More Than Meets the Eye

Dutch Fashion, Identity and New Materialism

Daniëlle Bruggeman

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Doctoral Thesis

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Danielle Bruggeman

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Introduction

In the opening scene of the film *A Single Man* (2009), directed by fashion designer Tom Ford, the protagonist – a British professor named George Falconer (Colin Firth) – wakes up frightened after having had a nightmare. Still in his nightwear, he goes to the bathroom, takes a shower, shaves, and takes his medication. He opens a drawer full of neatly folded socks, handkerchiefs, and perfectly ironed white shirts. While dressing himself and polishing his shoes, he says in a voice-over,

> [i]t takes time in the morning for me to become George, time to adjust to what is expected of George and how he is to behave. By the time I have dressed and put the final layer of polish on the now slightly stiff but quite perfect George, I know fully what part I'm supposed to play.[1]

Wearing a business suit and a black tie, he looks in the mirror and stares at himself as George, as if he is looking through the eyes of others. Although the film focuses on the narrative of George mourning the death of his partner, this particular scene captures issues at the heart of my dissertation on the dynamics of identity in the field of fashion. George's reflective thoughts on the act of dressing in the morning, to 'become George' in that process, suggest that clothing plays a central part in shaping and defining who he is. This quote from *A Single Man* implies that his identity as George is not necessarily pre-existent, but rather comes into being *through* the act of dressing. Moreover, he points out that being George is, in fact, a part that he knows how to play. Being George is thus presented as a performance, which is affected by other people's expectations as well as by the clothes he wears. Yet, how can we understand the particular role of clothes in the process of becoming the 'slightly stiff but quite perfect George'? To what extent is 'George' created by his clothes in comparison to, for instance, the ways in which he behaves or speaks, or in relation to his age, gender, profession or nationality? Would there be a George without him playing the part he is supposed to? What does it actually mean to 'become George'? Is this a question of identity, of performing rituals, or of mere appearances?

It is no surprise that items of clothing and the aesthetics of fashion play a central role in this film, considering Tom Ford's former positions as creative director at Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent in the 1990s and early 2000s before he launched his own fashion brand in 2005. Film critics have explicitly pointed out the similarities between Ford's advertising campaigns on the one hand, and the aesthetics and stylised look of *A Single Man* on the other (e.g. Abramowitz 2009; Tookey 2010; Bradshaw 2010). Moreover, this film, based on a novel by Christopher Isherwood, is said to reflect Ford's personal experiences of being part of the fashion world: 'Ford related to Isherwood's theme of the "true self observing the false self going through the day," and grafted details of his own life onto the story, including George's obsession with ritualistic grooming' (Abramowitz 2009). In this sense, the film resonates with important themes circulating in the global fashion world, such as the ways in which commodities affect the self or help one to 'perform' one's identity.

1 *A Single Man*. Ford, Tom. (2009) United States: Fade to Black Productions; producers: Tom Ford, Chris Weitz, Andrew Miano, and Robert Salerno, 4:24 – 4:55 minutes. Based on a novel by Christopher Isherwood.

More Than Meets the Eye explores the dynamic relationship between fashion and the complex notion of identity as it is expressed through visual media within the representational realm of Dutch fashion. Rooted in the field of cultural studies, this study aims to contribute to the further development of scholarly work on fashion and identity. By offering an interdisciplinary approach and synthesis of specific relevant sociological, psychological, philosophical, and cultural theoretical perspectives, this dissertation sets out to unravel the complexities of the different mechanisms underlying identity (on an individual, social and national level) within the field of fashion. Whereas scholars studying fashion often define identity in terms of the ways in which it signifies specific socio-cultural categories (i.e. class, ethnicity, gender, etc.), my analysis of contemporary Dutch fashion points out the importance of highlighting the fluid, performative, embodied and material dimensions of identity. In the process of developing a more elaborate notion of identity, this dissertation also explores ways to move beyond the dominant semiotic focus of studies on fashion and identity as part of a system of signification (Barthes 1967). Although a semiotic approach is relevant in relation to the ways in which clothing can signify social, cultural and political structures, at the same time it fails to take into account the physicality of the body and the materiality of clothing (Entwistle 2000). As I will argue throughout my dissertation, these facets are essential in order to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between fashion, clothing, the body, and identity. However, identity remains a complex notion, and I do not aim to offer an all-encompassing view of that notion in itself. Rather, I will propose a synthesis of theoretical perspectives to highlight key processes underlying identity in relation to the dynamics of fashion and the act of dressing.

Firstly, I will introduce my central research question and reflect on the way in which my research is embedded in the interdisciplinary project, *Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World* (2008-2013). Secondly, I will present my central arguments, which I will further discuss in relation to their theoretical context as well as to my research methodology in Chapter 1 'On Theory and Methodology'. Finally, I will conclude this Introduction by presenting the outline and structure of my dissertation.

Representations of Identity in Dutch Fashion: Central Research Question

This research is embedded in the *Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World* project (2008-2013), funded by the 'Cultural Dynamics' research programme of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). This project aims at opening up the under-researched field of Dutch fashion from interdisciplinary perspectives, while reflecting on questions of individual, social and national identity. Three developments in particular demonstrate the relevance of this research project: (1) the recent success of Dutch fashion, (2) the increased urgency of questions of national identity due to globalisation, and (3) the ways in which Dutch designers and fashion brands actively play with national design traditions and cultural heritage.

Although the Netherlands has never been especially known for its fashion, Dutch fashion brands (e.g. G-Star, Mexx, and Oilily) and designers (e.g. Viktor&Rolf, Marlies Dekkers, and Alexander van Slobbe) have been surprisingly successful since the 1960s.[2] This coincides with the emergence of a Dutch fashion culture (Teunissen 2006b: 5), and possibly – although this is an ongoing debate and needs to be critically assessed – with the development of a 'national identity' in fashion (Teunissen 2011: 158). The interest in the specific national context in which fashion designers and brands operate is part of a broader development. As the report *Identification with the Netherlands* (2007) by the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) shows, this search for who "we" are is related to several socio-cultural and socio-economic developments such as globalisation, Europeanisation, individualisation, and multiculturalism (2007: 11). It is in this context that the interdisciplinary research project *Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World* must be understood. In four different subprojects, the project explores the historical (Maaike Feitsma), cultural (Danielle Bruggeman), sociological (Constantin von Maltzahn) and economic (Anja Köppchen) dimensions of Dutch fashion. This research project starts from the idea that

> [i]n the creative experience economy of today innovation pertains to values, symbols, and culture. That is particularly true for dress and fashion, which are central to all forms of human identity construction, from the individual to the social level. In contemporary culture, dressing has become a vital element in performing one's identity.[3]

It is this relationship between (Dutch) fashion, dressing and identity that my subproject explores from the interdisciplinary perspective of cultural studies. More specifically, through a detailed visual analysis of fashion's aesthetics in visual media such as fashion photography and fashion shows of Dutch brands and designers, the central aim is to unravel the intricate relationship between fashion, dressing and identity, from the individual and the social to the national level. This central aim includes three sub-aims: (1) to critically reflect on and further develop the existing scholarly work on how fashion and dressing function in the construction and performance of identity, (2) to suggest new theoretical strands as potential methodological contributions to fashion theory, and (3) to gain insight into how Dutch fashion brands and media express and play with identity. My central research question is:

How can we reconceptualise the complex relationship between fashion, identity and the clothed body as it is expressed in the representational realm of contemporary Dutch fashion brands and media?

This research question is based on the idea that identity is a problematic notion in itself, and that it requires a sophisticated theoretical framework. Even though a lot of scholarly work focuses on the construction of identities in the field of fashion, the dominant methodological thread in fashion studies is to explore both identity and fashion in terms of their textual,

2 See the project application 'Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World', by prof.dr. Smelik (project leader), prof.dr. D. Jacobs, dr. M. Scheffer, and J. Teunissen.

3 See summary of project application 'Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World', by prof.dr. Smelik, prof.dr. D. Jacobs, dr. M. Scheffer, J. Teunissen, p. 1.

linguistic and discursive facets. This approach has also led to the prevailing interpretation of bodies as mere objects that can be 'fashioned' – i.e. given meaning – within the semiotic, discursive and representational realms of fashion (Entwistle 2000: 7-8). As a result of the discursive focus of existing methodologies, much of the contemporary discourse on fashion and identity, specifically with regard to the ways in which identity is shaped through the act of dressing, falsely suggests that 'there is no self apart from that which is constructed through the fashioning of one's appearance' (Negrin 2008: 2). In my dissertation I will challenge (1) existing methodologies of reading bodies and identities in the field of fashion (e.g. linguistics, semiotics), and (2) the prevailing interpretation of bodies and identities (e.g. as mere images, or as signifying surfaces referring to rather fixed socio-cultural categories). My challenge to existing methodologies does not mean that I will simply disregard them, since they are significant to understanding the phenomenon of fashion, but rather I will build upon these semiotic and discursive approaches and propose an interdisciplinary synthesis with other methodologies, which will enable me to develop a more elaborate interpretation of identity.

As my analysis of contemporary Dutch fashion brands and media will show, it is worthwhile to put more emphasis on methodologies and theoretical concepts that help to disentangle and shed light on the complexities inherent to the notion of identity instead of reducing it to a mere image or to a signifying text. This has resulted in two central arguments of my dissertation, and I will discuss these below.

The Complexities of Identity Dynamics: Central Arguments

Developing the Central Arguments

Throughout my dissertation I will develop two main arguments: (1) a critical argument on the conceptualisation of the notion of identity and its intricate relationship to fashion and the clothed body; and (2) a meta-critical argument for a move towards methodologies with a greater focus on embodiment and materiality in fashion studies. Evidently, these two arguments are interrelated as the methodological argument will contribute to the development of the first critical argument.

The first critical argument fits into the context of the current debate on the notion of identity (i.e. on a subjective individual, social, and national level) in studies of fashion. As I will further explain in Chapter 1 'On Theory and Methodology', the debate on individual and social identity is related to questions such as whether identity has a rigidly structured or a dynamic nature; the extent to which fashion and clothing can actually affect and construct identity; how to understand the relationship between the body, outer appearance and identity; and where the dominant interpretation of bodies and identities in terms of their semiotic, textual and discursive facets leaves the physicality of the body as well as dressing as an embodied practice. It is this debate that animates my dissertation. Drawing upon Zygmunt Bauman's (1991, 2000, 2011) and Gilles Lipovetsky's (1994, 2005) sociological perspectives on identity and Ulric Neisser's (1988) psychological notion of a 'conceptual self', I will present the central argument that clothing helps to shape specific *fluid concepts of the self*, as part of

a 'conceptual self' (Neisser 1988), which comes into being within the socio-cultural system of fashion. I will develop my main argument throughout this dissertation by highlighting specific mechanisms of how fluid concepts of the self are performed and performatively constituted; how they are closely connected to the body and affected by embodied experiences; and how they relate to the materiality of fashion objects. In addition to the debate on individual and social identity, there is an ongoing discussion in fashion studies on national fashion identities. As a critical response to this debate, I will expand my argument on the crucial notions of 'performance' and a fluid 'conceptual self' to a national level, and argue that we can find dynamics of fluidity and cultural hybridity underlying performances of "Dutchness" – a Dutch conceptual self – in the globalised fashion context.

The second meta-critical argument assesses the general tendency of methodologies in fashion studies to become increasingly discursive, focusing on representation. Fashion evidently is a realm of images as well as a discursive realm of representation, yet in order to understand the complexities of the ways in which fashion operates we need to draw more attention to embodiment as well as to the materiality of fashion objects and the clothed body. Even though I will focus on visual media and on identity within fashion's discursive and representational realm, my analysis points out the need to simultaneously investigate possible ways of studying the embodied experiences of wearing garments and the materiality of fashion objects in relation to fashion's representations and significations. For instance, the bodily experience of wearing clothes is, as I will argue, also affected by images and meanings circulating in the fashion system. As it is problematic and reductionist to conceive of bodies, identities and clothing as mere signifying surfaces, I will stress the importance of adding another – both bodily and material – dimension to a mere semiotic and linguistic approach to fashion and clothing. A focus on embodied experiences and on the materiality of clothing and the clothed body is essential in order to develop a better understanding of the intricate relationship between fashion, clothing, identity and the body. As a methodological contribution to fashion studies, I will particularly argue for the importance of the theoretical discourse of 'new materialism' (see e.g. Coole and Frost 2010). A new materialist approach allows incorporation of various facets of fashion's matter and materiality, i.e. physical, experiential, living bodies as well as fashion objects. As part of a new materialist approach, I will also highlight the significance of performance theories which foreground embodiment (e.g. Del Río 2008), and contemporary phenomenological approaches in the fields of feminist theory, visual culture and fashion.

In Chapter 1 'On Theory and Methodology' I will expand on my particular approach and on the importance of my methodological argument by discussing the historical and theoretical trajectory of scholarly work on fashion and identity. Here I will first elaborate upon my central arguments in relation to the key theoretical concepts and the valuable existing scholarly works that inform my dissertation.

Performing Fluid Concepts

Based on my visual analysis, I will show that fashion's representational realm expresses a paradoxical dynamic of identity. On the one hand, it functions as an imaginary realm that can produce a fluidity of identity, presenting identity as something that can easily change

shape. Yet, on the other hand, fashion representations often reduce identity to mere images and fixed codified concepts of the self or of 'others' – on an individual, social or national level. The way this happens on an individual and social level is, for instance, clearly visualised in the project *Exactitudes* by the Dutch photographer duo Ari Versluis and Ellie Uyttenbroek.[4] Since 1994 they have systematically documented social identities based on shared dress codes and appearances. For example, the photographers have categorised Madams, homeboys, French Touch boys, and hundreds more social groups (see fig. 2.1 - 2.3 > p. 74 - 76). Whereas identity is evidently much more complex, and formed by a wide variety of different (psychological, sociological and cultural) factors, *Exactitudes* presents the idea that clothes shape and visually signify one particular – yet overtly visible – codified concept of the self (e.g. a Goth, hipster, or skater). While it debunks the myth that the way we dress expresses an authentic and unique inner identity, this project also reduces identity down to outer appearance and a mere image. *Exactitudes* visually epitomises the way in which fashion's representational realm continuously 'fashions' bodies and identities with signs and meanings of the sartorial surfaces of clothing. In contrast, numerous contemporary fashion photographers, who use digital technologies and move between experimental and commercial editorial work, play with the human body 'as if it is made from the same material as clothing and can henceforth be cut, shaped, pasted and stitched in any imaginable way' (De Perthuis 2008: 176). In this sense, the imaginary, representational realm of fashion allows for experimentation with a fluidity of identity, free from the limitations of the corporeal body. Yet, how can we conceptualise this fluidity of identity and the way in which it is expressed in the field of fashion?

As I will argue, a synthesis between Bauman's and Lipovetsky's work offers productive theoretical insights on the fluid dynamics of identity, specifically in relation to contemporary consumer culture and fashion. Yet, an understanding of identity as a fluid dimension might falsely suggest that fashion can affect each facet of the self (Negrin 1999, 2008). As I want to avoid this misconception, Neisser's psychological view of a 'conceptual self' (1988) – consisting of numerous socially formed concepts of the self, some of which are more variable and fluid than others – serves to develop a more sophisticated perspective on the notion of fluid identities. I will point out that it is precisely *because* of an underlying fluidity of the conceptual self that clothes may offer possibilities to shape particular concepts of the self.

Moreover, these concepts of the self are performatively constituted and expressed. As the opening scene of *A Single Man* suggests, clothing plays a crucial role in the construction of George's identity *as* a performance. I will follow feminist philosopher Judith Butler's view on gender performance (Butler 1990, 1993) to conceive of identity as a doing, and as an embodied performative practice in daily life. In addition, sociologist Erving Goffman puts forward that the roles we play in the public sphere become part of who we are (1959: 252-253). The theoretical notion of 'performance' helps us to understand that identity is not an essential substance that precedes performance, but rather that specific concepts of the self – e.g. a 'slightly stiff but quite perfect' British professor named George – are produced through performance. As cultural theorist Anneke Smelik argues, 'as dressing

4 See www.exactitudes.com.

happens on the body, fashion is an important way of performing identity in its many facets' (2011: 82). Fashion allows us to perform different concepts of the self by offering the material tools required for our embodied performances. I will explore specific theoretical perspectives on the notion of performance that stem from sociology, art history, feminist theory, film studies, philosophy, and cultural studies – viewing identity as a performance in daily life (e.g. Goffman 1959; Butler 1990, 1993) and as an on-stage theatrical, artistic practice (e.g. Goldberg 1979; Stern and Henderson 1993; Auslander 1999; Jones 1995, 2000). Based on my analysis, I will point out how clothes performatively constitute fluid concepts as part of the conceptual self and argue that performance in the field of fashion must be conceptualised at the intersection of artistic, theatrical on-stage performances, and performative embodied practices of identity in daily life.

The cultural dynamics of identity on a national level can also be theorised in terms of the performance and fluidity of a national conceptual self. Drawing upon cultural theorist Stuart Hall's (2002) notion of national identity as a culturally shared and constructed *idea* of what the nation stands for, I will discuss how specific objects, symbols and representations of fashion play a discursive role in defining and *performing* specific concepts of a nation and of its 'others'. In contemporary Dutch fashion we can find interesting examples of well-known designers and brands referring to or playing with symbols – or perhaps clichés – that we have come to *perceive* as Dutch. The clogs on high heels, painted in a Delft Blue colour, which were introduced on the catwalk by the famous designer duo Viktor&Rolf (A/W 2007-08) perhaps epitomises the way in which Dutch national cultural heritage is commercialised in fashion (see fig. 0.1, p. 21) . Yet, the question is how can we understand this performance of a Dutch 'national identity': what does it consist of, how is its Dutchness constructed, and to what extent is it actually Dutch?

As I will argue, we can find dynamics of fluidity and cultural hybridity underlying such performances of Dutchness. In this regard, the Dutch children's label Oilily is an interesting example as it uses patchwork as 'a clear reference to traditional Dutch costume' (Teunissen 2005: 17). However, the traditional Dutch regional costumes on which Oilily's head designer, the late Marieke Olsthoorn, based her designs were greatly influenced by chintz, which originally is a 'hand-drawn, mordant- and resist-dyed cotton fabric from India' (Crill 2008: 8). Chintz was brought to the Netherlands in the 17th century by Dutch traders of the Dutch East India Company (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, VOC) (Hartkamp-Jonxis 1987: 6; Breukink-Peeze 2000: 58). Therefore, paradoxically, in Oilily we can see a link to Dutch traditional regional wear – which is nowadays viewed as an icon of Dutch national identity – while the designs of these "Dutch" costumes have been greatly influenced by Indian chintz from colonial times. Hall's view on the reciprocal interplay between self and 'the Other' (1992, 1997) as well as the post-colonial concept of cultural 'hybridity' (Bhabha 1990, 1994) enable scrutiny of the ways in which fashion objects and representations perform hybrid cultural concepts. The fluidity of concepts of the self – and of others – allows for cultural hybridity on a national level. Thus, the theoretical notions of fluidity, performance, and cultural hybridity are significant for developing a deeper insight into how concepts of the self or of others are performed – both materially through clothing and in fashion representations – on an individual, social and national level. I will

extend and generalise notions related to subjective identity (e.g. fluidity or performance) to conceptualise identity dynamics on a national level. While codified concepts – individually, socially, or nationally – can be confirmed, fashion can also exert its performative power to play with the fluidity of these concepts.

Towards Embodiment and Materiality: A New Materialist Approach

In addition to examining the fluid dynamics of the performance of concepts of the self within the socio-cultural system of fashion, I also want to take account of the complexities of identity by investigating ways to reevaluate the physical and material facets of the clothed body – also in relation to the representational, discursive realm of fashion. In this dissertation I will argue for a move towards a new materialist approach to fashion (e.g. Coole and Frost 2010; Bennett and Joyce 2010; Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012; Barrett and Bolt 2013; Smelik 2014). As a cultural theory, new materialism builds upon the valuable insights of historical materialism, the renewed focus on the performative body in feminist theory, and a vitalist perspective on affect and embodiment from Deleuzean philosophy. As part of a new materialist approach, I will, for instance, highlight film scholar Elena del Río's notion of 'affective performances' (2008), which points out that we are engaged in an active, creative process of doing identity when performing concepts of the self by means of clothes. This perspective allows for more expressive agency and affective, performative power of the actual living body, and liberates the body from the 'pressures to perform according to cultural, linguistic, or ideological requirements' (Del Río 2008: 5). This is a productive step to move beyond a mere semiotic, discursive focus in the field of fashion as well as to acknowledge the physicality of clothed bodies and embodied subjects.

My dissertation thus emphasises the significance of the body for the performance of concepts of the self through clothing within the socio-cultural system of fashion – both in visual representations and as a corporeal entity. For instance, the fashion photography of Dutch lingerie designer Marlies Dekkers demonstrates that the body *in representation* is crucial to the expression of, in this case post-feminist, identity. At the same time, Dekkers' fashion images also seem to sell the idea that consumers will embody, express and perform a post-feminist style of femininity when wearing the lingerie. It is in these representations that a corporeal experience of post-feminist identity is suggested. Yet, how can we take into account this suggested embodied experience in relation to the fashioned, sexualised and commercialised bodies represented in fashion images? How do consumers actually experience the wearing of Dekkers' lingerie in everyday life? What is their subjective bodily experience, and to what extent does that correspond to the post-feminist femininity that Dekkers' brand sells? In order to answer these questions, I will draw upon phenomenological perspectives – subject-centred views on how the self relates to phenomena – in the fields of fashion and visual culture to explore consumers' actual real-life embodied experiences of wearing clothes (e.g. Merleau-Ponty 1945; Entwistle 2000; Entwistle and Wilson 2003; Sweetman 2003; Sobchack 2004; Woodward 2007; Smelik 2007). In doing so, I will emphasise the importance of exploring the relationship between this phenomenological approach and the idea that consumers perform specific experiences staged by brands when using their goods in the context of the contemporary 'experience economy' (Pine and Gilmore 1999).

Instead of simply reading the body as a cultural text, or as symbolic codes within the socio-cultural system of fashion, I will thus draw more attention to the embodied experience of wearing clothes on the physical body. This approach allows me to think of subjective identity in terms of embodiment and also take into account the experiential and sensorial dimensions of clothing. Moreover, a phenomenological approach opens up an understanding of how dress 'operates on a phenomenal, moving body' (Entwistle 2000: 10) and functions as an embodied practice which is directly related to identity: '[dress] is an intimate aspect of the experience and presentation of the self and is so closely linked to the identity that these three – dress, the body and the self – are not perceived separately but simultaneously, as a totality' (Ibidem). It is in this sense that the embodied practice of wearing clothes and the performance of identity are interrelated (Smelik 2011: 82). While pointing out the importance of restoring attention to the corporeality in discourses on the body, I will argue that it is both the materiality of the garments and fashion's discourse (Parkins 2008: 502) that mutually form embodied experiences and performances of identity. Thus, both the symbolic codes and meanings staged by a brand or attached to a particular garment and the clothes' materiality affect the way one feels, acts and performs.

In addition to this focus on embodiment, I want to reevaluate the materiality of fashion objects as a way of moving beyond the idea that 'objects signify or represent us and that they are principally signs and symbols that stand for persons' (Miller 2010: 10). As the materiality of clothes often disappears into the realms of the linguistic, textual and discursive, I will foreground the materiality of fashion itself. It is mostly in the representational realm of fashion that we can observe how avant-garde fashion designers play with the materiality of fashion objects. In a Dutch context, the fashion shows and designs of Viktor&Rolf offer an interesting case, as their work can be viewed as a material experimentation with fashion as a theatre of metamorphoses and permutations. This is also the case for designers such as Hussein Chalayan or the late Alexander McQueen, whose fashion practices regularly escape semiotic or narratological frameworks.

In order to grasp these fashion practices, I will use a theoretical framework based on the work of philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari (1987) and on the new materialist discourse their work has become part of (e.g. Coole and Frost 2010; Bennett and Joyce 2010; Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012; Barrett and Bolt 2013; Smelik 2014). Specifically Deleuze and Guattari's work on aesthetics and art, and on the inseparability of ideas and their material expression, is useful in developing an alternative, more material, understanding of fashion practices. Moreover, a new materialist approach points to the inextricable interconnection between matter and meaning, matter and discourse, and the material and immaterial. This theoretical perspective also offers a fresh view on the ways in which material pieces of cloth are invested with meaning, and become subjectified and individualised when encountering human bodies in social contexts.

By exploring ways to move beyond a mere semiotic and representational focus of fashion studies, I hope to show that a new materialist approach to the performative, bodily and material dimensions of fluid concepts of the self captures important aspects of identity that deserve more attention in the field of fashion. By doing so, I hope to contribute to the further development of scholarly work on the relationship between (Dutch) fashion, clothing, identity and the body. The fluid, performative, embodied, material and culturally hybrid dimensions of identity will each be highlighted in a separate chapter in *More Than Meets the Eye*.

Outline and Structure of Dissertation

In Chapter 1 'On Theory and Methodology' I will discuss my research methodology, methods and research design. In addition, I will present a theoretical trajectory of scholarly work on the relationship between dress and identity, fashion and identity, and on how identities are shaped through clothing in particular. In doing so, I will also address, for instance, the relevance of fashion as a modern socio-cultural dynamic, and the dominant view of fashion as a system of signification. Moreover, I will critically reflect on the current debate on identity in fashion theory. This provides the context for my research methodology, and will help to account for my theoretical approach to the notion of identity.

In each subsequent chapter of my dissertation I will highlight a specific dimension of the dynamics of identity as expressed in visual media of the selected case studies. Each chapter focuses on a specific theoretical approach relevant to a particular case study, and I will move from a focus on fashion representations towards a focus on embodiment and materiality in Chapters 2 to 5. In Chapter 6, 'Dutch Hybridity', I reflect on the notion of 'national identity' to tie my dissertation in with the *Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World* project.

In Chapter 2 'Fluid Concepts of the Self' I will critically reflect on the notion of 'fluid identities' in relation to the case of Dutch fashion photography, i.e. a selection of specific photographic series or fashion images by Dutch photographers. It is in this chapter that I will propose a synthesis between Bauman's, Lipovetsky's and Neisser's sociological and psychological perspectives on the dynamics of identity, which offers a productive way to understand how garments help to define, communicate, shape and temporally freeze specific fluid concepts of the self. The Dutch representational realm points out a paradoxical double dynamics of identity. In addition, fashion photography illuminates how especially the face – both as a body part and conceptually (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) – plays a significant role in the formation of concepts of the self in the realm of fashion.

In Chapter 3 'Creative Performances' I will zoom in on the theoretical notion of 'performance' by analysing the columns and accompanying self-presentational photographs of fashion journalist Aynouk Tan in the weekly magazine supplement of the *NRC*, a leading Dutch quality newspaper. Based on my analysis of Tan's work, I will argue that the ways in which garments potentially shape specific fluid concepts of the self can be understood as a creative performance, situated in between staged artistic performances and embodied performances of identity in daily life. On the one hand, Tan demonstrates that one is able to select and perform specific encoded concepts of the self by means of clothes. On the other, Tan's photographs show how the representational realm of fashion is an imaginary realm full of creative potential in which clothing – the clothed and adorned body – can exert the performative power to explore, transform and experiment with numerous concepts of the self. Although I will primarily discuss fashion representations in this chapter, I will argue that the notion of performance, and the notion of 'affective performances' (Del Río 2008) in particular, allows the physicality of the clothed body and its embodied, performative expressions to be taken into account.

I will continue this emphasis on the body and dressing as an embodied practice in Chapter 4 'Embodied Experiences', which looks at the case of Dutch lingerie designer Marlies Dekkers. Drawing upon 'post-feminism' (e.g. Levy 2005; Genz 2006; Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009; Walter 2010), I will reflect on the ways in which Dekkers' visualisation of the female body dressed in lingerie expresses a post-feminist kind of femininity. In addition to my analysis of the body in representation, I will present the results of the interviews that I conducted with a selection of loyal consumers of Dekkers' brand to gain a deeper insight into the actual, real-life, embodied experiences of the women's clothed bodies while wearing the lingerie. I will argue that, in the case of Marlies Dekkers, it is both the specific design – the material object drawing attention to the corporeal body – and the discursively produced socio-cultural values and meanings of post-feminism staged by the brand that affect the wearer's embodied experiences and performances of concepts of the self.

In Chapter 5 'Towards a New Materialist Aesthetics' I will explore the materiality of fashion objects, based on my analysis of the fashion shows and collections of Dutch designer duo Viktor&Rolf. The work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and the new materialist discourse enables a move beyond the dominant thread of reading fashion merely in terms of what it signifies and represents. It is important to explore the materiality of fashion objects and the material basis of concepts of the self also within the representational realm of fashion. Instead of asking what it means, I suggest that fashion theory should pay more attention to how fashion functions as a network of 'assemblages' in which material, semiotic and social flows are entangled (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Bennett and Joyce 2010). It is in this entanglement that cloth is invested with meaning and with signs referring to concepts of the self, which are formed when encountering human bodies in social contexts.

In Chapter 6 'Dutch Hybridity' I will directly address the issue of 'national identity' in the visual representations of Dutch fashion firms, extending the crucial notions of performance and a fluid conceptual self as theorised in previous chapters to a national level. In this chapter I will focus on two case studies: (1) the children's label Oilily; and (2) the brands Mac&Maggie and Cora Kemperman.[5] These case studies show a paradoxical relationship between the ways in which fashion is 'othering' non-Western clothing styles on the one hand, while appropriating them on the other. I will argue that the current interest of Western fashion countries in their national roots or national conceptual self cannot be separated from cultural 'otherness' (i.e. other nations, cultures, traditions, symbols, commodities, etc.) as they are necessarily involved in a reciprocal interplay. Fashion's performances of concepts of cultural otherness, either materialised in clothing or represented in fashion images and incorporating the Other into the self, should be traced back to the global textile trade in the 17th century and should be understood in relation to Western industrial dominance, colonialism, and the Orientalist gaze. The ways in which Oilily, Mac&Maggie and Cora Kemperman[5] incorporate and renegotiate non-Western clothing styles can be understood from the theoretical perspective of cultural 'hybridity' (Bhabha 1990, 1994). These case studies perform cultural memories of colonial 'others' through commodified images, signs

5 As I will further explain in Chapter 1 'On Theory and Methodology', the firms Mac&Maggie and Cora Kemperman function as one case study because both designer Cora Kemperman (who was buying manager women's wear at Mac&Maggie before founding her own company in 1995) and stylist Frans Ankoné have been essential to the development of a recognisable style of both brands.

and objects of fashion, which are an inextricable part of the cultural dynamics of a fluid and hybrid Dutch fashion identity in a globalised world.

In the 'Conclusion' I will critically reflect on my findings in relation to my central aim and sub-aims. I will discuss the interrelations between the fluid, performative, embodied, material and culturally hybrid dimensions of identity in order to develop an integrated answer to my research question. Moreover, I will address the methodological implications of my research and argue for the importance of a 'new materialist' approach as a contribution to fashion studies.

fig. 0.1 Viktor&Rolf: *The Fashion Show* (F/W 2007-08) photography: Peter Stigter

01.
On Theory and Methodology

As presented in the Introduction, the central aim of my research is to unravel and reconceptualise the intricate relationship between fashion, identity and the clothed body as it is expressed in the representational realm of contemporary Dutch fashion brands and fashion media. While challenging the prevailing interpretations of bodies and identities, I will also explore ways to move towards methodologies that focus more on embodiment and materiality in the field of fashion studies. This chapter presents my research methodology as well as a theoretical trajectory of scholarly work on the relationships between both dress and identity, and fashion and identity which are particularly relevant to my central research question and aims. A critical reflection on the development of theories of consumption, specifically regarding the ways in which identities are considered to be expressed by clothing, is essential in order to fully comprehend my approach to identity in this dissertation. As I will demonstrate, the framework for my research is formed by the contemporary debate on identity as a flexible dimension and a signifying surface, on fashion in terms of its representational, semiotic and discursive facets, and, most recently, on dressing as an embodied practice.

In Part I, I will first offer workable definitions of the fundamental notions of fashion, dress and clothing. In addition, I will present my research design (i.e. case studies in Dutch fashion) and research methods (i.e. visual analysis and additional interviews) which serve as the basis for developing a more elaborate theoretical understanding of identity. In Part II, I will elaborate on the development of existing scholarly work on dress, fashion and clothing in relation to identity in order to place my particular approach in a theoretical and historical context. By critically evaluating the existing literature, I will emphasise that the notion of identity is a complex and problematic notion in contemporary fashion theory. This will help to account for my particular theoretical approach to the notion of identity and its relationship to fashion and the clothed body, which I will also discuss in the final part of this chapter.

Part I: Definitions and Research Methods

Defining Fashion, Dress and Clothing

'Fashion' is a slippery concept, and it can be defined in several ways. Firstly, fashion is an industry occupied with the production and consumption of commercialised goods as part of the capitalist market. At the same time, fashion is often considered to be of fundamental significance to the dynamics of modern societies (e.g. Simmel 1904; Wilson 1985; Lehmann 2000), and to the dynamics of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman 2000) or 'hypermodernity' (Lipovetsky 2005). As I will demonstrate, these dynamics of modernity are crucial to the dynamics of fashion as an important cultural and socio-economic phenomenon, especially in relation to the cultural dynamics of individuality and identity. Moreover, ever since literary theorist and semiotician Roland Barthes published *The Fashion System* (1983 [1967]), fashion is generally regarded as a system of signification in which clothing objects can signify social, cultural and political structures. This notion of fashion as a system of signs and meanings has been – and still is – of great importance to the majority of fashion-related studies.

As Barthes has greatly influenced the development of fashion theory, his work offers a good starting point for distinguishing the notions of fashion, dress and clothing. In his early article 'History and Sociology of Clothing. Some Methodological Observations' (1957) he uses Saussurian linguistics to make a distinction between dress ('langue'), dressing ('parole'), and clothing ('langage') (2006a [1957]: 8). He explains that for Saussure 'langue' is a social institution and 'a normative reserve from which the individual draws their parole' (Ibidem, original emphasis). Hence, 'langage' functions as the generic term for both 'langue' and 'parole'. In relation to clothing, Barthes argues that

> [i]t seems to be extremely useful, by way of an analogy to clothing, to identify an institutional, fundamentally social, reality, which, independent of the individual, is like the systematic, normative reserve from which the individual draws their own clothing, and which, in correspondence to Saussure's *langue*, we propose to call *dress*. And then to distinguish this from a second, individual reality, the very act of 'getting dressed', in which the individual actualizes on their body the general inscription of dress, and which, corresponding to Saussure's *parole*, we will call *dressing*. Dress and dressing form then a generic whole, for which we propose to retain the word *clothing* (this is *langage* for Saussure) (Barthes 2006a: 8-9, original emphasis).

This distinction between dress, dressing and clothing helps us to understand that dress is a system, a collective institution and a structure, consisting of a network of forms and norms. From this perspective, we can regard dress as a virtual system that is actualised through the individual act of dressing. Barthes also points out that there is a dialectical exchange between dress and dressing. On the one hand, specific codes of the system of dress can be proposed to individual wearers by their social group, but on the other hand a concrete individual act of dressing can become dress 'as soon as it is constituted as a norm by a particular group' (Barthes 2006a: 10). This distinction offers a basic understanding of how dress fundamentally functions as a system in relation to individual acts of dressing.

Yet, Barthes' notion of how the body is 'made to signify via apparel' (Stafford 2006: 130) through the act of dressing remains in the linguistic realm, and does not take into account the embodied dimensions of actually wearing clothes. Moreover, scholars who write about fashion tend to focus on how 'fashion articulates the body, producing discourses on the body' (Entwistle 2000: 4), while there remains 'a need to consider dress in everyday life as embodied practice: how dress operates on a phenomenological, moving body and how it is a practice that involves individual actions of attending *to* the body *with* the body' (Ibid.: 10-11, original emphasis). In this dissertation I follow fashion theorist Joanne Entwistle in emphasising that dressing is an embodied practice – which is an important addition to Barthes' definition.

The relationship between the notions of fashion and dress also needs further clarification. Barthes argues that 'fashion is always part of dress', and can either refer to a wearable object produced by specialists (i.e. haute couture), or it could start as an individual 'act of dressing

that is then reproduced at the collective level' (Barthes 2006a: 10). I subscribe to Barthes' argument to conceive of fashion in relation to dress in the sense that it is an abstract system of norms and codes. However, in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of fashion, I want to stress the importance of (1) recognising fashion as an industry of production and consumption, and (2) taking into account fashion's intertwinement with the socio-cultural dynamics of (late) modernity. Whereas the notion of dress can also refer to historical dress, fashion is bound up with the modern dynamics of continual change. For instance, fashion theorist Elizabeth Wilson argues that '[f]ashion is dress in which the key feature is rapid and continual changing of styles. Fashion, in a sense, *is* change, and in modern western societies no clothes are outside fashion' (2010 [1985]: 3, original emphasis). Philosopher and sociologist Gilles Lipovetsky is another scholar who is well-known for stressing the 'fleeting nature' and 'constant shifts' of fashion (2005: 5). He emphasises that fashion is 'a specific form of social change' and that 'the fashion system comes into play only when the taste for novelty becomes a consistent and regular principle' (1994: 16/20). By viewing fashion *as* change, these scholars highlight fashion as an immaterial dynamic. In a similar vein, Entwistle confirms that there is a 'consensus among a number of theorists regarding the definition of fashion as a system of dress characterized by an internal logic of regular and systematic change' (2000: 45). Furthermore, the fact that Barthes uses Saussure's notion of 'langue' to define dress suggests that dress – in contrast to fashion – may also pertain to specific national (or perhaps regional) styles as social and normative systems. As I will argue in Chapter 6, 'Dutch Hybridity', the idea of a national fashion is problematic in itself as well as reductive to the notion of fashion as an abstract system of signification that transgresses national boundaries and is characterised by cultural hybridity.

In addition to these significant differences between dress and fashion, I want to scrutinise the notion of clothing in relation to fashion by discussing its material and immaterial dimensions. In *Fashion-ology* (2005) fashion theorist Yuniya Kawamura offers a useful distinction between clothing as a material product and fashion as a symbolic, immaterial product. She argues that '[f]ashion is a concept that separates itself from other words which are often used as synonyms of fashion, such as clothing, garments and apparel. Those words refer to tangible objects while fashion is an intangible object' (2005: 2). In addition, she stresses that fashion is a 'symbolic product which has no content substance by/in itself' (Ibidem). Whereas fashion is an intangible, immaterial system of meaning as well as an abstract socio-cultural dynamic, clothing is its tangible and material basis – but so too are clothes or garments, for that matter. Here, the distinction between fashion and clothing serves a conceptual purpose but I would argue that there is, in fact, a continuous interplay between the immaterial values, signs and meanings circulating in the fashion system and the material objects of clothing. While, on the one hand, clothes are continuously invested with codes and signs, on the other hand individuals who experiment with the material features of garments can also affect the meaning that those garments convey. In this sense, fashion is always inextricably interconnected to clothing. Chapter 5, 'Towards a New Materialist Aesthetics', will expand on this entwinement between matter and meaning.

To sum up, firstly three elements are essential to the way in which I define fashion in this dissertation: fashion is (1) a commercial industry producing and selling commodities; (2) a

socio-cultural force bound up with the dynamics of (late) modernity; and (3) an immaterial, intangible system of signification. Secondly, I follow Barthes in his definition of dress as a virtual system that consists of a network of collectively shared codes, meanings and norms. In addition, dress can be used to refer to historical dress or a national form of dress. Thirdly, the notion of dressing will be used to refer to the individual act of getting dressed, which is both a discursive act of dressing the body with specific meanings as well as an embodied practice. Lastly, clothing, as well as clothes or garments, will first and foremost be regarded as the concrete material basis – i.e. the material products and tangible objects – of fashion as well as dress. I will also consider the wearing of clothes as an embodied practice and experience in order to move beyond the way in which clothing is often reduced to the realms of the linguistic, semiotic and discursive. These definitions set the stage for my approach to the relationship between fashion, identity and the clothed body.

Research Design and Methods

My research design and methods serve as the basis for the development of my theoretical understanding of identity dynamics as expressed by Dutch fashion brands and fashion media. While my research design is based on a selection of case studies, my research method primarily consists of the analysis of visual media within Dutch fashion. In this sense, I follow cultural theorists and cultural sociologists who have researched the interplay between representation and identity, focusing on visually mediated and discursively formed identities. However, in this dissertation I simultaneously determine where this method falls short, exploring alternative methodologies to take the bodily and material dimensions of fashion into account.

Fashion is a realm of representation as well as a system of signification, and it first and foremost comes to us in a visually mediated form. It is often *in* fashion images and representations that we see idealised identities and objectified bodies, or *through* visual media that we see designers play with the materiality of garments. Fashion media can raise important social, cultural and political questions pertaining to 'fashioned' identities. While identity is much too complex to be captured by any single form of representation, visual media can play freely with notions of identity to an extent that is not possible in everyday life. Moreover, it is in fashion representations that ideologically commodified identities are often reduced to mere codified concepts or signifying surfaces. This underlines the need to do more justice to the complexities of identity, especially in relation to the representational realm of fashion. Therefore, detailed visual analysis of fashion's aesthetics expressed in the visual media of the selected case studies (i.e. fashion photography and fashion shows by specific Dutch brands and designers) forms the core of my research. Meanwhile, I search for ways to challenge a mere focus on representational, discursive and semiotic methodologies in the field of fashion studies.

It is important to note that I consider fashion images and representations as objects that can generate theoretical questions in themselves. Each case study thus requires a specific theoretical approach depending on what is expressed through the visual media. Based on my analysis and on the specific questions raised by the visual media, I explore different theories and methodologies that help in understanding, interpreting and reconceptualising

the complex relationship between fashion, clothing, the body and identity. In so doing, I aim to further develop the existing theoretical frameworks. As my visual analysis exposes critical questions with regard to the status of the physical body and the materiality of fashion objects, I search for theories and methodologies that open up possibilities for the bodily and material dimensions of fashion and the clothed body to be taken into account – also in relation to fashion's representations and significations. Before elaborating on my theoretical approach, I will first present my specific research design by describing my methods for selecting the case studies, visually analysing the fashion media and conducting the additional interviews.

Case Studies

My research focuses on a selection of case studies to gain in-depth knowledge of the dynamics of identity as expressed by specific Dutch fashion brands and media.[6] This research design does not primarily lead to generalisable conclusions on Dutch fashion, yet it will enable detailed analysis of the complexities of the relationship between identity, the clothed body and fashion, which potentially contributes to the further development of existing methodologies and theoretical frameworks.

Based on my central research aims, preliminary visual analysis and on the context of the research project *Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World*, there are several criteria that inform the rationale for my selection of case studies. Firstly, the case studies need to be considered as *Dutch* fashion. Although this is a slippery term, the selected fashion brands all have a company located in The Netherlands with Dutch head designers who have studied textile or fashion design at a Dutch academy. As for the selected fashion media, it is important that they operate within the realm of Dutch fashion or are actively appropriated as part of contemporary Dutch fashion culture (e.g. in the press, or as part of exhibitions on Dutch fashion).

Secondly, the case studies must be contemporary Dutch fashion, active in the time frame from the 1960s until the present day. In the 1960s there was an important shift – a 'second democratisation' as Lipovetsky termed it (1994), after which fashion was no longer dictated exclusively by the French couturiers – which opened up the possibility for fashion centres to be established in other countries such as the Netherlands. Since then, we have seen a significant rise of Dutch fashion brands with a recognisable style, aiming for an international market, which coincides with the emergence of a Dutch fashion culture (Teunissen 2006b: 5). It is only recently that we can observe a possible development of a 'national identity' in Dutch fashion (Teunissen 2011: 158). Moreover, in the last couple of decades there has been an increased quest for identity due to the changing and rather fluid structures of modernity, often related to consumer culture and, specifically, fashion (see e.g. Bauman 2000), which underlines the importance of studying recent fashion in relation to the dynamics of identity.

6 My research design based on case studies is partly a result of the way in which the research project *Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World* is set up. For the coherence of the programme, the research group decided to collectively study a corpus of fashion brands as case studies from interdisciplinary perspectives.

The third criterion for selecting case studies is that they are renowned and have played – or still play – an important role in Dutch fashion. For fashion brands, I considered only winners of the 'Grand Seigneur Award', which is distributed each year by MODINT (the trade association for the Dutch apparel industry) to people, companies or institutions that have clearly contributed to the fashion industry in the Netherlands over a longer period of time.[7]

Fourthly, it is important that the case studies cover different fields within the context of Dutch fashion, e.g. fashion brands, designers or retailers, varying from haute couture to High Street brands. In addition, I wanted to analyse a selection of fashion media – not directly related to specific fashion brands or designers and their commercial interests – that reflect the dynamics of identity.

My choice to study visual media within different fields of Dutch fashion is related to the fifth criterion, which is that the selection of case studies preferably makes it possible to zoom in on various facets of identity dynamics. Based on my preliminary visual analysis, I selected case studies that would help me to gain insight into the complexities of different mechanisms underlying identity by addressing specific issues relevant to my research question and aims (e.g. the fluidity of identity, a focus on the body, national identity, etc.).

