989), attending to the environmental situation as well as changing our attitudes towards it has become more urgent. The climbing of temperatures, shifting seasons and rising of sea levels can be directly related to the way we produce and consume. The consumption and production of the clothes we wear has increased during the past fifteen years, while prices have gone down.22

We increasingly adorn ourselves in fast fixes that are easily discarded, however there is so much more that fashion can do and one can do with it. Apart from appreciating the material source of our clothing, as Meindertsma demonstrated, or the one who has created it, as Grannies Finest and People Tree foreground, one can also ‘make, do and mend’. Creating or altering clothing to make it last longer therefore also implies a different affective relation with the clothes we wear. Through investing time and dedication in making or mending items of clothing, they are bound to become less ephemeral, more personal, and more expressive of what one can do.

Lastly, technological developments may alter the ways in which we relate to clothing. From the invention of the sewing machine, to methods of mass production or the invention of new materials, fashion has traditionally changed through technological advances. Whether material or production-wise, artistically or practically, it does seem that a focus upon

» environment is found in the *Garments for the Grave* project by Australian designer Pia Interlandi (2012). Interlandi noticed that unlike for weddings, there is no special attire for a deceased. She therefore designed a funeral dress, made out of easily degradable organic hemp, cotton or linen that connects the body to the earth, returning the bodies nutrients to the soil whilst enriching it. From: [http://www.piainterlandi.com/garments-for-the-grave/](http://www.piainterlandi.com/garments-for-the-grave/), accessed November 2014.

fashion’s material, experimental and spiritual qualities and its productive assemblages can (and needs to) reclaim its ground. For instance, Gao’s designs open up a whole new field of potential in fashion, revolving around what it may do rather than what it may signify. Hence, thinking about our relation with clothing differently, and opening up to fashion’s creative qualities may transform the environmental disaster we are faced with when continuing business as usual.

Final Recapitulation and Thoughts Beyond this Dissertation

The intuition that fashion could not merely revolve around the communication of identities initiated the thoughts that have ultimately led to this research project. I wondered whether my children would look at me strangely if I returned home from university dressed in the apparel of one of my students. I questioned whether swapping clothes with someone else would also somehow entail trading identities. And I asked myself whether students or colleagues would change their thoughts about me when they encountered me in plain jeans, sneakers and a T-shirt while doing my weekend grocery shopping. The answer to all three questions above was ‘no’ or ‘hardly’, yet the idea that fashion conveys information about who we are or who we want to be regarded has proven to be persistent. During seminars, exhibitions and research meetings related to fashion, the phrase ‘Fashion can provide you with an identity’ was repeated frequently and left me wondering what more there could be to fashion.23 Even though I realised we all think about what we wear to cer-
tain occasions and do dress differently for work than for a day at home, I was still not convinced that our attire mainly or solely revolves around communicating who we are or who we are supposed to be.

A way of moving, gestures being made, a good joke or smart remark, a tone of voice, showing emotions, a style of writing, all seem to signify more about what someone is like than the way he or she is dressed. As such, it can be noted that fashion does indeed have two different faces; one of delineation and representation, and one which extends our bodies and the material that covers it infinitively. One that fixes our identity, and one that surpasses it and expands it in all directions. One that ties appearance to being, and one that experiments with and acknowledges what it may move, motivate and set into motion.

Even though Deleuze and Guattari emphasise that one ‘face’ is not better than the other but rather just different, and I do not contest this generally is the case, it can also be noted that the delineated, representable, fixing face of fashion as an identity marker has received foremost attention in both theory and practice. This has furthermore resulted in utmost unfavourable conditions for mainstream fashion itself, which can be said to lack expression; for our being which is confined upon our appearance, and most importantly for the environment that ties all of us as well as our expressions together. Regarding fashion as a means to represent one’s identity can be regarded for an emphasis upon the self that denies a perspective upon the role this ‘self’ plays within the social realm, and obscures the exploitation of workers at whose cost this occurs. In other words, there has been an overemphasis upon striating forces in fashion that are more than likely to result in disastrous effects: the destruction of the space we inhabit. Nevertheless, and as Deleuze and Guattari emphasise, smooth forces can and will emerge from perhaps over-striated ones. It has been my aim to show how and where this process can be aided by creating a perspective upon fashion that moves beyond representation of identity.

I, however, do not underestimate the power of the corporate industries, and do realise a few insightful artists, creative designers and innovative scientists are only a beginning. It has therefore been my aim to question the function of fashion as a representative tool, which, as is my contention, is much needed to bring about fundamental changes.
to reveal the possibility to adjust our thinking, to come up with a counterweight for one-sided practices, and to become aware of all extended processes and forces involved in what we wear. Viewing fashion in a heterogeneous manner – rather than through one organising principle be it that of, for instance, revenue, representation or exploitation alone – enables one to create analyses that extend to all fields, planes and perspectives involved in fashion. As I have argued, it also allows one to discover how our mental stance towards fashion is inextricably connected with the environmental and ethical issues that must also be related to current practices. The examples I have provided in the former section, as well as those alternatives presented in the former chapters, reveal that however radical regarding fashion beyond its representational function may be, there are actually many different ways of doing so to be found already. It is hence my contention that changing the attire of our thought may then very well be the onset of an inflection in the way we currently relate to what we wear.

Due to my emphasis upon what fashion may do, certain related aspects that reinforce a thinking in, and shopping for, subjectivity may have remained underexposed. I have, for instance, not taken the development of representation of identity through social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter into account. And although I have touched upon how these media emphasise representational being through limited categories, I have not examined their power or the effect these have upon fashion and its representational practices. One could say that fashion does not stand on its own, and critically examining the emphasis upon representation of identity in broader circles and cultural practices is required for change to come about. In addition, I have not concentrated on the viability of my alternative approach to fashion. Corporate powers may be extremely hard to conquer and alternative approaches can be said to currently appear too limited to do so on a large scale. Furthermore, I have not concentrated on addressing the economic and productional consequences of rethinking our relation with the clothes we wear. And lastly, I have centred my examination of fashion around western perspectives and practices and have not looked into what potential other cultural discourses of fashion may have to offer.

On the other hand, I have shown the limitations and problems inherent to a focus upon identity and representation for fashion. I have also
suggested that a profound change in the way we think about ourselves may be what is required to successfully overcome the overcoding practices as encouraged by high-street fashion brands. If we no longer think of fashion as predominantly a means to represent our being, and as such change the way we mentally relate to clothing, the true costs of our current practices on a social and environmental level come to the fore and can begin to be addressed. I have hence created an alternative manner of thinking about fashion in which its expressive, open-ended and experimental qualities are thought of as being inseparably connected to its social and environmental effects.

Taking the ‘I’ out of fashion and moving beyond identity does not only challenge existing discourses by opening up a perspective that enables a study of fashion that focuses upon productive assemblages and affectual qualities. It, at the same time, succeeds in revealing how actual molecular assemblages present in the people and environment where our clothing is created are intrinsically tied to the current concept of fashion as a means of representation. And as such it is my contention that in order to begin to solve fashion’s ethical and environmental problems, which are directly related to regarding fashion a means to represent our identities, a profound change towards traditional models of identity must be opened up. Whilst corporate powers will most probably not disappear, they may become less powerful when their mechanisms and effects are revealed. It has therefore been my task to create an alternative path of thinking about fashion, in which identity and representation are debunked, and experimentation, creativity and social and environmental relations are thought transversally. And since fashion is so intimately related to the body, which is in turn inseparable from mental, social and environmental ecologies, it may very well be that the onset of a different stance towards our being finds its fertile ground here.