These five criteria were the guiding principles when choosing four Dutch fashion brands, which can be subdivided into two fashion designers and two fashion firms.[8] I investigate two of the most well-known contemporary Dutch fashion designers working in an international context: (1) lingerie designer Marlies Dekkers; and (2) the design duo Viktor&Rolf.[9] In addition, I analyse two Dutch fashion firms that have existed for at least 30 years: (3) Oilily, especially known for its children's wear; and (4) the companies Mac&Maggie and Cora Kemperman. With regard to the latter, I treated them as one case study due to Cora Kemperman's central role in both companies.[10] Marlies Dekkers received the 'Grand Seigneur' award in 2005, Viktor&Rolf in 2009, Oilily and its founders Willem and Marieke Olsthoorn in 1989, and Mac&Maggie's Cora Kemperman in 1987.

In addition to selecting those fashion brands as case studies, I expanded the corpus by two contemporary media, namely (5) the 'Fashion According to Aynouk Tan' columns (April 2009 to March 2011) and the accompanying photographs in the weekly magazine supplement of *NRC*, a leading Dutch newspaper; and (6) a selection of fashion images

7 The Grand Seigneur Award has been granted by MODINT since 2001. Between 1984 and 1998 the prize was awarded by MODAM, the Association of the Dutch Fashion Fair.

8 My selection of case studies is, again, partly influenced by the aims of the research programme *Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World*. The two originally selected case studies to be collectively analysed were (1) the transition from the company Mac&Maggie in the seventies to Cora Kemperman in the nineties, and (2) the Dutch lingerie designer Marlies Dekkers who works in an international context.

9 In August 2013 the Marlies Dekkers company was declared bankrupt by the court in Rotterdam. The company is currently working on a restart with a new investor.

10 Before founding her own company in 1995, Cora Kemperman was buying manager of women's wear at Mac&Maggie, established by the Dutch retail chain Peek & Cloppenburg in 1976. Both designer Cora Kemperman and stylist Frans Ankoné have been essential to the development of a recognisable style of both brands.

and photographic series shot by Dutch photographers who visually play with identity and the body in relation to fashion, and who often move in between experimental and commercial, editorial work. With regard to the latter, I selected photographers who work or have worked for renowned international fashion brands such as Lanvin and Dior (e.g. Inez van Lamsweerde & Vinoodh Matadin), Diesel (Erwin Olaf), and Dutch brands such as Viktor&Rolf (e.g. Freudenthal/Verhagen and Van Lamsweerde & Matadin), and who have also done editorial work for magazines such as *The New York Times Magazine*, *Vogue* and *V Magazine*. These are photographers who now work in an international context yet are still regarded as an important part of the Dutch fashion or art scene. As for Aynouk Tan, in 2008 she won the 'Dutch Fashion Icon Award' for her remarkable personal style, which illustrates the role she plays within Dutch fashion culture.

These case studies delivered insights that allowed discussion of fluid identities (Dutch fashion photography); the performance of identity (Aynouk Tan); the significance of the body and of embodied experiences (Marlies Dekkers); the materiality of fashion objects in relation to fashion's visual media (Viktor&Rolf); and the dynamics of identity on a national level (Oilily and Mac&Maggie / Cora Kemperman). Those insights resulted from my analysis of the visual media in the case studies, and I will discuss that research method below.

Method for the Visual Analysis of Fashion Media

As visual media are my primary research material, it is important to take into account the broad scope involves: 2D media (e.g. photographs, printed advertisements in magazines, brochures, on billboards), audio-visual media (e.g. television commercials, websites) and 3D media (e.g. fashion shows, shop interiors and clothes themselves). My method of data collection was to contact the brands and designers to ask for access to their archives of visual material. In some cases a lot of visual material was available on the internet, in fashion magazines or in books. The research material that I analysed thus depended on the specific visual forms of expression each fashion brand used. The subsequent chapters of this dissertation will discuss the specific research material that I studied for each case study individually.

In order to approach the visual media of the selected case studies systematically, I developed a model for analysing visual media in a fashion context. This model draws upon several existing methods for the analysis of visual media as used in, for example, Bordwell and Thompson's *Film Art* (2004), Barthes' *Mythologies* (1972 [1957]), and the book *Effectief Beeldvormen* (Smelik, Buikema and Meijer 1999: 65-99). I modified and specified these methods for fashion. Hence, my method of visual analysis has been specially developed for my research material and consists of (1) a formalist approach, (2) a semiotic approach, and (3) an additional theoretical approach.

The model starts by looking at the formal (technical) elements of visual media. This formalist approach literally studies *what* is being depicted within visual material, and *how* it is represented, shaped and/or described. This includes, for example, the mise-en-scène, lighting and the framing of images. Specifically in relation to fashion, formalist analysis investigates what kind of garment is shown (e.g. what kinds of shapes, materials, colours,

fabrics, and patterns are used in the design), and how the clothes are presented in relation to the formal elements of still or moving images.

Secondly, the model offers tools for analysing the signification (the construction of meaning) that emerges partly from a combination of formal elements. It thus offers a semiotic approach to investigating what different signs refer to, and how these sign systems create meaning or are invested with meaning depending on a specific socio-cultural context. This semiotic method looks at, for instance, the possible creation of narratives, the characters, the cultural-historical context of images and words, and how specific symbols contribute to the creation of meaning. In addition, specifically for a fashion context, this semiotic approach explores, for example, implicit or explicit references to other fashion designers, the expression of (brand or national) values, the buying motives that are addressed, possible themes of the collections, the representation of fashion models, and the aesthetic style of a brand.

Thirdly, I analyse the visual media in the case studies using specific theoretical perspectives and synthetic methodologies, depending on which dimensions of identity the case studies place in the foreground. Whereas I use a formalist and semiotic method to analyse all of the visual media, each case study additionally requires a different theoretical approach to studying and interpreting the research material in order to address different facets of identity. For example, my method for the visual analysis of the Aynouk Tan case consists of (1) a formalist approach, (2) a semiotic approach, and (3) performance studies to theorise Tan's theatrical identity performances in the field of fashion. As the formalist and semiotic analyses of visual media are only productive to a certain extent, the additional theoretical methodologies offer a first step towards a synthetic perspective of fashion that includes embodiment and materiality in relation to visual media in fashion.

Additional Research Method: In-Depth Interviews

Although the analysis of visual media is my primary research method, I have also conducted interviews with key people in most of the selected cases studies to gain insight into their own views on what they visually express. Moreover, for the case of Marlies Dekkers I conducted consumer research to explore the actual embodied experiences of the female wearers. The interviews with key people in the case studies all serve as additional research material, but in the case of Marlies Dekkers the interviews also play a more central role as empirical research material.

Some of the interviews with key people in the case studies were conducted in collaboration with my colleagues within the *Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World* research project. This concerns the interviews with the founders of Oilily, Marieke and Willem Olsthoorn (Alkmaar, 3 September 2010) and with the graphic designer and initiator of the *Oilily magazines,* Jean Philipse (St. Michielsgestel, 21 April 2011); with designer Cora Kemperman (Amsterdam, 3 March 2010) and Mac&Maggie's and Kemperman's stylist Frans Ankoné (Amsterdam, 8 December 2009); and a written interview via e-mail with designer Marlies Dekkers (3 February 2011). Although these collective interviews addressed a variety of topics, my list of questions pertained to the brand's visual expressions, creative concepts, and aesthetic style, within a socio-cultural and Dutch context. Moreover, I aimed to gain a better understanding of what the interviewees intended to visually express

(e.g. specific values, meanings, experiences, etc.), and whether this was related to a specific kind of identity.

In addition to the collective interviews, I conducted an interview with Aynouk Tan (Amsterdam, 23 March 2010) which offered a deeper insight into her own intentions, thoughts and beliefs regarding her columns and performances of identity in daily life. For the case of Viktor&Rolf, I have interviewed Viktor&Rolf's Head of Atelier, Martin van Dusseldorp (Amsterdam, 9 January 2013), who has been technically assisting Viktor&Rolf from the start of their career.[11] As for the case of Marlies Dekkers, I conducted additional interviews with photographers Carin Verbruggen and Ferry Drenthem Soesman (Amsterdam, 12 September 2011) who were responsible for Dekkers' fashion photography and printed advertising campaigns from 2001 to 2011; and with Jos Arts (Amsterdam, 24 October 2011), writer of the book *Marlies Dekkers* (2008). Those interviews offered critical perspectives on the specific kind of femininity that Dekkers' brand visually expresses.

Except for the written interview with Marlies Dekkers herself, all of the interviews were semi-structured, in-depth interviews, conducted face-to-face with the interviewees. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, which provided me with interview transcripts as research material in addition to my visual analysis. Even though the interviews offered interesting insights into the intentions of the key people in the case studies, my results and interpretations are primarily based on my own visual analysis. I occasionally use excerpts from the interview transcripts to illustrate my arguments or, in some cases, to contrast my analysis with the designers' intentions.

For the Marlies Dekkers case I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with loyal customers of the brand to inquire into their embodied experience of actually wearing the lingerie. On my behalf, the Marlies Dekkers company contacted a selection of 25 customers who frequently buy Dekkers lingerie to ask if they would participate in my research project, and subsequently provided me with the names and e-mail addresses of those customers.[12] Some customers declined, but I actively approached those customers who were willing to participate and conducted in-depth interviews (varying from an hour to 90 minutes long) with a selection of seven loyal customers.[13] Those interviewees shop regularly in one of Dekkers' stores in the cities of The Hague, Rotterdam or Amsterdam. All of the customers I interviewed have been buying Dekkers lingerie over a longer period of time, varying from around 20 years (since the launch of the brand) to two years, and they visit a Dekkers store and purchase new collections on a regular basis (i.e. at least two to three times a year). Moreover, all of the interviewees, with only one exception, wear Dekkers lingerie on a daily basis.

During the interviews I used a semi-structured list of questions (see Appendix), which includes questions on Marlies Dekkers as a brand, on the femininity it visually conveys

11 Unfortunately, Viktor&Rolf declined participation in the research. However, they did allow me to meet with Martin van Dusseldorp for an informal interview and to ask some general questions.

12 More precisely, the manager of the Marlies Dekkers stores in the cities of Rotterdam and The Hague provided me with the contact details of regular customers who were willing to participate.

13 Most interviews were held on 7, 8 and 9 March 2013, and two additional interviews took place on 5 and 10 June 2013.

(also in relation to other lingerie brands), on the person's (embodied) experiences when wearing the lingerie, and the extent to which the lingerie affects how they feel, act or express themselves. All the interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees and subsequently transcribed. Since I asked all customers the same questions, I was able to do comparative analysis of their answers using the interview transcripts. Since I conducted interviews with only a small number of loyal customers, the results cannot be viewed as representative of all of Dekkers' customers. Nevertheless, I found remarkable similarities between the interviewees' answers and experiences, which indicates a possible relationship between the shared experiences of the female wearers and the femininity that the Dekkers brand visually expresses. Chapter 4, 'Embodied Experiences', discusses my findings that pertain to customers' views of the Dekkers lingerie brand and I reflect on their personal experiences of actually wearing the lingerie. I frequently use direct anonymous citations from the interview transcripts to substantiate my arguments. The consumer research that I conducted for the Marlies Dekkers case thus offers interesting empirical research material in addition to my visual analysis.

I use my visual analysis and the additional interviews as the basis for my subsequent theoretical interpretation. In order to account for my theoretical approach to the dynamics of identity, I will present a theoretical trajectory of scholarly work on dress and identity, and fashion and identity below. It is within this context that I developed my theoretical research methodology, which I will subsequently discuss. A critical reflection on the existing theories will help to illustrate the importance and relevance of my theoretical approach.

Part II: Theories on Fashion and Identity, Towards a New Materialist Approach

Moving Beyond Class Distinction: Fashion as a Modern Dynamic

In the trajectory of scholarly work on dress and identity, and fashion and identity, we can trace a development from the idea that dress signifies rather set and predetermined socio-cultural categories of identity, towards a perspective of identity as a flexible or 'fluid' dimension which enables individuals to play with its construction through the consumption of fashionable commodities. Although both perspectives are still present in contemporary academic discourse, the latter has increasingly gained significance, especially in the past two decades. In order to demonstrate this development, the writings of economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen at the end of the 19th century are noteworthy as they exemplify the relationship between dress and identity in terms of social status and class distinction. In 'The Economic Theory of Woman's Dress' (1894), Veblen first makes a distinction between what he views to be the original functions of dress, i.e. adornment, and of clothing, i.e. physical comfort (1894: 198). However, he argues that, although the origin of dress must be sought in the principle of adornment, it has increasingly developed into an economic fact: '[w]hat constitutes dress an economic fact, [...] is its function as an index of the wealth of its wearer – or, to be more precise, of its owner, for the wearer and owner are not necessarily the same person' (1894: 199). Veblen focuses on women's dress in this article, and asserts that it is the function of a woman 'to exhibit the pecuniary strength of her social unit by means of

a conspicuously unproductive consumption of valuable goods' (1894: 200). It is this type of consumerism that Veblen termed 'conspicuous consumption' in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). His work illustrates the ways in which material consumer goods as part of a system of dress in the 19th century served as an index of the wearer's or owner's wealth and social rank. The identity that clothing communicates and signifies here is thus primarily defined in terms of the socio-economic categories of class and status.

Only a few years later, philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel published his essay on 'Fashion' (1904) in which – in contrast to Veblen's focus on 'dress' – he points out the relationship between fashion and the dynamics of modern societies. Simmel reflects on the importance of fashion for social life and argues that it is 'of especial value in modern life with its individualistic diffusion' (1904: 138). Simmel describes the phenomenon of fashion as 'the charm of novelty coupled to that of transitoriness' (1904: 139), which he connects to the changing times of modernity:

> We can discover one of the reasons why in these latter days fashion exercises such a powerful influence on our consciousness in the circumstance that the great, permanent, unquestionable convictions are continually losing strength, as a consequence of which the transitory and vacillating elements of life acquire more room for the display of their activity (Simmel 1904: 139).

As fashion theorist Ulrich Lehmann argues in *Tigersprung. Fashion in Modernity* (2000), the link between fashion and modernity is crucial as it indicates that fashion is not only about clothing or commodities, but is also an important social force in itself (2000: xviii). In a similar vein as Simmel, the works of both novelist Charles Baudelaire and philosopher Walter Benjamin also offer insight into the dynamics of fashion as 'the supreme expression of that contemporary spirit. It changes constantly and remains necessarily incomplete; it is transitory, mobile, and fragmentary. This quality ties it in with the pace and rhythm of modern life' (Lehmann 2000: xii).

In Simmel's essay, the notion of class distinction is still relevant, yet he also addresses people's tendencies to use fashionable clothing for the purpose of individualist distinction – a theoretical perspective that has increasingly gained significance in fashion studies. He discusses two tendencies inherent to individual subjects and to society: on the one hand, Simmel observes a tendency for imitation, uniformity and social adaptation and, on the other, a desire for individual differentiation, independence, and thus the 'striving to advance to ever new and individual forms of life' (1904: 133). Simmel argues that these tendencies are essential to the phenomenon of fashion: 'fashion represents nothing more than one of the many forms of life by the aid of which we seek to combine in uniform spheres of activity the tendency towards social equalization with the desire for individual differentiation and change' (1904: 133). Fashion theorist Elizabeth Wilson also refers to the ways in which fashion in the late 19th century played a role in the signification of class as well as in the display of individuality:

> There was a move from display to identity. In the nineteenth century fashion – not uniforms alone – became one of the many, and one of the most elaborate, forms of classification that burgeoned with the triumph of industrial culture. No longer was it enough to be recognized as a member of a class, caste or calling. Individuals participated in a process of self-docketing and self announcement, as dress became the vehicle for the display of the unique individual personality (Wilson 2010: 155).

Here we can detect early signs of the ways in which dress – instead of signifying rather set socio-cultural categories of class – is increasingly absorbed into the dynamics of fashion, which is closely related to the modern dynamics of transitoriness and individual differentiation. This link between fashion and modernity is still relevant to contemporary scholarly work on the formation of individual identities through the consumption of fashionable clothes. Before elaborating on the contemporary views on fashion and identity in relation to late-modern societies, I will first reflect on another significant contribution to the contemporary understanding of the phenomenon of fashion, and to the prevailing view of how clothes signify identities in the context of the fashion system below.

Fashion as a System of Signification

Roland Barthes' *The Fashion System* (1983) has been important to the dominant view of fashion as a system of signification. Barthes explicitly moves beyond the idea that clothing serves the purposes of modesty, ornamentation and protection, and adds another function that he considers to be more important: the function of meaning. He argues that 'Man has dressed himself in order to carry out a signifying activity. The wearing of an item of clothing is fundamentally an act of meaning that goes beyond modesty, ornamentation and protection' (Barthes 2006d [1966]: 97). By adding the function of meaning to clothing, Barthes responds to psychoanalyst John Carl Flügel's *The Psychology of Clothes* (1930), in which he reflects on decoration, modesty and protection as the three main purposes that clothes are generally considered to serve (Flügel 1950 [1930]: 16-17). Instead of focusing on these three factors of clothing, Barthes asserts that researchers should rather be interested in 'the tendency of every bodily covering to insert itself into an organized, formal and normative system that is recognized by society' (Barthes 2006a: 6-7), which is an early expression of his view of fashion as a socio-cultural system of meaning.

As a structuralist and later a post-structuralist, Barthes was one of the first to apply semiology, adapted from Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic model, in order to study fashion. It was this semiology that developed into semiotics – 'a much more fluid, less rigid application of Saussurian linguistics to social phenomena' (Stafford 2006: 135) – in the 1970s. The methodology that Barthes applied to fashion can be understood as a way of reading fashion as a language, of 'breaking things down into units, classifying them and examining their rules of combination, like a grammarian' (Barthes 2006e [1967]: 100). In his early preface to *The Fashion System*, Barthes points out that his aim is first and foremost methodological:

> What we wanted expressly to do here was to apply the analytical procedures of structural linguistics to a non-linguistic object, Fashion clothing, and thereby reconstitute the formal system of meaning which humans elaborate using this object; in short, if a little approximate, to establish a 'grammar' of Fashion. In other words, this work can be defined as an attempt at applied *semiology* (Barthes 2006f [1998/1963?]: 70, original emphasis).

Based on Saussure's understanding of language, Barthes developed his view on fashion as a structure and as a text that needs to be deciphered by uncovering its various signifying units. In his article '"Blue is in Fashion This Year". A Note on Research into Signifying Units in Fashion Clothing' (1960), Barthes studies fashion magazines as a signifying system, which is an early version of the method he further developed in *The Fashion System* (Stafford and Carter 2006: x). He explains his method by demonstrating the ways in which the rhetoric of fashion magazines continuously presents semantic structures, such as '*this* women's suit [...] has a *young and slinky look*', which suggests a link between a form (the suit) and a concept (youth), and thus between signifier and signified (Barthes 2006b [1960]: 41, original emphasis). Although this link is completely arbitrary, the meanings are presented as qualities inherent to the forms. It is in this sense that fashion, in Barthes' view, can be understood as a language that sets up a system of signs through which 'our society [...] exhibits, communicates its being' (2006c [1961]: 61-62). The signifiers of clothes that individuals wear always already stand in relation to social groups or collective norms. As Barthes argues, 'one could say that it is the signifying function of dress which makes it a total social object' (Barthes 2006a: 11), which demonstrates the socio-cultural context in which fashion as a signifying system operates.

When Barthes published *Système de la Mode* in 1967, written between 1957 and 1963, his ideas had developed into a post-structuralist perspective. As he explains in his foreword, he increasingly moves towards a focus on representations of and writings on fashion, emphasising the textual and discursive facets of fashion as a system of signification: 'without discourse there is no total Fashion' (Barthes 1983: xi). Furthermore, Barthes argues that it is inherent to the commercial system of fashion to create 'a veil of images, of reasons, of meanings; [...] in short, a simulacrum of the real object' (Ibid.: xii). Instead of starting from actual clothing objects, Barthes thus underlines the discursive aspects of fashion representations, writings and significations as a system in itself. Jean Baudrillard develops this argument in his philosophy of the consumption of signs and of fashion as a symbolic self-referential system, taking it a step further. He argues that '[i]n fashion, as in the code, signifieds come unthreaded [*se défiler*], and the parades of the signifier [*les défilés du signifiant*] no longer lead anywhere' (Baudrillard 1993 [1976]: 87, original emphasis). Moreover, Baudrillard goes as far as to state that 'today, every principle of identity is affected by fashion' (Ibid.: 88). In Baudrillard's view, fashion is a self-referential game of signification with free-floating signs simulating the real, and thus mere representations and signs without a material basis. This argument is problematic, as it ignores the actual materiality of clothing as well as the complexities of identity. Nevertheless, it does help us to gain insight into the realm of fashion as a system of meaning.

As a result of Barthes' influential work, the textual, semiotic, discursive and representational facets of fashion have become the main focus of attention for fashion scholars. As Entwistle argues in *The Fashioned Body* (2000), dress is regularly viewed as 'one of the means by which bodies are made social and given meaning and identity', which could be understood as a way of 'fashioning' the human body (2000: 7). In addition to the view of fashion as a socio-cultural modern dynamic, the meanings, codes and signs circulating in the fashion system are vital to the prevailing understanding of the phenomenon of fashion and the way it affects bodies and identities in fashion representations.

Individuality and the Flexibility of Identity in Late Modernity

In the course of the 20th century, and around the turn of the 21st century, theories of consumption increasingly focus on the ways in which the signs and meanings of material objects of fashion can actively shape one's individuality. This is indicative of the general tendency of those theories to become more discursive and to move towards looser and more flexible understandings of identity. Yet we can still find theories of consumption that pertain to set structures and the logic of class distinction. For instance, as Lipovetsky argues, Jean Baudrillard's work on the consumption of signs – and the ways in which fashion's signs significantly affect identity – is still governed by the logic of class domination and social distinction (Lipovetsky 1994: 133/144). Another example is cultural sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, whose work is strongly connected to Veblen's theory, and is thus part of the paradigm of symbolic class distinction. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984 [1979]) he argues that consumption needs to be conspicuous in order to be symbolic and signify specific classes in which taste is an important classifier. Although Bourdieu's work offers insight into fashion as a field of symbolic production and consumption, fashion theorist Agnès Rocamora points out that it 'has also shown some difficulties overcoming its fixation on status differentiation and on the role of objects as signs' (2002: 343), which dismisses the 'the variety and complexity of people's engagement with the objects of material culture' (2002: 355).

In contrast to theories on the set structures of how clothes signify class, theories of consumption that shift towards individuality and the flexibility of identity have increasingly become important with regard to the contemporary dynamics of fashion and the ways in which material fashion objects play a part in the formation of identity. For example, Lipovetsky explicitly moves away from theories on the logic of distinction, and offers a more liberal perspective on consumerism and fashion as a way of expressing the uniqueness of individuality. He argues that '[a]s much as it was a sign of condition, class, and nation, fashion was also, from the outset, an instrument for inscribing individual difference and freedom, if only at a superficial and generally tenuous level' (1994: 33). This perspective opens up the possibility for understanding fashion as an expression of individual taste and personality (Ibid.: 34), which stands in stark contrast to theories that remain in the realm of consumption for purposes of class distinction. Theories on individuality are often strongly connected to modernity. At the end of the 20th century, this interconnection between the dynamics of fashion and late modernity is perhaps more relevant than ever. In *Adorned in Dreams* (1985), Wilson argues that '[f]ashion, then, is essential to the world of modernity, the world of spectacle and mass-communication' (2010 [1985]: 12).

Based on his historical and sociological analysis, Lipovetsky argues that fashion, as a cultural and socio-economic phenomenon, has become a 'general principle restructuring entire facets of society' (1994: 243). He refers to modern democracies that are pervaded by consumerism and structured 'from top to bottom by the attractive and the ephemeral – by the very logic of fashion' (1994: 5). In this sense fashion is primarily a social mechanism characterised by its ephemerality and by its taste for novelty as the main principle (1994: 16/20). In *Hypermodern Times* (2005) Lipovetsky explains that fashion, in his view, has been a driving force in leading modernity in a postmodern direction, and that development coincides with the rise of the age of what he calls 'consummate fashion': 'a superficial and frivolous society, which no longer imposes norms by discipline, but by choice, and the realm of spectacle' (2005: 6). This notion of 'consummate fashion' expresses the idea that the fashion process has pervaded broader spheres of collective life (1994: 131).

There are fundamental dynamics underlying the pervasive principle of fashion in contemporary society. Coming from the intellectual tradition of the French School such as structuralism and post-structuralism, Lipovetsky argues that hypermodernity, as an extension of postmodernity, is a liberal society characterised by 'movement, fluidity and flexibility, detached as never before from the great structuring principles of modernity' (2005: 11-12). In his view, these structuring principles are now replaced by the logic of fashion and consumption (2005: 14). It is these dynamics of fashion that facilitated autonomous and mobile individuals 'with fluctuating personality and tastes' (Lipovetsky 1994: 148-149). Although I would question the extent to which individuals in the realm of fashion are actually fully autonomous, as they evidently operate within the set structures of the fashion system, Lipovetsky's view on the relationship between fashion and late modernity shows that fashion extends far beyond the fashion industry and significantly affects individuality. It is because of the rather fluid structures of (hyper)modernity that consumption is no longer aimed at social distinction, but, in Lipovetsky's view, rather offers the possibility of continuously defining identities anew (2005: 84). This perspective on how we are free to shape our individualities is an important part of the contemporary discussion about the flexibility of identity in relation to consumption.

In a similar vein as Lipovetsky, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's work on the 'liquidity' of modernity and modern culture (1991, 2000, 2011) is vital to the contemporary discussion of identity in relation to consumer culture. Although Bauman has his roots in the Anglo-American and German traditions of thought (e.g. Habermas 1985; Giddens 1990, 1991; Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994), his work corresponds to Lipovetsky's in the sense that they both reflect on the ways in which individuals cope with the shifting structures of meaning in contemporary society. In *Liquid Modernity* (2000) Bauman discusses how the social structures of modernity have changed and are no longer given, enabling individuals to choose social roles through consumption instead of being '"born into" their identities' (2000: 32). As this development has led to an 'intrinsic volatility and unfixity of all or most identities' (Bauman 2000: 83), both Bauman and Lipovetsky argue that consumption potentially offers an answer in the contemporary quest for identity. While recognising that consumption plays a pivotal role in shaping identities within the socio-cultural power

structures of fashion, Bauman criticises the way in which 'the loose, "associative" status of identity, the opportunity to "shop around," to pick and shed one's "true self," to "be on the move," has come in present-day consumer society to signify freedom' (2000: 87). Whether it is an illusionary freedom, or a sign of a liberating process of democratisation as Lipovetsky argues, they share the idea that identities can be constructed through commodities – which has become a crucial conception in contemporary fashion theory. Here we can thus see the development from theories that focus on a set, structured and rather static nature of identity towards theories that highlight the dynamic and fluid nature of identity and the discursive ways in which consumption can shape individuality.

As a result of the fragmentation and changing structures of modernity, identity is increasingly considered to be a flexible, fluid or 'liquid' dimension without an essential core (Sim 1998: 367; Bauman 2000: 82-83; Carlson 2004: 206; Lipovetsky 2005: 64). Identity is thus frequently no longer merely defined through fixed status or social position, which enables objects of consumption to affect the construction of individual identity. As many contemporary scholars argue, fashion's material tools, dressing the physical body, are essential to the formation of identity (e.g. Davis 1992: 25; Crane 2000: 1; Entwistle 2000: 7; Svendsen 2006: 150). While some fashion theorists refer to the active 'construction and articulation of our social identities' in terms of socio-cultural categories such as gender, sexuality, social status or age (Davis 1992: 16), other scholars suggest that the consumption of 'cultural goods, such as fashionable clothing, performs an increasingly important role in the construction of personal identity' (Crane 2000: 11). The increased focus on individualism and personal identity can also be understood against the backdrop of the rise of street and youth culture in the sixties: '[f]rom then on, fashion became accessible to the broader masses, and there was more room for personal expression and identity styles' (Teunissen 2009: 15). In contemporary theories of consumption, it has become widely accepted that consumption is 'one of the most significant means through which [...] contemporary individualism is developed and articulated' (Hill 2005: 67), which demonstrates the discursive nature of these theories.

The notion of fashion as a system of signification plays an important role in the contemporary understanding of how the consumption of fashionable clothing shapes identity, because individualism is often regarded as being articulated through the signs, codes and symbolic values attached to the material objects of fashion. The prevailing idea is that clothes are perceived 'as "signs," that is to say entities capable of conveying meaning (who I am, how much I earn, what kind of music I listen to, which religion I believe in ...) and identifying and differentiating individuals within a community' (Marchetti and Quinz 2009: 117). In this sense, individuals are defined through the process of being '"dressed" by social conventions and systems of representation' (Entwistle 2000: 7/8), and thus with layers of cultural meaning (Ibid.: 143). This illustrates how contemporary fashion theorists regularly connect the dominant view of fashion as a system of signification to conceptions of identity and individuality as loose, flexible dimensions that can discursively come into being: 'clothes and the constellation of images and signs that they impose on the body (sexual, social and political) no longer warrant a stable identity. Rather, they become interchangeable symbols in a fluid, unstable game' (Marchetti and Quinz 2009: 118). Thus, identity – especially

through the material objects of fashion – is not only defined through fixed status, income and social position, but also appears as a flux of changeable identities within a universe of signifiers and signifieds.

In contemporary fashion theory, as I have shown, the late-modern fluid notion of identity is very much interconnected with the semiotic, representational and discursive context of the fashion system. Whereas the notion of identity as a flexible dimension is useful in relation to the dynamics of fashion, in my view it is reductive to the notion of identity to suggest that clothing is one of the most significant means through which identities are constructed since that would suggest that every aspect of identity can simply be affected by fashion. There has recently been a growing tendency to theorise dressing as an embodied practice which is, as I will discuss below, an important development towards moving away from a mere discursive focus on fashion and identity.

An Increased Focus on the Body and Performance: From Appearance to Embodiment

The discursive formation of individual identity through the signifying surfaces of clothing objects is often considered to be closely connected to the ways in which the body presents the self. As Entwistle points out, in contemporary society 'the body has increasingly come to be seen as the container of the self' (2000: 73-74). Since the shaping of self-identity 'is in a crucial sense a *body project*' (Svendsen 2006: 75, original emphasis), the modern individual is often read by his or her appearance (Entwistle 2000: 73). These ways in which the body is seen as the visible form of the self have given rise to the prevailing view of identity in terms of one's outer appearance. As philosopher Llewellyn Negrin argues,

> [w]hereas in the past, individuals were seen to have an identity apart from the goods they possessed, in the present era, one's identity is defined in terms of the image that one creates through one's consumption of goods, including the clothes one wears (1999: 111).

She denounces the way in which it is often uncritically accepted that self-identity has become equated with one's style of presentation, presenting the self *as* image (1999: 112), since that places too much emphasis upon outer appearance.

With regard to this prevailing focus on appearance, sociologist Mike Featherstone argued in the 1990s that, within consumer culture, a new relationship between body and self had developed. In his view, this also enabled the emergence of a new conception of the self – the 'performing self' – which put 'greater emphasis upon appearance, display and the management of impressions' (1991: 187). This emphasis on appearance can be traced back to the ways in which the body, clothing and personality became closely connected in the 19th century. As Richard Sennett points out in *The Fall of Public Man* (1974), in the 18th century bodies were simply carriers of signs and symbols referring to status and social position, and personality or character were irrelevant. It was in the 19th century that one's outer appearance became a sign of individuality and personality. As Sennett argues, in the 19th century,

> one is what one appears; therefore, people with different appearances are different persons. When one's appearances change, there is a change in the self. As the Enlightenment belief in a common humanity is eclipsed, the variation in personal appearances became tied to the instability of personality itself (Sennett 1977 [1974]: 152).

Personality was thus interconnected to one's personal appearance in the 19th century. In this sense, performances of status in the 18th century developed into performances of personality in the 19th century, with the clothed body playing an important part (Teunissen 2006a: 199-200). Whereas the emphasis on appearance reduces identity to a mere image, the notion of 'performance' is essential in relation to identity in the realm of fashion, and has become increasingly strongly related to the conception of identity as a fluid dimension: '[i]dentity is [...] configured precisely as a fluid dimension, nomadic, in constant transformation, in constant migration. It is [...], just so, performance' (Marchetti and Quinz 2009: 120).

Fashion can be viewed as the key arena for the performances of identities (Kondo 1997: 5). As argued by Malcolm Barnard, 'when fashion and clothing are considered as masquerade, one performs one's gender and social identities, for example, rather than fashion referring to or reflecting some original and authentic identity' (2002: 167). The contribution of Judith Butler (1990, 1993) – who draws upon the work of linguist John Langshaw Austin as well as post-structuralist philosophers Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida – to the concept of performance has been particularly influential with regard to scholarly work on performative identity dynamics. Her notion of performance as an *embodied* practice helps us to move beyond an understanding of performance in terms of mere outer appearances. The shift in the notion of performance from appearance towards embodiment resonates with the rising tendency in fashion studies to view the act of dressing as an everyday embodied practice, putting more emphasis on the embodied and sensorial experiences of wearing clothes (e.g. Entwistle 2000; Entwistle and Wilson 2003; Sweetman 2003; Woodward 2007; Smelik 2011). According to Entwistle, Michel Foucault's post-structuralist perspective has produced 'an account of bodies as if they were texts acted upon by social forces, rather than the flesh and blood material of our embodied existence' (2000: 102). In addition to this focus on bodies as texts, the notion that our outer appearance – our bodies clothed with signifying sartorial surfaces – plays a pivotal role in communicating identity has become problematic. As Entwistle argues, '[i]n everyday life, fashion becomes embodied' (2000: 1/4), and dressing as an embodied practice is closely linked to the presentation of the self (Ibid.: 10). Drawing upon Butler and Entwistle, Anneke Smelik argues that fashion can be viewed as a performance of identity because dressing is an active embodied practice (2011: 82). A focus on the body as a way of performing identity – either in terms of its outer appearance or, more recently, in terms of an embodied practice – increasingly prevails in contemporary scholarly work on the role of fashion and the act of dressing in relation to individualism and the formation of individual identities.

Moving Beyond the Self as Image: Critical Reflections

In the theoretical trajectory of scholarly work on fashion and identity, there is a clear tendency among contemporary theorists to increasingly foreground the flexibility of identity and the ways in which it can be discursively constructed through the consumption of clothing objects imbued with signs, codes and meanings of the fashion system. At the same time, as a result of the discursive, representational focus of fashion studies, there is a prevailing emphasis on outer appearance, reducing identities and bodies to mere images. However, recently, there have been new developments in studies of fashion that move beyond the textual, linguistic and representational facets of fashion by drawing more attention to the act of dressing as an embodied practice, and this is an important shift with regard to the complex dynamics of identity.

In order to understand the importance of this development, it is helpful to gain a deeper insight into the problematic interpretation of individual identity in terms of outer appearance, which is a 'reduction of self-identity to image' (Negrin 1999: 100). In 'The Self as Image: A Critical Appraisal of Postmodern Theories of Fashion' (1999), Negrin criticises postmodern theorists of fashion as they have failed 'to question the privileging of the cult of appearance over all other sources of identity formation which has become a hallmark of postmodern culture' (Ibid.: 100). She refers to Baudrillard as the prime example of how identities in fashion have been theorised in the postmodern context of the society of the spectacle and the cult of the artificial. Fashion theorist Barbara Vinken also points out these identity dynamics in the field of fashion in which '[i]dentity, Being itself, is unmasked as an "as if," as a game' (2005: 51).

It is this perspective that has led to a false understanding of identity as a never-ending game of changeable identities within a realm of non-signifying signs. Hence, this needs to be challenged as it reduces 'self-identity to the image one constructs through the clothes one wears' (Negrin 1999: 112). In *Appearance and Identity. Fashioning the Body in Postmodernity* (2008), Negrin elaborates upon this argument and disputes the 'new notion of the self as masquerade [which] conceives of the subject as constituted wholly through the various guises that one adopts' (2008: 2). I agree with this critique of the reductionist conception of identity into mere physical appearance because identity is evidently made up of many elements and cannot be transformed by simply changing clothes. This demonstrates the need for a new understanding of identity in the realm of fashion that is not reduced to the image one creates.

I will argue that the notion of the self as image in fashion theory is also a result of the supremacy of representations in the realm of fashion. Lehmann asserts that the 'pictorially represented clothes have come to equal real garments in their cultural importance' (2002: 12), which highlights the significance of representations to the fashion phenomenon. In fashion images, the model's body often becomes nothing but the 'bearer of symbolic values' (Svendsen 2006: 78). In this sense, bodies are subjected to the discursive power of the fashion system as they are dressed with the signifying surfaces of fashion's material tools. As Lehmann argues, 'fashion photography [...] operates in a very ideological manner' as it 'depicts the commodification of women and men through a system of sartorial signs'

(2002: 13). Fashion images 'function as both signs and commodities within the context of capital to mediate and structure desires and social relations' (Shinkle 2008: 6). Fashion representations play a crucial role in the production of meaning with regard to identity, as well as in the construction of identities (Ibid.: 9). In the realm of the fashion system, representations regularly present classifications of ideologically commodified identities, reducing the complexity of identity to mere fixed codified concepts or to mere images. This helps to justify the need to redefine and develop a more elaborate understanding of the notion of identity, especially in the representational realm of fashion. Moreover, this also illustrates the importance of acknowledging the physical and experiential dimensions of dressing and actually wearing clothes on a phenomenological body, as Entwistle convincingly argues (2000: 10).

Whereas the semiotic, discursive and representational facets of fashion have taken centre stage in contemporary fashion theory, that approach falls short in terms of acknowledging dress as an embodied practice (Entwistle 2000: 10). The meanings, codes and signs circulating in the fashion system are vital to the prevailing understanding of the phenomenon of fashion, and the way it affects bodies and identities in fashion representations. Yet it is remarkable that '[f]ashion in its presently codified state – that is as a commodity, social signifier, brand – is very rarely discussed as a material fact; it is almost exclusively perceived in its representation through the media' (Lehmann 2013).[14] Although I acknowledge the importance of representations and significations as a crucial part of fashion, the question remains where this leaves clothing as material objects as well as the physical and experiential dimensions of the dressed human body.

As a critical response to the prevailing interpretation of bodies and identities and to existing methodologies in fashion studies, I will develop my main argument on the conceptualisation of the notion of identity and its intricate relationship to fashion and the clothed body throughout this dissertation. At the same, I will argue for a move towards methodologies which focus more on embodiment and materiality. As pointed out in the Introduction, I will particularly argue the importance of the theoretical discourse of 'new materialism' (see e.g. Coole and Frost 2010) as a constructive approach to fashion which allows various facets of fashion's materiality, i.e. physical, experiential, living bodies as well as fashion objects, to be taken into account. Having laid out the field of fashion studies, I will now elaborate upon my specific theoretical approach.

Towards a New Materialism of Fashion

It is the contemporary debate on fashion and identity, and on the embodied practice of dressing, that provides the context for my theoretical approach. My analysis of the selected case studies highlights the importance of the fluid, performative, embodied, material and culturally hybrid dimensions of identity in the field of fashion. In order to develop a theoretical understanding of these dimensions, I use an interdisciplinary research methodology, building a new materialist approach to fashion step by step throughout this

14 Ulrich Lehmann, keynote lecture on 'Fashion and Materialism', as part of the 'Stuff: Fashion and New Materialism' study day organised by prof.dr. Anneke Smelik in collaboration with the Netherlands Institute of Cultural Analysis (NICA), Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands, 7 June 2013.

dissertation, with each chapter functioning as a building block. Firstly, Chapter 2 elaborates on the notion of identity and its underlying fluidity. Subsequently, Chapters 3 to 5 present the body of the work on new materialism, moving towards a new materialist approach to fashion and identity. The final chapter focuses on the notion of 'national identity' to tie my dissertation in with the *Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World* project.

The general methodological thread in my dissertation is for Chapters 2 to 5 to increasingly move from a focus on fashion representations towards a focus on embodiment and materiality. Despite this shifting focus, however, I also approach embodiment and materiality in relation to the representations and significations of fashion. It is essential to take into account the clothed body as a corporeal entity as well as the materiality of fashion objects, but we cannot separate these elements from the representational, semiotic and discursive facets of fashion, since '[c]lothing, of course, is discursively saturated: it is always shaped and contextualized by fashion' (Parkins 2008: 507). As meaning and matter, and discourse and embodied experiences are inextricably entwined, I stress the importance of the interplay between various approaches in order to study the interrelations between signifying representations, embodiment and materiality. My methodology is largely informed by post-structuralism, building upon semiotics as well as sociological, philosophical and cultural theoretical discourses of (visual) media and consumption. As pointed out in the Introduction, I will propose a synthesis between Bauman's (1991, 2000, 2011) and Lipovetsky's (1994, 2005) sociological perspectives and Neisser's psychological notion of a 'conceptual self' (1988) to theorise the fluidity that underlies specific concepts of the self which can come into being within the socio-cultural system of fashion. As I will show in Chapter 2, this is a first step towards developing a more elaborate perspective on the flexibility of identity instead of simply suggesting that every aspect of identity can be affected by the discursive power of fashion, thus reducing identity to a mere image.

In order to move towards a focus on embodiment and materiality, I will use a 'new materialist' approach (see e.g. Coole and Frost 2010; Bennett and Joyce 2010; Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012; Bolt and Barrett 2013; Smelik 2014), which incorporates both non-human matter (e.g. fashion objects) and human matter (e.g. physical, experiential, living bodies). New materialism aims to give special attention to matter and allow for the study of matter and meaning in their entanglement (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012: 91). This emerging, new materialist development traverses different disciplines such as philosophy, feminist theory, cultural theory and the arts. A new materialist aesthetics draws more attention to the actual *materiality* of matter, and can be viewed as a 'relationship "between" – between the human and non-human, the material and immaterial, the social and physical' (Bolt 2013: 6). Art theorist Barbara Bolt emphasises the relevance of this 'material turn' for the creative arts, since its 'very materiality has disappeared into the textual, the linguistic and the discursive' (Ibid.: 4) – which is particularly true for clothing and fashion. Bolt points out that 'art *is* a material practice and that materiality of matter lies at the core of creative practice. Dance, theatre and fashion, as embodied practices, engage the matter of bodies' (Ibid.: 5). This demonstrates the importance of a new materialist approach to fashion practices as a way of taking into account the living, fashioned bodies and the materiality of fashion objects, instead of a mere linguistic representationalism. As part of this new materialist approach, I will

also highlight performance theories that foreground the affective power of the performative (clothed) body (e.g. Del Río 2008) and contemporary phenomenological approaches to the embodied subject in the fields of fashion and visual culture. New materialism allows embodiment and materiality to be brought back into the visual, representational domain of fashion. Moreover, a new materialist approach to identity helps us to theorise the ways in which concepts of the self come into being within assemblages made up of 'semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 22-23, cited in: Bennett and Joyce 2010: 5).

In addition to my increased focus on embodiment and materiality, in the final chapter of this dissertation, 'Dutch Hybridity', I will explicitly investigate the topic of national identity and its underlying cultural hybridity (Bhabha 1990, 1994). In this chapter, I will use a methodology that contrasts and synthesises (post-)colonialist studies and performance theory, which I relate to the globalised context in which fashion operates. While these theoretical perspectives stem from different disciplines and contexts, this interdisciplinary approach leads to useful dialogues, enabling the development of a more elaborate conceptualisation of identity on an individual, social and national level. Although each chapter has a specific focus, throughout this dissertation I will develop a theoretical framework for the fluid, performative, embodied, material and culturally hybrid dimensions of identity in the field of fashion.

Concluding Reflections

It is important to emphasise that my research methods are first and foremost aimed at analysing discursively formed, visually shaped identities, whereas identity in itself is evidently formed by numerous psychological, sociological and cultural factors. Hence, studying the ways in which identities are created within visual media and through objects of consumption will necessarily lack an all-encompassing view of identity. In this sense, it is impossible to do justice to the complexities of identity when studying representations. This is a paradoxical element of my research: my research method primarily focuses on visual analysis, yet I am simultaneously arguing that studying the representational, semiotic and discursive realm of fashion falls short when researching the relationship between fashion, identity and the clothed body. Yet it is precisely my focus on visual media that highlights the limitations of this research method as well as the importance of reinstalling the interrelationships between representations and embodiment, and discourse and materiality, thus bringing back embodiment and materiality into the discourse of fashion and vice versa.

The theoretical perspectives that I use in addition to my formalist and semiotic analysis are a first step towards challenging the prevailing existing methodologies based on Barthes' view of fashion as a system of signification (1967), reading fashion as language and viewing identities and bodies as signifying surfaces. These synthetic theoretical approaches thus potentially contribute to the further development of analytical tools to take into account and reconceptualise the dynamics of identity and its intricate relationship with fashion and the clothed body. For instance, the consumer research that I conducted in addition

to my visual analysis for the Marlies Dekkers case demonstrates the importance of further exploring the potentially productive dialogues that arise from the interplay between various approaches. In this sense, I follow the recent developments in the field of fashion studies methodologically to shift the focus to the *embodied* practice of dressing (Entwistle 2000), yet I do so in relation to the representations and significations of fashion, and this requires more interdisciplinary research methodologies. Each chapter will, in different ways, offer analytical tools for unravelling specific aspects of the complexity of identity dynamics in the realm of fashion. Throughout this dissertation, I will increasingly demonstrate the importance of a new materialist approach to fashion and identity.

02. Fluid Concepts of the Self

Dutch Fashion Photography

'Identity', as Zygmunt Bauman provocatively asserts in *Liquid Modernity* (2000), is something one '[...] can get hold of only through shopping' (2000: 84). He argues that contemporary consumers have the ability to shop in a 'supermarket of identities', to select their identity and hold on to it as long as desired (2000: 83). In his earlier book *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991) Bauman also emphasises that 'through the market, one can put together various elements of the complete "identikit" of a DIY self' (1991: 206). As I have pointed out in the chapter 'On Theory and Methodology', this perspective on consumption and individualism must be understood in the context of the contemporary discussion of the ways in which social structures of modernity are no longer 'cast once and for all' (Bauman 2000: 8). Drawing upon the Anglo-American and German tradition of thought, Bauman's work folds into the context of, for instance, Jürgen Habermas, Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens and their analyses of the ways in which individuals cope with changing structures and fragmentation in modern society. It is from this perspective that Bauman developed his argument on the coexistence of the rise of modernity and its ordered structures with anxiety, uncertainty and ambivalence. As Bauman argues, this ambivalence has moved from the public to the private sphere in contemporary society (1991: 197), leaving individuals to 'face the problem of ambivalence alone, in the course of their private self-constructive efforts' (1991: 16). His metaphor of a 'supermarket of identities' thus refers to the ways in which individuals can choose social roles because of the 'liquid' structures of modern society as well as to the role consumption plays in these processes of identity construction.

As I have argued in 'On Theory and Methodology', identity is increasingly understood as a flexible, fluid or 'liquid' dimension that can be discursively shaped through fashion's material tools. The idea that identity must be constructed, and that clothes contribute to that, confirms that identity is, at least to a certain extent, not predetermined, static, and fixed, but rather mouldable, variable and fluid. These identity dynamics clearly find expression in fashion (Bauman 2011: 22-25). Yet, how should we conceive of 'fluid identities' in fashion? And how does this concept relate to the idea that fashion may also frame the self, and temporally fixate identity (Entwistle 2000: 74)?

The liberal view of identity as a fluid dimension might falsely suggest that fashion affects each facet of the self. In order to avoid the misconception that one can completely change identity by simply changing clothes, I develop a more sophisticated perspective on the notion of fluid identities in fashion. In so doing, it is important to acknowledge the discursive power of the fashion system – and of representations in particular – in the formation of identity. As I have argued in the chapter 'On Theory and Methodology', representations of fashioned bodies discursively produce identities *as images* within the fashion system of commercialised meanings and signs. Numerous ideological preconceptions surrounding identity and the body circulate in the representational realm of fashion. Fashion images regularly label, categorise and commodify individuals, suggesting that we can purchase this kind of appearance and identity, and selling the idea 'that we are what we wear' (Bauman 2000: 74). Garments often play a central part in the coming-into-being of identity on the representational level of fashion imagery, which regularly conveys commercialised messages of brands and designers. When consuming, and more importantly, *wearing* clothes, individuals can adopt, change, play with or subvert sartorial signs and commodified

identities. By so doing, they can choose to shape their identities as they dress their physical bodies, which is often an expression of the paradoxical dynamics that Georg Simmel observed (1904: 133): striving for individuality while simultaneously imitating and belonging to particular social groups. It is thus both on the actual, material level of dressed physical bodies and on the representational level of fashion imagery that clothes play a crucial role in processes of identity construction.

This chapter focuses on fashion photography, which helps to improve understanding of identity dynamics and of the concept of fluid identities in the representational realm of fashion. Fashion photography has increasingly gained significance in the fashion system as well as in contemporary culture (Lehmann 2002: 12). Rather than merely representing clothes with the main objective being to sell them, fashion photography 'is increasingly treated on a par with contemporary works of art; where it is consumed like autonomous art objects' (Ibidem). Considering the increased cultural status, relevance and ubiquity of fashion photography, it is likely that certain aspects portrayed in the work of renowned photographers resonate with important issues and developments in contemporary culture and society, such as the pressing questions of identity. The current proximity of fashion photography to contemporary art allows photographers to experiment with identity dynamics in an artistic sense, regularly leading to all the more thought-provoking imageries. Moreover, digital technologies have had an immense impact on the possibilities of fashion photography. As Karen de Perthuis argues in her exploration of digital fashion photography, the idea of endless possibilities – inherent to digital manipulation – 'is applied to the human body, which is treated as if it is made from the same material as clothing and can henceforth be cut, shaped, pasted and stitched in any imaginable way' (De Perthuis 2008: 176). Fashion photography, in this sense, has the 'ability to free fashion completely from the limitations imposed by the corporeal body' (Shinkle 2008: 10). It is thus because of digital post-production that fashion photography often becomes complete fiction, and offers infinite possibilities to play with the body as a fashion object and thus with illusions of the self.

I will enter the realm of the imaginary in this chapter. It is in this imaginary, virtual, representational realm that fashion photographers often have the artistic freedom to visualise certain dynamics that otherwise remain invisible in daily life on the actual, material level of dressed bodies. Whereas fashion photographers regularly contribute to the ideological commodification of men and women, their editorial and artistic work also offers opportunities to question, subvert and mobilise these dominant representations, to transgress boundaries, and to transform bodies and identities. At the same time, it is important to note that fashion photographers are also constrained to a certain extent as they operate in collaboration with brands, stylists, or editors of fashion magazines within the context of the commercial interests of the fashion industry. As Dutch fashion photographer Viviane Sassen pointed out, fashion photographers cannot escape from the power play of the brands and magazines they work for.[15] Nevertheless, the increased digitalisation of the virtual space in which these fashion photographers operate facilitates the re-imagination and reconceptualisation of the dynamics of identity in the representational field of fashion.

15 Dutch fashion photographer Viviane Sassen articulated this during a round table discussion on fashion photography as part of her exhibition 'In and Out of Fashion' in the museum *Huis Marseille*, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (14 March 2013).

Contemporary fashion photography provides the opportunity to play with the flux, fluidity, and flexibility of identity, and thus with concepts of the self. While certain fashion photographers demonstrate or criticise how clothes may potentially frame the self, the virtual realm of fashion photography can also offer the freedom to experiment with relatively fixed aspects of identity. Fashion photographers (as well as the editors who digitally post-produce these fashion images) thus have the power to literally split things into fragments, to make solid things fluid, to break free from seemingly fixed frames, boundaries or contexts, and by doing so, to raise fundamental questions, such as: What is identity? What is fashion? What role does the body play, and, more importantly, how are these three elements interconnected? It is thus imperative to take into account this virtual, representational realm of fashion.

In this chapter I analyse the ways in which specific Dutch fashion photographers visually play with and offer a fresh perspective on the porous boundaries between clothes, the body and identity. I have analysed the work of a few internationally renowned Dutch photographers, such as Inez van Lamsweerde, Erwin Olaf and Ari Versluis & Ellie Uyttenbroek as well as the work of perhaps less well-known Dutch photographers, such as Freudenthal/Verhagen, Marcel van der Vlugt, Edland Man, and Bart Hess (who is a designer as well as a video artist). These photographers all experiment, albeit in different ways, with concepts of the self, raising questions about identity, the body and fashion. Since the boundaries between commercial, editorial and artistic fashion photography are increasingly blurred, I propose to use a broad definition of fashion photography. I will discuss specific photographs or series that are particularly relevant in order to clarify the concept of fluid identities in relation to fashion. My analyses mostly focused on the editorial work as well as the artistic, independent work of these fashion photographers, who often move between experimental and commercial, editorial work. In addition, the role of digital technologies – and the infinite possibilities they provide to play with the body and concepts of the self – takes centre stage in the photographs I have chosen.

Firstly, it is necessary to address the ways in which I choose to use the concept of identity, while reflecting on the role that clothes play in that definition. For my theoretical framework I will first elaborate on the work of both Bauman (1991, 2000, 2011) and Lipovetsky (1994, 2005). Although their work stems from different theoretical contexts and traditions, I propose a synthesis of their approaches as they correspond to each other in their understanding of the ways in which individuals face the decline of traditional structures of meaning in contemporary society, which leads to a quest for identity. Both Bauman and Lipovetsky explicitly discuss the phenomenon of fashion, and suggest that consumption offers an answer to the contemporary state of uncertainty, which I will elaborate upon in the next section. Furthermore, psychologist Ulric Neisser (1988) has provided me with the notion of a 'conceptual self' as a fruitful analytical tool to develop a more nuanced view on the notion of identity. This perspective helps to explain the inextricable interconnection between the internal psychological definition of the self (e.g. by dressing the physical body with material objects of fashion) and the external sociological construction of identity (e.g. the shaping of identity within a socio-cultural system which codifies social groups). Secondly, I will use this theoretical framework to analyse identity dynamics as expressed in fashion photography. I will elaborate on photographers who visualise the power of

the fashion system and of clothing to (momentarily) construct, label, and fixate identity. In the last section I will discuss the work of fashion photographers who deliberately play with concepts of the self, and with the flexibility of identity, clothing and the body, while undermining static representations of fixed identities. In doing so, fashion photography serves as a magnifying glass to illuminate the identity dynamics in the representational field of fashion, shedding light on the ways in which fashion as an imaginary realm produces a fluidity of identity.

Conceptualisation of Identity

A Synthesis of Bauman's and Lipovetsky's Sociological Perspectives

In order to develop a productive way of thinking identity, I will first further elaborate on Bauman's and Lipovetsky's work, which I introduced in 'On Theory and Methodology'. Subsequently, I will go a step further and connect these sociological perspectives to Neisser's notion of a 'conceptual self'. In *The Empire of Fashion* (1994) Lipovetsky applies a conceptual, historical and sociological analysis of individualism in modern democratic societies, and argues that 'we have reached the era of *consummate fashion*', in which 'everyone is more or less immersed in fashion' (1994: 131). As he explains in the epilogue to the English translation of *L'Empire de l'éphémère* (1987), his primary goal was to 'offer a new interpretation of fashion in a broad historical perspective', breaking with the 'paradigm of symbolic class struggle and competition, or – as it has come to be called in the wake of Pierre Bourdieu's work – the logic of distinction' (1994: 242). Rather, he wants to emphasise 'the modern individualist ethic that has been present exclusively in the West for more than six centuries' (Ibidem).

Lipovetsky positions his argument in the intellectual context of French thinkers (e.g. Tocqueville, Gauchet, and Dumont) who enabled the conceptualisation of individualism as a way to characterise liberal systems, which he contrasts with Marxist, Heideggerian and Foucauldian tendencies (1994: 243). He follows Jean Baudrillard in recognising fashion as the 'backbone of consumer society' (1994: 144), but at the same time he criticises Baudrillard's view of the empire of seduction and obsolescence as a 'fetishist and perverse system leading back to class domination' (1994: 133). As Richard Sennett explains in his Foreword to *The Empire of Fashion*, Lipovetsky emphasises that the wide variety of goods produced by the fashion system leads 'to greater individuality through consumption' which 'serves something like the common democratic good' (Sennett, in Lipovetsky 1994: ix/viii). In this sense, fashion, in Lipovetsky's view, plays an important role in attaining individual autonomy. This is epitomised in today's 'hypermodernity', an extension of postmodernity, in which '[h]ypercapitalism is accompanied by its double: a detached hyperindividualism' (2005: 33). As Lipovetsky argues,

> in the present situation, [...] we question our identities, we examine them, we want to appropriate for ourselves something which has hitherto gone without saying. Cultural identity used to be institutional: now it has become open and reflexive, an individual gamble in which the dice can be thrown again and again (2005: 64-65).

Whereas the postmodern was defined as a 'crisis in foundations and a decline in the great systems of legitimation' (2005: 77), Lipovetsky wants to show that in hypermodern times new principles arose: the rise of hyperconsumption and of volatile, fragmentary and deregulated consumers craving for experiential consumption rather than class distinctions (2005: 83).

Although Lipovetsky 'makes a convincing case for analyzing the emergence of fashion historically, arguing that its appearance was coextensive with modernity' (Kondo 1997: 115), I agree with the criticism that he puts too much emphasis on fashion and 'individualism as liberation of the human self' (González 2012: 27). Moreover, he has been criticised for showing 'too little acknowledgement of the ways in which the liberal humanist choosing subject is also above all a consumer-subject' (Kondo 1997: 115), disregarding capitalist power in the formation of individualism. In contrast to Lipovetsky, Bauman's work does acknowledge the power of capitalist consumption through which individuals can choose their identities. In *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991), Bauman discusses the ways in which modern order coexists with uncertainty (1991: 7), which has moved to the private sphere and is now a personal affair (1991: 197). He draws upon, for instance, Simmel's view on how 'the individual [is] doomed to a never-ending quest for a fixed point in himself' (1991: 201) in the face of modern fragmented life, and upon Habermas' perspective on subjectivities in the context of the transitoriness of modernity in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985). Also, Bauman's work has a strong connection to Anthony Giddens' argument on the consequences of modernity, which leads to '[t]he construction of the self as a *reflexive project*, an element part of the reflexivity of modernity; an individual must find her or his identity amid the strategies and options provided by abstract systems' (Giddens 1990: 124).[16]

It is thus within this context that Bauman must be understood when he explicitly refers to the market as a facilitator of processes of self-construction as it 'puts on display a wide range of "identities" from which one can select one's own' (1991: 206). As Bauman furthermore claims, '[t]he attractiveness of market-promoted identities is that the torments of self-construction, and of the subsequent search for social approval for the finished or half-baked product, is replaced by the less harrowing, often pleasurable, act of choice between ready-made patterns' (1991: 206). Crucially, in Bauman's view, consumers can thus choose between 'ready-made patterns' within the modern social system and within the capitalist market, which is, paradoxically, 'experienced as liberation from the cumbersome necessities

16 See also Anthony Giddens' *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991); and Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash's *Reflexive Modernization* (1994).

of life and feels like freedom' (1991: 211). In this sense, the capitalist market, epitomised in the fashion system, could be understood as a 'higher-order structuring principle' *within* which individuals are able to articulate their subjectivities: 'Ultimately, individuals were only creative and self-determining in terms of pre-existing structuration principles' (Buchli 1999: 8). In *Liquid Modernity* (2000) Bauman again points to the paradoxical 'freedom' of individuality, suggesting that 'one is free to make and unmake identities at will. Or so it seems' (2000: 83), which contrasts with Lipovetsky's liberal view on the ways in which individuals have the possibility to articulate their identities through fashion's serving a democratic purpose. In his introduction to *Postmodern Ethics* (1993) Bauman explicitly criticises the way in which Lipovetsky 'counsels us to applaud' the freedom of this new era of 'unadulterated individualism' (1993: 2-3), which elucidates the contrast between their approaches.

While taking into account the differences between Lipovetsky's and Bauman's sociological perspectives, I propose a synthesis of these approaches as they share a similar analysis of the self-reflexive construction of identity in the context of modern societies, in which consumption plays a crucial role. This synthesis will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the sociological ways in which fashion's material tools help to define identities anew. Both Lipovetsky and Bauman describe the dynamics of our contemporary society in terms of certain instability, flexibility, fluidity or liquidity, in which identity is 'anything but [...] given once and for all' (Lipovetsky 2005: 64). Identity is rather characterised by an intrinsic volatility (Bauman 2000: 83). This 'fluidity', as Bauman explains, may be understood as 'a continuous change in shape' (2000: 1): 'liquids, unlike solids, cannot easily hold their shape' (Ibid.: 2). In these days of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman 2000) or 'hypermodernity' (Lipovetsky 2005), individuals are no longer born into their identities and are faced with the decline of traditional structures of meaning: 'the hypermodern generates insecurity, the loss of fixed guide-lines, the disappearance of secular utopias, and an individualist disintegration of the social bond' (Lipovetsky 2005: 64). Hence, individuals are abandoned to themselves, deprived of any framework (Ibid.: 56), finding themselves in a state of unfinishedness, undetermination, and anxiety (Bauman 2000: 62). 'For the modern self', as Joanne Entwistle argues, 'this fragmentation results in anxiety and a crisis in identity' (2000: 74). It is in this state of uncertainty that 'new needs for unity and meaning, for security and a sense of belonging arise' (Lipovetsky 2005: 64), bringing about a quest for identity. This is where consumption comes into play.

As Bauman and Lipovetsky assert, consumption offers an answer to the state of anxiety and functions as 'a daytime ritual to exorcize the gruesome apparitions of uncertainty and insecurity which keep haunting the nights' (Bauman 2000: 81), and offers the possibility 'of giving new birth to oneself in pleasure' (Lipovetsky 2005: 84). Shopping, therefore, is no longer merely about the products as such. We shop for 'new and improved examples and recipes for life', as Bauman argues (2000: 74). From this perspective, it is through consumption that we can cope with the constantly changing and fragmentary modern world as it helps us to find a solution to the contemporary quest for identity, which Bauman views as the 'ongoing struggle to arrest or slow down the flow, to solidify the fluid, to give form to the formless' (Ibid.: 82). As he further explains,

> [g]iven the intrinsic volatility and unfixity of all or most identities, it is the ability to "shop around" in the supermarket of identities, the degree of genuine or putative consumer freedom to select one's identity and to hold to it as long as desired, that becomes the royal road to the fulfilment of identity fantasies (Ibid.: 83).

While identities are intrinsically in a state of flux, consumption potentially plays a part in the temporary fulfilment of new needs for meaning and of the desire for coherent and unified identities. Following Bauman, Anneke Smelik argues that 'consuming, whether it is food, education, gadgets, technologies, accessories or clothes, allows people to perform their "liquid" identity' (2011: 81).

Clothes in particular play a crucial role in this respect. Lipovetsky connects the contemporary cultural dynamics of identity to fashion as the domain of the 'ephemeral *par excellence*' (2005: 4). In a similar vein, Bauman suggests that fashion's modus operandi is intimately bound up with the changeability of 'liquid' identity in today's culture (2011: 22-25). Paradoxically, it is precisely *because* of this underlying flexibility of identity, that clothes may potentially offer possibilities for 'framing the self, at least momentarily' (Entwistle 2000: 74), and thus for temporarily shaping our fluid identities. From this perspective, 'clothes are a vital part of the social construction of the self' (Svendsen 2006: 19). Here we can already see an indication of the interplay and oscillation between the underlying flexibility of identity (which is interconnected to the dynamics of fashion) and the framing of the self through garments within a socio-cultural system, which I will elaborate upon later in this chapter.

Both Bauman and Lipovetsky have greatly contributed to a valuable deeper understanding of these contemporary cultural dynamics. Their analyses help us to comprehend the important part that consumption, with fashion as the prime example, plays in the construction of identity. A synthesis of their approaches does justice to the ways in which the consumption of clothes enables the formation of individuality as well as to the 'higher-order structuring principles' of the capitalist market and of the fashion system. Yet, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, this view on the volatility and fluidity of identity might lead to the misconception that the consumption of clothes affects and shapes every aspect of the self. Therefore, it is crucial to go one step further and to develop a more sophisticated perspective on these dynamics of identity. Moreover, new questions arise when trying to make their views on the inherently elusive and complex notion of identity productive for analysis. What exactly is a changeable, flexible and fluid identity? How should we define the fundamental notion of identity? Before further elaborating on the relationship between fashion and identity, clothes and identity, and on the fluidity of identity, it is essential to first establish a workable definition of the concept of identity. What does identity consist of? How does it relate to the notion of the self? What role does the physical body play? However abstract and complex, these are fundamental and significant questions. Different academic disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, anthropology or sociology theorise the concept of identity differently, which makes it an even more difficult concept to disentangle. Due to its complexity, it is impossible to provide an all-encompassing definition, as any definition

would be a simplification. In addition, as the notion of identity itself is subject to continuous change – especially in today's rapidly shifting cultural dynamics – it is an essentially elusive concept in itself and cannot be easily labelled or fixed. At the same time, in order to improve understanding of the dynamics of identity in the realm of fashion, it is indispensable to formulate a working definition. My aim is to find a productive way of thinking identity, and subsequently fluid identity, while trying to do as much justice as possible to the complexities of these conceptions. Building upon Bauman's and Lipovetsky's work, I will thus take a further step.

Identity in terms of a 'Conceptual Self'

I propose to view the concept of identity in terms of a 'conceptual self', which is, as I will argue, a particularly fruitful notion for fashion. In his introduction to *Living Autobiographically. How We Create Identity in Narrative* (2008), Paul John Eakin connects the term identity to the notion of a 'conceptual self' as it was defined by Neisser (1988) in his essay 'Five Kinds of Self-Knowledge' (1988). In this essay, Neisser aims at establishing different aspects of the self, and distinguishes between five different selves, while acknowledging that '[the self] is simultaneously physical and mental, public and private, directly perceived and incorrectly imagined, universal and culture-specific' (1988: 35). Neisser's five notions of different selves are:

> (1) the *ecological self*: 'the self as directly perceived with respect to the immediate physical environment' - 'I am the person here in this place';
> (2) the *interpersonal self*: 'also directly perceived, is established by species-specific signals of emotional rapport and communication' – 'I am the person who is engaged, here, in this particular human interchange';
> (3) the *extended self*: 'is based on memory and anticipation' – 'I am the person who had certain specific experiences';
> (4) the *private self*: 'appears when we discover that our conscious experiences are exclusively our own' – 'I am, in principle, the only person who can feel this unique and particular pain';
> and (5) the *conceptual self*: 'draws its meaning from a network of socially-based assumptions and theories about human nature in general and ourselves in particular' (1988: 35-36).

While self functions as the umbrella term, identity is a manifestation of Neisser's fifth notion of the 'conceptual self', as Eakin argues (2008: xiv): '*Self*, then, is the larger, more comprehensive term for the totality of our subjective experience. [...] Identities may erode, but we remain selves of some kind as long as consciousness continues' (Ibidem.). Neisser's fifth notion of the conceptual self (i.e. identity) is based on the idea that each of us has a 'concept of him/herself as a particular person in a familiar world', which originates in social life and may thus vary widely across different societies and cultures (Neisser 1988: 52). To clarify this, Neisser gives a few examples of his own concepts:

> I am an American, a husband, and a professor. I assume that I have certain social obligations and political rights, that I have a liver and a spleen and a distinctive pattern of nuclear DNA; that I am a fast reader, poor at remembering names, and neither handsome nor ugly; that in general I do not think enough about the future consequences of my actions (Ibidem).

Neisser's concepts of himself include, for instance, nationality, social roles, profession, and personality traits. In addition, he incorporates concepts pertaining to his body and appearance, which is evidently significant with regard to the part that clothes may play in the formation of a conceptual self.

It is important to emphasise that these concepts of the self are never defined in isolation, but always in relation to other people, to other possible concepts, or to other theories of the self, as Neisser points out. These concepts or theories of the self may be acquired from, for instance, our parents, our peers and our specific culture. In this sense, these concepts of the self are created *within* socio-cultural structures. The conceptual self thus 'draws its meaning from the network of assumptions and theories in which it is embedded' (Neisser 1988: 36). Neisser makes a distinction between three different subtheories, in which our concepts of the self are embedded: (1) role theories, which are mostly sociological notions of how we fit into society; (2) internal models, concerning theories of our bodies and minds; and (3) trait attributions, which overlap with social roles and internal models and involve our beliefs that we are, for example, intelligent, attractive or ugly (Ibid.: 53-54). These three self-theories are primarily based on 'socially established and verbally communicated ideas' (Ibid.: 54).[17] I will argue that clothing, as a socio-cultural phenomenon, has its points of connection with all three subtheories of the conceptual self, although garments communicate the self in a performative way, which I will address in Chapter 3 'Creative Performances'.

Before focusing on clothing in particular, I first want to elaborate further on Neisser's notions as well as Eakin's reflections, also with regard to material objects in general. As mentioned before, Eakin, who claims that identity is constructed by the stories we tell *about* ourselves (2008: x), reflects on Neisser's argument by connecting the term conceptual self to the notion of identity. Eakin argues that thinking of yourself in terms of certain concepts – 'a literary critic, a father, a midwesterner, a bourgeois suburbanite' – is thus thinking of yourself in terms of identity (2008: xiv). Following both Neisser's and Eakin's lines of thought, as human beings we gradually develop, create or choose concepts of who we are, which is then a primarily thought-based sense of self in a social context: our identity. This helps to explain the dynamic interplay between internal psychological formations of concepts of the self and external sociological constructions of identity. In this way, we form mental images, stories or ways to think of 'me'. For instance, our relationship to other people, the social roles that we play (role theories), our profession, our cultural background, or even other people's views – 'what I have been told' (Neisser 1988: 53) – may all become part of the mental concepts that we identify with as 'me'. Moreover, our body can be a

17 It is important to note that 'each of the other four kinds of self-knowledge', as developed by Neisser, 'is also represented in the conceptual self' (Neisser 1988: 54). Specific personal experiences, memories or emotions, for instance, may thus become part of certain concepts of the self.

strong point of identification – for example, 'I have a beautiful body' – which consequently becomes an important concept of the self (which is both an internal model as well as a trait attribution). It becomes part of the story we tell about ourselves, and hence enhances our mental sense of identity.

In addition to this creation of mental concepts pertaining to our physical form, we may also identify with material possessions – which is especially relevant in these days of 'hyperconsumption' (Lipovetsky 2005: 11). Material objects may become part of our notion of who we are, and will thus add to our conceptual self. With regard to consumer culture, this has, for instance, been theorised in marketing theory. Following Tucker (1957), Constantin von Maltzahn argues that 'consumer goods [...] represent stimuli for cueing and strengthening the self-concept of consumers. [...] In that way, the purchasing act serves a number of different functions, the most important of which being the affirmation and enhancement of the self' (2013: 22). For instance, a large motorcycle that we own, or having a lot of books on our shelf, may contribute to our mental concepts of ourselves as 'tough' or 'intelligent' (trait attributions). I would argue that the mechanism of the formation of these concepts of the self is inextricably interconnected to the construction of identity through consumption as both Lipovetsky and Bauman analyse, which helps us to understand that our choices to consume particular objects take place within the context of capitalist, socio-cultural and economic systems. Furthermore, this identification with material goods is, in my view, particularly true for fashion's material tools, dressing the physical body, which have increasingly become an important means in the formation of identity (Teunissen 2009: 15). As fashion is so close to the physical body, it is an intimate form of consumption, and therefore essential to the construction of identity. The roles that we play in society (role theories), the concepts of our physical bodies (internal models), and the traits we assign to ourselves or to other people (trait attributions), may all be materialised, expressed, or affected by clothes. This articulation of concepts of the self by wearing particular garments must also be understood within the dynamics of social structures and external stimuli inherent to the fashion system. As I will illustrate, theories of different fashion scholars confirm the relationship between clothing and each of these three sub-theories (role theories; internal models; and trait attributions) in which our concepts of the self are embedded.

With regard to role theories (i.e. sociological notions of how we fit into society), Simmel has already made the connection with fashion by arguing how it functions as a tool for social distinction (1904: 133). In addition, later fashion theorists have pointed to the ways in which clothes are interconnected with a person's core sociological attributes (Davis 1992: 26), and thus function as a means to perceive people's position in social structures (Crane 2000: 1). In this regard fashion may, for instance, communicate gender, sexuality, social status, or age (Davis 1992: 191), express or contest gender boundaries (Wilson 2010: 117), gender and class divisions (Vinken 2005: 4), or other social categories such as wealth or ethnicity (Anderson 2005: 83). Since all these aspects concern the social roles we enact in society, these fashion theorists, in my view, substantiate the interrelation between clothes and Neisser's first subtheory of role theories.

Secondly, clothes are inextricably interconnected with our internal models (i.e. theories of our bodies and minds), and within that subtheory first and foremost pertain to concepts of our (dressed) bodies and appearance. This is particularly relevant in these times in which 'the shaping of self-identity [...] is in a crucial sense a *body project*' (Svendsen 2006: 75). Dress is often understood to function as a second skin, as it lies on the boundary between self and other, forming part of our epidermis (Entwistle 2007: 93). Considering that clothes are 'an immediate continuation of the body' and that we increasingly seek identity in the body (Svendsen 2006: 77), concepts of the self related to our physical form cannot be separated from the clothes that adorn it. Our concepts of our bodies can be greatly influenced by the clothes that we wear, and vice versa. This confirms the connection between dress and concepts concerning our physical bodies, our internal models.

Thirdly, trait attributions, which overlap with social roles and internal models according to Neisser (1988: 53-54), may be affected or expressed by the garments that we wear. For instance, Fred Davis points to the 'configuration of attributes and attitudes persons seek to and actually do communicate about themselves' (1992: 16) in relation to dress. He argues that fashion constantly seeks to 'relinquish one image of self in favour of another, to cause what was until then thought ugly to be seen as beautiful and vice versa' (Ibid.: 27), clearly pointing out the connection between fashion and trait attributions. In addition, Lipovetsky discusses how haute couture started to psychologise fashion 'by creating designs that gave concrete form to emotions, personality, and character traits' (Lipovetsky 1994: 79). Hence, he argues that 'depending on her clothes, a woman could appear melancholy, casual, sophisticated, severe, insolent, ingenuous, whimsical, romantic, gay, young, amusing, or athletic' (Ibidem). From this perspective, clothes may thus help to create or influence certain beliefs that we are, for example beautiful or ugly, or other traits we assign to ourselves and others.

Garments may therefore help to define, communicate, enhance and shape *specific concepts of the self* that are embedded within these three socially-based subtheories, as part of our conceptual self. Yet, as I have pointed out in the Introduction to my dissertation, much of contemporary discourse on identity and the body suggests that 'there is no self apart from that which is constructed through the fashioning of one's appearance' (Negrin 2008: 2). As I do not want to imply that one's dressed 'physical appearance supplants all other sources of identity formation' (Ibid.: 5), it is important to think in terms of specific *concepts* of the self that may be affected by clothes. In addition to these concepts which are interrelated to the material tools of fashion, different ideological concepts of the self pertaining to role theories, internal models and trait attributions also circulate in the virtual realm of the fashion system. Normative preconceptions concerning, for instance, the clothes we ought to wear when performing a certain role in society, the ways we should think of particular kinds of bodies, or the clothes that supposedly make us more beautiful, sophisticated or feminine, are prevalent in the fashion system. This indicates the relationship between fashion, as a system or network of different concepts of the self, and Neisser's subtheories of the conceptual self. The formation of concepts of the self must thus be understood within these structuring principles of the fashion system.

Based on the points of connection between clothing and Neisser's three subtheories in which the concepts of the self are embedded, I argue that the construction of identity in the virtual realm of the fashion system as well as through garments primarily operates at the level of the conceptual self. From this perspective I propose to the construction of identity through clothing in terms of how these material objects of fashion may help to create, change or add concepts to our conceptual self. At the same time, there is an interplay between self-concepts and material objects, since other mental concepts that we have – for instance, 'I am a professor' – may evidently also influence our choice of clothes, expressing part of our conceptual self through clothing, and consequently affirming our identity. In this sense we are able to manage our appearance, enhancing specific concepts of the self, based on anticipated social expectations. Erving Goffman explains this process in his analyses of the way in which the roles we perform in the public sphere become part of who we are. He argues that individuals play roles in society in relation to social audiences and are thus usually what they appear to be as they are able to manage their appearances (Goffman 1959: 71). This confirms that the conceptual self comes into being in relation to a social network, and is thus simultaneously psychologically created as well as socially constructed.

The role material objects play in the construction of certain concepts of the self, points to a fundamental fluidity or variability of specific parts of the conceptual self. Although some are perhaps more stable than others, certain concepts of the self may erode, or may be changed – which is where the fluidity of identity comes into play. Also, we have the possibility – although in some cases to a greater extent than in others – to consciously choose the content of these mental concepts, which also confirms its underlying flexibility. We may thus change or add to these self-concepts, but we may also hold on to a more fixed conceptual self. Certain concepts are more likely to stay relatively stable over time, while other concepts of the self are more fluid. The self-concepts that may be shaped, affected or altered by material objects such as clothes are presumably more variable than, for instance, one's nationality. The difference between the terms 'sex' and 'gender' clarifies this. Whereas sex – male or female – refers to biological differences between men and women, gender is the socio-cultural construction of masculinity and femininity. Since gender is often conceived of as a performance (Butler 1990, 1993), self-concepts concerning gender are more prone to be changed and are thus more fluid than concepts pertaining to one's sex – which exemplifies the way in which certain concepts are more variable than others.

The increased importance of consumption to our identity could potentially enable the continuous variation of different mental concepts of who we are – while other concepts might remain unaffected. Considering its inherent constant change and dynamics of novelty (Wilson 2010: 3; Lipovetsky 1994: 20-24), fashion incessantly provides consumers with new items as well as imageries to consume and identify with, which makes the fluidity of certain concepts of the self particularly relevant in the realm of fashion. Evidently, one may also consume in order to reconfirm and enhance the same concepts over and over again. Yet, in these days of 'liquid modernity' there are perhaps less fixed and stable concepts of the self, which leaves more room for the fluid parts of the conceptual self.

To bring the theoretical concepts together, consumption – with fashion as the prime example – is the important link between Neisser's psychological perspective on the formation of the conceptual self, and Lipovetsky's and Bauman's sociological analyses of the construction of identity. As individuals dress their physical bodies with fashion's material tools, they simultaneously operate within fashion as a socio-cultural and economic system, which requires a synthetic description of the creation of specific concepts of the self, integrating psychological and sociological approaches of identity. Following Eakin and Neisser, I understand the concept of identity in terms of a conceptual self, consisting of numerous different concepts of the self, which are embedded in a network of socially-based assumptions and theories (role theories; internal models; and trait attributions). Instead of using the notion of the fluidity of identity – which may suggest the fluidity of every aspect of identity, or of each facet of the self – I prefer to think in terms of the fluidity of specific *concepts* of the self. In using the term fluidity I refer to the way in which Bauman defined it as something that can easily change shape (Bauman 2000: 1-2). It is important to note that certain concepts are more variable or fluid than others. Specific concepts of the self, embedded in Neisser's three subtheories, may be materialised, expressed and affected by clothes. The self-concepts affected by clothes are more fluid in contrast to other material objects because of the proximity of textiles to the physical body. Garments may thus help to define, enhance and shape specific concepts of the self, as part of the conceptual self, which then comes into being within the socio-cultural system of fashion. By shaping certain concepts, framing part of the conceptual self, and thus temporarily solidifying the fluid as defined by Bauman (2000: 82), clothing potentially offers a perhaps illusionary answer to the quest for identity in constantly changing, fragmentary 'hypermodern times' (Lipovetsky 2005). In the next section I will explore the virtual realm of fashion imagery in which Dutch photographers experiment with specific concepts of the self, while looking at the way clothes relate to these concepts.

Momentary Fixations: Exactitudes

First, I will briefly discuss the work of photographers who visualise the power of the fashion system and of clothing to construct and fixate certain visible parts of the conceptual self. The Dutch photographer duo Ari Versluis and Ellie Uyttenbroek are known for the way in which they have systematically documented numerous social identities since 1994, a project which they have called *Exactitudes*.[18] Random people they encountered on the streets of various cities are categorised into different social groups based on shared dress codes and characteristics of their appearances – which is emphasised by their similar poses. The photographers categorised, for example, Madams, homeboys, French Touch boys, and hundreds more social groups (fig. 2.1 - 2.3 > p. 74 – 76). These photographic series visually epitomise Simmel's argument that fashion entails two contradictory social tendencies: the need for union through imitation on the one hand, and on the other, the desire for isolation through individual differentiation (1904: 133); or in other words the

18 See www.exactitudes.com.

desire to belong while striving for individuality. 'This artwork of typology', as Anneke Smelik argues, 'makes us realise that there is very little originality in dressing: rather than being a distinctive individual we are part of a social group or fashion tribe' (2011: 77), which points to the paradoxical relationship between the self and group identities. In *The Times of the Tribes* (1996) Michel Maffesoli discusses these paradoxical dynamics in his postmodernist analysis of the 'interplay between the growing massification and the development of micro-groups', which he calls 'tribes' (1996: 6). He asserts that these tribes characterise sociality at the end of the 20th century, as they are 'preferably [...] expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form' (Maffesoli 1996: 98).

I want to argue that these classifications illustrate the way in which specific concepts of the self may be '"caught," frozen, temporally fixed by fashion' (Entwistle 2000: 32). Fashion, as a system, is a realm of standards, ideal forms, codes and meanings. All these dominant codes, circulating in the fashion system, contribute to the coming-into-being of certain codified concepts of the self. This is clearly exemplified by certain subcultural groups, such as Goths, skaters and punks, who perform already codified self-concepts by wearing certain clothes and adopting a specific outer appearance. As Joanne Finkelstein argues,

> fashion provides a shortcut by which we can adopt an identity and join a subculture that in turn can variously insulate us from others or promote our social stakes. [...] Fashion segments the social world, it localizes social groups by tastes and possessions, it transforms identity into a material commodity (2007: 211).

Fashion's material tools, in this sense, have the power to temporally freeze part of the conceptual self. From this perspective, one could argue that, at the same time, *Exactitudes* shows how the fashion system functions as a 'supermarket of identities', from which one can select an identity (Bauman 2000: 83). Yet, following Neisser, I would rather understand this formation of identity in terms of how the fashion system shapes specific *concepts* of the self, as part of the conceptual self, with many social codes and cultural meanings attached. Individuals who are part of these different codified social groups thus share specific concepts of the self. As *Exactitudes* shows, numerous different concepts can potentially be created, and clothing has a great impact on performative communication as well as the formation of these self-concepts. In this sense *Exactitudes* visualises part of the socio-cultural network of different concepts from which the conceptual self draws its meaning. In addition, *Exactitudes* illustrates that concepts of the self are always defined in relation to other people and other concepts – which is an important part of Neisser's theory.

Material objects of fashion may thus help to create, frame, fixate and express specific concepts as part of our conceptual self. For instance, the concept 'I am a Goth' may be materialised and simultaneously produced by means of clothes, which reinforces one's concept of oneself as well as the concepts others have of this particular person. It is important to emphasise that this obviously pertains to only *one* concept as part of the conceptual self, which consists of numerous different concepts. Furthermore, as Neisser's theory has shown, the conceptual self is only one manifestation of different facets of the self. One's identity is much more

complex, and consists of numerous different concepts, some of which are more stable, and some more variable. The identity of a Goth is undeniably formed by a wide variety of different factors, of which clothing is only one – yet overtly visible – element. Yet, in the case of *Exactitudes*, clothes shape and visually signify one particular visual concept of the self, which reduces identity to merely one visible codified concept. This reduction of identity is accentuated by the similar poses and age groups, and by neutral, white backgrounds providing no environmental context. It could be argued that *Exactitudes* thus demonstrates how the socio-cultural system of fashion operates as a 'higher-order structuring principle', codifying social groups based on shared dress codes, while reducing the complexity of identity to mere fixed concepts.

Exactitudes also shows the way in which fashion's material tools may frame specific concepts of the self, which at the same time confirming the fluid dimension of these concepts. It is precisely *because* of an underlying fluidity of specific concepts of the self, that clothing has the power to shape these concepts. Specific concepts of the self – especially the ones that are easily affected by the material tools of fashion – follow the identity dynamics described by Bauman: 'identities are more like the spots of crust hardening time and again on the top of volcanic lava which melt and dissolve again before they have time to cool and set' (2000: 83). Although Bauman's quote might suggest that every aspect of identity is fluid, it is important to think in terms of the fluidity of specific concepts of the self. Whereas some concepts have set more than others and one can obviously choose to hold on to certain concepts of the self and thus let these concepts harden, I want to point out the intrinsic momentary status of certain concepts of the self that can be shaped through clothes. In this process, a concept of the self may thus dissolve into formlessness before hardening again, taking the shape of a new self-concept. The role that age may play in the formation of specific concepts of the conceptual self demonstrates the ephemerality of particular concepts. For example, it is rare for people in their 40s and 50s to continue dressing up as Goths – which confirms the temporary status of concepts such as 'I am a Goth', while other concepts may remain stable. Clothing – when it is utilised to shape and express specific concepts of the self – can be viewed as the temporary materialised form of numerous possible fluid concepts. The photographers of *Exactitudes* primarily visualise the fixations of different concepts of the self through clothes, while, at the same time, implicitly indicating their flexibility.

In addition to this momentary status of certain formed concepts of the self, it is important to think in terms of *semi*-fixed concepts. Next to their temporality, the fixity of these concepts is also relative and even more fluid than it seems at first sight. When taking a closer look at the categorisations of specific concepts of the self as visualised in *Exactitudes,* we see numerous minor differences between different people within these social groups. For instance, within the category 'Ghoullies' – who look somewhat comparable to Goths – we can distinguish a wide variety of corsets, gloves, accessories, jewellery, or hair styles (see fig. 2.4 > p. 77). Even when choosing to express a particular recognisable "fixed" concept of the self, individuals tend to make minor changes or play with certain codes in order to differentiate themselves, which is, again, an illustration of the contradictory social tendencies that Simmel describes (1904: 133). Moreover, this emphasises the fluidity *within* these seemingly "fixed" concepts of the self. Bauman's analyses of the cultural dynamics of identity help to explain

this illusionary coherence and fixity of different concepts of the self, which he partly bases on a quote by Albert Camus:

> "seen from a distance, [people's] existence seems to possess a coherence and a unity which they cannot have, in reality, but which seems evident to the spectator." [Camus 1971: 226-7] This, of course, is an optical illusion. The distance (that is, the paucity of our knowledge) blurs the details and effaces everything that fits ill into the *Gestalt*. [...] We struggle to deny or at least to cover up the awesome fluidity just below the thin wrapping of the form [...]. Identities seem fixed and solid only when seen, in a flash, from outside (Bauman 2000: 82-83).

The fixity of identity, or in this case rather the fixity of a particular concept of the self expressed and created by means of clothes is thus an optical illusion as well as a sign of the desire for stability, solidity and a coherent self. While *Exactitudes'* visualisations of various visible parts of the conceptual self seem rather fixed from a distance, there are numerous minor differences at the micro-level of details, which indicates the intrinsic fluidity of these concepts. Even the boundaries of these concepts are rather porous in some cases: when are you a Ghoully, when a Goth? In addition, as these categorisations may develop over time, or might differ from country to country, these framed social groups are relatively variable. Yet, while implicitly revealing the flexibility of certain concepts, *Exactitudes* nevertheless primarily visualises the ways in which the fashion system produces semi-fixed concepts of the self, which may be materialised and performed through material objects of fashion.

It is in this sense that *Exactitudes* illustrates the role that consumption and specifically clothes play in the contemporary search for meaning, stability, and a sense of belonging in these insecure times of hypermodernity (Lipovetsky 2005: 64). The performance of certain concepts that we identify with – even if they are only momentary, semi-fixed or illusionary – may thus be seen as a response to the current desire for stability and certainty and as a way to cope with these times of rapid change. Fashion provides the material tools to do this.

Fluid Concepts of the Self

Inez van Lamsweerde: Transforming Bodies, Mobilising Concepts

In contrast to *Exactitudes*, which highlights the possibility of using clothing to temporarily solidify parts of the conceptual self, I will now discuss the work of different fashion photographers who focus first and foremost on the inherently *dynamic* nature of identity – even though they employ different strategies to do so. As mentioned before, it is important to note that most of these photographers often move between experimental work and commercial, editorial work, playing with the fluidity of certain concepts of the self, and with the flexibility of identity, clothing and the body. I will start with the photography of renowned Dutch fashion photographer Inez van Lamsweerde, who, with her partner Vinoodh Matadin, works for well-known brands such as Dior, Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent,

and the Dutch designer duo Viktor&Rolf. Van Lamsweerde's early artistic work in the 1990s already revealed her desire to play with the boundaries of the body as well as the boundaries of identity – questioning and subverting dominant commercial representations of idealised subjects. She was one of the first Dutch fashion photographers who used digital technologies to criticise, for instance, the myth of feminine beauty in western culture (Smelik 2004: 299). As Van Lamsweerde experimented with the 'latest digital imaging technologies', her early artistic work 'captured the imagination of art critics', while the fashion community was captivated by her editorial work not much later (Martin, inezandvinoodh.com).[19] Whereas she contributes to the construction of the image of ideal bodies and subjects in her commercial work, she critically assesses these ideal concepts of the self in her artistic photography.

For example, in the photograph 'Sasja 90-60-90' (1992) Van Lamsweerde presents a model dressed in a bikini with a so-called perfect body and with the ideal bust, waist and hip measurements of 90-60-90 centimetres. However, by using digital technologies her head has been turned 180 degrees, with the front facing backwards – literally providing a different view of the female body. In this sense Van Lamsweerde illustrates as well as criticises most fashion photography, that 'in following the suggestion of the fashion industry about the latest figure, measurements and proportions, declares a new beauty each season; a beauty that is fugitive, ephemeral and insubstantial, yet exerts a powerful hold on corporeal ideals' (Lehmann 2002: 14). While undermining corporeal ideals and pointing out the ephemerality of these concepts of beauty by easily subverting them, Van Lamsweerde also challenges and mobilises normative conceptions regarding a certain fixity of the body. She explores and transgresses the boundaries of the body by liberating certain body parts from their predetermined position. By presenting a body that is not 'organized in accord with biological functions, organic forms, or cultural-historical values' (Sotirin 2005: 101), she embraces the freedom of the virtual realm of photography to re-imagine what a body is. As she rotates one of the most fundamental parts of our being 180 degrees, she investigates ways to approach our bodies or our perception of our bodies differently, to change their shape, and explore their fluidity. Van Lamsweerde's imagery represents the trend among contemporary fashion photographers who are freed from the limitations imposed by the corporeal body or biological realities (De Perthuis 2008: 172), which enables her to create imaginary forms, playing with the flexibility of different concepts of the body. These concepts of our physical bodies are an important part of our conceptual self, as they are embedded in what Neisser calls our internal models, as mentioned before: 'our self-concepts typically include ideas about our physical bodies' (Neisser 1988: 54). Van Lamsweerde thus transgresses the confines of specific concepts of the self embedded in our internal models, and enhances the fluidity (i.e. something that can easily change shape) of these concepts of the body. As Karen de Perthuis argues, these bodies are 'underwritten by the idea of metamorphoses. In other words, it contains the possibility, inherent to fashion, of reinventing itself in a constantly changing form' (2008: 174).

19 As mentioned in Van Lamsweerde and Matadin's biography, written by Penny Martin, on their website: inezandvinoodh.com/#/texts/bio/.

It is the virtual and imaginary realm of fashion that offers the opportunity to play with the idea that 'the body is a cultural construct rather than a natural entity that is fixed and immutable' (Negrin 2008: 83). This is also expressed in Van Lamsweerde's exploration of the fluid boundaries between masculinity and femininity, which is a recurrent theme in her photography as we can see in, for instance, 'The Forest' (1995) (see fig. 2.5 > p. 78) – an image of a man with the hands and lips of a woman – as well as in her recent work with Matadin for the magazine *The Gentlewoman* (2010). Her subversion of specific concepts of the self as regards gender identity is also part of a larger development in fashion photography in which notions of female and male identities have been blurred, giving rise to 'subjects of malleable gender' (Shinkle 2008: 10). In an even more radical way, Van Lamsweerde experiments with the fluidity of certain concepts of the self in her series 'Thank you Thighmaster' (1993) (see fig. 2.6 > p. 79).

In this series Van Lamsweerde displays women whose genitalia have been removed by using digital technologies. These women, for instance, still have breasts, but no longer have nipples. Their bodies have an unnatural metallic gloss, which make them look quite artificial and plastic. By so doing, Van Lamsweerde highlights and criticises the artificiality of contemporary unattainable standards of beauty that people try to meet by, for instance, using exercise products such as the Thighmaster. Furthermore, digital technologies have made these bodies sexless and almost beyond humanity, creating an image in which human and machine are merged (Smelik 2004: 299). As we can sometimes see the veins in hands and feet, there is a clash between the humanity and the artificiality of these bodies. Here, Van Lamsweerde presents the image of a cyborg (cybernetic organism) – 'a hybrid of machine and organism' (Haraway 1991: 149) – which moves in between human and machine, biology and technology, real and artificial, and thus blurs and transgresses the porous boundaries of these categorical distinctions (Sotirin 2005: 101; Braidotti 2011: 208; Smelik 2012: 183). As cultural images of cyborgs move in between these binary oppositions, they mobilise certain fixed categorisations of the self, opening up opportunities to play with what the body is, or what human beings are. Dutch photographers Anuschka Blommers and Niels Schumm view these artificial images of sexless 'posthuman beings' in fashion photography as an expression of the 'prevailing fear of the gradual loss of identity in a society that seemed to have come adrift and in which nothing was what it seemed' (2007: 96). In a more positive sense, these imageries explore a dynamic state of the conceptual self, which could be understood as 'new model for a liberated conception of the self' (Negrin 2008: 83). From this perspective, 'Thank you Thighmaster' can be read as a visual exploration of the fluidity of the concept of the self as a natural organism, or even of the concept of the self as a woman since the female sex organs have been removed.

It is important to emphasise that here, in her artistic work, Van Lamsweerde is playing with the naked, undressed body in contrast to the crucial role that clothes play in her commercial fashion photography. Lehmann argues that the body in fashion photography often disappears behind a complex system of signification of fashion, which makes it a non-body, devoid of sex, bearing no relation to the sensual body (2002: 13-14). Along these lines, Van Lamsweerde's representation of highly artificial sexless bodies may be understood as an implicit reflection on the vital part that clothes – with numerous symbolic codes and

meanings attached – play in the subjectification, or even sexualisation of the human body. As Lehmann continues, 'the body in its "natural" (i.e., naked) state is asexual in fashion photography; only through the addition of commodified fashion does the body obtain sexuality within the image' (2002: 14). It is this asexuality of the body – before being dressed and commodified – in fashion photography that Van Lamsweerde highlights, while pointing out the artificiality of that asexuality at the same time. By doing so, it is implicitly suggested that the body is subjectified, given meaning, a sexuality or an identity through clothes, which is a reflection on the possible temporary fixation of concepts of the self through the addition of commodified clothing – while (concepts of) the naked, undressed bodies in 'Thank you Thighmaster' find themselves in a more fluid state, becoming cyborgs. This confirms the inherently dynamic nature of certain concepts of the self – even those concerning the body – while suggesting that clothing may solidify these fluid concepts. Especially in her artistic work, Van Lamsweerde has experimented with different ways to transform bodies, to transgress seemingly static imageries and ideal subjects, visually playing with different concepts of the body. It is essential to take these concepts of the body into account, especially since the shaping of self-identity is often conceived of as a 'body project' (Svendsen 2006: 75). By visually playing with the flexibility of the body, Van Lamsweerde explores the fluidity of certain concepts of the body, which are the fluid parts of our conceptual self.

Edland Man & Erwin Olaf: Literal Fluidity and the Face of Fashion

Some fashion photographers play with liquidity and fluidity in quite a literal sense. In his artistic work, Dutch fashion photographer Edland Man – who has worked for renowned magazines such as *Vanity* and Italian *Vogue* – uses the possibilities of digital technologies to literally visualise a certain liquidity of our bodies. In both his artistic photographic series 'Metals' (2002) and 'Liquids' (2011) he offers a peek into the mechanism and the fluid substances inside bodies (see fig. 2.7-2.10 > p. 80-83). Although these are different photographic series, these bodies are visualised in similar ways. It is remarkable that we see the bodies of both a coloured woman in 'Metals' and (at least the suggestion of) a white woman in 'Liquids', consisting of similar fluid substances. As we see the ethnic identity of the coloured woman dissolve into liquidity, it is suggested that we are all made up of a comparable "fundamental" fluidity irrespective of, for instance, ethnic background, or skin colour. In this sense, certain concepts of her visualised identity are emptied of their content, as if an important part of her conceptual self finds itself in a state of formlessness. Only her face, which is often taken as emblematic of our self-identity in Western culture (Negrin 2008: 87; Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 167-191), still reveals her ethnic identity and shapes our perception of her visualised conceptual self as a coloured woman. Here we do not see fluidity in the sense that the body is presented as something that can easily change shape, but rather we witness the intrinsic fluidity *within* the body, and hence also the fluidity underlying specific concepts of the body as part of our internal models, as Neisser describes.

I would argue that the face, here, functions as the most important body part in the process of shaping visualised concepts of the self. In the series 'Liquids' the faces are either invisible or have become fluid as well, which draws all attention first and foremost to the inherent

liquidity of the bodies. In one of the images in 'Liquids', we see white trousers, dressing a part of the body below the buttocks, that presumably have just been taken off (see fig. 2.7 > p. 80). This undressing of the body reveals the complex mechanism and the intrinsic fluid dimension of the body, which is usually covered by clothes that may, as argued before, subjectify and sexualise bodies, or (temporarily) shape, fixate and solidify concepts of the self. By literally playing with the fluidity inside bodies, Edland Man points to a fluidity at the core of an important part of the conceptual self and thus liberates these bodies from fashion, from certain fixed codes, labels and concepts of the self.

In a similar vein, Dutch fashion photographer Erwin Olaf literally explores the liquidity of the body in his editorial series 'New York Times Couture' (2006), published in the *New York Times magazine* (see fig. 2.11-2.15 > p. 84-88). Whereas in Edland Man's photography we can still see the contours of the bodies, Erwin Olaf lets different body parts of the models melt and dissolve into for instance, a stone floor or staircase. He thus makes certain "solid" materials – the substance of our body, the material of the floor – fluid, playing with the flexibility of certain fundamentals of our being. The contours of certain body parts have become blurred, fluid, and can barely be discerned from the walls or floors they dissolve into. The models wear dresses by famous designer brands such as Chanel, Lacroix, Versace, or Valentino. Remarkably, in several images in this series, it is primarily the models' heads and faces that fuse with the walls or floors. For instance, in the photo with the dress by Versace the stone floor is making a wave-like motion with the model's face as the epicentre (Bruggeman 2009: 6) (see fig. 2.15 > p. 88). In the photo presenting garments by Chanel, the model's head is about to be absorbed into the swirling movement of the wall (see fig. 2.11 > p. 84). As the face is crucial to the expression of identity, it is an important part of the body as well as particularly significant for our concepts of the self, as Edland Man's series also pointed out.

In order to gain a better understanding of this role of the face, I want to draw attention to the way in which philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari have theorised the concept of the face. They view the face as the body part that operates at the centre of processes of signification: 'the face [...] emits and receives, releases and recaptures signifying signs' (1987: 115). Deleuze and Guattari link the concept of the face to what they call the 'white wall/black hole system' (Ibid.: 167), in which the white wall is 'the wall of the signifier' and the black hole is the 'hole of subjectivity' (Ibid.: 188). The face is thus interconnected with a system of signification and subjectification. Following Deleuze and Guattari, Llewellyn Negrin also points out that 'in our culture, the face is deemed the most precious characteristic of human identity and therefore enjoys a privileged status to the rest of the body. It becomes the site of signification and subjectification' (2008: 87). Faces are thus essential to the coded constitution of identity. In addition, for Deleuze and Guattari 'the face is a politics' (1987: 181), which Ronald Bogue clarifies by explaining that they associate the concept of the face with certain power structures that create meaning, form individual subjects and place them in social and political relation to one another (2003: 83). In his essay 'Surface as Material, Material into Surface' (2013) Lehmann argues that Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the concrete power structures of the face can be expanded to 'the "fashion system" as a ubiquitously coded layer for such structures' (2013: 214). From this perspective, the face – as a body part as well as in a conceptual sense – plays a central role

in processes of signification, in the subjectification of individuals, and in the construction of social identities, which is significant in relation to the fashion system. But what happens when faces become liquid, as we can see in some of Erwin Olaf's photographs?

By liquefying faces and letting them dissolve into certain walls or floors, I argue that he is dismantling the face, which is conceptually 'the same as breaking through the wall of the signifier and getting out of the black hole of subjectivity' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 188). Erwin Olaf thus breaks with the face as the centre of signification, and hence with certain meanings and codes inscribed into the face (Bruggeman 2009: 6). The bodies in these photographs are thus moving towards 'the realms of the asignifying, asubjective, and faceless' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 187), finding themselves in a process of designification and desubjectification, which I propose to explain as the emptying out of the content of certain concepts (or codes and meanings) of the face as a significant body part in the process of the coming-into-being of the conceptual self. We thus see part of the models' bodies literally disappear 'behind the fashions that adorn and conceal it' (Lehmann 2002: 14), which could be an expression of the depersonification of the models that 'allows the clothing to become the body' (Khan 2000: 125). In some cases, the garments stand out even more because of the disappearance of the models' faces, which might also benefit this editorial series in a commercial sense. While the models are in the process of becoming faceless, the designer dresses are given 'a face' instead. As Deleuze and Guattari assert, 'faciality' may also be transferred to other body parts or other objects:

> Even a use-object may come to be facialized: you might say that a house, utensil, or object, an article of clothing, etc., is *watching me,* not because it resembles a face, but because it is taken up in the white wall/black hole process (1987: 175).

When a clothing item becomes facialised, is given a face, it looks at you in the sense that it appeals to you and catches your attention. This relates to the idea that the face usually overcodes other body parts or objects: 'in order to become a "face," one body part has to "overcode" the rest of the body' (Wegenstein 2002: 235). A dress that is facialised is thus taken up in the process of signification and subjectification. In this sense, clothes, as surfaces dressing the physical body, become faces in a conceptual sense. Viewing clothes as both material objects and sartorial signifying sur-faces carrying symbolic codes and meanings, Lehmann argues that '[t]he surface of fashion, in fabrics [*étoffes*], textiles, accessories, make-up and hairstyles, is a repetitive subjectification of dress codes through stylistic manoeuvres' (2013: 202). Furthermore, he continues, in this process, '[t]he body becomes a system of signification and the materiality of limbs, torso and sexual organs is covered up by the "faciality" of a textile front. This front thus moves from textile to text' (Lehmann 2013: 202-203), which can subsequently be read as a signifier as part of the fashion system.

Here we see a significant process in which fashion photography renders subjects 'faceless' (i.e. without identity), as physical human bodies are concealed behind the signifying surfaces of fashion's material tools, while these clothing items simultaneously become 'faces' conceptually as part of fashion's system of signification and subjectification. Thus, fashion

paradoxically leads to a process of depersonification, covering bodies with sartorial signs, yet at the same time offers signifying and subjectifying 'faces' to be consumed. The fluid, faceless bodies in Erwin Olaf's editorial series help to open up the possibility for garments to speak to consumers, to overcode the rest of the body, and to become a face in a conceptual sense. As Erwin Olaf, in my view, allows these designer dresses to become a face, he confirms that clothes are interconnected with a system of signification and subjectification, and, in some cases, may even take over the role of the face in fixating certain concepts of the self. This emphasises the significance of the face in the coming-into-being of specific concepts of the self, which would be an important contribution to Neisser's theory. By letting the models' body parts dissolve into liquidity, playing with the flexibility of certain "fixed" concepts of what a body is, Erwin Olaf also confirms the crucial role of the sur-'face' of fashion in codifying identity.

Marcel van der Vlugt & Freudenthal/Verhagen: Fashioning Concepts of Ethnicities

Since the face plays an important part in the codification of identity, I want to briefly draw attention to a few photographic series by Marcel van der Vlugt in which he dresses faces with different kinds of materials. While Van der Vlugt is also known for his advertising campaigns for brands in fields other than fashion and cannot exclusively be labelled as a fashion photographer, he is active in the world of fashion as he has worked for, for example, the lingerie brand Hunkemöller, Dutch designer Claudy Jongstra as well as for different fashion magazines. His artistic photographic series 'I like...' (2002) and 'Hoshii' (2004) are noteworthy in relation to the face, and specifically to the way in which faces are sometimes covered by cloth and refer to certain concepts of the self. In this series, the faces of the models with different ethnicities are dressed with a wide variety of materials, such as miso, cheese, or coffee (see fig. 2.16-2.18 > p. 89-91). This raises questions about the ways in which adorned and dressed faces – using dress in its broadest sense – refer to certain ethnic identities, and thus to specific concepts as part of different conceptual selves. For instance, in one image of the series 'Hoshii', the face of an Asian woman is covered with the dark brown seasoning, miso, which changes the shape of her face and causes it to resemble that of an African woman (see fig. 2.16 > p. 89). Yet, as she is still recognisable as an Asian woman because of her eyes, we observe an almost alienating combination of different visualised concepts of the self as specific ethnicities are mixed up.

Here we thus encounter fluid faces in the sense that they can easily change shape (Bauman 2000: 1-2) through the addition of different kinds of materials, which shows the fluidity of concepts concerning ethnicity. This image points to the role the face plays in how we fit into society, which, in this case, pertains to both Neisser's role theories and internal models as it concerns socially-based assumptions surrounding ethnicity based on the physical face. Whereas clothes can solidify specific concepts of the self, certain materials dressing the body also enable concepts relating to, for instance, ethnicity to be played around with. In another image of 'I like...', a white woman's face is covered with a slice of cheese – often conceived of as a typical element of Dutch national culture – in such a way that it resembles part of an Islamic niqab, a cloth covering the face below the eyes (see fig. 2.17 > p. 90). Van der Vlugt thus uses different ways to cover faces in order to blur the boundaries between different ethnicities and cultures. He explores how different material objects 'fashion' – i.e.

give meaning to – the physical body, while reflecting on the seemingly easy ways in which dressing certain body parts – in this case especially the face – opens up the possibility of altering certain concepts of the self in the eyes of others. Moreover, Van der Vlugt reflects on the ways in which dressing the face may define and fixate specific concepts of the self, such as the labelling of an Arabic identity, which confirms that the covered face – as a sur-face – is an important part of subjectification and signification. Clothing in its broadest sense is thus also a sur-face 'fashioning' the physical form, as Van der Vlugt's photographic series convey.

The way in which clothing refers to particular ethnicities is a central theme in the series 'Majid' (2010) by the Dutch fashion photographer duo Freudenthal/Verhagen, who do commercial work for different fashion designers (e.g. Viktor&Rolf) as well as editorials for specific fashion magazines (e.g. *Dazed & Confused* and *i-D magazine*). In their series 'Majid' for *Blend Magazine* (July 2010) Freudenthal/Verhagen photographed a dressed man, the stylist Majid Karrouch, with a long beard and a turban, signifying a Western view of religious Arabic identity – although this is evidently only one of the numerous concepts of his conceptual self (see fig. 2.19-2.21 > p. 92). The turban – especially in combination with a long beard – has become a crucial clothing item in Western perspectives of ethnicity when shaping concepts of the self. We may either identify *with* or *against* (mental concepts surrounding) people wearing turbans, enhancing our mental image of others as well as our mental sense of self. This series illustrates how specific concepts of the physical body, of clothes, and of our dressed body become part of the accumulated content of a conceptual self, in our own eyes and also in the eyes of others. In one of the photographs in this series, we see Majid's photo hanging on a white wall, suggesting that he is labelled with an Arabic identity as an *image*, which thus reduces his identity to a mere representation (see fig. 2.20 > p. 92). However, his turban breaks through the fixed frame of his image and appears to be 3D, which, in a sense, liberates him from this fixed 2D image of Western concepts of Arabic identity that were created in the political context of Islamic terrorism.

These photographers are thus playing with concepts concerning ethnicity as part of the visible elements of Majid's conceptual self – his dressed body. These concepts of ethnicity and of the physical body are inextricably interrelated and may thus be positioned at the interface of Neisser's role theories and internal models. Clothing plays a crucial role in this regard, as it functions as a visual marker of certain social roles, and affects the coming-into-being as well as the subversion of concepts of the clothed body. Freudenthal/Verhagen are breaking through boundaries, fixed frames and contexts, which is clearly visualised in another photograph in this series in which the image is horizontally cut into two halves (see fig. 2.21 > p. 92). While Majid himself has taken off his turban, and is cutting his own beard, the photographers accentuate this undoing of the visible part of religious Arabic concepts by literally breaking with the fixity of his image. The process of undressing, here, coincides with the undoing of concepts of the self. The photographers liberate certain seemingly fixed ethnic concepts of his conceptual self which were partly constructed through his appearance, while simultaneously doing more justice to its fluid parts. This is also visualised in a photograph in which Freudenthal/Verhagen have literally made holes in Majid's face and turban, as if a digital hole puncher had been at work (see fig. 2.19 > p. 92),

which is quite a literal expression of a search for ways to break with the fashioned image of the Western view of his Arabic identity, and with its underlying system of signification and subjectification. Freudenthal/Verhagen operate in fashion as an imaginary realm, and use digital techniques to cause fragmentation, and to literally undo certain "fixed" concepts of the self, shaped through the sur-face of fashion's material tools. They play with the fact that there are more opportunities in the virtual realm of fashion photography for experimenting with the intrinsic unfixity of specific concepts of the self that can easily be undone and freed from fixed frames and contexts. Whereas clothing items and outer appearance temporarily hardened part of Majid's conceptual self as if 'spots of crust [...] on the top of a volcanic lava' (Bauman 2000: 83), the process of undressing and literally breaking with dress codes helps to melt and dissolve his "fixed" concepts into formlessness again, and opens up the virtual realm of numerous other fluid concepts that may subsequently potentially shape his conceptual self.

Bart Hess: Alienating Imageries of Indefinable Concepts

In an even more alienating way, designer, video artist and photographer Bart Hess experiments with visualisations of the conceptual self by dressing the body with different kinds of materials – which he regularly does in collaboration with the artist Lucy McRae. As mentioned on Hess' website: 'the artistic duo LucyandBart are known for whimsical manipulations of the human body, and they love to use outlandish materials like foam and beds of grass' (barthess.nl/portfolio/62). In his work Hess explores several fields, such as material studies, animation and photography, and cannot therefore easily be labelled. Nonetheless, it is particularly interesting with regard to the relationship between fashion and the notion of the conceptual self that he plays with, for instance, certain unexpected materials as a second skin, and with the fusion between fashion and the human form. In their series for the fashion magazine *AnOther Man* (A/W 2010), for instance, Hess and McRae take their investigation of the fluidity of the conceptual self to an extreme by exploring the boundaries between humans and animals – even moving beyond the subtheories defined by Neisser in which concepts of the self are embedded. This series is a collaboration between Hess, McRae, stylist Alister Mackie and photographer Nick Knight, and presents fashion designs by Rick Owens, Comme des Garçons and Vivienne Westwood (see fig. 2.22-2.25 > p. 93). Hess and McRae's editorials consequently need to be understood as experiments within the commercial context of magazines in the fashion system, which could be viewed as a sign of the current proximity of fashion photography to contemporary art. Although this experimental, artistic dimension might be considered ambiguous since these images are presented within the context of commercial and promotional purposes, this series does present an interesting perspective on the ways in which the virtual, representational realm of fashion offers possibilities to play with concepts of the self.

A few photographs in this series depict male human bodies dressed with different kinds of sculptural shapes and with animalistic hair-like materials also covering the face, which function as surrealistic extensions of the human body – exploring, stretching and transgressing the boundaries of concepts embedded in Neisser's internal models. The otherness of the men in this series is emphasised as they visually move towards the animalistic, almost beyond humanity. The artists play with the notion that certain material objects

of fashion function as a second skin (Entwistle 2007: 93-104), which raises questions about the porous boundaries between clothes and the human body. In two other even more alienating images of this series we can hardly tell the difference between human bodies and the other materials anymore, pointing to an exploration of the fluid boundaries between the body and material objects. This is an expression of the relative freedom – although possibly constrained by commercial interests – of contemporary fashion photographers to create 'imaginary forms where body and garment dissolve into one another' (Shinkle 2008: 10). These bodies merge with a variety of different materials that can barely be identified, but are presumably foam, paint, and long hair. Only a few body parts – two legs, and a face – can still be recognised in this fusion between the physical form and an estranging combination of materials functioning as a second skin.

These explorations lead to alienating, almost monstrous imageries, visually offering ways to think beyond concepts of the human, escaping from concepts of the body as we know it, as well as from our established conceptions of fashion. Philosopher Rosi Braidotti's analyses of the monstrous in western, postmodern culture help to develop a better understanding of these imageries. Braidotti argues that there is an enormous increase in different "others," and particularly 'teratological or monstrous others' (2002: 175), which is especially visible in social and cultural imageries (Ibid.: 177):

> To sum up: in the contemporary imaginary, the monstrous refers to the play of representation and discourses that surround the bodies of late postmodernity. [...] I view this as the counterpart and the counterpoint to the emphasis that dominant post-industrial culture has placed on the construction of clean, healthy, fit, white, decent, law-abiding, hetero-sexual and forever young bodies (Braidotti 2002: 199).

These perfect and dominant concepts of the self (e.g. clean, healthy, fit, white, decent) are often visualised in commercial advertising campaigns, but are radically undone in the images of "other" men – although almost impossible to distinguish as men – in these editorial photographic series for *AnOther Man*. The images in this series also move beyond certain pre-categorised concepts of the self as visualised in *Exactitudes*, moving towards the indefinable, the inconceivable, and the realms of fluidity. Although part of a fashion editorial, we observe radically different forms in this photographic series, dressed by other material objects than prevail in the representational realm of fashion. Following Braidotti, this could be understood as a countermovement to representations and discourses surrounding idealised concepts of the self in contemporary (fashion) imageries.

Since these imageries move beyond signification, and beyond subjectification, the viewer is unable to define or identify concepts expressing what we observe. This illustrates the role certain material objects, functioning as a second skin, may play in experimentation with certain indescribable and impalpable imaginary concepts of the self. In addition, this confirms the fluidity or indefinability of specific parts of the conceptual self as well as the way in which certain materials, dressing the physical body, help to undo certain "fixed" concepts of the self. Although Bart Hess is not solely a fashion photographer, he works in

the virtual realm of fashion in quite an artistic sense. He thus embraces the possibilities of the imaginary realm of fashion to transgress boundaries and experiment with the liquidity of certain concepts of the self that pertain to the physical body and material objects in an often surrealist way.

All these examples demonstrate the different ways in which photographers play with fluid concepts as part of the conceptual self. Although some of these images might seem rather extreme, they exemplify the ways in which fashion photography often operates as it opens up a virtual realm of possibilities to visualise that which often remains invisible in real life. In a broader cultural sense, these visualised fluid parts of the conceptual self could be read as an expression of the state of individuals in these times of hypermodernity – 'characterized by movement, fluidity and flexibility' (Lipovetsky 2005: 11) – in which the dynamics of fashion are all-encompassing (Lipovetsky 1994: 131) and individuals are more destructured, unstable, in thrall to changing fashions, and more open and easy to influence (Lipovetsky 2005: 12). The virtual realm of fashion photography expresses these times of movement, fluidity and flexibility to which specific concept of the self are subject, and visualises the ways in which both the dynamics and the material objects of fashion have become an inextricable part of contemporary individual subjects, integrated into human bodies. While the selected fashion photographers sometimes implicitly reflect on the ways in which clothing as a sur-face helps to define, enhance and shape specific concepts of the self, they primarily focus on the inherently dynamic nature of the conceptual self – often taking its fluidity to an extreme. They visualise the flexibility of specific concepts of the self embedded in Neisser's role theories or internal models, while, in some cases, also moving beyond these categories of different concepts of the self.

This experimentation with liquid faces, bodies, and hence with the fluid boundaries of concepts of the self, confirms that fashion as an imaginary realm produces a fluidity of identity. It is important to emphasise that, here, this fluidity primarily resides in the representational realm of fashion. Therefore, this fluidity of fashion first and foremost affects the visible outer layer of specific concepts of the self, which again illustrates that fashion's material tools function as visual sur-face. On the one hand, these surfaces have the power to subjectify individuals and to signify codified identities. On the other hand, since this fluidity relates to the surface as an outer layer, it allows for continuous experimentation with the boundaries of specific concepts of the self by playing with the material objects of fashion. However, this fluidity primarily affects only specific visible concepts as part of the conceptual self which, as the synthesis of Neisser's and Bauman and Lipovetsky's theories helped to understand, consists of numerous concepts of the self constituted through different psychological and sociological factors.

Conclusion: A Continuous Oscillation

A focus on fashion photography shows the ways in which the virtual, representational realm of fashion enables photographers to play with the fluidity of the conceptual self, which consists of numerous different concepts of the self embedded in a network of socially-based

assumptions and theories, as Neisser defines it (1988: 35-36; 52). Based on my analyses of photographic series related to fashion, I argue that there is a continuous oscillation between the formation and temporary fixation of specific visible concepts of the self through the signifying sur-face of clothes (e.g. *Exactitudes*) and the potential undoing of these concepts to do more justice to their underlying fluidity (e.g. Inez van Lamsweerde, Erwin Olaf, Freudenthal/Verhagen, etc.). Thinking of identity in terms of a conceptual self as Neisser defined it helps us to understand that different *concepts* of the self may be changed or expressed through fashion's material tools, without falling into the trap of the misconception that fashion necessarily affects every aspect of identity. Although fashion photographers regularly visually play with the conceptual self in a way that is often not possible in real life, their work does shed light on the ways in which the representational realm of fashion – and the use of digital technologies in particular – offers infinite possibilities for playing with the body and concepts of the self.

While most of the Dutch photographers I focused on do commercial work as well, they frequently explore the artistic, more experimental side of fashion by using digital technologies, sometimes almost moving towards somewhat surreal imageries. This exemplifies the current proximity of fashion photography to contemporary art, and emphasises that fashion is an imaginary realm, in which it is possible to play with the boundaries of identity. These fashion photographers often blur the boundaries, exploring numerous opportunities to play with the conceptual self, mobilising the seemingly immobile, while embracing fashion as an imaginary realm to visualise the often inconceivable, and are thus doing justice to the idea that specific concepts of the self are in flux, fluid and flexible. Nonetheless, their work also offers insight into the ways in which clothes as visual sur-faces can fixate concepts of the self, and codify identity. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the 'face' helps us to understand that fashion's material objects can render subjects 'faceless' as they are concealed by sartorial signs. At the same time, these clothing items can simultaneously become 'facialised' in a conceptual sense, operating as part of fashion as a system of subjectification and signification.

The importance of the 'face' – both conceptually and as a body part – is, as we have seen, particularly significant for the coming-into-being of specific concepts of the self, which makes an important contribution to Neisser's theory. Furthermore, as fashion can be understood as all-encompassing dynamics (Lipovetsky 1994: 243) and the structures of the fashion system help to articulate identities (Bauman 1991: 206), forming and playing with concepts of the self through fashion's material tools thus take place within this context of commodification, which adds an extra dimension to Neisser's theory of the conceptual self in these days of commodity culture. The ways in which fluid concepts of the self can be shaped through fashion is closely related to the *performance* of identity – the performance of certain concepts that we identify with – through the material objects of fashion, which I will elaborate upon in the next chapter 'Creative Performances'.

fig. 2.1 Exactitudes: *Madams* (1998)
photography: Ari Versluis & Ellie Uyttenbroek

fig. 2.2 Exactitudes: *Homeboys* (2002)
photography: Ari Versluis & Ellie Uyttenbroek

fig. 2.3 Exactitudes: *French Touch Boys* (2006)
photography: Ari Versluis & Ellie Uyttenbroek

fig. 2.4 Exactitudes: *Ghoullies* (2002)
photography: Ari Versluis & Ellie Uyttenbroek

fig. 2.5 Inez van Lamsweerde, *The Forest* (1995) Rabo Art Collection

fig. 2.6 Inez van Lamsweerde, *Thank you Thighmaster* (1993) Rabo Art Collection

fig. 2.7 Edland Man: *Liquids* (2011)

fig. 2.8 Edland Man: *Liquids* (2011)

fig. 2.9 Edland Man: *Liquids* (2011)

fig. 2.10 Edland Man: *Metals* (2012)

fig. 2.11 Erwin Olaf, New York Times Couture: *Chanel* (2006)

fig. 2.12 Erwin Olaf, New York Times Couture: *Gaultier* (2006)

fig. 2.13 Erwin Olaf, New York Times Couture: *Lacroix* (2006)

fig. 2.14 Erwin Olaf, New York Times Couture: *Valentino* (2006)

fig. 2.15 Erwin Olaf, New York Times Couture: *Versace* (2006)

fig. 2.16 Marcel van der Vlugt, Miso (2004) from the series Hoshii

fig. 2.17 Marcel van der Vlugt, Cheese (2002) from the series I Like...

fig. 2.18 Marcel van der Vlugt, Coffee (2001) from the series I Like...

fig. 2.19 Freudenthal/Verhagen, *Majid* (2010)
Blend magazine

fig. 2.20 Freudenthal/Verhagen, *Majid* (2010)
Blend magazine

fig. 2.21 Freudenthal/Verhagen, Majid (2010)
Blend magazine

fig. 2.22 Bart Hess & Lucy McRae, *AnOtherMan* (2010) photography: Nick Knight

fig. 2.23 Bart Hess & Lucy McRae, *AnOtherMan* (2010) photography: Nick Knight

fig. 2.24 Bart Hess & Lucy McRae, *AnOtherMan* (2010) photography: Nick Knight

fig. 2.25 Bart Hess & Lucy McRae, *AnOtherMan* (2010) photography: Nick Knight

03. Creative Performances

The Case of Aynouk Tan

In contemporary scholarly work on fashion and the act of dressing, there is an increased focus on the body and performance. As I have shown in the chapter 'On Theory and Methodology', the notion of 'performance' was often connected to outer appearance yet, more recently, scholars have increasingly emphasised dressing as an embodied practice – which is important to theorising identity as a performative practice. Moreover, the notion of identity as a fluid dimension is strongly related to the idea that identity needs to be performatively constituted. In this chapter I will elaborate on the theoretical concept of performance in relation to fluid concepts of the self in the field of fashion, aiming to develop deeper insights into the performative dimension of identity and the performative expressions of the clothed body.

In general, the concept of performance is used in many different areas, such as anthropology (Turner), sociology (Goffman), theatre studies (Schechner), art history (Goldberg), and linguistics (Austin). Since the 'Performative Turn' in the nineties, scholars have tended to analyse events and view our culture and daily life 'as performance' (Schechner 2002: 32; Taylor 2003: 3). Jon McKenzie argues that we are entering an age of global performance: 'Performatives and performances are our system and our style, our ways of saying and seeing [...] performatives and performances are in the midst of becoming the onto-historical conditions for saying and seeing anything at all' (2001: 176). In this chapter I will focus on performance in a cultural sense, which is: 'the living, embodied expression of cultural traditions and transformations' (McKenzie 2001: 8).20 The notion of cultural performance operates on two levels. On one level, performance functions as an object of analysis and involves cultural practices and events such as dance or theatre, which are characterised by intentional rehearsed behaviour on stage. On another level, performance 'constitutes the methodological lens that enables scholars to analyse practices as performance', such as gender, ethnicity, and sexual identity, which are implicitly performed daily in the public sphere (Taylor 2003: 3). Judith Butler's work on gender performance has greatly contributed to the contemporary perspective of how identity, theoretically, can be viewed as a performance (Butler 1990, 1993). Performance is thus understood as an artistic, theatrical on-stage performance, and as a performance of identity in daily life. This is reflected in the field of fashion studies. On the one hand, fashion is increasingly conceived of as an aesthetic and creative performance, with the fashion show as an expression of on-stage artistic performances or performance art (e.g. Hollander 1975; Duggan 2006; Smelik 2007; Teunissen 2009). On the other hand, scholarly work on fashion and identity has increasingly drawn attention to the performance of identity through fashion and clothing (e.g. Featherstone 1991; Kondo 1997; Barnard 2002; Vinken 2005; Marchetti and Quinz 2009; Smelik 2011). Although both theoretical perspectives of performance are significant, in this chapter I will argue that, within the context of fashion, the separation between these two levels of performance cannot be maintained as these are inextricably interconnected. I will critically reflect on how to conceive of the concept of performance in the realm of fashion, while arguing for the importance of a theoretical understanding that allows embodiment and the clothed body's performative expressions to be taken into account.

20 I will thus not take into account other notions of performance, such as 'organisational performance' or 'technological performance' which Jon McKenzie distinguishes in *Perform Or Else. From Discipline to Performance* (2001: 5-12).

I will do so by presenting my analysis of the columns and accompanying photographs of Dutch fashion journalist Aynouk Tan in the weekly magazine supplement to *NRC*, a leading Dutch quality newspaper (April 2009 until March 2011).[21] Every week Tan dressed up differently and was photographed for her columns. Wearing unexpected outfits in a playful way, Tan aimed to offer a fresh perspective on fashion's possibilities and conceptions, presenting fashion as a performance: 'Fashion is not just clothes [...] it is also how you move and talk, actually one big act' (Interview AT 2010). In her performances Tan explores different personas which are either clichéd or alienating: Lady Gaga, a superhero, a futurist robot, a dandy, a king of the absurd, a woman who is completely 'en vogue', a boy wearing street wear, Mathilde Willink (an extravagant Dutch fashion icon in the 1960s and 1970s), a character from the Enlightenment, smart brats, a posh Muslim, a free-spirited travelling woman inspired by the road-trip movie Easy Rider, a burka babe wearing a Christian cross, a colourful homeless person, and some are even beyond description (see e.g. fig. 3.1-3.4 > p. 114). Both in the written text of the columns and in the accompanying photographs, Tan comments on the fashion system, specific designers, fashion items, recent fashion events, and on new phenomena and trends within (Dutch) fashion culture.

Tan's interest in fashion has its roots in a project she did while studying communication studies. As a third-year student, she hit on the idea of starting a project on fashion, called 'Discover Dutch Fashion', together with her friend Jan Schoon. For this project Schoon and Tan selected several designers who were at the time studying at the Fashion Institute Arnhem (FIA), which is where Tan met many contemporary Dutch fashion designers. She also worked as a model for graduation projects and for 'Anti-Models', a model agency for less conventional-looking models. In the same period, Tan became acquainted with Dutch fashion designer Bas Kosters, 'who is a performer himself' as Tan claims (Interview AT 2010). Kosters is known for his extravagant designs and performances in which he playfully mixes fashion, design, music and art. Tan was fascinated by his theatrical approach to fashion in combination with his societal reflection. After her internship at FIA, Tan worked for several magazines and newspapers and modelled in various fashion shows. In 2008 she won the 'Dutch Fashion Icon Award' for her remarkable personal style, confirming her role as a style icon within Dutch fashion culture. During these years her performative games with clothing and identity, and her critical view on fashion, continued to develop and later found expression in her columns and photographs for *NRC*'s magazine (Interview AT 2010).

Tan's photographs were initially shot by photographer Dennis Duijnhouwer and later, from June 2009 onwards, by photographer Mylou Oord. In an interview that I conducted with Tan, she claimed to have quite a lot of freedom when creating her columns, expressing her thoughts and choosing her photographs (Interview AT 2010). The photos served to illustrate the written text in the columns and thus visualised the topic. In addition, the names of the brands, designers and the prices of the clothes were explicitly mentioned in a short text next to the photographs. Both in the images accompanying her columns and in daily life she experiments with the material tools that fashion offers to (de)construct specific

21 Because of a new fashion editor-in-chief and a change of format for the newspaper and magazine, Tan could not continue her weekly columns for *NRC*'s magazine.

concepts of the self, which is why Tan's columns serve as a worthwhile case to study. Using my model for visual analysis as a method, I have analysed every single column from April 2009 until March 2011. Additionally, I have conducted an interview with Aynouk Tan herself (Amsterdam, 23 March 2010), which helped me to gain a deeper insight into her intentions, thoughts and beliefs.

My analysis shows that both levels of performance – *artistic, theatrical on-stage performances* and *performances of identity in daily life* – are addressed in Tan's columns. Based on my analysis, I argue that performance in the field of fashion needs to be theorised at the intersection of staged theatrical performances and embodied identity performances in daily life, which requires an interdisciplinary, synthetic approach. Therefore, I use different theoretical perspectives relevant to fashion and identity performances stemming from sociology, art history, feminist theory, philosophy and film and cultural studies. Firstly, I will approach Tan's self-presentational fashion images within the framework of artistic, theatrical on-stage performances or, in other words, performance art (e.g. Goldberg 1979; Stern and Henderson 1993; Auslander 1999; Jones 1995/2000; Carlson 2004). Secondly, as Tan plays with identity performances, I will address the everyday embodied practice of dressing as a performance which is implicitly enacted in the public sphere daily. Especially Butler's (1990, 1993) work on performative identity dynamics and Erving Goffman's (1959) view on the enactment of certain social roles, provide a useful theoretical framework for comprehending the way in which clothing allows us to perform specific concepts of the self. Thirdly, I will explore the interplay between these two levels of performance, arguing that fashion operates in between identity performances and artistic performances, and exploring new possible conceptions of performances. The concept of 'theatrical sociality' (1976), which stems from the postmodern philosophy of Jean Baudrillard, is useful for theorising the interconnection of theatrical performances and identity performances. Yet, as I have pointed out in the chapter 'On Theory and Methodology', this philosophical perspective is helpful to the extent that it presents fashion as a system of free-floating non-signifying signs, which allows us to perform and to simulate identities. However, we need additional analytical tools to acknowledge the role of the body and embodiment when theorising performative identity practices in the realm of fashion.

While Butler's important contribution to the notion of performance proposes that performative practices are *embodied* practices, her work has also been criticised for remaining indebted to a discursive and representational paradigm (Del Río 2008: 5). In the final part of this chapter, I will argue that the notion of 'affective performances', as theorised by Elena del Río (2008), is useful in taking the next step. In her work Del Río emphasises the affective, creative and performative power of actual, living bodies (Del Río 2008: 16). The conceptual tools she offers allow the creative potential of the (clothed) body – and thus the body's expressive and affective qualities in each performative event – to be taken into account.

Performance Art and Tan's Self-Presentational Images

Tan's self-presentational images resemble different artists who were also engaged in the act of performing identity. Therefore, I will first reflect on performance as an artistic cultural practice. Tan's visual imageries, her self-presentational images, as well as her performances in everyday life could be seen as a continuation of a long artistic trajectory. In *Travelling Concepts* (2002), Mieke Bal points out that 'the home of the word *performance* is not philosophy of language, but aesthetics' (2002: 179). Tracing the aesthetic and artistic dimension of performance is an important first step towards comprehending Tan's enactments.

Performance art, which especially flourished during the 1960s and 1970s, basically concerned live presentations by artists. RoseLee Goldberg was the first to publish a history of performance art in 1979, 'demonstrating that there was a long tradition of artists turning to live performance as one means among many of expressing their ideas' and using live gestures as a weapon against the conventions of established art (2001 [1979]: 7). In *Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present* (1979) Goldberg positioned this "new" live art form within the context of an avant-gardistic art history such as Futurism, Dada and Surrealism. 'Unlike theatre', Goldberg argues, 'the performer *is* the artist, seldom a character like an actor, and the content rarely follows a traditional plot or narrative' (2001: 8). Goldberg emphasises that performance art in the 20th century is an open-ended medium, executed by artists impatient with the limitations or more established art forms, and determined to take their art directly to the public. While arguing that each performer makes his or her own definition of performance art in the very process, Goldberg also mentions that it often draws freely on a number of media and underlines performance art's anarchic stance (2001: 9). Many other scholars have also purported to further define performance art. Carol Simpson Stern and Bruce Henderson (1993), who are influenced by Goldberg, provided a number of characteristics, while at the same time stressing that performance art can vary widely:

> (1) an antiestablishment, provocative, unconventional, often assaultive interventionist or performance stance; (2) opposition to culture's commodification of art, (3) a multimedia texture, drawing for its materials not only upon the live bodies of the performers but upon media images, television monitors, projected images, visual images, film, poetry, autobiographical material, narrative, dance, architecture, and music; (4) an interest in the principles of collage, assemblage, and simultaneity; (5) an interest in using "found" as well as "made" materials; (6) heavy reliance upon unusual juxtapositions of incongruous, seemingly unrelated images; (7) an interest in the theories of play [...], including parody, joke, breaking of rules, and whimsical or strident disruption of surfaces; and (8) open-endedness or undecidability of form (Stern and Henderson 1993: 382-3).

As I will illustrate, several of these characteristics of performance art defined by Stern and Henderson are useful for gaining insight into Tan's columns, which enter the domain of performance art in a number of ways. Tan uses different techniques that stem from

performance art within the field of fashion. As I will argue, this exemplifies the way in which the boundaries between performance art and fashion are increasingly blurred.

Using her own body, the medium of photography, fashion photography and written text in the magazine supplement of a well-established newspaper, Tan employs a multimedia strategy to express her performances directly to the public. By assembling different items that cover – and sometimes even move beyond – the full range of what could possibly be considered as clothing, Tan plays with material garments by taking them out of their original context to create new and unexpected combinations. For instance, in her column 'Arrogance on a Clothes Hanger' (13 March 2010), she combines a Jean Paul Gaultier kaftan with sleeves made from black leggings she bought at her local supermarket (see fig. 3.5 > p. 115). Making surprising combinations, she shows 'an interest in the principles of collage, assemblage, and simultaneity' (Stern and Henderson 1993: 382-3). Tan regularly wears clothes that play with fashion's creative potential, such as a dress made of a myriad of colourful umbrellas by Bas Kosters; a shirt with a composition of bow ties presumably made by Tan herself; a yellow dress by the Dutch designer Monique van Heist that is worn in front of the body; or a black jacket with holes in the armpits for the arms by the Belgian fashion house Maison Martin Margiela (see fig. 3.6-3.9 > p. 115-116). By mixing up different kinds of materials and clothes – from umbrellas to high fashion – Tan shows 'an interest in "found" as well as "made" materials' (Stern and Henderson 1993: 382-3).

In addition, Tan aims to offer alternatives to prevailing ideas, standards and symbols circulating in contemporary culture and the fashion system by presenting ambiguous images. For instance, she turns certain beauty ideals concerning the body and identity upside down. In one of her columns, 'The Naked Truth' (5 December 2009), Tan criticises the fact that many women buy into the "perfect" ideals of beauty (see fig. 3.10 > p. 116). Tan, who is photographed wearing a bunny outfit entirely made of correction underwear, emphasises that this artificial ideal does not exist in reality. By presenting ambiguous and sometimes alienating images, Tan sets out to undermine the conventions of the established fashion system. She explicitly attacks the power of fashion magazine *Vogue* (US) and its chief editor Anna Wintour who, writes Tan, has largely influenced the way most fashion glossies look today by putting celebrities on the cover, featuring skinny models and promoting seasonal trends. To demonstrate the power of *Vogue,* Tan quotes an employee of the magazine who compares the supremacy of *Vogue* and Wintour – with their 13 million followers – to religion, calling *Vogue* 'the Church' and Wintour 'the Pope'. By praising and wearing clothes by designers who subvert certain codes dominating the fashion system, Tan presents different ways to dress, arguing for active individual differentiation rather than passive group behaviour. The alternatives she offers often take individual differentiation to an extreme, and include 'unusual juxtapositions of incongruous, seemingly unrelated images' (Stern and Henderson 1993: 382-3), such as combining the typical look of the rock group Kiss with an abundantly colourful dress (see fig. 3.11 > p. 116).

Not only does Tan present ambiguous and alienating alternatives, she also plays with rather familiar images in contemporary fashion culture, such as a nerdy schoolboy, the 'celebrity look', a typical Dutch schoolgirl who wants to conform with her peers, or an over-the-top

transvestite. Either by exaggerating the theatricality of these acts in the photographs or by deconstructing these rather stereotypical characters in her column text, Tan parodies these recognisable images, again insisting on more experimentation and creativity. By turning these cliché images into caricatures, Tan employs a performance art technique that includes play, parody, joke and breaking with rules (Stern and Henderson 1993: 382-3).

Although Tan employs several performance art techniques in her columns and accompanying photographs, her performances take place within the realm of fashion. This stands in stark contrast to the political context of the provocative performances in the 1960s and 1970s, which has influenced both Goldberg's and Stern and Henderson's rather avant-gardistic perspective on performance art. Whereas their definition highlights performance art's opposition to culture's commodification of art, Tan evidently operates within the realm of commodity culture. Moreover, Goldberg was primarily focused on live performances by artists, whereas Tan's self-presentational photographs can be better understood in the context of contemporary mediatised culture and, as I will argue, in relation to the confluence between performance art, commodity culture and fashion. In his book *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (1999), Philip Auslander discusses the relationship between live performances and the present mediatised context. He argues that mediatised forms of live performances 'compete for audiences in the cultural market place, and that mediatized forms have gained the advantage in that competition' (1999: 6). At the same time Auslander questions 'whether there really are clear-cut ontological distinctions between live forms and mediatized ones' since 'live events are becoming ever more like mediatized ones' (1999: 7). Therefore, it is important to understand both Tan's performances in everyday life as well as the self-presentational images accompanying her columns in the context of mediatised forms of performances.

Tan's images specifically resemble the work of some artists in particular who have also used the media of photography and clothing to perform specific concepts of the self. Amelia Jones discusses the photographic self-portraiture in the 1980s in which artists exaggerated the process of commodification of the self, and she refers to the 'simulacral self-masquerades' of Eleanor Antin, Cindy Sherman and Robert Mapplethorpe (2000: 22). As Jones argues, these performances of the self-as-image parallel 'the surface emphasis of popular culture's body beautiful cult' (2000: 36), which is particularly relevant in a fashion context. Jones relates this photographic registration of the self back to, for instance, Duchamp's Rrose Sélavy. Auslander too argues that, for instance, Cindy Sherman's photographs of herself in various guises belongs to the same theatrical category called 'performed photography' as Duchamp's photos of himself as Rrose Sélavy (2006: 2). Even though this can be traced back to Duchamp, Jones argues that these photographic self-presentational performances became dominant in the 1980s. It was thus in the 1980s that performers posited the body 'as always already hypercommodified, *as always already a picture*' (Jones 2000: 37, original emphasis), which is comparable to the crucial role that commodity culture, fashion and clothes play in Tan's self-presentational performances. Moreover, as I have argued in the chapter 'On Theory and Methodology', this critique of the self *as* a mere image is a crucial element in contemporary fashion theory.

In '"Clothes Make the Man": The Male Artist as a Performative Function' (1995), Jones specifically elaborates on the role of clothing and identity in relation to Western male artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Andy Warhol, Yves Klein, Robert Morris and Chris Burden, who have enacted masculinity in alternative ways by the use of 'dress' in their self-presentational performances (Jones 1995: 18-32). In this article, 'dress' is understood as 'expressing identities in coded terms that signify affiliations of gender, class, race, nation, profession, and sexual orientation' (1995: 18). Both Duchamp – as his artistic persona Rrose Sélavy – and Warhol – in his drag performances – let us 'know (via context and/or the inclusion of contrasting, masculine codes) they are "men", encouraging us to question how a "man" – or more specifically an "artist" – is defined by confusing the vestimentary codes of artistic subjectivity' (Jones 1995: 25). Their performance of gendered concepts of the self by means of clothes – or rather, their elaborated appearance including make-up, gestures, etc. – helps us to gain insight into Tan's columns, in which gender is a recurrent theme.

Tan deliberately employs the ways in which the sartorial surfaces of clothing signify gender in order to subvert these coded concepts of the self. She claims that 'clothes provide the possibility to rewrite my body: super-feminine or androgynous' (Tan, 11 April 2009), and she desires the freedom to choose who she wants to be: masculine, feminine and everything in between (Tan, 30 October 2010). As I have pointed out in the chapter 'Fluid Concepts of the Self', this should be understood in terms of how material objects of fashion may help to create, fixate and express *specific concepts of the self*, as part of our 'conceptual self' (Neisser 1988), within the socio-cultural system of fashion. Whereas clothing can fixate encoded concepts of, for instance, masculinity or femininity, one can also play with the fluidity of these concepts. Especially concepts pertaining to gender, as the socio-cultural construction of masculinity and femininity (in contrast to one's biological sex), are more prone to be changed, and are thus more fluid and variable. Tan regularly plays with the fluidity of gendered concepts of the self. On the one hand she often creates a stereotypical masculine image by wearing a moustache or a man's suit, and on the other hand she also experiments with masculinity and androgyny by presenting ambiguous images and using certain elements that are alienating to a masculine look. For instance, for the photograph accompanying the 'Holes under the Armpits' column (18 April 2009) Tan wears an oversized jacket by Maison Martin Margiela and has put her arms through the holes under the armpits (see fig. 3.9 > p. 116). Tan wears bright red nail polish and lipstick which are in sharp contrast to her short, dark hair, androgynous face and the masculine vestimentary codes. By combining different codes of masculinity and femininity, Tan emphasises the ambiguity of gendered self-concepts. Tan's self-presentational performances work in a similar way as, for instance, Duchamp's and Warhol's artistic presentations of masculinities in the sense that she also uses contrasting masculine or feminine vestimentary codes in order to question how a man – or a woman for that matter – is defined. Thus, Tan's photographs resemble the work of several artists who have theatrically performed gendered concepts of the self in their photographic self-presentational performances, and who have particularly employed the transformative power of clothing to do so. By intentionally performing alternative and ambiguous gendered concepts, Tan unveils gender *as* a performance, and I will elaborate on this in the second part of this chapter.

The artistic tradition of photographic self-portraiture with an emphasis on commodification of the self as well as on playing with gendered self-concepts offers insight into Tan's use of the sartorial surfaces of clothing to perform different concepts of the self in the realm of fashion. Moreover, Tan's performances must be understood in the context of the blurring boundaries between performance art and commodity culture. While performance art and fashion are evidently quite different media, they are increasingly converging. In his *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (1993), performance artist Allan Kaprow reflects on everyday life activities in performance art. He argues that 'the line between Happening and daily life should be kept as fluid and perhaps indistinct as possible' (1993: 62) and provocatively asks: 'What if I were to just go shopping? Would that not be art?' (1993: 201). In addition to the blurring boundaries between performance art and everyday life, Marvin Carlson demonstrates that by the early 1980s performance art had shifted towards more 'interdisciplinary collaboration and "spectacle," influenced by TV and other popular entertainment modes' (2004: 119). This points to performance art's move towards popular culture. While performance artists in the late 1970s and in the 1980s also displayed the body in costume 'to create a powerful visual image or to embody some historical or contemporary individual or type upon which the artist wishes to comment – often in order to make some social or satirical point' (Carlson 2004: 125), they have increasingly engaged with popular culture, commodity culture and fashion since then.

Photographer Cindy Sherman is noteworthy in this regard. She is known for the ways in which she 'employs costume as disguise to stage images of feminine stereotypes' (Jones 2000: 13) by presenting either the artificiality of stereotypical feminine identities or highly estranging images. In addition, she plays with 'the way in which we dress or the hairstyle we adopt can reflect the controlling social norms and expectations' (Ibid.). Sherman's 'Fashion Series' (1983), commissioned as advertisements, exemplify the confluence of performance art and fashion as she transfers her enactments in her artwork to the field of fashion. As Amelia Jones explains,

> Sherman was commissioned by shop owner Diane Benson to make a series of fashion photographs for *Interview* magazine. She was supplied with clothes by designers such as Jean-Paul Gaultier and Comme des Garçons. The resulting images subverted the glamour of high fashion as a masquerade of caricatured 'feminine' stereotypes in exaggerated costumes and highly mannered poses. Other pictures in a second series commissioned by *Vogue* magazine are more sinister: Sherman appears furious, scarred, depressed, possibly abused or assaulted and mad. While these images served to undercut the fantasy identities sold to women by the fashion industry, their theatricality has enabled the fashion industry to appropriate the dark side of feminine identity to advertise their clothes (Jones 2000: 151).

While some photographs are quite grotesque, Sherman offers an interesting and perhaps somewhat paradoxical critical reflection on the fashion system while simultaneously contributing to the promotion of clothes by famous designers. In her later career Sherman

continued her work in fashion and collaborated with, for instance, *Harper's Bazaar* magazine (1993), designer Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garçons (1994), designer Marc Jacobs (2006) and Balenciaga (2007). In all of those photographic series, Sherman continued her performative self-displaying acts in order to subvert, for example, the contemporary body cult, gender codes, the cultural fascination with youth and idealised identities in the fashion system.

Hence, Cindy Sherman exemplifies the contemporary 'flirtations of performance art with commodity culture' (Auslander 1989: 122), which Auslander conceives as the general trend of performance art – moving 'away from the margins, toward greater exposure' (Ibid.: 123). He regards how performance has found its way into commodity culture as characteristic of postmodern performance, which is 'already between vanguard art and mass culture' (Ibid: 129-130). It is this context of postmodern commodity culture that must be taken into account in relation to Tan's self-presentational performances by means of fashion's material tools. Carlson refers to psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton's notion of a 'protean self', which is 'reflective of the flux of the postmodern world': 'The new sort of self may retain "corners of stability" but it is primarily engaged "in continuous exploration and personal experiment"' (Carlson 2004: 206). As Carlson points out, Lifton cites performance art as one of the tools of such experimentation (Ibidem). Contemporary performance art may thus allow for personal experimentation in the context of the flux of postmodern commodity culture. This is inextricably linked to the fluid dynamics underlying the 'conceptual self' (Neisser 1988), which I theorised in the chapter 'Fluid Concepts of the Self' in relation to the dynamics of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman 2000) and 'hypermodernity' (Lipovetsky 2005). In this sense, performance art allows the fluidity of numerous concepts of the self to be explored through clothes.

Tan's performative practices can best be understood within this context of performance art's increased engagement with postmodern commodity culture, in which fashion offers the material tools for personal explorations. Comparable to the artists mentioned, she is engaged in the act of performing the self in many different guises, experimenting with the possibilities of her own appearance in a continuous process of metamorphosis, playing with the fluidity inherent to the conceptual self. Tan's images – her staged performances – show considerable similarities to a tradition of artists performing the self as an 'exploration through performance of alternative, imaginary, even mythic selves' (Carlson 2004: 163) – which I would rather understand as the performance of alternative, imaginary or mythic *concepts* of the self. This kind of performance was also established during the 1970s and is sometimes called character or persona performance art (Ibidem). Eleanor Antin, for instance, is known for this particular kind of performance art as she explored 'exotic and imaginative alternative versions of her self' such as a king, a ballerina, a movie star, and a nurse (Carlson 2004: 164). In her performances, Tan imaginatively investigates the possibilities to perform numerous concepts of the self using the transformational power of clothing. As she writes in her very first column, 'every single day fashion gives me the opportunity to become who I want to be' (Tan, 11 April 2009), which expresses how contemporary performance art allows room for personal experimentation and for playing with the fluidity of the conceptual self in the flux of the postmodern world. While Tan's enactments resemble earlier performance artists

who used photography and clothing to perform and question particular (often gendered or commodified) concepts of the self by photographic self-portraiture, she simultaneously operates within fashion's commodity culture. She playfully subverts codes and meanings circulating in the realm of fashion while at the same time promoting specific designers by wearing their clothes and explicitly mentioning their names and the prices of the garments. As Tan explained in our interview, her columns can be viewed as both an editorial in a fashion magazine and a journalistic article (Interview AT 2010). Her primary aim is to create more awareness about the social system that we are all part of, which is, in her view, expressed through fashion and consumer behaviour:

> Clothing is the way in which we express ourselves. But it also very much conveys our social behaviour. We are groups of people, we judge at first sight. I want to challenge these boundaries, these stereotypes [...] and let people think about it. (Interview AT 2010).

In this sense, Tan's self-presentational images are comparable to the fashion-related work of Cindy Sherman, who also aimed at critical reflection while simultaneously operating within the context of commodity culture. Tan thus is active at the interface between commercialised fashion and artistic performances.

Significantly, Tan regularly enacts her theatrical performances by means of fashion's material tools in everyday life and when attending specific events. This underlines the blurring boundaries between her performances in representation and in daily life. From this perspective Tan resembles the Italian fashion editor and style icon Anna Piaggi, who was famous for her eccentric outfits. As Piaggi pointed out, she preferred to cheerfully mix up garments anachronistically or to interpret them in different ways (Piaggi 1986: 214), or in the words of Karl Lagerfeld:

> in dressing herself she created an image. [...] She dresses the way one plays a role. She is a great performer, but she is also the author of a play. [...] She never does what one expects and yet it is always convincing. An unexpected detail, a tautology of style, a contradictory accessory, a surprising mixture, unforeseen associations of ideas and an indispensable touch of humor create a unique appearance. [...] Dressing is her means of communication. It is an ephemeral act which has constantly to be started over again. [...] She is prepared for any improvisation, and the unexpected never fazes her. She scintillates on the everyday stage (Lagerfeld, in: Piaggi 1986: 7).

Tan's performances both in her weekly columns and in daily life show remarkable similarity to Piaggi's toying approach to fashion on the stage of everyday life. The way in which Tan playfully creates unexpected combinations of clothing items, enacting different roles over and over again and experimenting with the communicative function of clothes, could thus be viewed in line with Piaggi's acts in the field of fashion. In addition, Piaggi performs different personas by means of clothes. As she explains, over the years she has been, for instance, on some occasions a '"Nijinksa," on others Mrs Alice Keppel, Sarah Bernhardt,

Queen Alexandra' (Piaggi 1986: 218). These characters thus refer to specific persons or figures in particular eras and locations as Piaggi explored ways of 'evoking by means of a dress, a setting, or an ambience, a particular period or a story' (Ibidem). While Tan similarly performs characters connected to a particular period or setting, she also creates rather alienating, ambiguous and dislocated figures which are sometimes difficult to capture in words or to position in a particular time or place. Nevertheless, the comparison with Piaggi helps us to gain an understanding of the crucial role that clothing can play in order to theatrically perform different roles in daily life.

Tan's performances demonstrate the blurring boundaries between fashion and the artistic dimension of performance. As Anne Hollander already put forward in 1975, '[f]ashion is a visual art that uses the individual, physical self as its medium' (1988 [1975]: 311), which makes it into an expression of performance art (Teunissen 2009: 18). At the same time, Tan's theatrical performances offer insight into the everyday practice of dressing *as* a performance of identity which is implicitly enacted daily in the public sphere. In the following section I will explore Tan's enactments in relation to the performance of identity in daily life.

Performances of Identity in Daily Life

In her columns and self-presentational images, Tan reflects on the crucial role that one's adorned outer appearance – and specifically clothing – plays in the performance of identity. In one of her columns, 'Superman Dress' (27 June 2009), she writes about a fashion universe in which we can transform ourselves into someone else such as a superhero (see fig. 3.12 > p. 116). Although this example is evidently fictional and pertains to the imaginary, representational realm of fashion, it does raise relevant questions about the role that clothing plays in relation to who we are. In the process of her continuous metamorphosis and performance of many different characters, personas or "other selves", Tan is exploring ways to transform herself by changing her outer appearance. As I have argued in the previous chapter, it is important to emphasise that one cannot completely change every aspect of identity, or transform into someone else, simply by changing clothes. Fashion does not necessarily affect each facet of the self, or every aspect of identity. Rather, clothes may help to define, enhance, shape or fixate specific *concepts* of the self, as part of the 'conceptual self' (Neisser 1988). At the same time, fashion's material tools offer possibilities to play with the fluidity of these concepts. As Tan is continuously changing her outer appearance within the imaginary realm of fashion, she is thus exploring the fluid, flexible dimension of specific visible concepts. Although one's conceptual self is formed by many different factors, Tan demonstrates that clothes – as signifying surfaces – play an important role in *performing* specific fluid concepts of the self. Her self-presentational performances serve to highlight the way in which dressing as an everyday embodied, performative practice affects and shapes specific concepts as part of our conceptual self.

While she advocates creativity and play, she simultaneously calls attention to the implicit codes and conventions that are embedded in our culture, of which clothing is an expression

and materialisation. For example, in one of her photographs she performs as a typical Dutch schoolgirl who wants to be trendy and conform to her peers' standards (20 February 2010, see fig. 3.13 > p. 117).. This could have been one of the numerous encoded self-concepts visualised in *Exactitudes,* which I discussed in the chapter 'Fluid Concepts of the Self'. In the accompanying column Tan condemns passive consumers who simply copy looks from elsewhere and follow the latest fashion trends. As Tan explained in our interview, she wants to criticise the 'ignorance' of the majority of consumers who simply wear what they 'ought to wear' without thinking about it (Interview AT 2010). Although many consumers are not merely passive consumers but instead are well aware of the dominant codes, Tan does illustrate the way in which clothing can possibly shape and fixate specific concepts of the self. The trendy Dutch schoolgirl exemplifies a particular codified concept of the self that one can gain, either consciously or unconsciously, through shopping and by wearing such clothes. While Tan embodies the potential of experimenting with the conceptual self by means of clothes, she simultaneously demonstrates how one is able to select and subsequently perform encoded concepts of the self within the discursive realm of the fashion system.

With regard to these encoded identities, one recurrent theme is once again gender (see e.g. fig. 3.4 > p. 114 and 3.9 > p. 116). For example, in the column 'Work Clothes' (30 January 2010), Tan displays her overtly fashioned body dressed in masculine clothes by Hugo Boss men's wear, a vintage skirt by Yves Saint Laurent and glamorous high heels (see fig. 3.14 > p. 117). She is adorned with an abundance of gold jewellery, black nail polish and lipstick, and wears an odd ponytail on top of her head. Here, Tan also criticises the dominant codes of gender attached to specific clothing items, particularly in relation to what women are supposed to wear to the office. In this column she playfully contrasts codes of masculinity and femininity, while theatrically exaggerating specific (dress) codes, unravelling the ways in which clothing defines specific gendered concepts of the self. This illustrates that Tan aims to transgress gender boundaries by subverting dominant gender codes attached to certain clothes. By doing so, Tan expresses the idea that 'we expect men to dress to "look like" men and women to "look like" women' (Woodhouse 1989, cited in Entwistle 2000: 140), which emphasises the importance of clothing for the coming-into-being and performance of gendered self-concepts. By intentionally inverting gender roles, Tan unveils and denaturalises the fashion codes attached to gender 'choreographies' that still prevail (Foster, cited in Buikema and Van der Tuin 2007: 175). In doing so, Tan highlights the fluidity of gendered concepts, and presents identity as 'a fluid dimension, nomadic, in constant transformation, in constant migration. It is [...], just so, performance' (Marchetti and Quinz 2009: 120).

Understanding identity *as* a performance – an everyday embodied, performative practice – brings us into the realm of the theoretical concept of 'performativity'. The term 'performativity', which is often used interchangeably with the concept of 'performance', originally stems from John Langshaw Austin's speech act theory (1955). In *How to Do Things with Words* (1962 [1955]) he asserts that language is performative in the sense that it is an act which can affect transformation. A performative sentence, a performative utterance, or 'a performative' indicates that 'the utterance is the performing of an action' (Austin 1962: 6). These are cases 'in which *by* saying or *in* saying something we are doing

something' (Ibid.: 13). This is the notion of performativity that Judith Butler draws upon in *Gender Trouble* (1990), emphasising that gender is not an essential being, but stating that gender is always a 'doing' (1990: 34) by the repetition of certain acts and gestures:

> Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality (1990: 185).

Butler thus views (gender) identity as being performatively constituted through a process of repetitive, citational and discursive practices, which are naturalised and normalised. The idea that gender is not an essential being, and needs to be performatively constituted, points to its underlying fluidity: 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (1990: 34). In this sense, 'gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body' (1990: xv). As Steph Lawler further clarifies, 'for Butler identities [...] are not *expressions* of some inner nature; rather, they are performed in that they are constantly and repeatedly "done"' (2008: 114). Thus, 'they are performative in that they bring into effect what they name. Furthermore, they are done within a matrix of social relations that authorized their being done' (Ibidem). This theory of performativity therefore focuses on how fluid identities – and thus specific concepts of the self – are shaped through everyday embodied practices enacting certain discourses.

As Butler's theory has been enormously influential, 'performativity has come to be understood as the culturally dictated performance of identity based on the well-trodden binarisms of gender, race, class and so on. Thus, scholars have variously referred to "performing femininity/masculinity," "performing queerness," "performing whiteness/blackness"' (Del Río 2008: 7). While Tan is intentionally performing, for instance, femininity, masculinity or queerness, she shows how the embodied practice of wearing clothes is crucial to the performative constitution of these inherently fluid concepts of the self. By exposing the performative nature of identity, Tan denaturalises and demythologises certain (gender) identity choreographies. This way, Tan unveils how performativity works. Wearing feminine clothes is thus a way of performing femininity, of doing and constituting concepts of femininity. Tan's performances illustrate what we do in our daily life: when dressing, we are also repetitively *doing* identity. Drawing upon Butler, Anneke Smelik relates the embodied practice of wearing clothes to the performance of identity: 'as dressing happens on the body, fashion is an important way of performing identity in its many facets' (2011: 82). This is also based on the idea that the body, clothes and identity are inextricably interconnected, as Joanne Entwistle argues in *The Fashioned Body* (2000: 10). Wearing clothes thus plays a crucial role in the performance, the coming-into-being, of specific fluid concepts of the self.

The notion of performing identity might at first seem paradoxical: '*being* an (authentic) identity' is often positioned in opposition to '*doing* an identity (performing)' (Lawler 2008:

103). Whereas the first is considered an expression of one's unique identity, the latter is viewed as role-playing, as a masquerade. However, in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Erving Goffman – who employs the perspective of theatrical performance to analyse social life and identity – argues that the roles we play in the public sphere become part of who we are. According to Goffman, individuals enact performances in society, playing roles in relation to social audiences, and usually are what they appear to be as they are able to manage their appearances (1959: 71). Thus, Goffman also views identity as something that is *done*:

> what ought to be stressed in conclusion is that the very structure of the self can be seen in terms of how we arrange for such performances. [...] A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation – this self – is a *product* of a scene that comes off, and is not a *cause* of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented (1959: 252-253).

Identity, thus, is not an essential substance that precedes performance. Rather, identity is produced *through* performance. Goffman's notion of identity as a performance – at the intersection of theatrical, artistic performances and performances in daily life – opens up the possibility for actively choosing and managing the roles you want to play within different contexts.

It is precisely this mechanism of the performative constitution of specific fluid concepts of the self through clothes that Tan illustrates and praises as she chooses whether she wants to be masculine, feminine, anything in between or everything that transgresses this binary opposition. Because the performative nature of identity is revealed, the possibility arises of intentionally experimenting with performances of specific concepts of the self through the act of dressing. This is what Tan is advocating: treat everyday life as a stage, actively play with the fluidity of self-concepts, and use clothing as an artistic performance in daily life. Here, we are at the interface of artistic performances and the performance of identity as an everyday, embodied practice. It is important to emphasise that there are evidently material boundaries to how identity can be toyed with in daily life. Yet to a certain extent we can choose which roles to play, and we can perform different concepts of the self. Fashion allows us to do so by offering the material tools required for the performance of our 'liquid' identities (Bauman 2000).

Fashion's Theatrical Sociality

Having arrived at the intersection of artistic performances and performative embodied practices of *doing* identity, I will now take the next step by theorising performance in relation to the dynamics of identity in the field of fashion. Considering that the performance of identity, of certain social roles, is a well-established concept after Butler, I want to focus

more on fashion in relation to its artistic, theatrical and creative dimension of performing identity, without necessarily being on stage – which Goffman had already initiated to a certain extent. I will argue that the ways in which garments can shape specific fluid concepts of the self can be understood as a creative performance, situated in between staged artistic performances and embodied performances of identity in daily life. In order to theorise the interconnection of theatrical performances and identity performances, the notion of fashion's 'theatrical sociality' developed by Jean Baudrillard (1976) is useful. In addition, Baudrillard's work also helps us to gain insight into Tan's subversion of systems of representation and signification within the realm of fashion.

In his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (2006 [1981]) Baudrillard puts forward the idea that we have entered an age of simulation. Since everything has been endlessly represented and copied, as Baudrillard argues, all interaction we have with the real world is mediated. In his view, the real has been reduced to mere self-referential signs. These signs thus bear no relation to any reality whatsoever: they are their own pure simulacrum (2006: 6). In another work, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993 [1976]), Baudrillard specifically reflects on fashion as a self-referential system of simulation in which 'the signifier/signified distinction is erased' (1993: 87). He contends that 'fashion [...] commutes all signs and causes an absolute play amongst them' (Ibid.: 89). Furthermore, he argues that 'as opposed to language, which aims for meaning [*sens*] and effaces itself before it, fashion aims for a theatrical sociality, and delights in itself' (Ibid.: 94, original emphasis). In this sense, fashion theatrically plays with signs without signification, with meanings without messages. As argued by Ulrich Lehmann,

> [f]ashion can be seen as an apt, even appropriate, simulation within late modernist societies, where images, spectacles and signs mirror and subsequently replace existing economic categories of productive exchange, and provide a mirage of social relations that exist in communication and media structures only. [...] Fashion 'performs' its role as simulacra of dress or costume willingly in order to maintain the potential for its continuous operation (2010).

Fashion could thus very well be conceived of as a simulacrum, consisting of non-referential signs, simulating social relations in its 'theatrical sociality'. Notably Baudrillard also mentions that, today, every principle of identity is affected by fashion as 'dress and the body grow deeper: now it is the body itself, its identity, its sex, its status, which has become the material of fashion – dress is only a particular case of this' (1993: 91). Although I disagree with the idea that every principle of identity is necessarily affected by fashion, this perspective does point out the ways in which fashion's theatrical sociality, as a realm of free-floating non-signifying signs, allows us to perform and simulate self-concepts. The notion of a 'theatrical sociality' indicates that fashion indeed finds itself in between artistic, theatrical performances on stage and socio-cultural performances of identity in daily life.

Tan clearly operates within this realm of fashion as a theatrical sociality and as a simulacrum, playing with non-representational, self-referential signs. The signs that Tan plays with thus

do not refer to an existing reality, but rather to a simulated or performed reality. When assembling conflicting signs of masculinity and femininity, she does not refer to a real, true and essential (gender) identity, but to specific concepts of the self that are *done*, performed and simulated. Moreover, Tan experiments with signs and references that no longer lead to a clear-cut meaning. When she, for example, wears leggings as headgear, they lose their original function and meaning, and become emptied of their indexical relation to the body. The leggings merely function as pure material, a purely visual form, which can creatively be reused. Clothes enter the domain of the post-indexical, which can be understood as 'the empty index, the impotent index, the index at one remove, the index that is no longer a sign, but instead, pure signifier' (Saltzman 2006: 13). By exploring the use of different materials, or by changing the way certain clothes are supposed to be worn, meaning often becomes lost and signification is no longer possible. Different signs encounter each other, are assembled in various ways, simulate to refer to an "original" context and become devoid of meaning. Tan thus employs fashion's material tools to break with fashion as a system of representation and signification, presenting fashion as a theatrical sociality in which there are numerous possibilities to create, perform and play with different concepts of the self.

Baudrillard's view of fashion as a self-referential game of signification helps to theorise how Tan performs specific concepts of the self within fashion's theatrical sociality, operating in between theatrical performances and socio-cultural performances of identity. Yet at the same time this philosophical perspective dismisses the actual embodied and material basis of the clothed body. To take that aspect of identity performances in the field of fashion into account, we need additional conceptual tools. Whereas Butler has greatly contributed to the theoretical understanding of *embodied* performative identity practices, in the final part of this chapter I will argue that Elena del Río's notion of 'affective performance' (2008) allows for more expressive agency and affective, performative power of the actual living body.

Affective Performances: the Performative Power of the Clothed Body

While performing specific codified concepts of the self and playing with their underlying fluidity within fashion's theatrical sociality, Tan at the same time affirms the transformative, creative and performative power of the clothed body, embodying the transitory, ever-changing dynamics of fashion as an 'ephemeral phenomenon *par excellence*' (Lipovetsky 2005: 4). In order to theorise this, I draw upon the work of Elena del Río. In *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance. Powers of Affection* (2008) Del Río has inspiringly advocated a more creative, expressive and affective notion of performance – which is an important step in moving beyond a mere semiotic, discursive and representational approach to identity performances in the field of fashion.

By building upon phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty) as well as the writings of Deleuze and Guattari on the body's affective powers, Del Río reflects on the performing body, and its

expressive agency and affective qualities.[22] She does so in her studies of cinema as the 'privileged medium for the exhibition of bodies' (2008: 10), which demonstrates the possibility to take into account the actual, living, affective and performing body in relation to what is expressed in visual media. Fashion is, equally, a privileged medium for the exhibition of bodies, and there is a similar urgency to restore the embodied and affective-performative qualities of the body in fashion. Del Río offers the conceptual tools to do so.

She distinguishes three levels of performance: 'the literal, narrative level of on-stage performance; the discursive level of identity performance/performativity; and the affective level' (2008: 4). In the first part of this chapter I reflected on the level of on-stage, theatrical performances, and in the second part I discussed the level of discursive identity performances, both of which are essential in the field of fashion. Yet in the realm of fashion's theatrical sociality it is crucial to focus more on embodied processes, on the actual physical clothed body and its performative expressions – which is where Del Río's third affective level of performance comes into play. Although Del Río acknowledges Butler's persuasive analysis of the performative and imitative function in the acquisition of, for instance, gender and race, she states that there has been 'little or no attention to the specific and unique bodily expressions that accompany performative acts (2008: 7). Moreover, she contends that 'while Butler's core argument astutely defines feminine identity as a repetitive gestural production, she downplays the force of difference that underpins repetition' (2008: 33). Clearly, Del Río is inspired by Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* (1994 [1968]), which is aimed at understanding difference in itself, as a non-oppositional pure difference, claiming that difference is always produced in repetition. Rather than mere citational practices of repetition, a non-representational process of continuous change, of constant transformation, is at play. These dynamics of repetition with a difference are central to the dynamics of fashion, which continuously recites and reinterprets its own past: '[fashion] always appears as the most immediate present, affecting the future with its constant changes, yet it always quotes from the past' (Lehmann 2000: xviii).[23] In addition, other fashion scholars have theorised fashion as an expression of continuous change (Wilson 2010: 3), and reflected upon fashion's endless metamorphoses and marginal differentiation (Lipovetsky 1994: 15/131). As Tan's performances illustrate, clothing offers the possibility to transform our outer appearances, and to play with simulations of numerous fluid concepts of the self through the embodied act of dressing instead of simply imitating and reinstating dominant codes and maintaining oppositional differences.

22 Del Río acknowledges the differences between phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty) and Deleuze and Guattari's work and explains that 'while phenomenology largely operated within the realm of subjectivity […], Deleuze's transcendental empiricism operates in a desubjectified field of forces. […] Deleuze regards the kinetic and the affective as material flows whose individuation and exchange do not rest upon subjectified intentions, but rather upon the workings of a non-organic, anonymous vitality' (2008: 115). Although she recognises the differences between Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze and Guattari, she argues that they are both 'interested in surpassing deterministic notions of the body as fully coerced by the operations of cultural and social systems' (2008: 114).

23 See also Walter Benjamin's work on fashion as a 'tiger's leap into the past' (p. 261) in: 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', *Illuminations* (1968), New York: Schocken, pp. 253-264.

Del Río highlights the importance of taking into account 'the active and transformative potential of the body's expressive capacities' (2008: 33). As clothing is often understood to function as a second skin (Entwistle 2007: 93), the unique bodily expressions that accompany dressing and wearing clothes as an embodied performative act may not be disregarded. In line with this perspective, I want to argue that every individual thus potentially expresses themselves differently in each performative event. Tan's continuous metamorphoses, her weekly experimentation with the possibilities of her clothed body to play with the empty signs of identity, demonstrate the differences that come with the repetition of each performative event – which underlines Del Río's argument. In addition, throughout her columns Tan explicitly points out the urgency of individual differentiation and unique self-expression, affirming Del Río's idea that 'the body's expressions are not exhausted by the pressures to perform according to cultural, linguistic, or ideological requirements' (2008: 5).

Tan's performances thus make us rethink the clothed body and its embodied expressions of concepts of the self in terms of creative potential. These kinds of performances can be understood in terms of Del Río's notion of affective performances, which 'shift the emphasis from the organized body, slave to morality and representation, to the ethical and creative potential of the expressive body' (Ibid.: 16). In this sense, the body has the power to actively create, and to affect change through its performative expressions. When *doing* and performing concepts of the self by means of clothes, then, we are potentially engaged in a more active and creative process of transformation – as Tan demonstrates in her affective performances. Here affectivity, or affect, is understood in a Deleuzean sense as productive of new thoughts or feelings by displacing familiar values and beliefs (Ibid.: 48). While Tan continuously experiments with processes of transformation, she explores the expressive and affective power of the clothed body by questioning what is known, challenging prevailing notions and ideas. She regularly raises questions such as: what can a body do, or what can a body become through fashion? For instance, in her column 'Emotional Cat Suit' (16 May 2009) she is dressed in wearable technology, investigating the integration of the physical body, clothing and technology (see fig. 3.2 > p. 114). Tan presents herself as a cyborg figure – 'a hybrid of machine and organism' (Haraway 1991: 149) – exploring the boundaries of humanity and moves in between human and machine, and biology and technology (Sotirin 2005: 101; Braidotti 2011: 208; Smelik 2012: 183). Comparable to the ways in which several photographers discussed in the chapter entitled 'Fluid Concepts of the Self' visually re-imagine what a body is, challenging and mobilising fixed concepts of the self and creating new imaginary concepts, Tan uses her embodied performances to explore the potential creative power of clothing to transform self-concepts.

As she is often experimenting with in-between modes – such as a cyborg, or moving in between gendered concepts of the self – her performances also pertain to Jon McKenzie's understanding of performance. As McKenzie argues in *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (2001), 'liminality' – being on the threshold, the space in between – is the most concise and accurate response to the question 'what is performance?'. He views liminality as a 'mode of activity whose spatial, temporal, and symbolic "in betweenness" allows for social norms to be suspended, challenged, played with, and perhaps even transformed' (McKenzie 2001: 50). As he believes that we are entering an age of global performance,

in his view we are increasingly allured to 'go the limit, play the margin, be the other' (Ibid.: 189). It is this performative power that Tan enacts. In this sense, Tan's performances have a transformative and affective effect as she is experimenting with different expressions of the (clothed) body.

The notion of affective performance contributes to a 'reconfiguration of the poststructuralist concept of subjectivity as [...] more expressive agency [is found than] in the subjugated subject of ideology, psychoanalysis, or semiotics' (Del Río 2008: 16). This opens up a productive way of understanding the performative expressions of the clothed body. In the realm of fashion's theatrical sociality, the uniqueness of each self-expressive, performative event may not be dismissed. Fashion is an imaginary realm full of creative potential in which clothing – the clothed and adorned body – can exert the affective-performative power to explore, transform and experiment with numerous fluid concepts of the self.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the performative ways in which one expresses and creates specific fluid concepts of the self by means of clothing. While the notions of (1) identity *as* a performance in daily life and (2) artistic and theatrical on-stage performances are productive in themselves for grasping various specific facets of fashion, I have argued that especially the area in between holds great potential for understanding both the transitory, changing dynamics of fashion as a realm of free-floating non-signifying signs and the transformative, creative and performative power of clothing. As Tan reveals the performative dimension of identity, the possibility arises of intentionally and creatively playing with the conceptual self through the embodied practice of dressing – comparable to the ways in which specific performance artists play with "other selves". Tan presents fashion as an imaginary realm of creative potential, in which there are numerous possibilities to re-create, temporarily shape and perform concepts of the self. In her embodied performances, difference is produced in every repetitive performative act within fashion's theatrical sociality. This demonstrates that clothing – the clothed body – can potentially exert the performative power to explore and play with the fluidity underlying the conceptual self.

My analysis of Tan's performances has pointed out a double dynamic of identity similar to my findings in the chapter 'Fluid Concepts of the Self': through the embodied practice of dressing, one can repetitively perform – and thus give form to – specific encoded concepts of the self within the discursive fashion system, yet at the same time one can also actively employ the clothed body's performative, creative and transformational power to play with the fluidity of specific concepts. Especially Del Río's notion of 'affective performances' offers a fresh perspective on performance as a more embodied, creative and transformative dynamic, crucially putting more emphasis on the expressive agency of the (clothed) body – which is an important contribution to fashion theory. Del Río's phenomenological and Deleuzean understanding of performance thus helps us to move beyond the semiotic, representational and discursive facets of fashion, doing more justice to the actual, living body and to the performative expressions of embodied subjects. In turn, this is an important step in moving towards a new materialism of fashion. It is this focus on the body in relation to fashion and clothing that I will further explore in Chapter 4, 'Embodied Experiences'.

fig. 3.1 Aynouk Tan, *Mirror, Mirror* (6 March 2010) photography: Mylou Oord

fig. 3.2 Aynouk Tan, *Emotional Cat Suit* (16 May 2009) photography: Dennis Duijnhouwer

fig. 3.3 Aynouk Tan, *King of the Absurd* (12 December 2009) photography: Mylou Oord

fig. 3.4 Aynouk Tan, *Boy Wearing Street Wear* (2 January 2010) photograpy: Mylou Oord

fig. 3.5 Aynouk Tan, *Arrogance on a Clothes Hanger* (13 March 2010) photography: Mylou Oord

fig. 3.6 Aynouk Tan, *Queen of the Sun in the Rain* (11 April 2009) photography: Dennis Duijnhouwer

fig. 3.7 Aynouk Tan, *Butterflies in December* (12 December 2009) photography: Mylou Oord

fig. 3.8 Aynouk Tan, *Yellow Dress* (2 May 2009) photography: Dennis Duijnhouwer

fig. 3.9 Aynouk Tan, *Holes under the Armpits* (18 April 2009) photography: Dennis Duijnhouwer

fig. 3.10 Aynouk Tan, *The Naked Truth* (5 December 2009) photography: Mylou Oord

fig. 3.11 Aynouk Tan, *Television Fame Dress* (27 March 2010) photography: Mylou Oord

fig. 3.12 Aynouk Tan, *Superman Dress* (27 June 2009) drawing by Anje Jager

fig. 3.13 Aynouk Tan, *Passive Sheep,* (20 February 2010) photography: Mylou Oord

fig. 3.14 Aynouk Tan, *Work Clothes,* (30 January 2010) photography: Mylou Oord

04. Embodied Experiences

The Case of Marlies Dekkers

This chapter focuses on the importance of the body for the performance of concepts of the self, highlighting the actual, lived and embodied experiences of wearing clothes. The body is an indispensable part of the everyday lived experience of wearing clothes, yet, remarkably, this corporeal aspect seems to have been omitted from most studies of fashion. 'The specific ways in which fashion speaks of the body have been ignored', Joanne Entwistle argues, '[s]o, too, has the relationship between discourses on the body and embodiment' (2000: 5). Whereas fashion is generally conceived of as a system of representation and signification, as I have pointed out in previous chapters, there has been an increasing tendency to study dressing as an embodied practice, which helps to do more justice to the complexities of the dynamics of identity in relation to fashion and clothing. As I have argued in 'Creative Performances', the notion of performance is crucial as it takes into account the embodied, performative practice of dressing and of doing identity. This chapter continues with my focus on the body, both in representation and as a corporeal reality.

Although I want to foreground the interconnection between the body and clothes in this chapter, it must be noted that garments are not always necessarily in direct relation to the body. Clothing can also be valued for its aesthetic or artistic qualities, which finds expression in, for instance, costume history or the contemporary confluence between art and fashion. As Anne Hollander points out in *Seeing Through Clothes* (1975), the rise of modernist abstract art has led to an abstraction in fashion as well, which enabled clothes to 'aim at an ideal shape of their own, to which a body was truly subordinate' (1988 [1975]: 336-337). Furthermore, clothing is invested with economic value and socio-cultural signs and meanings circulating in commodity culture and in the realm of the fashion system, which also dissociates it from actual, lived bodies. My aim in this chapter is to restore corporeality in discourses on the body in fashion, while developing a better understanding of the interplay between clothes, the body and identity by underlining embodied experiences in everyday life. I will also take into consideration the crucial role the body plays in fashion imagery. As I have argued in previous chapters, the body in fashion photography and advertising campaigns is often a mere image, a visualisation and representation of a brand's identity, and a commodified – and often sexualised – object to be looked at, selling clothes as part of the fashion system. It is thus both (1) the body as an image, as a visual representation – which 'predominates today in our media-saturated environment' (Negrin 2013: 159) – and (2) the body as a corporeal reality in everyday life that must be taken into account.

In this chapter I will specifically explore the ways in which the material object of lingerie relates to the female body. I do so by focusing on Dutch fashion designer Marlies Dekkers, who is internationally renowned for her daring lingerie (see fig. 4.1-4.3 > p. 148-149). As lingerie is worn so close to the physical body, it is inevitably connected to femininity and to the immaterial values and meanings surrounding the female body in the fashion system. In addition, lingerie is a particularly interesting material object of fashion considering its ambivalent role in the history of feminism, and its continuing significant impact on contemporary representations and discussions of femininity. From the start of her career, Dekkers' designs have revealed and drawn attention to specific parts of the female body. In 1991, Dekkers graduated from the St. Joost Art Academy in Breda, the Netherlands, with her provocative 'bare-bottom dress'. A photograph taken by the Dutch fashion photographer

Inez van Lamsweerde in 1993, shows Dekkers herself wearing her white 'bare-bottom dress', exposing her right leg as well as part of her buttocks. She seems to be playing a game with the visibility and invisibility of specific body parts, and with the gaze of the viewer, seducing him/her to look at her body, and particularly at her exposed buttocks. This visual aspect – exposing particular body parts – has always been an important part of Dekkers' designs.

In 1993, Dekkers launched her lingerie label *Undressed*, which is characterised by a specific design: extra straps follow the round shape of the breast parallel to the cups of the bra.[24] Although her style has developed over the years, Dekkers' lingerie is recognisable through the graphic interplay of black or white straps on the female body, creating different geometrical patterns and accentuating specific parts of the female form (Arts 2008: 9). Moreover, Dekkers' lingerie is not hidden under clothes, but is designed to be seen, which she refers to as 'underwear as outerwear'. She was awarded a prize for her 'remarkable and progressive collections' during the Night of the Lingerie in 1994, which was an initiative of the Dutch body fashion branch (Van Mierlo et al. 1996: 47). Furthermore, as I have pointed out in 'On Theory and Methodology', it is noteworthy that Marlies Dekkers was awarded a 'Grand Seigneur Award' by MODINT (the trade association for fashion in the Netherlands) in 2005, acknowledging her contribution to the Dutch fashion industry over a longer period of time. Whereas celebrities like Britney Spears, Lady Gaga, and Paris Hilton wear Dekkers' lingerie openly as outerwear on stage, in everyday life one will usually see only a few straps peep out from under clothes. As Dekkers' lingerie is designed to be partly visible, it enters the realm of fashion and becomes an essential part of the feminine identity that is publicly performed. As José Teunissen points out, a remarkable aspect of the brand is the way in which it portrays a 'strong, independent, post-feminist woman' (Teunissen, in Arts 2008: 5). On her website, Dekkers claims: 'As a lingerie designer, I design to please women. Working from the assumption that there is beauty and power in every woman, my wish is to accentuate women's self-confidence'.[25] Dekkers' fashion photography, most of which is shot by the photographers Carin Verbruggen and Ferry Drenthem Soesman, enhances the kind of femininity that her brand conveys.

I have analysed different visual media to investigate the female body dressed in lingerie as represented by the brand Marlies Dekkers. The fashion photography and printed advertising campaigns photographed by Carin Verbruggen and Ferry Drenthem Soesman from 2001 to 2011 (i.e. the time span of their collaboration) functioned as the most important visual material for my analyses, since little promotional material was available

24 It should be noted that Marlies Dekkers also sells a men's collection. I will not elaborate on this men's collection, as it is only a small part of the company and, in addition, the female body and the feminine identity as expressed by the brand is much more essential to the brand as well as relevant for the sake of my argument.

25 See http://www.marliesdekkers.nl/nl/about-us/portrait.html.

from the years before 2001.[26] In addition to my visual analyses, I conducted interviews with designer Marlies Dekkers (3 February 2011),[27] with the photographers Carin Verbruggen and Ferry Drenthem Soesman (Amsterdam, 12 September 2011), and with the writer of the book *Marlies Dekkers* (2008), Jos Arts (Amsterdam, 24 October 2011). Furthermore, as I discussed in the chapter 'On Theory and Methodology', I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with loyal customers of the brand to inquire into their embodied experience of actually wearing the lingerie.

Based on my analyses, I will argue that Dekkers' visualisation of the female body dressed in lingerie expresses a post-feminist femininity that appeals to the consumers' imagination of embodying this post-feminist experience and performing post-feminist concepts of the self when wearing the lingerie. I will draw upon feminist and post-feminist theory to contextualise Dekkers' representations in relation to the ways in which female bodies are fashioned and sexualised in contemporary culture (e.g. Levy 2005; Genz 2006; Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009; Walter 2010). Moreover, I will present the results of the interviews that I conducted with a selection of loyal customers. In order to gain a better understanding of their actual, lived, embodied experiences while wearing the lingerie, I will focus on theoretical perspectives on the phenomenal body (Merleau-Ponty 1945), and on embodied experiences in relation to feminism (De Lauretis 1987; Young 1990; Scott 1991) and visual culture and fashion (Entwistle 2000; Entwistle and Wilson 2003; Sweetman 2003; Sobchack 2004). In contrast to these phenomenological perspectives on embodiment and subjective embodied experiences, I will also reflect on the notion of 'experience' as defined by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore in *The Experience Economy* (1999). By doing so, I will explore the relationship between actual subjective embodied experiences and Pine and Gilmore's view of the ways in which consumers perform specific experiences staged by the brand when using the goods (1999: 15). This chapter thus has three main foci: (1) visual representations of the fashioned body in the theoretical context of post-feminism, (2) a

26 Since Dekkers' company claimed that no official promotional material was available from the years before 2001, I concentrated mostly on the fashion photography and advertising campaigns from 2001-2011. More precisely, I studied the photographs used in a number of advertising campaigns that the company Marlies Dekkers provided me with (2002-2011); the photographs selected for the book *Under_Exposed* (2008) by Carin Verbruggen and Ferry Drenthem Soesman that covers the time span of their collaboration from 2001 until 2008; the audio-visual digital magazines accompanying the lingerie collections (2009-2011) that are available on Dekkers' website (www.marliesdekkers.com); the images in the book *Marlies Dekkers* (2008) written by Jos Arts, which, fortunately, also provided me with several photographs of the early years of the brand marlies|dekkers (from 1993-2008); and the advertising campaigns that are accessible on Dekkers' Flickr-website (2010-2011). In addition to the fashion photography and advertising campaigns, I looked at several short collection movies made by Marlies Dekkers, fashion shows (e.g. during the Paris Fashion Week in 2008 and *Victorian Vampire Night* in 2010) and documentaries (e.g. *Dutch Profiles: Marlies Dekkers*) that are available online on Dekkers' website or on *YouTube*; and at photographs of a few exhibitions organised by Marlies Dekkers (e.g. an exhibition at the museum *Kunsthal* in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 2008). Furthermore, I studied the book 33 *Propositions* (2003) written by Meghan Ferrill in collaboration with Dekkers' company as well as the book *Stout [Naughty]* (2007) by designer Marlies Dekkers and writer Heleen van Royen.

27 This was a written interview via e-mail conducted with designer Marlies Dekkers by the research group 'Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World', Radboud University Nijmegen (The Netherlands), 3 February 2011.

phenomenological perspective on the actual lived embodied experience of wearing clothes, and (3) the contemporary experience economy.

In the first part of this chapter, I will elaborate on the dynamics between the body and clothes, and on the interaction between clothes and the conceptual self – which pertains to both representations of the body (i.e. the body as an image) and to the body as a material entity (i.e. its corporeality). Secondly, based on my visual analyses, I will discuss the ways in which the female body dressed in lingerie is represented in Dekkers' visual media, and on the fashioned body within the theoretical framework of post-feminism (e.g. Levy 2005; Genz 2006; Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009; Genz and Brabon 2009: 96-97; Walter 2010). I will provide a historical trajectory of the role of lingerie and consumption in relation to feminism and post-feminism (e.g. Steele 2001; Fields 2007), and discuss the way in which lingerie, today, serves as a means of making a post-feminist statement. In the third, and last, part of this chapter, I will move from the images to the experiences of the wearer, and present the findings of the interviews I conducted with loyal customers of the brand. Drawing upon the theoretical perspectives of phenomenology and experience economy, I will reflect on the ways in which Dekkers' lingerie offers the female wearer particular bodily experiences. By so doing, I aim at gaining a deeper insight into the performance of specific concepts of the self in relation to representations of the body in contemporary fashion imagery, consumers' actual embodied experiences, and the experiences staged by fashion brands.

Lingerie as a Second Skin

The Dynamics between Clothes and the Body

The role of the body is of particular importance with regard to lingerie. As I have pointed out in the Introduction and in the chapter 'On Theory and Methodology', bodies are often seen as mere objects – or signifying surfaces – that can be fashioned within the semiotic, discursive and representational realm of fashion (Entwistle 2000: 7-8). An important contribution to the prevailing view of the body being fashioned stems from feminist theory, which has made the body – specifically the female body – a central topic, reflecting on it with regard to fashion and consumer culture. For example, in the feminist classic *The Second Sex* (1975 [1949]) Simone de Beauvoir argues that a woman – in comparison to man's clothes and the male body – 'on the contrary, is even required by society to make herself into an erotic object. The purpose of the fashions to which she is enslaved is [...] to offer her as a prey to male desires' (1975: 543). De Beauvoir's use of 'enslaved' and 'prey' may seem somewhat radical today. Yet, bodies are often still seen as texts or objects that are acted upon, focusing on what is done to the body rather than what the body does, or how we, as human beings, actually experience our bodies and our embodiedness. As Entwistle argues, Michel Foucault's poststructuralist perspective has greatly contributed to the prevailing view of bodies as texts acted upon by social forces (2000: 102). Vivian Sobchack also points out that bodies are often perceived as objects and texts: 'More often than not, the body, however privileged, has been regarded primarily as an object among other objects – most often like a text and sometimes like a machine' (Sobchack 2004: 3). Both visually represented adorned bodies and actual, lived clothed bodies can be read as texts

acted upon by social forces, and in terms of signifying surfaces within the context of fashion. These notions of fashioned bodies as texts or objects are prevalent and indispensable in relation to contemporary consumer culture. This, however, denies the physical, experiential dimensions of the embodied subject.

It is important to put more emphasis on the relationship between clothing and the performance of our 'conceptual self' in terms of our actual lived everyday embodied experience of wearing clothes. As Llewellyn Negrin argues, '[p]aradoxically however, while fashion has been embraced as an embodied art form [...], its evolution in Western culture has to a large extent been predicated on a disavowal of the body' (2013: 141). In this regard Negrin refers to Anne Hollander, who has argued that in the tradition of Western dress, garments have primarily contributed to the making of an *image* of the self, 'an image linked to all other imaginative and idealized visualizations of the human body' (Hollander 1988: xiv). Whereas Hollander views the ways in which fashion is 'being shaped less by the corporeal nature of the body and more by formal aesthetic considerations' as liberating since it significantly expanded the creative possibilities of fashion designers (Negrin 2013: 141-142), Negrin argues for an approach that acknowledges the materiality of the body: 'we need to envisage a new mode of dress, which engenders a sense of the body, not as a visual image, but as an active corporeal presence' (Ibid: 142). Crucially, Negrin's work has become part of the theoretical discourse of new materialism (see e.g. Barrett and Bolt 2013). It is also this corporeality of the body in relation to fashion that I want to highlight.

Using a new materialist approach, I will draw more attention to the experiential, living body of the embodied subject instead of only viewing the body as a text within the socio-cultural system of fashion. Several scholars have recently fruitfully theorised the more sensorial aspects of the lived body, focusing on embodiedness, and on sensorial, embodied experiences from a phenomenological perspective (e.g. Entwistle 2000; Marks 2000/2002; Entwistle and Wilson 2003; Sweetman 2003; Sobchack 2004; Smelik 2007; Woodward 2007). In *Carnal Thoughts. Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (2004) Sobchack, for instance, foregrounds embodiment, the *lived* body, and aims at understanding the body as matter, as a 'sentient, sensual and sensible ensemble of materialized capacities and agency that literally and figurally makes sense of, and to, both ourselves and others' (Sobchack 2004: 2). In relation to fashion, Sophie Woodward points out that the 'material, embodied relationship of how clothing feels on the skin and allows the body to move' is pivotal in how women decide what to wear in addition to the ways in which 'clothing affects the appearance of the body' (Woodward 2007: 3). Furthermore, Paul Sweetman emphasises the importance of not simply reading the fashionable body as a cultural text, viewing fashion in terms of symbolic codes. He proposes to also take into account the more experiential dimensions of fashion by explaining the way in which the clothes he wears significantly affect the way he feels and presents himself:

> When I wear a suit, I walk, feel, and *act* differently, and not simply because of the garment's cultural connotations [...], but also because of the way the suit is cut, and the way its sheer materiality both enables and constrains, encouraging or demanding a certain gait, posture and demeanour, whilst simultaneously denying me the full range of bodily movement that would be available were I dressed in jogging-pants and a loose-fitting t-shirt (Sweetman 2003: 66).

In addition to the cultural connotations of a suit, Sweetman highlights the effect of the suit's *materiality* on the way he feels and acts. Dressing is an embodied practice, and everyone – although some perhaps more consciously than others – has an embodied experience when wearing certain clothes, which may influence the ways in which an individual feels, acts and presents him/herself. It is thus important to take into account both the symbolic codes attached to particular garments and the clothes' materiality, which mutually affect one's embodied experience as well as one's performance of specific concepts of the self.

There is a constant interplay between our experience of our selves, and the way in which we express and perform our identity in relation to others. As argued by Svendsen:

> It is not that one first has an identity and then chooses to express it via certain clothes, or that there is an 'inner' identity independent of all outer representations that can subsequently be given expression by various means, including clothes. The argument could just as easily be reversed and the claim be made that it is the outer that constitutes the inner, that it is clothes that constitute identity. But that would also be misleading. It is impossible to give absolute priority to either the internal or the external aspect of identity: they are mutually dependent on each other (2006: 151).

Clothing is located on this porous boundary. As it lies on the boundary between self and other, forming part of our epidermis, clothing is often understood to function as a second skin (Entwistle 2007: 93). As I have argued in 'Fluid Concepts of the Self', it is because of the proximity of textiles to the body that garments help to shape specific concepts of the self. In everyday life dressing is an embodied practice as it 'operates on a phenomenal, moving body', which is inextricably interconnected with the 'experience and presentation of the self' (Entwistle 2000: 10). It is in this sense that the embodied practice of dressing and the performance of identity are interrelated (Smelik 2011: 82). Considering that clothes, the body and the conceptual self are inextricably interconnected, it is important to underline notions of embodiment and embodied experiences in relation to performances of concepts of the self through garments.

These embodied experiences and performances of identity are mutually formed by the materiality of garments encountering human subjects and by fashion's discourse. Ilya Parkins points out the entwinement of material objects with discursive practices in the realm of fashion: 'Fashion is undoubtedly a discursive machine, but is also a site of intimate encounters between consuming subjects [...] and material things: garments, fabrics,

accessories' (Parkins 2008: 502). Parkins draws upon Karen Barad's work on the 'utter mutuality of discourse and matter' (Ibidem), which has become part of the theoretical discourse of new materialism (see e.g. Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012). Building upon Barad in relation to fashion, Parkins argues for an understanding of clothing and fashion as simultaneously material and discursive phenomena (Parkins 2008: 502).[28] Comparable to Entwistle's argument on the interconnection between clothing, the body and the self, Parkins asserts that 'very often a *psychic* intimacy between subject and garment, subject and fashion, prevails along with the material intimacy of body and garment' (Parkins 2008: 507, original emphasis). The intimacy between subject and object, body and garment, and thus human matter and non-human matter must be understood within the context of fashion as a discursive machine (Ibidem). This helps to explain the ways in which clothes, dressing the physical body, are both material objects and an intrinsic part of the discursive system of fashion, which mutually affect one's embodied experience as well as one's performance of concepts of the self.

Dekkers' Graphic Interplay of Lines as a Second Skin

While clothing is often considered to function as a second skin, lying on the boundary between self and other, lingerie is worn even closer to the body, and is even more intimate and personal. However, Dekkers' lingerie is designed to be partly visible, which makes it an essential part of the second skin that is exposed to others and of the femininity that is publicly performed, which maybe even converts the other clothes that one wears into a "third skin". When wearing Dekkers' lingerie, one thus exposes something that is usually more personal, more private, and closer to the body. The straps of a Dekkers' bra most likely to show, for example when wearing a relatively low-cut dress, are the upper straps following the round shape of the breasts. Instead of primarily highlighting the breasts, Dekkers' lingerie may also draw attention to, for instance, the upper part of the chest near the collarbones.

As a brand Marlies Dekkers can be positioned in the upper segment of the lingerie market, in which the price range of a bra is approximately between €75 and €250. In comparison to other lingerie brands in the upper segment of the lingerie market (e.g. Marie Jo, Agent Provocateur, La Perla, Chantal Thomass, Myla, Eres), Dekkers' lingerie can be characterised in terms of its particular design (the graphic interplay of the straps, and the fact that the lingerie is meant to be seen); its fabrics (very little use of lace); and its colours (in the early years primarily plain black and white, but later also bright colours with a variety of motifs). Whereas lingerie brands such as Marie Jo, Agent Provocateur, La Perla, Chantal Thomass, Myla, and Eres are comparable to Marlies Dekkers in terms of price/quality, there are noteworthy differences in terms of design style. For instance, Marie Jo's style can be described as quite classical, romantic and feminine. Its lingerie has a conventional shape, and can be characterised by its frequent use of lace and soft (or sometimes pastel) colours such as pale blue or pale pink. In terms of style and design particulars of brands in the upper segment of the lingerie market, Agent Provocateur is perhaps closest to Marlies Dekkers' style because of its daring designs that in some cases are cut in such a way that they also

28 See Karen Barad's work on 'agential realism', in which she argues that agential qualities are inherent in all matter (human or non-human) and that 'phenomena are produced through complex intra-actions of multiple material-discursive apparatuses of bodily production' (2001: 87), in: 'Re(con)figuring Time, Space, Matter', Feminist Locations: *Global and Local, Theory and Practice*, edited by Marianne Dekoven, 2001, pp. 75-109.

expose specific, unexpected parts of the skin. Yet, in contrast to Dekkers, Agent Provocateur does frequently use lace in its designs, which designer Marlies Dekkers conceives of as an 'especially entrenched cliché for femininity' (Ferrill 2003: 11).

It is thus primarily the graphic design style with simple lines, the lack of lace, in combination with the use of bright colours that characterises Marlies Dekkers' style. From the start of her career, Dekkers' designs have revealed specific parts of the female body. She claims that her design principle is based on a text by Roland Barthes, who once wrote that any female body part will become sensual when you frame it (Teunissen, in Arts 2008: 4). As Teunissen argues, because of her inquisitive, conceptual and graphic approach, Dekkers' style can be related to other Dutch product and industrial designers who became widely known in the early 1990s (Teunissen, in Arts 2008: 4). Dekkers presented several of her sources of inspiration at an exhibition in the Dutch museum Kunsthal in Rotterdam in 2008. Her lingerie and fashion photography were shown within a context of art, design, architecture and philosophy with quotes by Plato, Baudelaire and Bataille; art by Picasso, Mondriaan and Rodin; and Dutch design by Studio Job and Rietveld. She referred to a wide variety of artists, designers and philosophers, but it is noteworthy that the selected Dutch art, design, and architecture suggest a link with Dekkers' style. The style of modernists like Mondriaan and Rietveld, for instance, is characterised by the graphic play of horizontal and vertical lines, the use of primary colours (i.e. red, yellow, blue, and black), and their geometric shapes and interlocking planes. The focus on simple lines and geometric forms could indicate a connection between Dekkers' style and a Dutch artistic tradition.

Remarkably, in 2008, Dekkers' 'bare-bottom dress', which exposes part of the buttocks, was acquired by the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. As the owner of many Dutch masterpieces by, for example, the famous painters Rembrandt and Vermeer, the Rijksmuseum was thus acknowledging Dekkers as a noteworthy player within Dutch culture. The director of the Rijksmuseum, Wim Pijbes, stated:

> In all its apparent simplicity, this dress is a striking example of Dutch culture. [...] One strong, seemingly simple idea that suddenly creates a radically new image. The chair by Rietveld and the red-yellow-blue work by Mondriaan also have that quality (Pijbes, in *NRC,* 12 June 2008).[29]

Dekkers has also explicitly referred to Dutch history in other collections and fashion shows and to several stereotypical elements of Dutch national culture, such as clogs, windmills, the Dutch flag, or Delft blue earthenware (see fig. 4.4-4.5 > p. 150-151). She thus deliberately positions herself within a Dutch artistic tradition and design style.[30] By doing so, she actively contributes to the performance of specific clichéd concepts of a Dutch national self through fashion – which I will elaborate upon in the chapter 'Dutch Hybridity'.

29 'Rijksmuseum verwerft jurk Marlies Dekkers', NRC (12 June 2008), see http://vorige.nrc.nl/kunst/article1916508.ece/Rijksmuseum_verwerft_jurk_Marlies_Dekkers.

30 See the dissertation by my colleague Maaike Feitsma, *Nederlandse mode? Een verkenning van mythevorming en betekenissen* ('Dutch Fashion? An exploration of myths and meanings') (2014), for a discussion of Marlies Dekkers within the context of a Dutch design style.

In this chapter I want to focus on how Dekkers employs her specific design style as a means of fashioning the female body, expressing a specific kind of femininity. Playing with highlighting and concealing certain parts of the body through the graphic elements of Dekkers' design style – 'a pattern interposed among the strong lines and provocative shapes' (Ferrill 2003: 11) – represents important aspects of Dekkers' portrayal of femininity. As Dekkers has said herself in the interview that I conducted with her, she wants to move beyond the image of a female body as a sex object, as something to be consumed:

> In my designs it is always about self-awareness, about power, about accentuating the power of the wearer. The woman is in charge of seduction [...]. Women are not tasty pieces of flesh, but self-aware, beautiful human beings (Interview MD 2011).

Yet, to what extent is it possible to move beyond the prevailing stereotype of objectified femininity when selling sexy lingerie in a culture in which images of femininity (and increasingly also of masculinity) are evidently also consumed as erotic objects? As Anneke Smelik argues:

> Visual culture negotiates and sells the image of the body, mostly female but increasingly male too, turning it into a commodity. [...] For the body to circulate as a commodity in visual culture, it is fully dependent on its relentless visualisation. The continuous exposure of bodies as images is an aspect of visual culture that can be understood as 'pornification' (Smelik 2010: 23).

It is because of this cultural context that Dekkers' initial collections of lingerie met sharp criticism. In the promotional book *33 Propositions* (2003), published in collaboration with Dekkers, author Meghan Ferrill writes that 'her designs, detractors claimed, were pornographic, demeaning, banal. [...] She was accused of selling out, of degrading women by objectifying them' (Ferrill 2003: 11). Nevertheless, Dekkers continued her style, because she was 'convinced of the importance and sincerity of her intentions – namely, to liberate women to see and experience themselves' (Ibidem). However, the question remains in how far the purchase of commodities, material objects of fashion that sexualise female bodies, can actually contribute to women's liberation? As I will argue, it is in this sense that Dekkers' lingerie expresses the paradoxical values and socio-cultural meanings of post-feminism.

Lingerie, Feminism and Post-Feminism

Corsets, Girdles and Brassieres: from Feminism to Post-Feminism

In order to gain a better understanding of Dekkers' lingerie in relation to post-feminism, I will first discuss the ways in which lingerie and feminism have been interconnected historically. Lingerie has played a significant role in the tradition of feminist movements. On September 7, 1968, second-wave feminists protested at the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City and claimed that Miss America promoted 'an ideal of women as plastic,

doll-like, submissive sex objects who paraded in swimsuits for the pleasure of men' (Dow 2003: 128). Bras, as well as girdles, high heels and cosmetics were thrown into a 'freedom trash can' on the boardwalk in Atlantic City. The trope of bra-burning feminists originates here. Although it is said that no bras were actually burned at the 1968 protest, the myth of burning bras has been inextricably connected to radical second-wave feminism ever since (Ibidem). Feminists have often considered corsets and bras to be symbols of women's oppression and have employed lingerie in strategic ways during protests to make political statements for women's liberation. In her book *The Corset* (2001) Valerie Steele provides a rich cultural historical overview of the corset by arguing that it should not simply be viewed as a mere symbol of the oppression of women. She offers a more sophisticated perspective by emphasising the positive connotations of the corset, such as social status, self-discipline, artistry, respectability, beauty, youth, and erotic allure (2001: 1). Nevertheless, she takes into account the claim of feminist historians that the corset was deeply implicated in the 19th century construction of a 'submissive' and 'masochistic' feminine ideal (Ibid.: 35); that Victorian women were forced to submit to tight-lacing (Ibid.: 90); and that erotic connotations of the corset were closely related to constriction and pain (Ibid.: 120).

Whereas some have argued that women choose to conform to the prevailing beauty ideals, letting intimate apparel shape and sexualise their bodies, the corset has thus been a controversial clothing item throughout history (Steele 2001: 1). In *An Intimate Affair* (2007) Jill Fields describes how underwear has been used frequently to make subversive political statements. She refers, for instance, to the strike by the 'American Lady Corset' workers in Detroit in 1941 who took to the streets dressed in corsets and stockings, protesting and asking for better working conditions (Fields 2007: 243). Wearing underwear as outerwear thus conveyed political, emancipatory messages of female empowerment. Although different women's rights activists advocated freedom of movement for women in the 19th and early 20th century, and the corset did gradually disappear in the early 20th century, it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that a noticeable trend away from 'control garments' became visible (Steele 2001: 162). Against the backdrop of hippie culture and the second-wave feminist movement, a significant and often contradictory shift in attitude towards the body occurred: 'girdles, especially, but also brassieres, were increasingly perceived as restrictive, uncomfortable, and mendacious' (Ibidem). Yet, as an act of rebellion, the corset was re-appropriated in the early 1970s by young women associated with London's punk and Goth subcultures. 'Long disparaged as a symbol of female oppression,' Steele writes, 'the corset began to be reconceived as a symbol of female sexual empowerment' (2001: 166).

Vivienne Westwood and Jean Paul Gaultier pioneered the design principle of wearing corsets openly as fashionable outerwear in 1981 and 1983 respectively. Pop star Madonna played an important part in popularising this trend. Madonna's stage shows were conceived of as overtly sexualised and seemed at odds with the ideals of feminism to fight against the sexual objectification of women (Scott 2010: 124). At the same time, for many feminists Madonna was an important symbol of women's sexual liberation. She was an inspiration for women by the way she expressed sexual independence and female desire, and the way

in which she freely played with different representations of femininity.[31] In retrospect, Madonna's decision to wear sexy lingerie on stage is an early expression of a *post*-feminist statement. In fact, nowadays, Madonna is often regarded as the quintessential post-feminist icon (Genz and Brabon 2009: 118). As Stéphanie Genz points out, post-feminism is interconnected with 'the discourses of capitalism and neo-liberalism that encourage women to concentrate on their private lives and consumer capacities as the sites for self-expression and agency' (Genz 2006: 337-338). Moreover, she argues that 'postfeminist women become the "entrepreneurs" of their own image' (Ibid.: 338) and 'stage a sexualization of the feminist body in order to construct a new femininity (or, new femininities) around the notions of autonomy and agency' (Ibid.: 345). These post-feminist women are thus 'not straightforwardly objectified but are presented as active, desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so' (Gill 2007: 151). Angela McRobbie also points out the role that consumer culture plays in post-feminism. She argues that post-feminism is characterised by women who are economically independent and are in charge of creating their own sexual experiences and pleasures using the goods made available by consumer culture (McRobbie 2009: 3).

Feminist scholars increasingly criticised the notion that the quest for sexual 'liberation' has resulted in a hyper-sexualised culture and a renewed sexism in which women themselves are actively participating (Walter 2010: 5) Thus, post-feminism is not without its pitfalls. Wearing underwear as outerwear and symbolically burning bras are feminist acts that play a part in a longer history of political protests against women's oppression and struggle for equal rights and women's liberation. In contemporary popular culture, however, women openly wear sexy lingerie to celebrate their bodies, showing that they are proud of who they are and enjoy their own sexuality. This suggests that lingerie can now be used as a means to make *post*-feminist statements. Feminists see a backlash in the contemporary sexualisation of the female body that goes hand in hand with its commercialisation in consumer culture. Moreover, women are not objectified dupes of this development but are actively involved in the sexualisation, commercialisation and the fashioning of their bodies. This, in my view, is the paradox of post-feminism. Journalist Ariel Levy captures the post-feminist mood remarkably well: 'only thirty years (my lifetime) ago, our mothers were "burning their bras" and picketing Playboy, and suddenly we were getting implants and wearing the bunny logo as supposed symbols of our liberation' (Levy 2005: 3). Whereas women fought on a large scale to liberate themselves from the constraints of fashion in the 1970s, today they are still disciplining themselves in the name of fashion through moulding, shaping and sexualising their bodies.

This contemporary sexualisation is, for instance, clearly visible in the images of the female body dressed in lingerie in the advertisements of the world's largest lingerie brand, Victoria's Secret. The models have a perfectly polished, shaped, tanned, and shiny body with lifted breasts. Women's pushed-up breasts are in most cases unmistakably the centre of

31 See for example the collection by Lisa Frank and Paul Smith (eds.), *Madonnarama: Essays on Sex and Popular Culture* (Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1993).

attention. 'New! Miraculous Push-up! Instantly adds two cup sizes', states one of Victoria's Secret's billboards. The names of the different collections speak for themselves: 'Very Sexy', 'Miraculous', 'Gorgeous Push-up', 'Sexy Tee'. The female bodies are highly idealised and conform to Western beauty ideals that can only be achieved by digital technologies such as photoshopping. Victoria's Secret seductively displays women in the spectacle of what Laura Mulvey has called 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey 1989 [1975]: 19): the women in these ads are sexualised, commercialised and objectified. However, something has changed since the analysis of the representation of women in cinema that Mulvey made in the 1970s. Whereas women were then portrayed as eroticised objects for the male gaze, now they have become subjects of their own image. This reflects a significant shift in representations of women in visual culture in recent years. As Rosalind Gill argues, 'rather than being presented as passive objects of the male gaze, young women in adverts are now frequently depicted as active, independent and sexually powerful' (Gill 2008: 35).

Another lingerie brand that takes visualisations of women as sex objects to an extreme is the Dutch lingerie brand Sapph, which is a copycat of Marlies Dekkers in a lower segment of the lingerie market. The two brands have recently been involved in a lawsuit which confirmed that Sapph had violated Dekkers' copyrights by incorporating the extra strap following the shape of the cups of the bra in four different designs.[32] Sapph's portrayal of femininity in their publicity campaigns is quite distinct. This brand's images are highly digitally retouched, producing an unreal look of "perfect" female faces and bodies. Their skin looks plastic and their bodies have the artificial shape that we know from porn movies: slim with firm buttocks and unnaturally big breasts. Moreover, the models wear lots of make-up and adopt suggestive poses. I would argue that Sapph, and to a lesser degree also Victoria's Secret, portray women as 'living dolls', which is the title of Natasha Walter's book (2010). Walter argues that:

> living a doll's life seems to have become an aspiration for many young women, as they leave childhood only to embark on a project of grooming, dieting and shopping that aims to achieve the bleached, waxed, tinted look of a Bratz or Barbie doll (Walter 2010: 2).

What is more, she claims that 'throughout much of our society, the image of female perfection to which women are encouraged to aspire has become more and more defined by sexual allure' (2010: 3). The imagery of both Sapph and Victoria's Secret represents the trend of re-moulding feminine subjectivity 'to fit the current postfeminist, neoliberal moment in which young women should not only be beautiful but sexy' (Gill 2008: 35). A post-feminist woman would probably emphasise that there is nothing inherently wrong with these images, because women are doing it of their own free will and for their own enjoyment and pleasure.

32 'Sapph maakt inbreuk op rechten Marlies Dekkers', Rechtspraak (25 May 2011), see http://www.rechtspraak.nl/Organisatie/Rechtbanken/Midden-Nederland/Nieuws/Pages/Sapph-maakt-inbreuk-op-auteursrechten-Marlies-Dekkers.aspx.

Nonetheless, this argument one-sidedly focuses on female liberation and on free choice for women. Paradoxically, this 'empowerment' is part of the current hypersexual culture: 'Anyone who would like to criticize this culture that sees women primarily as sexy dolls will find themselves coming up against the constantly repeated mantra of free choice' (Walter 2010: 28). Levy also criticises this 'raunch culture' in which 'all empowered women must be overtly and publicly sexual' (2005: 26), and in which we have 'developed a taste for kitschy, slutty stereotypes of female sexuality' (Ibid.: 34). Sapph, in my view, epitomises 'raunch culture' in which women are actively participating. We have entered a new regime of sexual meanings based on female consent, equality, participation and pleasure (McRobbie 2009: 28), resulting in a sexualised visual culture in which women are self-objectifying their own bodies. We are thus witnessing a 'hyper-culture of commercial sexuality' in which young women 'indicate their proactive desire for sexual objectification' (Amy-Chinn 2006: 173).[33] Women who are making themselves or other women into sex objects are, in Levy's words: 'Female Chauvinist Pigs' (2005: 4). Although feminism's quest for women's sexual liberation has been achieved, female bodies are still being sexualised and objectified by and for women themselves. Considering this context, it seems almost impossible to escape from the current hyper-sexualisation of our culture when designing daring lingerie. There is indeed a fine line between presenting post-feminist femininity on the one hand and contributing to new forms of sexism on the other hand.

Dekkers and the Paradox of Post-Feminism

I will now take a closer look at the fashion photography for Marlies Dekkers in relation to post-feminism. The photographers Carin Verbruggen and Ferry Drenthem Soesman were responsible for Dekkers' fashion photography and printed advertising campaigns for ten years (2001-2011). During an interview I conducted with them, they claimed to have largely influenced the creation of the visual brand image as well as the representation of femininity for Marlies Dekkers' brand (Interview CV&FDS 2011). Their earlier advertising campaigns (roughly 2001-2004) often depict narratives of, for instance, a woman (as a secretary or manager) in an office building (*Petit Coquet* collection, S/S 2001, see fig. 4.6 > p. 152), a woman who shows off her body while lying in a car (*Check* collection, S/S 2003, see fig. 4.7 > p. 152), and a woman who seems to be playing the game of seduction with a maid in a hotel room (*Butterfly Streaky* collection, A/W 2004). The female body is the centre of attention in these images. Hard and warm key light comes from the side, and the black or white lingerie creates sharp contrasts. These images depict rather classical narratives that have also been explored in the work of fashion photographers such as Helmut Newton and Guy Bourdin, or of more contemporary fashion photographers such as Steven Meisel, Mario Sorrenti, and Ellen von Unwerth.

Marlies Dekkers' – or perhaps rather Verbruggen and Drenthem Soesman's – portrayal of femininity is captured well in an image of the collection *Leading Strings* (S/S 2004, see fig. 4.3 > p. 149). This image presents a woman dressed in lingerie casually smoking a cigarette. The depicted woman is standing outside at night and is leaning slightly against

33 See also Angela McRobbie, 'Post-Feminism and Popular Culture', *Feminist Media Studies* 4, 3 (2004): 255–264; Rosalind Gill, 'From Sexual Objectification to Sexual Subjectification: The Resexualisation of Women's Bodies in the Media', *Feminist Media Studies* 3, 1 (2003): 100–106; Brian McNair, *Striptease Culture: Sex, Media and the Democratisation of Desire* (London: Routledge, 2002).

a brick wall in a presumably urban setting. Her body is illuminated by a warm key light coming from the side, creating strong contrasts between light and dark, and white and black, thus emphasising the bright white straps. As the profile of her face is photographed from the right, the suggestion is made that she has just turned her face to the right, aware of the fact that someone is there looking at her. Yet, she has not completely turned her face towards the person accompanying her. This pose thus gives the impression that she is comfortable with letting herself be looked at, and she is maybe even enjoying the exposure of her barely dressed body. As this picture is taken from a low angle, it accentuates the portrayal of a powerful, self-assured woman. Compared to the images of Victoria's Secret and Sapph, it is noteworthy that, for instance, the woman's breasts are not the centre of attention. Rather, the woman in this image of Dekkers' *Leading Strings* collection shows the graphic lines of the white straps of her lingerie, guiding the eye of the viewer to at least 14 rectangular shapes on the back of her tanned body – from her lower back up to her shoulder blades. Moreover, this woman's body is not nearly as plastic and artificial as the objectified female bodies presented in Sapph's advertising. Although photoshopped, this image does not present an unnatural female body similar to Victoria's Secret's or Sapph's 'living dolls' (Walter 2010). The woman photographed wearing Dekkers' lingerie evidently wants to be looked at as she is willingly exhibiting her body, which suggests that she enjoys playing an erotic game of pleasure in a post-feminist sense. Yet, this image does not cross over into gross 'raunch culture' as Levy would put it (2005: 26).

This image bears some resemblance to a photograph for American *Vogue* shot by Helmut Newton in 1998, in which a woman is also photographed from the back while she leans on a brick wall. Newton's image guides the eye of the viewer to a specific part of the woman's upper leg because of the cut of the dress, which also creates a strong contrast between the black dress and the white skin colour. The difference is, however, that the woman's head is left out of the frame of Newton's photograph, which enhances the objectification of her body. This is in significant contrast to Verbruggen and Drenthem Soesman's image in which the depicted woman is clearly a subject of her own image, as she is actively exhibiting her body dressed in lingerie, looking over her right shoulder, showing awareness of the fact that someone is looking at her. Their photography of Dekkers' lingerie – like much fashion imagery today – endorses the importance of sexual independence and pleasure, conveying women who are actively playing the game of seduction. A photograph of Dekkers' *Royal Flush* swimwear collection (A/W 2007) is also representative of this portrayal of women who are in charge of seduction (see fig. 4.8 > p. 152). This black and white image depicts a blindfolded man looking to his right, wearing a black suit with a white shirt and a bow tie, and holding a glass of wine in his right hand. In front of him stands a woman of approximately the same height, smoking a cigarette, wearing her swimwear with patterns of red, white and black playing cards (hearts, clubs, spades, and diamonds). This image suggests that they might be at a masked party, maybe even in a casino. Red is the only bright colour in this black and white photograph, which highlights her swimwear. This woman has adopted an active pose and has seductively turned the front of her body towards the camera, which in this case also draws attention to her breasts. As the man stands behind the woman, blindfolded and looking to the side, his passivity enhances the powerful representation of the woman as the centre of attention. The woman is clearly in charge, and has maybe even

blindfolded the man herself, actively playing the game of seduction, while inviting viewers to participate and look at how beautiful she is. While these kinds of classical narratives are regularly explored in cinema and fashion photography, this particular portrayal of femininity also remarkably resembles the contemporary advertising of the lingerie brand Agent Provocateur.

The paradoxical post-feminist values of female empowerment through seduction and sexualisation by the wearing of daring lingerie are highlighted on Agent Provocateur's website: 'Founded in 1994, Agent Provocateur empowers women to celebrate and enjoy their sensuality'.[34] The brand's advertising campaigns focus on images of women who are in charge, actively playing the game of seduction, dressed in lingerie with a rather unconventional design. In a similar vein as Dekkers, Agent Provocateur's lingerie is in some cases characterised by graphic black lines, drawing attention to specific unexpected parts of the exposed female body (e.g. collection A/W 2012). Agent Provocateur's fashion images also explore classical visual narratives such as a woman – with shiny legs, and feminine red nail polish – who while leaning on a car at a petrol station is wearing the daring black lingerie with straps accentuating the breasts (e.g. collection S/S 2013). These classical narratives are comparable to the stories and representations of femininity in Dekkers' advertising campaigns from roughly 2001 until 2004. In both Agent Provocateur's and Dekkers' photographs in which men are represented, they are frequently portrayed as obedient to the women whom they are simultaneously worshipping (e.g. Agent Provocateur's 2008-09 A/W campaign; and Dekkers' 2006-07 A/W campaign, see fig. 4.9 > p. 153). Even though Agent Provocateur's design style in some cases corresponds to Dekkers' style, its use of lace is an important difference, as mentioned before. Yet there are remarkable similarities in the ways in which both brands portray femininity. The women in both Agent Provocateur's and Dekkers' fashion photography are certainly not mere passive objects, but are actively presenting and perhaps even sexualising their fashioned bodies of their own free will without being afraid of a sexual double standard. This corresponds to Verbruggen and Drenthem Soesman's view of femininity. As they claimed during my interview with them, they try to create an image of powerful femininity in their photography by portraying women who are independent and conscious of their own womanliness. The stereotype of women as erotic objects is not an issue for them, because they believe there is nothing wrong with a woman choosing to be looked at. At the same time, Verbruggen and Drenthem Soesman are aware that there is sometimes a precarious balance between portraying women as stereotypical erotic objects and playing with the boundaries between stereotype and innovation (Interview CV&FDS 2011). In this sense, Dekkers' fashion photography is strongly related to the values of post-feminism.

Interestingly, as of 2005 the brand's fashion photography moved in new directions. The female body often becomes part of a more artistic setting in their publicity campaigns. For instance, the Autumn/Winter collection of 2005 depicts a model displaying a graphic interplay of black straps on her back (see fig. 4.10 > p. 153). She sits in a fantasy world full

34 See http://www.agentprovocateur.com.

of black and white geometrical shapes. Digital drawings, a necklace with tiny beads, spots of black paint, and a little fantasy moon have been added to the image. By doing so, attention is drawn away from the body as an erotic object. Similarly, in the collection *Butterfly Dream* of 2006 a dream world has been created (see fig. 4.11 > p. 153). The female body and hair of the model have an unnatural grey colour; a butterfly has been digitally drawn on her left eye; and the background shows a somewhat estranging image of a newspaper covered with the same enlarged shape of the digital butterfly. Since the model is wearing a plastic poncho, interesting reflections are created on her body. Such images create a more artistic impression and represent the development of Dekkers' fashion photography from sexual self-objectification to a playful experiment with shapes and graphical lines set within a rather abstract, stylised, and digitally drawn décor. In this sense, the development of Verbruggen and Drenthem Soesman's publicity campaigns is representative of the ways in which contemporary editorial fashion photography increasingly puts an atmospheric and artistic dimension of the photograph in the foreground. As argued by Jennifer Craik, '[t]he mood of the photograph continues to play a greater role than the depiction of the clothing in contemporary fashion photography' (2009: 192). Contemporary fashion photography is thus characterised by 'abstract, mood-driven, and contextual commentaries' and has propelled a wider revision of what counts as fashion; beauty; aspiration; and, therefore, art' (Craik 2009: 193). In a similar vein, Susan Kismaric and Eva Respini have argued that 'the fashion world has turned to current trends in art photography' (2008: 30). In the chapter 'Fluid Concepts of the Self' I discussed the current proximity and blurring boundaries between fashion photography and contemporary art, in which photographers can play with fashion as an imaginary realm. These blurring boundaries between art and fashion are reflected in Dekkers' fashion photography from approximately 2005 until 2011. I would argue that this artistic evolution is an attempt to counteract the hyper-sexualisation of recent years without undoing the joyful liberation of female sexuality.

Nonetheless, after the collaboration between Dekkers and the photographers Verbruggen and Drenthem Soesman ended in 2011, the latest advertising campaigns remarkably suggest a return to a less artistic and more sexualised representation of femininity. For instance, recent fashion images depict women seductively displaying their slim, shiny and tanned bodies in a neutral setting (e.g. *Charms* collection S/S 2013, see fig. 4.12 > p. 154). In order to grasp this recent development in Dekkers' portrayal of femininity, it is worth comparing it to the fashion images depicting women dressed in lingerie designed by Laura Urbinati. Although Urbinati's fashion images also present women in neutral settings, there are significant differences in these representations of femininity. For example, in the images presented in Urbinati's A/W 2012-13 campaign a woman is photographed in a simple, white setting. This woman has a natural look which is in sharp contrast to the tanned, shiny, photoshopped female bodies with lots of make-up and styled voluminous blond hair represented in Dekkers' latest campaigns. In addition, the woman in Urbinati's photographs is not overtly striking a pose like the models in Dekkers' latest images. These are rather more realistic portraits of a woman wearing lingerie – in some cases also in combination with other clothes – not necessarily needing to be sexy and seductive. In contrast to Urbinati's neutral representation of female bodies dressed in lingerie, Dekkers' portrayal of femininity is more in line with Walter's idea of the bodily perfection of glamorous, sexualised 'living

dolls' (2010: 2) with the post-feminist attitude of wanting to show off their bodies.
Based on my analyses of the images that Dekkers' team produced over the years, I maintain that the brand Marlies Dekkers may play on our hyper-sexualised times, but it does not transgress the boundaries of 'raunch culture' (Levy 2005: 26). Marlies Dekkers employs her lingerie to make a post-feminist statement, which is comparable to Agent Provocateur's promise of female empowerment by letting women actively participate in the sexualisation of their bodies when wearing daring lingerie. The lingerie designs and photography of the brand Marlies Dekkers epitomise the paradox of post-feminism. Today, it is through consumption and the material tools of fashion that we can perform feminine identity and express *post*-feminist values, which have taken the place of political or social engagement of first and second wave feminism. This is part of a broader trend in affluent developed societies 'in which women are invited to purchase everything from bras to coffee as signs of their power and independence (from men)' (Gill 2003: 36). Dekkers' lingerie can thus be understood as a post-feminist gesture of female empowerment and independence, while shaping and sexualising the body. In this sense, the fashioned female bodies in Dekkers' photography perform paradoxical post-feminist concepts of femininity.

Trying to conform to contemporary, highly sexualised beauty ideals by shaping the body through diet, exercise and cosmetic surgery is a sign that 'the corset did not so much disappear as become internalized,' as Steele argued (2001: 143). We could say that while the bra is shown on the outside, the corset remains hidden inside the body. Through the internalisation of beauty ideals and practices of self-regulation, we are disciplining our bodies in a Foucauldian sense. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977 [1975]), Foucault explores practices of modern power systems in relation to discipline and punishment. He argues that the body is subjected to power relations that it has internalised and thus performs self-regulating disciplinary practices in order to conform and escape punishment (Foucault 1977: 25). This argument can be extended to contemporary visual culture since '[p]hotographic images have been instrumental in the production of what Foucault called the *docile bodies* of the modern state – citizens who participate in the ideologies of the society through cooperation and a desire to fit in and conform' (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 98). This disciplinary process can be related to the 'media images that produce homogeneous images for us of the perfect look, the perfect body, and the perfect pose' (Ibidem). Because of the internalisation of these ideologies of society, people will discipline their bodies in order to carry out tasks, perform ceremonies and emit signs that conform to these ideals. This includes performances of encoded and fashioned concepts of the self.

In this sense, the corset is still present, yet invisible and internalised, practising its power to shape, sexualise and fashion the female body. Yet, contemporary fashion culture only seems to celebrate the positive connotations attached to the internalised corset, such as youth, beauty, and erotic allure. To a great extent, women's bodies are still being fashioned, acted upon, and are displayed as sexualised, commercialised objects to be consumed. The feminist critique that the quest for sexual liberation has resulted in a hyper-sexualised culture seems to be ignored on the catwalk and in glossy magazines. The post-feminist point of view is thus rather one-sided or perhaps recklessly optimistic in emphasising the idea that women have the freedom to shape and sexualise their own bodies by wearing daring lingerie. It is this

paradox of post-feminism – aiming to present empowered femininity while balancing on the edge of a renewed sexism – that is epitomised in Dekkers' lingerie brand.

Embodied Experiences

From Images to Corporeal Experiences

Based on my analyses of the representations of femininity of the brand Marlies Dekkers, I have argued that Dekkers presents the female body dressed in lingerie as an expression of post-feminist femininity. Its publicity material and fashion photography sell the idea that consumers will embody, express and perform post-feminist concepts of the self when wearing the lingerie. It is thus in these representations that a corporeal experience of post-feminist femininity is suggested, because of the material object of the extra straps following the cups of the bra that is so specific to Dekkers' design. The straps offer a peek of the lingerie that a woman is wearing. Dekkers' fashion images thus imply that the women wearing Dekkers' lingerie with visible straps *want* to be looked at, and enjoy the visibility of specific accentuated parts of their body. By so doing, as the fashion images suggest, the female wearer actively shapes and sexualises her body for her own enjoyment, emphasising her beauty and attractiveness. In this sense, Dekkers' representations stage post-feminist concepts of femininity and post-feminist experiences that can subsequently be consumed and performed.

The way in which experiences are staged and sold can be understood in terms of the contemporary 'experience economy', which is a term that Joseph Pine and James Gilmore popularised in their book *The Experience Economy* (1999). Pine and Gilmore contend that once the prosperity in a country reaches a certain level, attention shifts from goods and services to experiences. When a person buys into an experience, 'he pays to spend time enjoying series of memorable events that a company stages – as in theatrical play – to engage him in a personal way' (Pine and Gilmore 1999: 2). According to Pine and Gilmore, many companies today wrap an experience around their goods by focusing on the experience that consumers have while using the goods, and thus on 'how the person performs while *using* the good' (1999: 15). Following these lines of thought, fashion brands may stage certain experiences, and individuals can subsequently perform these experiences when wearing their clothes. In the case of Marlies Dekkers, it is then a post-feminist experience that is staged and wrapped around the material product of lingerie. In this last part of the chapter I will explore how this notion of our contemporary experience economy relates to the subjective *embodied experience* of wearing certain clothes. What is the relationship between the idea that a consumer performs certain experiences staged by a brand while using the goods and the actual subjective embodied experience of wearing clothes? I will discuss whether the suggested experiences of post-feminist femininity in Dekkers' fashion images correspond to the actual embodied experiences of women wearing Dekkers' lingerie in daily life.

In order to address the notion of embodiment, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) – an existential philosophical reflection – is helpful as it offers a subject-

centred view on how the self relates to phenomena. As Merleau-Ponty asserts, '[w]e shall find in ourselves, and nowhere else, the unity and true meaning of phenomenology' (2002 [1945]: viii). Moreover, he argues that we cannot experience and make sense of the world 'without the mediation of bodily experience' (Ibid.: 235). It is thus always *through* the body that we perceive and experience the world. As Elisabeth Grosz points out, Merleau-Ponty thus demonstrates that experience – 'of course implicated in and produced by various knowledges and social practices' (1994: 94) – 'is always necessarily embodied, corporeally constituted, located in and as the subject's incarnation' (1994: 95). Also following Merleau-Ponty's argument, Entwistle emphasises the relation between the body and the self, arguing that '[t]he body forms the envelope of our being in the world; selfhood comes from this location in the body. [...] the self is located in a body, which in turn is located in time and space' (Entwistle 2000: 29).

In the field of visual culture, Sobchack fruitfully draws on this phenomenological perspective by focusing on what it is to *live* one's body, rather than merely *looking* at bodies, even though vision is 'central to the subjective dimensions of embodied existence' (2004: 2). She thus calls for a shift from the body as mere image and representation to an understanding of embodiment as being 'in the flesh', as the 'radically material condition of human beings that necessarily entails both the body and consciousness, objectivity and subjectivity, in an *irreducible ensemble*' (2004: 4). Whereas there are many bodies to look at in the realm of fashion, the practice of dressing in everyday life is always already embodied. According to Sweetman, fashion and adornment not only have an impact on our appearance, but also have an effect on 'our experience of the body and the ways in which the body can be used' (2003: 66). Hence, it is worthwhile to explore how clothing affects our bodily experience, how it literally makes us feel, and how it influences the way in which we experience, perceive and perform specific concepts of the self. A focus on embodied experiences adds another dimension to the way in which I have theorised the performance of specific concepts of the self in previous chapters.

Actual Experiences of Dekkers' Loyal Customers

I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with seven loyal customers of the brand Marlies Dekkers about their actual experiences of wearing the lingerie. As I have explained in the chapter 'On Theory and Methodology', all of the customers I interviewed have been buying Dekkers' lingerie for a longer period of time varying from 20 years (since the launch of the brand) to 2 years, and they visit the store and purchase new collections on a regular basis (i.e. at least two to three times a year). Moreover, all of these customers, with only one exception, wear Dekkers' lingerie on a daily basis. The results of these interviews show remarkable similarities in the way these women perceive Marlies Dekkers as a brand, and experience wearing the lingerie. While most women stressed the importance of the comfortable fit and the good quality of the bras as a buying motive, these interviews also offered an interesting perspective on their embodied experiences in relation to post-feminism and femininity. Firstly, I will discuss my findings of the interviews that pertain to the customers' view of Dekkers' lingerie and of wearing it. Secondly, I will reflect on their personal embodied experiences of actually wearing the lingerie.

When I asked the customers about Dekkers' lingerie, it was remarkable that the majority of the interviewees expressed the idea that 'you wear a Marlies Dekkers for yourself in the first

place' (Interview 7 March 2013 A).[35] One interviewee even explicitly claimed that it is not about seduction or being a sex object for men (Interview 8 March). Yet, at the same time, most customers mentioned that their partner either joins them when they go shopping, or that they value whether or not their partner likes the lingerie they buy. This indicates that these customers have internalised Marlies Dekkers' post-feminist statements underlining that her lingerie is for women *themselves*. However, the results of the interviews reveal that male desire does play a part in these women's choice of the lingerie. As one of the interviewees states, her partner 'plays a very important role' when buying lingerie at Dekkers' store (Interview 5 June). Another recurring issue is that most of these interviewees believe that lingerie, today, is something to be seen and something that you *may* show, which a few of these women give Marlies Dekkers credit for as she popularised this idea in the Netherlands by using her 'underwear as outerwear' statement as a sign of female empowerment. At the same time, most of these women acknowledge that there are constraints to wearing the lingerie openly. The majority feels it is not appropriate to show the visible straps of the lingerie when, for instance, going to work. One of the interviewees stated that she is 'afraid that it might undermine her work' as she wants to keep the attention focused on the quality of her work (Interview 7 March B). Another customer said that the visible straps are absolutely not done in her work in healthcare, because 'that would be offensive' (Interview 8 March). As another interviewee explained, she works for a conservative company, and wants her clients to focus on her instead of on the graphic play of lines on her body (Interview 5 June). In some cases, these women deliberately choose to wear Dekkers' lingerie that will be hidden underneath their clothes, or that is only visible in a subtle way. In contrast, another woman who works in the art world claims that in the art scene you see a lot of women wearing Dekkers' lingerie (Interview 7 March A), which demonstrates that it is accepted in certain contexts.

It is interesting to see that most loyal customers share and confirm the post-feminist ideas that Dekkers' brand conveys, i.e. that it is permissible to show your lingerie, and that the lingerie is meant for women themselves – suggesting that they have internalised these socio-cultural values, meanings and ideologies of post-feminism. However, the interviews show that it is in fact more nuanced than these post-feminist statements imply. Furthermore, the majority of these loyal customers explicitly articulated that they value and want to conform to contemporary beauty ideals. For example, one of the interviewees said that she fully agrees with the idea that 'a woman should push up her breasts' (Interview 7 March A). Another woman stated that 'in the end, as a woman, you just want to meet the idealised image of beauty. [...] I mean, every woman would rather have the figure of a model' (Interview 8 March). These women thus explicitly express their desire to conform to the beauty ideals, which confirms Steele's idea that the corset is still present, yet internalised, practising its power to shape the female body (2001: 143). This internalisation of society's beauty ideologies is an expression of a Foucauldian disciplinary process through self-regulating practices. In this sense, wearing Dekkers' lingerie can be viewed as a disciplinary practice, shaping the female body trying to attain the beauty ideals. One of the interviewees pointed out that wearing Dekkers' lingerie increases her consciousness of her body, and affects

35 Most interviews were planned on 7, 8 and 9 March 2013, and two additional interviews took place on 5 and 10 June 2013. When citing the anonymous interviewees I will refer to the date of the interviews. In some cases I conducted two interviews on the same day, which I will refer to as interview 'A' or 'B' on a specific date.

her posture. Because she claims it feels 'as if someone is watching her', she pulls back her shoulders, holds in her stomach, and makes sure she has a straight back (Interview 9 March A), which I would understand as a self-regulating practice that illustrates that the corset is indeed internalised while the bra is shown on the outside. Dekkers' lingerie is thus viewed as a means to live up to the contemporary idealised image of beauty.

When discussing with the loyal customers that Dekkers was initially accused of 'degrading women by objectifying them' (Ferrill 2003: 11), some of the women strongly disagreed with the idea the Dekkers portrays women as sex objects. 'That is nonsense', one interviewee expressed, '[Dekkers' lingerie] is about self-awareness instead of being a sex object' (Interview 5 June). Nonetheless, the majority of the interviewees did agree with the idea that women possibly sexualise their bodies when wearing Dekkers' lingerie, but they do not see a problem in that. As one interviewee stated:

> it is alright for a woman to be seen as a sex object, [...] as long as she is pulling the strings herself. It is not about being a tasty piece of flesh, or as something to be consumed, but it is up to you to decide "now I want to look very sexy" or "now I want to look provocative" or "now I want to look chic and feminine". With Marlies Dekkers you can decide for yourself (Interview 7 March A).

I would argue that this is a clear expression of a post-feminist point of view, emphasising that there is nothing wrong with women sexualising their own bodies as these woman are doing so of their own free choice – which is a sign of the 'constantly repeated mantra of free choice' that Walter observes as part of the current hyper-sexual culture (2010: 28). Moreover, another interviewee claimed that wearing Dekkers' lingerie might indeed be a way of sexualising your body, but she stated that 'that is part of the self-confidence that one gains [when wearing Dekkers' lingerie]. Apparently women who wear Marlies Dekkers enjoy that' (Interview 7 March B). This relation between the sexualisation of the female body and the feeling of self-confidence confirms the paradoxical post-feminist idea that sexualising your own body is an expression of female empowerment. Based on my findings that pertain to the customers' view of Dekkers' lingerie and wearing it, I would thus argue that the majority of the women who choose to wear the lingerie seem to believe in the values of post-feminism. This post-feminist point of view is clearly illustrated (and simultaneously criticised) by journalist Ariel Levy quoting an American actress who said: '"If a woman's got a pretty body and she likes her body, let her show it off!"' (Levy 2005: 9). In this post-feminist era, the prevailing attitude is that it is 'permissible, once again, to enjoy looking at the bodies of beautiful women', as McRobbie argues in her book *The Aftermath of Feminism* (2009: 17). The interviews that I conducted confirm that the views of Dekkers' loyal customers correspond to these socio-cultural values of post-feminism.

With regard to their actual experiences of wearing the lingerie, an important aspect is the visibility of the straps that is specific to Dekkers' designs, which creates an interaction between the wearer and the male or female viewer. In everyday life one will usually see a few straps peep from under the clothes. These straps will in some cases graphically delineate

the upper part of the chest, but usually the upper part of the breasts. When wearing lingerie with clearly visible straps, the majority of the interviewees said that they certainly attract attention to specific parts of their body – which most of them enjoy. Two women admitted to being a bit hesitant to wearing the lingerie openly because they are afraid that some people in specific situations might comment on how expensive the lingerie is, but the majority of the interviewees takes pleasure in the visibility of the straps. 'You create a kind of tension. The gaze of [the viewer] moves to a part of the body that you normally won't stare at', as one loyal customer claims (Interview 7 March B). Another interviewee also emphasised that her decision to wear lingerie with visible straps is motivated by that creation of 'a bit of mystery, [...], a bit of tension' (Interview 9 March B). She asserts that she would not necessarily overtly show every part of the lingerie, but she enjoys revealing just a few visible straps to make people wonder where the straps lead to, which she finds exciting (Interview 9 March B). 'If someone is looking at it', another interviewee states, 'you play with the fact that "he is looking at me"'(Interview June 5). These findings illustrate that the female wearer is well aware of the fact that she is playing with the gaze of the male or female viewer, drawing attention to her lingerie, and to her body.

Thus, the female wearer knows – as she has made the conscious choice to wear this lingerie – that she will draw extra attention to her cleavage, accentuating her femininity. All of the women I interviewed agreed that wearing Dekkers' lingerie affects their feeling of femininity. They all claim that wearing the lingerie is directly related to their femininity: 'It's a very feminine feeling, [...] a very sexy, feminine feeling' (Interview 5 June). In addition to viewing the lingerie as a functional product, 'it is definitely a part of being feminine' (Interview 8 March), or a part of feeling sexy (Interview 7 March B). The majority of the interviewees stated that they feel extra feminine and more aware of their femininity when wearing the lingerie. Moreover, one women stated that 'it makes you more of a woman', which she does not experience when wearing lingerie of other brands (Interview 7 March A). Whereas some women found it difficult to judge because they wear Dekkers' lingerie on a daily basis, most of the interviewees explicitly emphasised that lingerie of other brands does not affect their experience of femininity to the extent that Dekkers' lingerie does (e.g. Interview 7 March A; Interview 9 March A; Interview 9 March B; Interview 5 June; Interview 10 June). Although we must take into account that most interviewees almost exclusively wear Dekkers' lingerie, it is remarkable that they claim that Dekkers' lingerie makes them feel more feminine than lingerie of other brands.

While the female wearer experiences a heightened awareness of femininity, of her female body and of her embodiedness as a woman, she is – when wearing lingerie with visible straps – simultaneously presenting her body to be looked at, which makes the lived body 'at once, both an objective *subject* and a subjective *object*' (Sobchack 2004: 2). According to Sobchack, this is the condition of embodiment; it is the way in which we literally and figurally make sense of, and to, both ourselves and others (Ibidem). The wearer of Dekkers' lingerie is thus a subject actively making herself into an object to be looked at. She regularly deliberately plays a game with the visibility and invisibility of specific parts of her female body, as she offers just a peek of her lingerie instead of actually wearing a bra openly as outerwear without other clothes (which the celebrities usually do on stage). Yet this peek, in

my view, produces the same effect as the 'underwear as outerwear' trend, as Barbara Vinken describes:

> What was supposed to remain concealed and give figure to the body – the girdle, the bra – is now openly exhibited. The whole apparatus of hiding and revealing, of the forbidden, [...] is now openly displayed in its costume-function as illusion-generating: here fashion offers a look behind the scenes at the mechanics of lust (Vinken 2005: 66).

The women who are visibly wearing Dekkers' lingerie want to be looked at. They are exhibiting their bodies, openly playing the game of lust, and they are apparently doing it for their own pleasure. The female wearer thus actively shapes and sexualises her own body for her own enjoyment as well as for the male or female viewer, while emphasising the beauty of her body, affirming the power of the internalised corset. This is an expression of McRobbie's notion of a post-feminist 'enjoyable femininity' (2009: 3), which, as mentioned before, refers to women who are happily embracing consumer culture to enjoy their femininity and their own sexual and other pleasures. Wearing Dekkers' lingerie, therefore, is a way of *embodying* these post-feminist values and meanings. In addition, since wearing this lingerie stirs the physical experience of being a beautiful woman as well as a sexual human being, I would argue that these wearers have an *embodied experience* of post-feminist femininity. The interaction with the gaze of a male or female viewer is essential to this embodied experience of the wearer as it amplifies her awareness of her female body. In my view, this interaction leads to an intensification of the interplay between our embodied experiences, and the way in which we perform specific concepts of ourselves in relation to others. Hence, Dekkers' lingerie serves as a means to experience, express and perform post-feminist femininity – which is interconnected with the staging of post-feminist experiences in the brand's fashion images, as I will argue.

In addition to their heightened awareness of femininity, most of the interviewees asserted that wearing Dekkers' lingerie makes them feel more self-assured. One of the women explained that she always felt a bit insecure about her body, but wearing Marlies Dekkers' lingerie played an important part in helping her to feel more self-confident: 'I always had a lot of confidence because I always wore a beautiful, well fitted bra by Marlies Dekkers' (Interview 7 March A). Furthermore, this interviewee claims that lingerie of other brands did not have the effect of giving her more self-esteem. Another woman mentioned that Dekkers' lingerie helps her to feel more confident about the decisions that she has to make on a particular day. She expresses that, on some days she chooses a particular bra 'to be a strong, tough woman', and it is on those days that 'you will be more determined', for instance, 'when you have to make decisions' (Interview 8 March). This points to the idea that Dekkers' lingerie thus helps these women to feel surer of themselves. One of the interviewees even stated that wearing the lingerie sometimes has a therapeutic effect on her. She explained that she is a rather shy person, and that wearing Dekkers' lingerie helps her to push herself to the centre of attention a bit more, which she views as a positive way of pushing her boundaries (Interview 9 March A). Yet, at the same time, she said that this therapeutic effect also depends on whether or not she feels comfortable with the people around her (Interview

9 March A). Although it depends on the context, this woman thus acknowledges that she benefits from Dekkers' lingerie – sometimes even in a therapeutic sense – to overcome her shyness, which I would also interpret as a way to feel more self-confident. This interviewee also claims that Dekkers' lingerie, in this sense, is different from the lingerie by other brands (Interview 9 March A). It is remarkable that all interviewees thus share the experience that wearing Dekkers' lingerie is interconnected with being self-assured. Considering the bodily experiential effect that this lingerie causes, I now want to explore the connection with the experiences staged in the contemporary 'experience economy' (Pine and Gilmore 1999).

Transformational Experiences

As Pine and Gilmore contend, companies that consider themselves part of the 'experience economy' explicitly design 'their goods to enhance the user's experience [...] – essentially *experientializing* the goods' (1999: 16, original emphasis). In order to stage an experience, according to Pine and Gilmore, the focus should shift to the user: 'how the individual performs while *using* the good' (1999: 15, original emphasis). As the women I interviewed expressed that Dekkers' lingerie creates a heightened awareness of their femininity, and increases their feeling of being a self-confident woman, I would argue that this product is *experientialised* in order to enhance the women's experience and performance of post-feminist femininity. Moreover, as Pine and Gilmore argue, 'the experiences we have affect who we are, what we can accomplish' (1999: 163), which is interesting with regard to, for example, the interviewee who said that wearing Dekkers' lingerie makes her more certain when having to make decisions. This interviewee suggests that, at those moments, the product affects her idea of who she is – a 'strong, tough woman' (Interview 8 March) – as well as increases her ability to accomplish what she wants since the lingerie helps her to be determined when making decisions. As such, Dekkers' staged experiences enhance the women's experiences while wearing the lingerie, and potentially affect their experience of who they are and what they can accomplish.

However, as Pine and Gilmore argue, the experience economy brings more than experiences: transformations. They assert that the creation of transformations is the most far-reaching phase of the experience economy, and it is the experiences that 'set the stage for transformation' (1999: 180). As Pine and Gilmore contend, 'in the nascent Transformation Economy, the customer is the product and the transformation is an aid in changing the traits of the individual who buys it' (1999: 205). Experiences thus become transformations in this phase, guiding consumers in their process of changing 'as a result of what the company does' (1999: 172). 'While commodities are fungible, goods tangible, services intangible, and experiences memorable', Pine and Gilmore claim that 'transformations are effectual' (1999: 171). As the loyal customers pointed out, shopping in Dekkers' store is quite an experience as they receive individual attention and advice. One interviewee mentions the 'boudoir-like' interior design with 'nice light', which makes her feel very feminine while trying on the lingerie (Interview 7 March A). Another woman describes the stores as 'special' and 'exclusive' (Interview 7 March B). 'It is a total experience', as another loyal customer points out, which speaks to 'all of the senses' as 'there are little chocolates, and she serves wine' (Interview 9 March B). Moreover, 'the way in which you buy the lingerie [...] is like a little show', which makes this interviewee feel 'like a child in a candy shop' (Interview 9 March A).

As shopping at a Dekkers' store is thus not simply about finding the right size, fitting, and buying, I would argue that – based on the interviews – the customers consider shopping at Dekkers' stores as a memorable experience, which Pine and Gilmore define as the fourth stage of the experience economy. While these shopping experiences are memorable, the wearing of the lingerie is more than that. As we have seen, this lingerie actually makes a difference in the ways in which the female wearer feels – more feminine, more self-assured, etc. – which suggests that the experience of wearing Dekkers' lingerie is indeed *effectual*. Wearing Dekkers' lingerie does not change these women in the sense that they become completely different people, but it is transformational as it significantly affects and enhances the way in which they claim to feel feminine, sexy and self-confident. In this sense Dekkers' lingerie does make these consumers feel differently, affecting their perception and experience of who they are, which demonstrates the transformational potential of Dekkers' experientialised lingerie.

As we have seen, Dekkers stages and sells post-feminist experiences in her fashion images. In addition, the stores enhance the experiential dimension of the lingerie and of the brand. My findings based on the interviews suggest that customers who wear the lingerie with visible straps perform the experiences staged by the brand to a certain extent, as they play a game with the male or female gaze, drawing attention to their female bodies, which makes them feel sexy and beautiful, and affects their experience of who they are. This indicates how Dekkers' lingerie – designed to draw attention to the female body – has an effect on the way in which these women feel, act and perform, in a similar vein to that pointed out by Sweetman (2003: 66). Their embodied experiences thus affect their performance of femininity. At the same time, the female bodies are being fashioned with the values and meanings of post-feminism which are also attached to Dekkers' lingerie. In this sense, they both embody post-feminist values and meanings and simultaneously express and *perform* post-feminist concepts of the self in relation to others, which illustrates Svendsen's argument of the constant interplay between our experience of ourselves and the way in which we express and perform our identity (2006: 151). It also confirms Entwistle's argument on the inextricable interconnection between the experience and presentation of the self, the act of dressing, and identity (2000: 10).

While the customers feel more feminine and self-confident, their actual experiences do not always match the post-feminist experiences staged by the brand. Because of certain constraints in real life, some consumers feel there are restrictions to openly wearing the lingerie in specific situations which in some cases reduces the post-feminist experience of showing and sexualising the female body and taking pleasure in that. Moreover, the interviews show that the partners of the female wearers also play an important role, which contradicts the post-feminist attitude of wearing the lingerie solely for yourself and your own pleasure as a woman. While the loyal customers claim to share the post-feminist values that Dekkers' brand stages, in reality there are constraints upon their post-feminist bodily experiences and performances. Although the consumers internalised post-feminist cultural values and meanings, the actual subjective embodied experiences do not always correspond to the post-feminist experiences staged by the brand. Nevertheless, Dekkers' experientialised lingerie does potentially have a transformational effect in Pine and Gilmore's sense. As such,

the women's embodied experiences are affected by the experiences staged by the brand as they perform post-feminist concepts of the self.

The Material Production and Discursive Constitution of Experiences

From my analyses, theoretical framework, and interviews, we can see that both the specific design of Dekkers' lingerie – the material object drawing attention to the corporeal body – and the discursively produced socio-cultural values and meanings of post-feminist experiences staged by the brand seem to affect the wearer's embodied experiences and performance of post-feminist concepts of the self. At the end of this chapter, I will, therefore, reflect on the material production (i.e. the lingerie encountering the wearer's corporeal body) and the discursive constitution (i.e. commodified staged experiences and values of the brand) of the experience of post-feminist femininity.

With regard to the embodied experience of a post-feminist femininity, it is noteworthy that feminists of the 1970s had already discussed the notions of corporeality and experience. As a critique to the male-dominated representations of femininity in our culture, Luce Irigaray argued for a recognition of sexual difference, of the specificity of female embodiment, of women's bodily experience and sexual desire (1985 [1974, 1977]). In her phenomenological account of feminism, Iris Young (1990) also claims that women's sexuality is significantly different from men's and explores everyday experiences that are unique to women's embodiment, such as having breasts. Young, for instance, criticises the way in which 'male culture' fetishizes women's breasts, and 'challenges us to imagine breasts are they are [...] for women themselves' (Bartky 2000: 323). Moreover, in her essay 'Women Recovering our Clothes' (2005 [1994]) Young draws attention to the sensuous pleasures that women can have while wearing clothes, challenging the idea that these experiences are necessarily affected by images of women in clothes or by the male gaze. Other feminist theorists have argued for an understanding of the experience of femininity beyond what they consider the limits of sexual difference, studying gender in relation to structures of subjectivity – in order to avoid essentialism. In *Technologies of Gender* (1987), Teresa de Lauretis proposes that gender – as well as representations of sexualities and gender relations – is a product of various social technologies, i.e. social and cultural practices and institutional discourses, which are subsequently experienced by individual subjects. She thus views experience as 'a process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed' (1987: 159), and constructs a 'semiotics of experience', theorising meaning and consciousness as it works through the body (Threadgold 1997: 49). In a similar vein, Joan Scott, in her essay 'The Evidence of Experience' (1991), underlines the discursive dimension of experience: 'we need to attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences. It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience' (1991: 779). The work of these feminist theorists thus helps to clarify the ways in which embodied experiences can be discursively constituted.

As argued before, in this post-feminist era, women are enjoying their own female bodies, and their own female sexuality. In this sense, Irigaray's call for the acknowledgment of women's sexual desire and Young's challenge to imagine breasts as they are for women themselves are not only fulfilled, but abundantly celebrated as the embodied experience

of post-feminist femininity in popular culture. Whereas this is more tempered in daily life, the feminist theories of embodied experiences are relevant in order to gain a better understanding of the post-feminist experiences of women who are visibly wearing Dekkers' lingerie, and especially of the ways in which post-feminist subjectivities may be partly constituted through discourse and through the experiences offered by Dekkers' brand. In our contemporary consumer culture, and in the fashion system, many discursive representations of the female body, of beauty, of sexuality are at play. As we have seen, the wearer of Dekkers' lingerie is shaping and often sexualising her body, yet often embraces the pleasure that she experiences by the interaction with the male or female viewer looking at her body. While wearing Dekkers' lingerie, these women experience a heightened bodily awareness of their femininity, but are, at the same time, operating in the realm of the social and cultural discourses of the fashion system. Their embodied experiences of post-feminist femininity are partly constituted through the bodily incorporation of the experiences staged by Dekkers' brand which is interconnected with post-feminist discourse in contemporary culture.

In this sense, the experience of the wearer of Dekkers' lingerie is affected by both the material objects, dressing the physical body of the embodied subject, and by fashion's discourse. As Barad's new materialist approach helps to understand, it is important to think in terms of the mutuality of materiality and discourse, and of matter and meaning (Barad 1996, 2003; Parkins 2008). Parkins, who draws upon Barad's work, points out the entwinement of material objects with discursive practices within the realm of fashion, discusses the effect of the way in which garments leave specific 'marks [...] on the body' (2008: 511):

> These marks are material, and they issue from power-saturated discursive and material fields. In case of fashion, they might be understood as the ways in which a garment shapes a body, both materially and visually: the marks left by the bra straps, the way a body is thrust forward on high heels (Parkins 2008: 511).

This helps to understand the ways in which Dekkers' lingerie shapes the female body materially as well as visually. Perhaps this lingerie also functions as a means of thrusting the body forward, as one interviewee suggested (Interview 9 March A). The physical experience of wearing this graphic interplay of lines on the female body affects the wearer's bodily experience of femininity. From a phenomenological perspective, following Merleau-Ponty, I would argue that the physical experience of wearing Dekkers' lingerie on the phenomenal body plays a part in the formation of subjectivity, and thus in the coming-into-being of post-feminist concepts of the self.

At the same time, material garments – in this case specifically lingerie – shaping the body are necessarily interconnected with the 'power-saturated discursive' field of fashion. In the case of Marlies Dekkers, the bodily experience and performance of post-feminist femininity is produced through the interplay between material and discursive factors, i.e. the material objects of the lingerie affecting the lived, bodily experience, and the cultural meanings, experiences of post-feminism staged by Dekkers' brands that can discursively fashion

the female body. It is thus the mutuality of the material production and the discursive constitution of experience that, in this case, creates a heightened awareness of femininity, and potentially has a transformational effect on the consumer. Moreover, it is the mutuality of matter and discourse, matter and meaning, and the material and the immaterial that affects the interplay between embodied experiences and the performative expressions of the clothed body.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the role of the body in fashion images as well as in the everyday embodied practice of dressing. The fashioned female bodies in Dekkers' fashion photography express the paradoxical meanings and values of post-feminism, while staging and selling post-feminist experiences that consumers can subsequently perform. I have argued for the importance of taking into account the interrelations between the fashioned bodies and staged experiences in the fashion images, and the subjective embodied experiences of wearing the lingerie on the phenomenal body. Moreover, as I have pointed out, actual lived embodied experiences of wearing clothes are essential to performances of concepts of the self. The lingerie designed by Marlies Dekkers intensifies the interplay between the heightened awareness of one's bodily self and femininity by intentionally exposing and drawing attention to one's "first skin" on the one hand, and the performance of post-feminist concepts of the self in direct relationship to the male or female gaze on the other hand. It is both the materiality of the clothes and the discursive systems in which one operates that affect bodily experiences. As the act of dressing inevitably takes place in the context of the discursive system of fashion, one might also physically incorporate, internalise, and subsequently express specific symbolic meanings attached to clothes while enacting certain social and cultural discourses, which influences the ways in which one feels, acts and performs. Furthermore, the sensorial experience one has when using certain goods in everyday life are partly a result of the experientialised products and experiences staged by certain brands as part of our contemporary experience economy.

In the case of Marlies Dekkers, the concepts of post-feminist femininity performed in the brands' fashion photography play a part in the discursive constitution of embodied experiences and performative expressions of the living, experiential clothed bodies of the wearers. However, as I have argued in the chapter 'Creative Performances' by drawing upon Del Río (2008), the clothed body also potentially has the expressive agency to play with the fluidity of concepts of the self through its embodied performances. Instead of performing post-feminist femininity, enacting post-feminist discourses, the female wearer can thus also exert the affective-performative power of their living, experiential, clothed bodies to explore, transform and experiment with these concepts of the self. Yet, in the case of Marlies Dekkers, most of the loyal customers seemed to embody and perform the experiences staged by the brand, fashioning their bodies with the paradoxical meanings and values of post-feminism.

In this chapter I pointed out the importance of putting more emphasis on embodiment and embodied experiences. Since garments are worn literally on the phenomenal, experiential body and function as a second – or sometimes maybe third – skin, they necessarily interact with one's physical body and one's outer appearance as an expression of the conceptual self. The materiality of clothes encounters the materiality of bodies, possibly affecting one's actual *sense* of the self. Products, especially in the field of fashion, are generally being used in a direct relationship to the consumer's body, which enhances the direct relationship between the experientialised goods sold by a brand and the actual embodied experiences of the consumer, and hence of the actual wearer. Since the experientialising of products has gained importance in our experience economy, I would speculate that our bodily experience and awareness might also be increased by using these products, which makes it even more worthwhile to draw more attention to actual embodied experiences, in particular in the realm of fashion.

Therefore, the body in fashion studies should not merely be understood in terms of its epidermis communicating identity, reducing identity to a mere outer appearance – although I do not deny that outer appearance plays an important part in the performance of the conceptual self. Yet in order to avoid the reduction of the self to a mere image, a new materialist approach to embodied experiences is crucial as it helps to acknowledge and revalue the actual, physical, experiential and living body – also in relation to fashion's representations and significations. Moreover, it adds another important dimension to the complexities of the relationship between fashion, identity and the clothed body. Hopefully we can find a 'mode of body awareness which goes beyond the presentation of the body of spectacle' (Negrin 2013: 150). I would thus advocate a renewed focus in fashion studies on sensorial experiences, returning to clothing in its lived everyday embodied context, and to the body as a 'sentient, sensual and sensible ensemble of materialized capacities' (Sobchack 2004: 2). In addition to my focus on the corporeality of the body – i.e. bodily matter – in the next chapter I use a new materialist approach to explore the actual materiality of fashion objects – giving special attention to matter and materiality, while taking into account the inextricable interconnections between matter and meaning, matter and discourse, and the material and immaterial.

fig. 4.1 Marlies Dekkers, *exhibition in the Kunsthal museum* (2008) Rotterdam

fig. 4.2 Marlies Dekkers, *Leading Strings* (S/S 2 2004)
photography: Carin Verbruggen & Ferry Drenthem Soesman

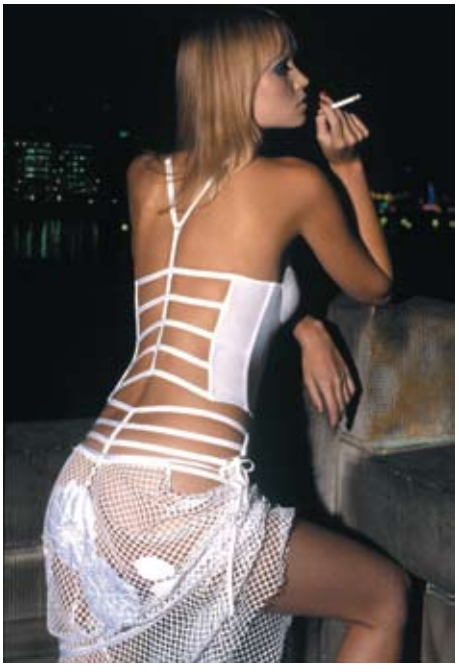

fig. 4.3 Marlies Dekkers, *Leading Strings* (S/S 2 2004)
photography: Carin Verbruggen & Ferry Drenthem Soesman

fig. 4.4 *Press Event in Paris* (2007)

fig. 4.5 *Press Event in Paris* (2007)

fig. 4.6 Marlies Dekkers, *Petit Coquet* Collection (S/S 2001)
photography: Carin Verbruggen & Ferry Drenthem Soesman

fig. 4.7 Marlies Dekkers, *Check* Collection (S/S 2003)
photography: Carin Verbruggen & Ferry Drenthem Soesman

fig. 4.8 Marlies Dekkers, *Royal Flush* swimwear collection (A/W 2007)
photography: Carin Verbruggen & Ferry Drenthem Soesman

fig. 4.9 Marlies Dekkers (A/W 2006-07)
photography: Carin Verbruggen & Ferry Drenthem Soesman

fig. 4.10 Marlies Dekkers (A/W 2005-06)
photography: Carin Verbruggen & Ferry Drenthem Soesman

fig. 4.11 Marlies Dekkers, *Butterfly Dream* collection (A/W 2006-07)
photography: Carin Verbruggen & Ferry Drenthem Soesman

fig. 4.12 Marlies Dekkers, *Charms* collection (S/S 2013)
photography: Philip Riches

05. Towards a New Materialist Aesthetics

The Case of Viktor&Rolf

In this chapter I will emphasise fashion's matter and materiality, i.e. both bodily matter and fashion objects, which is also the material basis of identity. Whereas I highlighted embodiment and living, experiential fashioned bodies in the chapter 'Embodied Experiences', in this chapter I will focus even more on the materiality of fashion objects – also in relation to fashion as a realm of representation and signification. In the discourse of fashion, 'the object is often present not in its materiality but as an object of consumption' (Riello 2011: 5). The capitalist field of fashion continuously adds surplus value to the products. As Ulrich Lehmann puts forward, 'the relation between the exchange value of textiles or clothes and the surplus value generated by the designer's/producer's work in turning material product into fashionable commodity or experience heightens fashion's dependency on a capitalist socio-economic structure' (Lehmann 2011: 9). As I have argued throughout my dissertation, there is an urgency to bring back embodiment and materiality into fashion discourse, and vice versa. In this chapter I will argue that fashion needs a new materialist vocabulary. This will also offer insight into the material basis of identity, i.e. specific concepts of the self, as part of the conceptual self. While emphasising the materiality of fashion objects and fashioned bodies, I will at the same time take into account the inextricable entwinement between matter and meaning, since '[t]he material dimension creates *and* gives form to the discursive and vice versa' (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012: 91, original emphasis).

I will base my argument on the work of Dutch fashion designers Viktor&Rolf, and specifically on their exploration of the possibilities of the medium itself, their play with materiality and immateriality, and with embodiment and disembodiment. Viktor&Rolf's work exemplifies the fashion practices of avant-garde designers which, as I will argue, often escape semiotic and narratological frameworks. Since they graduated from the Arnhem Academy of Art and Design in The Netherlands in 1992, and started their collaboration, Viktor&Rolf have, throughout their career, 'subverted not just the format of the catwalk show but also the time and space of fashion itself, thereby unsettling the viewer's normal experience of it' (Sheffield and Bush 2008: 6). They are famous for their spectacular performance shows, and for their 'use of anything that would trigger sensations' (Kamitsis 2010: 100). After their graduation Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren moved to the fashion centre of Paris, where they started working within the art scene to make *haute couture*. A year later, in 1993, they won three prizes for their first collection *Hyères* (1993) at the competition 'Salon Européen des Jeunes Stylistes' during the Festival International de Mode et de Photographie in Hyères, Southern France. In the following years, Viktor&Rolf produced several fashion installations for art galleries in different cities in Europe, illustrating the hybridity of fashion and art. As art historian Richard Martin argues, their installation *Launch* at Torch Gallery in Amsterdam (1996), for instance, 'demonstrates fashion's power, [...] its presence to be "art"' (Martin 1999: 113). Viktor&Rolf consistently refused to conform to the fashion system, and would, for example, create posters stating 'Viktor&Rolf on strike' instead of releasing a collection for the next season, sell expensive fake and scentless perfume in bottles that could not be opened (Smelik 2007: 67-68), or let models on the catwalk throw porcelain accessories to the ground, breaking them into pieces (De Baan 2005: 16).

Yet, Viktor&Rolf's presentation of 'statement collections' is not an exceptional phenomenon within the fashion world. Designers like Hussein Chalayan, Alexander McQueen and John Galliano, for instance, are also known for it. While Viktor&Rolf keep criticising the fashion system, they are at the same time willingly partaking in it (De Baan 2008: 10-11). In 2000 they presented their first prêt-à-porter show (which gave them their breakthrough), showcased their work in an exhibition at the Louvre in Paris, and signed a contract with L'Oréal to develop their perfume *Flowerbomb*. They keep creating spectacular fashion shows and notable designs, such as a white blouse with five collars, dresses stuffed with balloons resembling the mushroom cloud shape of nuclear bombs, or clothes worn upside down (see fig. 5.1-5.6 > p. 177-178). Although they are now evidently working within the context of commercial fashion, the media as well as scholars regularly conceive of them as artists (Boelsma 2000: 23; Kuijpers 2003: 2; Sheffield and Bush 2008: 6), or as performance artists (Smelik 2007: 64-72). With regard to their work of the 1990s, Martin proclaims that 'Viktor&Rolf have purposely taken us to that ambiguous place where we are not sure if it is art or fashion that is speaking; but the message is that art and fashion can be involved and even be indivisible' (Martin 1999: 120). In addition to this perspective on their artistic fashion practices, Caroline Evans emphasises that Viktor&Rolf 'rapidly acquired a reputation as top-end conceptual designers who generated images and ideas rather than commercial fashion' (Evans 2008: 10). Whereas they are praised for their conceptual approach, I propose to conceive of their work as a material experiment with the medium of fashion. Their concepts and artistic ideas are inextricably linked to the matter – i.e. living fashioned bodies and the garments – that brings it to expression. As stated by the organisers of the Viktor&Rolf exhibition at the Barbican in London in 2008, 'Viktor&Rolf understand that great art is not simply about creating great and original works, but is in itself a philosophical exploration of the limits and possibilities of the medium' (Sheffield and Bush 2008: 6).

It is precisely this exploration of the medium of fashion itself that I focus on in this chapter. Since the start of their career, Viktor&Rolf – assisted by their technical staff – have played with the limits and possibilities of the materiality of clothing. As Martin observes in their early work, '[r]eferring, of course, to the prevailing interest in deconstruction in fashion and the visual arts in 1993, Viktor&Rolf insisted in their intermediate world between art and fashion on the collage aspect of their work' (1999: 113). In addition, as Martin also notes with regard to Viktor&Rolf's *Collection #2* (A/W 1994-95), 'Viktor&Rolf offered a suite of variations on a white dress, accepting fashion as a site of infinite variations and permutations' (1999: 113). I will expand on this collage aspect, the process of endless combinations of material fabrics, in combination with the emphasis put on the materiality of cloth as a site of infinite variations and permutations, which has been an important part of Viktor&Rolf's work until today.

I have analysed Viktor&Rolf's fashion shows from their 'First Couture Show' in 1998 until now, focusing on the ways in which they play with fashion's materiality on-stage.[36]

36 Videos of their fashion shows from their First Couture Show in 1998 until now are available on their website: http://www.viktor-rolf.com. In addition, a lot of videos and image material from their fashion shows and collections is available on the website Style.com. See: http://www.style.com/fashionshows/designerdirectory/VIKROLF/seasons/.

Fashion images of Viktor&Rolf's collections – from their first collection *Hyères* (1993) to their collection *No* (A/W 2008-09) – were available in the book *The House of Viktor&Rolf* (2008), edited by Caroline Evans and Susannah Frankel. In addition, I have looked at the actual materials of specific designs at the depot of the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, the Netherlands, that owns a collection of Viktor&Rolf. The online archive of this museum has provided me with information on the fabrics of specific designs. Furthermore, I have interviewed Viktor&Rolf's Head of Atelier, Martin van Dusseldorp (Amsterdam, 9 January 2013), who has been technically assisting Viktor&Rolf from the start of their career.[37]

Based on my analyses, I will discuss Viktor&Rolf's exploration of the physicality of the body as well as the (im)materiality of fashion, their play with embodiment and disembodiment, and their emphasis on material processes and continuous change. I will show that their fashion shows are disruptive of processes of signification as they regularly subvert certain meanings, codes and signs, or go beyond merely communicating identity. Rather, processes of transformation and experimentation take centre stage. It must be noted that Viktor&Rolf's work can certainly be read in terms of signification and identity. Their own appearances, for instance, are vital to the branded identity they convey as designers in a performative way. Yet, the other aspect of their work – their material, processual approach to cloth – cannot be grasped with the existing vocabulary in fashion studies, and inspires an alternative, more material and transformational, reading of fashion and identity.

Theoretically, I approach Viktor&Rolf's artistic fashion practices by using key terms from the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, some of which he developed in collaboration with Félix Guattari. In addition, I build upon Deleuze (and Guattari)'s work as it has been used in the context of aesthetics (e.g. O'Sullivan 2006), and as it has become part of the theoretical discourse of 'new materialism' (e.g. Coole and Frost 2010; Bennett and Joyce 2010; Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012; Barrett and Bolt 2013; Smelik 2014). Drawing upon Anneke Smelik's work on Deleuze and Guattari in relation to fashion (2007, 2014), I will show that the analytical tools offered by Deleuze, most of which he developed in collaboration with Guattari, enable rethinking the aesthetic power and the dynamics of fashion in a material, transformational and relational sense. Moreover, a new materialist approach allows to study fashion practices in terms of an 'entanglement of materiality and meaning' (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012: 91). As cultural theorist Rick Dolphijn and philosopher Iris van der Tuin stress, 'new materialism is a cultural theory that does not privilege matter over meaning or culture over nature' (Ibid.: 85). It rather wants to give special attention to matter, and allows 'for the study of the two dimensions in their entanglement: the experience of a piece of art is made up of matter *and* meaning' (Ibid.: 91). As I will argue, this approach holds great potential to study fashion practices as well as to theorise the ways in which concepts of identity can be materialised, performed and transformed within the realm of fashion.

First, I will elaborate upon a Deleuzean and new materialist approach to fashion in order

37 Unfortunately, Viktor&Rolf declined participation in the research. However, they did allow me to meet with Martin van Dusseldorp for an informal interview and to ask some general questions.

to move beyond a mere representational and semiotic focus of fashion studies. Secondly, I will reflect on fashion's asignifying potential within the commercial, capitalist system of fashion, theorising the ways in which Viktor&Rolf play with minor subversions of the fashion system. In doing so, I will propose to think fashion in terms of material encounters between bodies and clothes – a first step to rethink the material basis of identity. Thirdly, I will discuss the processual, transformational element of Viktor&Rolf's work. I suggest that the notion of 'transformational assemblages'[38] is a useful next step to understanding the ways in which concepts of the self, as part of the conceptual self, come into being within an entanglement of material, semiotic and social flows (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Bennett and Joyce 2010), which is crucial to my new materialist reconceptualisation of identity in the field of fashion. In the final part of this chapter I will focus on Viktor&Rolf's play with (dis)embodiment and (im)materiality of bodies and clothes, and with fashion as a theatre of metamorphoses – an important part of fashion as a new materialist aesthetics.

A Deleuzean and New Materialist Approach

Although Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy might seem far removed from the field of fashion, their work potentially offers analytical tools to develop fashion theory along new lines, moving beyond the dominant representational and semiotic approaches in contemporary fashion studies (Smelik 2014). In his philosophy Deleuze aims to move away from the transcendent level of representation and identity. Following Nietzsche, Deleuze argues in *Difference and Repetition* (1994 [1968]) that '[r]epresentation fails to capture the affirmed world of difference. Representation has only a single centre, a unique and receding perspective, and in consequence a false depth. It mediates everything, but moves nothing' (1994: 55-56). This can be viewed as a critical response to both 'the methodological problem of structuralism and the historical-political problem of 1968' (Colebrook 2002: xxxv). It is in this post-structuralist and political context that Deleuze and Guattari developed their critique of representation and capitalism, aiming to rethink and move beyond the structures through which classes and identities are formed. This critique and the analytical tools that Deleuze and Guattari created to think differently can be useful to theorise the capitalist fashion system, as well as to rethink the subject 'as a dynamic and changing entity' engaged in a continuous process of 'becoming' (Braidotti 2006, 2011: 5).

Moreover, Deleuze's work on aesthetics and art is valuable when developing an alternative, more material, understanding of fashion practices. As Deleuze argues in one of his most significant works on aesthetics, *Francis Bacon. The Logic of Sensation* (2004), '[w]e are besieged by photographs that are illustrations, by newspapers that are narrations, by cinema images, by television images' (2004: 71); or by identity representations in fashion and consumer culture, I would add. It is, therefore, important to search for ways 'to break with representation, to disrupt narration, to escape illustration', as Deleuze argues (Ibid.: 6). For Deleuze, modern art potentially functions as an important force in mobilising the static

38 I would like to thank professor Rosi Braidotti for her fruitful suggestion to think in terms of 'assemblages' during the seminar on Deleuze and fashion on 7 February 2012.

perspective of representation when 'it becomes a veritable *theatre* of metamorphoses and permutations' (Deleuze 1994: 56, original emphasis). In addition to the role modern art can play to mobilise representations, Deleuze and Guattari argue for a return to the specific material expression of art itself (1994 [1991]). In their view, the artistic medium is expressive in itself – 'the smile of oil, the gesture of fired clay, the thrust of metal' (1994: 166-167) – regardless of its content. This helps to rethink the expressivity of the medium of fashion as well. In 'Fashioning the Fold: Multiple Becomings' (2014) Smelik proposes that the Deleuzean notion of 'the fold' is a useful tool to explore the body *in-motion* as well as cloth in its actual materiality and transformational state in the field of fashion. As she argues, '[n]owhere is the constantly vibrating dynamic and creative force of the fold more visible and palpable than in the pleats, creases, draperies, furrows, bows and ribbons of fashion' (Smelik 2014). As such, Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy offers the analytical tools that present a fresh perspective on fashion as a materialist aesthetics.

In addition to this focus on the expressivity of materiality, Deleuze points out the ways in which the ideas of the artwork are indivisible from the medium that brings it to expression. In *What is the Creative Act?* (2006) he stresses that 'ideas have to be treated like potentials already *engaged* in one mode of expression or another and inseparable from the mode of expression' (2006: 312, original emphasis). He gives the example of having an idea in cinema, which is 'not the same thing as having an idea somewhere else. [...] [i]deas in cinema can only be cinematographic' (Ibid: 316). As Daniel Smith notes in his introduction to Deleuze's *Francis Bacon. The Logic of Sensation* (2004 [1981]): 'Great artists are also great thinkers, but they think in terms of lines and colors, just as musicians think in sounds, filmmakers think in images, writers think in words, and so on' (2004: viii). Sjoerd van Tuinen, following Deleuze, points out that '[i]n art, the act of invention is inseparably caught up within the medium in which it propagates or diffuses its point of view' (2010: 328). As I will argue, this helps to understand that Viktor&Rolf are also bringing ideas to expression through fashion's materiality itself as they experiment with and affirm the creative potential of the medium of fashion. Whereas they are often conceived of as conceptual designers engaged with immaterial meanings and artistic ideas, Viktor&Rolf – and especially their technical staff – are moreover involved in material practices, thinking in terms of textiles, fabrics, patterns, shapes, colours, etc. Although this may seem evident to fashion designers or pattern cutters, this materialism is often disregarded in the journalistic and academic discourse of fashion (Van de Peer, forthcoming).

In order to think fashion beyond a mere representationalism, I will also draw on the work of art historian and cultural theorist Simon O'Sullivan on aesthetics, which is inspired by Deleuze and Guattari. In *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari* (2006) O'Sullivan argues for a way of thinking art beyond representation (2006: 144). He points out that:

> discourses around art tend to be premised on a binary – meaning versus object, or, if you prefer, content versus form. [...] You ask the question 'what is the meaning of art?' or 'what does that painting mean?' and automatically, perhaps unintentionally, you have reactivated the conceptual opposition between object/form and meaning/content, an opposition which itself sets up the promise that art will 'mean' anything at all (2006: 14).

In a similar vein, discourses around fashion have consistently asked the same questions, in search for meaning, disavowing the actual matter of clothing. Moreover, in the field of fashion the matter of the physical body – the bodily self, i.e. the material basis for the formation of concepts of the self – is similarly disregarded as it is often reduced to a signifying surface. Therefore, in this chapter I will explore the material dimension of clothes, as well as the relationship between the body and clothes, which can be viewed – as O'Sullivan's work helps to understand – in terms of continuously changing encounters between the materiality of clothes and the physicality of the body. As I will argue, it is through these material encounters that specific concepts of the self, as part of the conceptual self, are formed, performed or transformed.

My approach must be understood within the context of 'new materialism' (e.g. Coole and Frost 2010; Bennett and Joyce 2010; Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012; Barrett and Bolt 2013; Smelik 2014). As Dolphijn and Van der Tuin point out in *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* (2012), the most prominent new materialist scholars of today are Rosi Braidotti, Manuel DeLanda, Karen Barad and Quentin Meillassoux. Interestingly, contemporary new materialist philosophies, especially Braidotti's and DeLanda's work, have been greatly influenced by Deleuze (and Guattari). It is important to note that new materialism is not necessarily opposed to the historical or Marxist materialist tradition nor to the so-called 'linguistic turn', but this approach rather 'says "yes, *and*" to all of these intellectual traditions' (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012: 89-91). As I have argued in the chapter 'On Theory and Methodology', new materialism proposes a renewed focus on materiality that incorporates bodily matter. Especially Braidotti's new materialism is a bodily materialism that begins with the 'embodied or enfleshed subject' (Braidotti 2011: 15). This bodily dimension is also stressed by O'Sullivan (2006) who highlights the relationality and expanded connectivity between human and non-human matter. Whereas clothing often 'becomes reduced to its ability to signify something that seems more real – society or social relations – as though these things exist above or prior to their own materiality' (Miller 2005: 2), a new materialist approach to fashion and identity allows to take into account living, fashioned bodies, embodied subjects, and the actual materiality of fashion objects – while simultaneously acknowledging the entwinement of matter and meaning (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012: 91). This will offer insight into Viktor&Rolf's fashion practices and play with (im)materiality and (dis)embodiment. First I will reflect on fashion's asignifying potential in the context of the capitalist fashion system, which opens up ways to rethink and theorise fashion in a more material, transformational sense.

Objects of Encounter in the Heart of the Tree of Fashion

In *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari* (2006) O'Sullivan puts forward an argument 'for a kind of "return" to aesthetics', which he understands as the 'deterritorialising function of art' by highlighting its asignifying potential (O'Sullivan 2006: 38). This points to art's ability to subvert systems of signification and representation. It needs to be understood within the context of Deleuze's aim to move away from the level of representation, thereby enabling ways to rethink the aesthetic power of art in a more transformational and material

sense. Before elaborating on Viktor&Rolf's play with the medium of fashion, and their experimentation with the ways in which cloth encounters the body, I will draw attention to the ways in which their practices regularly explore fashion's asignifying potential.

At this point it is necessary to first address the question whether it is possible for designers who are obviously working in the commercial, capitalist system of fashion – with its dominant modes of thinking in models of representation and signification – to find ways to escape from this context and disrupt systems of knowledge while affirming different ways of thinking to the extent that art does. In *Difference and Repetition* (1994), as mentioned above, Deleuze argues that modern art may operate as an important force in the realisation of the conditions for every object to leave the domain of representation (1994: 56). Inspired by Deleuze, O'Sullivan takes on the following argument about art's ethico-aesthetics, i.e. its asignifying potential:

> This is art's function: to switch our intensive register, to reconnect us with the world. Art opens us up to the non-human universe that we are part of. Indeed, art might well have a representational function (after all, art objects, like everything else, can be read) but art also operates as a *fissure* in representation. And we, as spectators, as representational creatures, are involved in a dance with art, a dance in which – through careful manoeuvres – the molecular is opened up, the aesthetic is activated, and art does what is its chief modus operandi: it transforms, if only for a moment, our sense of our "selves" and our notion of our world (2001: 128).

Taking into account this perspective on art's function, the question arises to what extent fashion designers can escape representation and signification, and affect transformation while working in the commercial, capitalist field of fashion. In her exploration of the ethico-aesthetics of fashion photography, Peta Malins argues that capitalism 'on the one hand, accelerates the creative potentials of art, but on the other hand, reduces its capacity for connecting to an outside' (2010: 170-171). Yet, at the same time she raises the question: 'can revolutionary, artistic flows not also potentially be produced from within sites of capital?' (Ibid: 179). As Malins notes, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the 'deepest law of capitalism' is that 'it continually sets and then repels its own limits, but in so doing gives rise to numerous flows in all directions that escape its axiomatic' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 472). Following Deleuze and Guattari, I would argue that, even within a commercial system of fashion in late capitalism, there is a potential for minor flows to arise rebelling against and escaping from its own rules and laws. In capitalism, and in fashion, there are representations as well as fissures in representation, and signifying as well as asignifying forces. In Deleuze's theory, 'lines of flight', which may be understood as escape routes, always start from the centre. As Deleuze asserts, 'each composing representation must be distorted, diverted and torn from its centre' (1994: 56). From this perspective, the hierarchical structure of capitalist fashion, based on the logic of representation and signification, must thus be disrupted from the centre.

Deleuze and Guattari's example of the rhizome demonstrates these dynamics. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) Deleuze and Guattari perceive rhizomes as asignifying, non-linear, non-unified, non-hierarchical systems with no beginning, middle or end, and no point of origin. Any point can and will continuously be connected to any other. This is different from a tree or root, which are more hierarchical and centred systems as the tree 'plots a point, fixes an order' (1987: 7). Yet, 'a new rhizome may form in the heart of a tree, the hollow of a root, the crook of a branch' (Ibid.: 15). It is thus within hierarchical, centred systems that new rhizomes, new lines of flights and minor asignifying forces may arise. These may subsequently be captured by the dominant logic of capitalism again, but even in that case 'new lines of flight, new possibilities of movement, will [...] emerge in a constant process of opening and closure' (O'Sullivan 2006: 34). Following Deleuze and Guattari, my answer to the question raised is, therefore, that fashion does have the potential to create lines of flight from the centre of capitalism, to temporarily escape from representation and signification, to evoke and affirm new ways of thinking, if only through minor experiments, minor disruptions, or minor fissures in representation. In this sense, fashion practices can be both rhizomatic and tree-like.

While Viktor&Rolf are evidently working within the capitalist system of fashion, they frequently search for ways to escape from its fixed orders and its representations and significations. Their exploration of ways to subvert the fixed order of fashion is, for example, expressed in the fashion show *Upside Down* (S/S 2006, see fig. 5.3-5.6 > p. 178). When this show starts and the audience anticipates the first model to showcase the first piece of the new collection, surprisingly, the designers Viktor&Rolf enter the catwalk. Their logo and names are displayed and positioned upside down behind them. The designers walk half-way down the catwalk, applaud and go off the stage again. Subsequently, all the models appear in a "final" parade on the catwalk, walking in a straight line and clapping. The lights are turned off. Uncertain about what will happen next, the audience sees a model wearing the final signature look. The second model to appear wears the exact same dress but she wears it upside down. This principle continues during the entire fashion show. Dresses are worn upside down or, for example, with the straps hanging down loosely, almost touching the floor. As Evans and Frankel observed, '[t]he "Upside Down" collection showcased couture pieces that could be worn bottom up or bottom down; on the catwalk they were presented first one way and then the other' (2008: 172). At the end of the show, instead of the finale with the appearance of the designers, we see the last model leaving the catwalk, striking a pose at the beginning of the catwalk, and the lights are slowly turned off. During the show Diana Ross's song 'Upside Down' is played in reverse, emphasising the 'absurd logic' (Ibidem) of the presentation of this collection. The fashion show *Upside Down* (S/S 2006) refers to the boutique that Viktor&Rolf opened in Milan in 2005 (and closed again in 2008), in which the interior also hung upside down.

Upside Down is illustrative of Viktor&Rolf's minor subversion of the conventions of the fashion show and, in a more general sense, of fashion as a system. As Viktor&Rolf stated in an interview, '[a] constant questioning of fashion itself as a system – and our own place in it – is always the root of our work' (cited in Frankel 2008: 33). Furthermore, as Evans argues, 'a sense of inversion and reversal also finds expression in much of their design work. [...] In

a more diffuse way, all their work has an upside-down or distorted quality' (Evans 2008: 15). In this *Upside Down* show they reverse the normal procedure of the catwalk, thereby unsettling expectations of the audience. Since the models wear the couture pieces bottom up and bottom down, the audience is stimulated to reconsider the possibilities of the clothes being worn differently, upside down, or maybe even inside out. Skirts, for example, are in some cases detached from the lower part of the body, and reencounter the upper part of the body. The skirts then become mere pieces of cloth again, ready to make new connections to other parts of the body, and thus temporarily lose their representational function of signifying femininity. Here Viktor&Rolf experiment with the flexibility and possibilities of cloth being continuously remade into different clothes and shapes, irrespective of their seemingly indexical relationship to certain body parts. By so doing, the material independence of cloth comes to the fore as the clothes are freed from their attachment to particular body parts or to certain meanings and codes. It is demonstrated that cloth can enter into a composition with the body in many different ways, emphasising fashion as a site of infinite variations.

In order to gain a deeper insight into these fashion practices, I want to draw attention to the distinction that O'Sullivan (2006) makes between 'objects of encounter' and 'objects of recognition'. He argues that the latter is a mere confirmation of our knowledge, beliefs and values, and thus a '*re*presentation of something always already in place' (2006: 1, original emphasis). On the contrary, 'objects of encounter' disrupt our systems of knowledge, forcing us to think, while simultaneously affirming ways of seeing and thinking this world differently (Ibidem). Regardless of the question whether or not Viktor&Rolf's work can be considered to be art, in my view their subversion of conventions of the fashion show does have a similar effect to O'Sullivan's definition of 'objects of encounter' to the extent that it breaks with the concept and principle of 'the fashion show' as we know it, and at least temporarily unsettles our habitual mode of thinking and seeing fashion. One could argue that art has a greater potential than fashion to operate as an 'object of encounter', since the fashion system is obviously dominated more often than not by many 'objects of recognition'. Yet, as fashion practices can be rhizomatic within the heart of the commercial tree of fashion, I would argue that fashion has a potential to give rise to minor asignifying 'objects of encounter'. These may disrupt expectations and habitual systems of knowledge, beliefs and values – if only temporarily. I thus propose to think of Viktor&Rolf's subversive fashion shows and collections, firstly, as potential minor 'objects of encounter', momentarily unsettling our habits of thinking and maybe even offering a new way of thinking the dynamics of fashion differently – viewing clothes in terms of their potential to make creative new connections.

Secondly, the use of the term 'encounter' leads to another possible viewpoint. We might also think of fashion as a process of endless transformative encounters between, for instance, fabrics, textiles, shapes, patterns, the hands and tools of the designers and pattern cutters, or the bodies of the wearers. In this regard, political theorist and philosopher Brian Massumi's material perspective on the notion of 'meaning', following Deleuze and Guattari, is noteworthy. He views meaning as a material process of encounters: 'meaning is precisely that: a network of enveloped material processes' (Massumi 1992: 10). Meaning, here, is not based on semiotics, but it is rather a 'meeting' between different forces. Also, the presence of the sign is not an identity, but Massumi understands signs as qualities,

such as colour, texture, or durability (Ibid.: 10-11). As O'Sullivan explains, Massumi's notion of meaning is a relation, a process, a dynamic encounter between 'two (or more) forces acting on one another in a reciprocal and transformative relationship' (O'Sullivan 2006: 21). Massumi reflects on a woodworker encountering a piece of wood and bringing the qualities of wood to a certain expression. He discusses the relationships between, for example, tools and wood – 'tool meets wood' (Massumi 1992: 11) – but also relationships with the woodworking body. Following Massumi's line of thought, O'Sullivan proposes to think of 'the artist's "meeting" with his or her materials', which he views as an encounter of the same fundamental nature (O'Sullivan 2006: 21). I would argue that this material process also holds true for fashion designers and pattern cutters who continuously 'meet' with different fabrics, transforming the (qualities of the) materials, and experimenting with different possible ways to let cloth encounter the body. As Viktor&Rolf played with these different encounters between cloth and the models' bodies on the catwalk in their show *Upside Down*, they do not create meaning in a semiotic sense, but rather in Massumi's sense as a dynamic process of material encounters. Thinking of fashion in terms of processes of encounters, connections, and in terms of the meeting of different materialities is thus a first step to moving away from the prevailing models of representation and signification. I will elaborate on these material encounters between bodily matter – the bodily self – and cloth in relation to concepts of the self, as part of the conceptual self (i.e. identity), in the following paragraph 'Transformational Assemblages'.

Here I will continue reflecting on Viktor&Rolf's explorations of the aesthetic power of fashion to break with systems of signification and representation, affirming fashion's 'deterritorialising' potential. With their notion of 'territorialisation' (1987) Deleuze and Guattari refer to the process of creating certain territories, which may be understood as temporary unified, demarcated wholes, fixed structures, organisations or frameworks. However, these territories can always be unsettled again through the process of 'deterritorialisation', which is 'the movement by which "one" leaves the territory. It is the operation of the line of flight. [...] the territory itself is inseparable from vectors of deterritorialization working it from within' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 508-509). Processes of territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and subsequently reterritorialisation are always connected and caught up in one another. These are processes that are operating continuously. Fashion, as a fixed symbolic, capitalist territorialised system with its own laws, can then potentially always be deterritorialised and reterritorialised, while simultaneously expanding the territory of fashion.

In their fashion shows and collections as 'objects of encounter' Viktor&Rolf often explore these processes of deterritorialisation – investigating where ruptures can be made to break with the territories of fashion. This investigation may, in the case of their *Budget-cut-Couture* collection (S/S 2010), be understood quite literally and materially. During this fashion show, dresses were showcased with actual gaps, holes and cuts in the fabric. For example, a hole was made from front to back in the skirt of a red tulle ball gown and some of the edges were cut away as if a large hole puncher had been at work (see fig. 5.7 > p. 179). Another blue tulle dress was cut horizontally from left to right, sliced in half, with a top and a bottom piece, and a remaining gap in between (see fig. 5.8 > p. 179). While the title of

this collection, referring to cuts need to be made in an economic sense in times of the credit crunch, confirms the conceptual aspect of Viktor&Rolf's work, this is inextricably connected to a material experimentation with actual ways of undoing the dress, by making gaps in the territory of the dress. This is thus a literal investigation of where cuts can be made to liberate certain pieces of fabric from their connection and attachment to the dress. During my interview with Martin van Dusseldorp (2013), he referred to this collection as an example of the technical challenges that some of Viktor&Rolf's designs confront him with. As Head of Atelier, it is his job to offer technical and creative solutions to realise Viktor&Rolf's sketches into 3D garments. In Van Dusseldorp's view, the *Budget-cut-Couture* collection is a good example of the ways in which Viktor&Rolf use conventional materials (i.e. the fabric of tulle), while at the same time giving it a certain twist (i.e. making holes into the fabric). As it was required to cut holes in the tulle using a saw, this collection posed a material challenge, as Van Dusseldorp pointed out (Interview MvD 2013). As there are literally gaps within these ball gowns, the *Budget-cut-Couture* collection is a very material expression of a search for where ruptures can be made in the territories of fashion. Here we see an expression of the new materialist interrelation between the material (i.e. the cuts in the fabric) and the immaterial (i.e. the meaning and concept of the collection), pointing to the ways in which 'material and immaterial, real and symbolic, forces of production and knowledge, [...] are better understood as being inextricably fused' (Frow 2010: 33).

In their fashion practices, Viktor&Rolf are thus – both conceptually and materially – playing with fashion's potential 'objects of encounters', and thus with avant-gardist rhizomes within the commercial tree of fashion. Their minor subversions and their disruptive, deterritorialising practices open up ways to rethink and theorise fashion in terms of material connections and transformative encounters between, for example, the body and cloth. This is a first step towards a new materialism of fashion and identity which entails the relationships between 'the human and non-human, the material and immaterial, the social and physical' (Bolt 2013: 6), which I will elaborate on in the next section.

Transformational Assemblages

In this part I will draw more attention to the processual, transformational element of Viktor&Rolf's fashion shows, to their explorations of the materiality of cloth, while expanding on the ways in which they produce creative connections and material encounters. Moreover, I will elaborate on these material encounters between the bodily self and cloth in relation to concepts of the self, as part of the conceptual self (i.e. identity). As I will argue, concepts of the self come into being through these material encounters and within 'transformational assemblages'.

The transformational element of Viktor&Rolf's work is clearly expressed in, for example, their fashion shows *Russian Doll* (A/W 1999-00) and *Glamour Factory* (A/W 2010-11). At the beginning of the show *Russian Doll* we see nothing but shoes on a pedestal. Barefoot and wearing a short, jute dress in its natural colour, the model Maggie Rizer enters the catwalk, accompanied by Viktor&Rolf who help her into the shoes on the pedestal. Her dress

has loose threads, as if some of the threads are liberated from being 'held together' by the structure of the weave, giving it an unfinished quality. Martin van Dusseldorp explains that the technique in which the threads of this cloth are interlaced is a plain weave (Interview MvD 2013). Wearing the shoes, she stands on the revolving pedestal like a doll, or a 'toy ballerina in a music box' (Evans 2003: 181). Viktor&Rolf leave the stage again to return with a second outfit, a lace couture dress, which they place on top of the first dress. Whereas the first layer was made of the unconventional fabric of jute, the second layer is a lace dress, which is a traditional fabric in haute couture (Interview MvD 2013). This process of placing layers on top of each other is repeated with different outfits each time (see fig. 5.9 > p. 180). While she keeps turning around on the pedestal, Rizer is dressed real time on stage by Viktor&Rolf. Each dress is placed on top of the previous one, and, finally, she wears nine outfits on top of each other: 'Eschewing the catwalk convention of a procession in which each model wears one outfit, the show featured one model who wore the entire collection – at once' (Evans and Frankel 2008: 88). Instead of presenting the final product of the collection on the catwalk, here we see the dynamic process and act of dressing, which is presented as a continuous performance. Each garment is connected in different ways to the previous one, completing the unfinished elements of the previous layer (Smelik 2007: 70). The model is standing still rotating on the pedestal instead of walking on the catwalk in a linear way, showing first the front and then the back of the garment. During the process of the act of dressing, we witness the model's visible, continuous transformation. Repetitively, different layers are placed over different layers – comparable to a Russian Matryoshka doll – suggesting that this process could potentially continue endlessly. The attention of the audience is drawn to the process and the experience of the act of dressing (Spindler 2000: 7; Smelik 2007: 70).

As Viktor&Rolf proceed to dress Rizer with increasingly larger-sized dresses, the materiality and the tactility of the clothes are brought to the fore (Smelik 2007: 69). The contrasts between the different fabrics and materials, such as jute, silk, satin and lace, and the heavily embroidered dresses with crystals highlight the material quality of these clothing items (see fig. 5.10 > p. 181). Each layer seemed to be a preparation for the next, and 'the preparations acted as pieces in a puzzle, each new layer completing or mirroring a detail or an element on the preceding tier' (Evans and Frankel 2008: 88). It is this materiality of the items, and the connections between the different pieces of cloth, that is emphasised in addition to the processual, transformational nature of the show. Smelik points out the way in which the clothes are highlighted *as* material fabrics during this fashion show (2007: 69). By referring to Laura Marks' notion of 'haptic visuality' (Marks 2000/2002) – a type of visuality that draws on the senses (Marks 2002: 2) – Smelik emphasises the possible tactile relationship between the viewer and the object during a fashion show. She argues that fashion shows potentially offer 'haptic experiences' when the tactility of the object, the clothing item, is foregrounded. Then, as viewers we are not simply voyeurs looking at the fashion show from a distance, but we crave touching the object (Smelik 2007: 70-71). During the show *Russian Doll* this tactile, material quality of the dresses is enhanced by the strong contrast between the unconventional *couture* fabric of jute and the conventional materials such as lace and crystals, or the conventional paisley design.

Additionally, in the course of the show the model's physicality increasingly comes to the fore. All the layers of clothes become more and more out of proportion to her petite, fragile body. In the end, when wearing the nine outfits, she almost staggers and we can barely see her head any more (Smelik 2007: 69). As viewers we become aware of the heavy weight as well as the warmth of all the layers of clothes that she must experience. Besides the material and the tactile aspect, our attention is thus also drawn to the physical aspect of this show. We witness a processual network of physical as well as material encounters between Viktor&Rolf, the materiality of the couture dresses, and the physical body of Rizer. While we observe the movements, dynamics and the process of the act of dressing, we are engaged in how this fashion show functions. The ways in which Viktor&Rolf operate are take priority over, for instance, the creation of meaning in a semiotic sense. Viktor&Rolf are literally making creative connections, letting their hands encounter, or meet with, the materiality of their couture dresses and with the physicality of the model's body. In each act of this process of making connections, with each new layer that is added, with each new connection that is made, we see the model in a continuous state of transformation. A process of continuous movement and change is staged.

A similar transformational process takes place in Viktor&Rolf's fashion show *Glamour Factory* (A/W 2010-11), for which the Dutch design duo Studio Job developed the scenography that consists of imagery of industrial machines and technical tools. Whereas in *Russian Doll* Rizer entered the catwalk wearing just one outfit before being dressed with nine layers, *Glamour Factory* opens with the model Kristen McMenamy wearing ten layers (see fig. 5.11 > p. 182). Because of this physically demanding task, she is wobbling on her high heels while stepping onto a rotating platform in the middle of the catwalk. Viktor&Rolf take centre stage, stand beside her, and take off her tweed cape while a second model in a body stocking appears, and also steps onto the rotating platform. Subsequently, the designers dress the second model with the clothing item they had just taken off McMenamy, creating an interesting dynamics between the processes of undressing and dressing at the same time (see fig. 5.12 > p. 182). During this process the cape becomes a coat for the second model. While McMenamy stays on the revolving platform, the second model walks down the catwalk before going off stage again, and a third model appears. This turns into a repetitive practice with different models and clothing items. Systematically, McMenamy is undressed layer after layer, while Viktor&Rolf are simultaneously dressing the other models with the items they have just taken off. At a certain point, when McMenamy is wearing no more than a pink bodysuit, the same process continues in reverse: McMenamy is dressed again with layers of clothing items taken off the other models (see fig. 5.13-5.14 > p. 182-183). Cloth continuously meets and makes transversal connections with other bodies and with other fabrics, while undergoing transformations itself as the function of the garments changes in the process: capes become coats, coats become dresses. Here, we can understand Viktor&Rolf's fashion practices as a '*theatre* of metamorphoses and permutations', which Deleuze ascribed to the role of modern art in *Difference and Repetition* (1994: 56), challenging systems of representation and signification.

With machinelike precision and meticulous timing Viktor&Rolf dress and undress the models, as if they are operating in a factory of transformation, constantly producing new

connections between different bodies and material fabrics. In their *Glamour Factory*, they are engaged in an almost machinic process of assembling, disassembling and reassembling. In order to grasp this processual, transformational way of producing new creative connections, I propose to bring into play Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'assemblages' – a next step in thinking of fashion in terms of encounters and connections. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) they discuss the ways in which 'multiplicities with heterogeneous terms [...] enter certain *assemblages*' (Ibid: 242, original emphasis), which they understand as a temporary '"holding together" of heterogeneous elements' (Ibid: 323): 'we will call an *assemblage* every constellation of singularities and traits deducted from the flow – selected, organized, stratified – in such a way as to converge (consistency) artificially and naturally' (Ibid: 406). Heterogeneous elements could be, for instance, 'materials, colors, odors, sounds, postures, etc.', but also 'the various elements of given assembled behaviors that enter into a motif' (Ibid.: 323). In this sense, an assemblage can be understood as a collection of different particles, which 'meet' and form a temporary territory. As Deleuze and Guattari explain,

> [e]very assemblage is basically territorial. The first concrete rule for assemblages is to discover what territoriality they envelop, for there always is one: in their trash can or on their bench, Beckett's characters stake out a territory. Discover territorial assemblages of someone, human or animal: " home" (Ibid.: 503).

These assemblages may thus potentially form different temporary territories, or constellations, which can for instance take the shape of someone, human or animal, or of certain 'cultures' or 'ages', such as 'the classical, romantic, and modern' (Ibid.: 346). The basic principle of assemblages is thus their temporary 'holding together' resulting from the connections between different heterogeneous elements. These 'elements could be diverse *things* brought together in particular relations' (Macgregor Wise 2005: 78). Yet, as Deleuze and Guattari emphasise, the 'territoriality (content and expression included) is only a first aspect; the other aspect is constituted by *lines of deterritorialization* that cut across it and carry it away. These lines are very diverse: some open the territorial assemblage onto other assemblages' (1987: 504). Assemblages can always be deterritorialised and disassembled, and subsequently, potentially reterritorialised and reassembled again.

Another important principle of the ways in which assemblages function is that they are 'in constant variation'; they are 'themselves constantly subject to transformations' (Ibid.: 82). An assemblage is far from a fixed and static territory; the 'arrangement' is always opening up to an outside, may always be disassembled again and is itself always undergoing transformations. The French original, *agencement*, can be translated as an arrangement of things, and moreover as the active *act* of arranging; the *process* of arranging, assembling, or fitting together (Macgregor Wise 2005: 77; Bogue 2007: 145). These assemblages are constantly moving, changing and potentially encountering other assemblages. New connections may always be made, and lines of flight may always arise. Colebrook stresses the rather 'machinic' nature of these assemblages, which is for Deleuze and Guattari a way to escape from 'the idea that wholes pre-exist connections': 'There is no finality, end or order that would govern the assemblage as a whole; the law of any assemblage is created from its

connections' (Colebrook 2002: xx). In his essay 'On Machines' (1995) Guattari rethinks the world as a collection of virtual machinic *agencements*, which he views as one way of breaking down 'the ontological iron curtain between being and things' (Lévy cited in Guattari 1995: 8). These assemblages, in Guattari's view, maintain 'all sorts of relationships with social constituents and individual subjectivities' (Guattari 1995: 9), and thus function as a tool to enable one to think through of expanded connectivity (O'Sullivan 2006: 26). As Tony Bennett and Patrick Joyce point out in their introduction to *Material Powers* (2010), this is where Deleuze and Guattari have influenced their contemporary approach to materialities as part of the 'material turn'. Bennett and Joyce particularly emphasise Deleuze and Guattari's 'contention that social life is to be understood in terms of the operation of assemblages made up of "semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously"' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 22-23; Bennett and Joyce 2010: 5). Thus, this theoretical perspective is an important contribution to the new materialist focus on materiality as it helps to understand the ways in which material, semiotic and social relations are entangled with one another: 'a mix of human and non-human, textual and material, social and technical elements' (Bennett and Joyce 2010: 7). Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, I propose to utilise this notion of assemblages – a thinking through of expanded connectivity and relationality between non-human and human matter – to develop a new materialist approach to fashion and identity.

In Viktor&Rolf's show *Glamour Factory*, we see the *act* of arranging, the *process* of assembling on stage. Yet, evidently, in the process of actually making this collection prior to this fashion show numerous creative, transformative connections had already been made between different heterogeneous elements, such as different materials, textiles, patterns, or colours – creating 'meaning' in Massumi's sense. The actual material garments are manufactured in actual textile factories, yet, in contrast, in the show *Glamour Factory* we see performances of assemblages. On stage Viktor&Rolf let different clothes encounter each other as well as the models' bodies, producing new momentary constellations and assemblages, temporary 'holdings together' of different models' bodies and clothing items. This functions as follows: firstly, a human body is already an assemblage in itself. As Colebrook, following Deleuze and Guattari, notes, '[a]ll life is a process of connection and interaction. Any body or thing is the outcome of a process of connections. A human body is an assemblage of genetic material, ideas, powers of acting and a relation to other bodies' (2002: xx). Secondly, a clothing item is also already an assemblage in itself, as it is made up of, for instance, different materials, textiles, colours, threads and fibres. When a human body then encounters an object of cloth, two assemblages meet, make a connection and form a new assemblage, a new temporary territory or 'holding together': a dressed body – which is an assemblage made up of semiotic, material and social flows.

As Viktor&Rolf strip McMenamy of her layers of clothes, they engage in a process of disassembling. At the same time, when the removed clothing item is connected in a different way to another model's body, different assemblages again encounter each other, forming new assemblages and reassembling new constellations. By doing so, Viktor&Rolf invent their own laws of assemblages, which are created from the transversal connections between the physical bodies of the designers, of the models and the materiality of the clothes. In this process the nature of the assemblages also transforms. The pieces of cloth undergo

metamorphoses as their function changes through the encounters with different bodies (capes become coats, coats become dresses), and the dressed models transform as they are constantly assembled, disassembled and reassembled. By performing this 'machinic' process on stage, Viktor&Rolf affirm the transformational potential of cloth to continuously enter into different assemblages with different bodies, and thus relating in new ways to different social, semiotic and material flows. This inspires and opens up a different way of conceiving, in a broader sense, what happens whenever a physical body (an assemblage) encounters a material piece of cloth (another assemblage). Different heterogeneous elements meet, set up relations, make connections and form assemblages in which social and semiotic flows are also intertwined. It is thus within these assemblages that cloth and bodily matter are inextricably interrelated to meanings, codes or signs.

Pieces of cloth are in themselves composed of different heterogeneous elements, which we could call 'singularities'. As Deleuze explains in *The Logic of Sense* (1990 [1969]), a singularity

> belongs to another dimension than that of denotation, manifestation, or signification. It is essentially pre-individual, non-personal, and a-conceptual. It is quite indifferent to the individual and the collective, the personal and the impersonal, the particular and the general – and to their oppositions. Singularity is *neutral* (Ibid.: 52).

With regard to clothes, these singularities could be understood to be the numerous different (natural or artificial) fibres that textile or cloth consists of. The fibres of cloth, in their pure material state, are in themself pre-individual, a-subjective, a-signifying and a-conceptual. In the process of the production of actual clothes, the conceptual identity of the cloth – e.g. a dress, trousers, cowboy boots – comes into being due to the formation of assemblages in which material, semiotic and social flows meet. Simultaneously, a process of signification may start, connecting immaterial semiotic meanings to these clothing items, for instance, attributing femininity to a dress and masculinity to cowboy boots. When pieces of cloth – that have become fashionable commodities – then encounter human bodies in a social context, these clothes become individualised, and subjectified. This is also when a process of 'facialisation' may start, which is essential in relation to the fashioning of identity. As I have argued in the chapter 'Fluid Concepts of the Self', clothing objects are facialised when they are taken up in the process of signification and subjectification (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 175). In this sense, clothes function as sur-*faces,* dressing and facialising the physical body. It is in this process that concepts of the self, as part of the conceptual self, are formed. As such, concepts of the self are constituted through material encounters and within assemblages in which material, semiotic and social flows are interwoven. This is crucial to my new materialist reconceptualisation of the relationship between fashion, identity and the clothed body.

The concept of 'assemblages' thus functions as an important next step in developing an understanding of the dynamic ways in which bodies (i.e. bodily matter, the bodily self) encounter material pieces of cloth, creating assemblages in the realm of fashion, while

instigating a process to constitute a form of individuality, subjectivity or a conceptual self. As argued above, assemblages are always subject to transformation. Moreover, these transformational assemblages can always be disassembled and reassembled, new creative connections can always be made, and material, semiotic and social flows can interact in different ways – which may affect or transform concepts of the self. As I have pointed out in 'Fluid Concepts of the Self', clothed bodies may potentially move towards 'the realms of the asignifying, asubjective, and faceless' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 187). In this process, clothed bodies find themselves in a process of designification and desubjectification, and certain concepts of the self are emptied of their content (or codes and meanings). This can also be understood in terms of the affective performative power of the clothed body (Del Río 2008) to transform and play with the fluidity underlying concepts of the self. In my view, using a new materialist vocabulary to theorise how concepts of the self can be understood as transformational assemblages opens up an understanding of embodied subjects as 'relational, connecting, and dynamic' (Braidotti 2004: 104-105) and 'to think of subjectivity as a creative process of becoming' (Smelik 2014). As Braidotti argues in *Nomadic Subjects* (2011), it is important to 'think differently about the kind of nomadic subjects that we have already become and the processes of deep-seated transformation we are undergoing' (2011: 13). I argue that it is particularly important to take into account this inherently transformational dimension of subjectivities in relation to the field of fashion, in which the complexities of the clothed body are often radically reduced to nothing but signification, transcendent meanings, immaterial values and fixed images of conceptual fashioned identities and subjects.

Thinking fashion in terms of transformational assemblages, material encounters, and relationality between human and non-human matter does more justice to the complexities of bodies, clothes, and identities of embodied subjects in the realm of fashion. Viktor&Rolf's fashion shows – staging the production of transformational assemblages on the catwalk – have inspired to explore in more depth the ways in which fashion practices can be understood as material explorations of the creative potential and transformational dimension of the medium of fashion. This opens up ways to think fashion differently, which in Deleuze and Guattari's terms as well as in Viktor&Rolf's work, is 'very much a materialist practice' (O'Sullivan 2006: 16). To move away from the dominant way of theorising fashion, we could – instead of asking what it means – pay more attention to how fashion functions as a network of transformational assemblages in which material, semiotic and social flows are woven together. This also enables a new materialist perspective of how concepts of the self can be formed, performed and transformed.

Fashion as a Theatre of Metamorphoses

In addition to Viktor&Rolf's performances of transformational assemblages, I will now explore in more depth the ways in which they play with (dis)embodiment, and with the (im) materiality of the body and clothes, while exploring fashion as a theatre of metamorphoses and permutations. In their fashion show *Long Live the Immaterial* (A/W 2002-03) Viktor&Rolf utilise the blue screen technology – often used in the film and television

industry – to project different imageries onto the blue garments. The title of this fashion show refers to the French artist Yves Klein's exclamation 'Long Live the Immaterial!' in his *Chelsea Hotel Manifesto* (1961). In addition, the blue colour Viktor&Rolf use in their garments has the same brightness and intensity as the 'International Klein Blue' – a colour comparable to ultramarine, mixed and patented by Klein himself (Bourriaud 2000: 35). Klein has worked with this colour of blue in different artworks, such as his *Monochrome* paintings in the 1950s and early 1960s. His use of the blue is frequently interpreted as an exploration of pure artistic sensibility (Perlein 2000: 13). One of the curators of the Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain in Nice (France), a museum that devotes an entire section to Klein's work, describes one of his *Monochromes* as follows:

> A single painting, offered to our gaze. A lone blue rectangle stands out against the white wall. A single color, fragment of matter, asserting at once a presence and an absence. Thus begins the ambiguity; the trusted reference points have vanished. The painting has evacuated the image by refusing 'the tyranny of representation'. [..] In 1913, when Malevich proposed a black square by foregoing any representation of the outside world. It is as if the artist's objective were to lay bare the material itself, to strip the means of production down to the extreme. Once this degree of purity is attained, the work is complete: there is nothing further to say (Perlein 2000: 13).

In this description, curator Gilbert Perlein draws attention to the way in which this single coloured painting creates a sense of pure materiality and pure intensity as that which refuses representation. Reference points vanish so all that is left is the pure materiality of the artwork and the pure intensity of the colour blue. In his preface to *Yves Klein. Long Live the Immaterial* (2000), the director of the museums of Nice, Jean-Francois Mozziconacci, argues that Klein approached 'what Delacroix called "the indefinable"' (Mozziconacci cited in Perlein and Corà 2000: 9). In this sense, Klein's artwork escapes representation, figuration and signification, and he seems to explore the sensibility of colours, the indefinable dimension of art. It is interesting that Viktor&Rolf explicitly refer to Klein's work as they also experiment with ways to escape representation.

In *Long Live the Immaterial* the usage of the blue screen technology, that projects imageries onto the garments, creates the somewhat surrealist effect of the models wearing and almost becoming these moving images (see fig. 5.17 > p. 186). On screen, parts of the models' bodies seem to become, for instance, Egyptian pyramids, cityscapes, blue skies or ocean waves. Birds are flying through the body, or so it seems. As Evans and Frankel note, it seemed as if certain sections of the garments 'came to life on giant screens on either side of the stage, the blue replaced by breathtaking footage from the natural and urban worlds' (2008: 126). Each garment is designed to express these imageries in a different way. Sometimes trousers become landscapes, scarves become cloudy skies, or dresses become fireworks. Seen on screen, these projections cause a continuous transformation of the clothes, again presenting fashion as a '*theatre* of metamorphoses and permutations', in the words of Deleuze (1994: 56). Here Viktor&Rolf are clearly exploring the possibilities of both the immateriality and the materiality of the medium of fashion. While the projected images express a sense of

immateriality of the clothes as they seem to dissolve into the moving imageries, at the same time the materiality of the garments worn on the catwalk comes to the fore as the intense, bright blue colour bursts out. In addition, rather heavy materials, such as velvet, wool, and crochet, are used in the designs, which highlights the tactile quality of the garments (see fig. 5.15-5.16 > p. 184-185). For example, the garment of the *Long Live the Immaterial* collection titled 'Karolina' is made of cotton, silk, wool, and leather (see fig. 5.18 > p. 186).[39]

At the same time the physicality of the body is explored visually on stage. In some cases, the collars of the garments are bright blue, which seemingly detaches the face from the rest of the body on screen. This creates an almost extraterrestrial effect as the faces seem to be disembodied as they are surrounded by different movements of colours. In other cases, complete garments are made of the same intense blue coloured fabric, with only the models' faces and hands remaining visible in their natural bodily state. During the fashion show finale, Viktor&Rolf enter the catwalk, dressed in matching blue pyjamas. On screen their heads and hands are floating in the darkness of a starry sky. Therefore in this show too Viktor&Rolf are clearly playing with the themes of embodiment and disembodiment. By using the blue screen technology and the moving imageries, they are visually exploring the possibilities of dressed bodies to potentially become something else. On screen the clothed body undergoes a continuous change as the images, body and clothes are incessantly folding into each other, thereby liberating 'the materiality of the body into something continuously changing, mobile and fluid' (Smelik 2014). Certain body parts seem to become invisible, fluid or flowing and find themselves in a continuous state of movement. These clothed body parts are visually subject to continuous processes of metamorphoses and permutations.

At a certain point during the fashion show one of the models opens her long coat to reveal its bright blue lining. As her dress is made of a similar radiant blue colour, the imageries, projected onto the inside of the coat and onto the dress, surround her entire body with approximately a metre of intense, warm, shifting colours (see fig. 5.19 > p. 187). The contours of her dressed body become blurred, fluid and can barely be discerned from the clothing items as they both seem to have dissolved into the moving images. It is impossible to tell where the body ends and where the clothes begin, which also deterritorialises the fixed territory of the body. There is hardly any fixity left as there is only movement. Interestingly, only her face – a very coded, representational part of the body, as pointed out in previous chapters – is still static and visible. The other dressed body parts are absorbed into the movement and intensity of the imageries, subject to constant transformation. As the images and the dressed body keep changing, they cannot be grasped. I would argue that Viktor&Rolf are visually experimenting with the possibilities of letting the clothing items and the dressed bodies be dissolved into a continuous state of movement – perhaps a step towards the indefinable, which is a step beyond the 'tyranny of representation', to borrow Perlein's terms. In their investigations of both the materiality and immateriality of fashion in *Long Live the Immaterial,* they are letting the dressed body dissolve into the intensity of the fields of colours and the expressivity of the projections. By doing so, Viktor&Rolf

39 Long Live the Immaterial: 'Karolina' is part of the collection of the Centraal Museum in Utrecht: http://centraalmuseum.nl/ontdekken/object/?q=viktor & rolf&img_only=1#o:28433

are visually liberating the dressed body in fashion from their representational function by 'undoing its codes, unsettling its regularities, inducing metamorphoses' (Bogue 2007: 147). The designers are thus engaged in the practice of experimenting with the (im) materiality and performing the transformational potential of the medium of fashion itself – the performative power of fashion.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that fashion needs a new materialist vocabulary. Rather than merely asking 'what does it mean?' I emphasised the importance of foregrounding the matter of fashion, i.e. bodily matter and the materiality of fashion objects, also as the material basis of identity. Multiple analytical tools developed by Deleuze, mostly in collaboration with Guattari, do contribute to a possible new vocabulary to rethink the aesthetic power of fashion. In line with O'Sullivan and Massumi, both drawing upon Deleuze and Guattari's work, I suggest to think fashion in terms of processes of encounters, connections and transformational 'meetings' between different materialities. Moreover, the notion of 'assemblages' helps to understand the expanded connectivity between human and non-human matter. A focus on the materiality of pieces of cloth and on its creative potential to make transversal connections between heterogeneous components – endless encounters between fabrics, shapes, patterns, colours – and thus to form assemblages with other materials and physical bodies, is a first step towards a materialist aesthetics of fashion, moving beyond a mere semiotic and linguistic focus of reading fashion and identity in terms of what it signifies and represents. In this chapter I focused on the designers Viktor&Rolf but their fashion practices provide insight into what lies at the heart of the dynamics of fashion. Rethinking fashion as a new materialist aesthetics is a way to do more justice to the complexities of cloth in itself and of (dressed) bodies, without reducing it to the domain of representation. I hope to have enabled a focus on dynamic processes, on the creative potential, the transformational quality and expressivity of the materiality of cloth in itself – thereby liberating fashion's materiality, its colours, threads, fabrics from its mere representational function.

When reflecting on Viktor&Rolf's fashion shows, I aimed to draw more attention to the matter that brings their concepts to expression. Yet, Viktor&Rolf's play with fashion as a theatre of metamorphoses takes place within the realm of fashion as a system of representation and signification. Although it is important to give special attention to fashion's materiality and to the medium of fashion, in the field of fashion we will need to look at the ways in which 'material and semiotic relations are entangled with one another' (Bennett and Joyce 2010: 6). Immaterial ideas and concepts are always inextricably intertwined to their material expression. A new materialist approach helps to reinstall the interrelations between embodiment, materiality, and fashion's representations and significations. The insights of new materialism can greatly contribute to fashion studies, as this theoretical perspective accentuates the entanglement of matter and meaning, matter and discourse, and the material and immaterial. In combination with the theoretical framework of Deleuze and Guattari these insights help to understand the ways in which social, semiotic and material flows 'meet' within the realm of fashion. Using a new materialist vocabulary, I propose to view concepts of the self in terms of transformational assemblages made up of entwined semiotic, material and social flows.

fig. 5.1 Viktor&Rolf, *One Woman Show* (A/W 2003-04) photography: Peter Stigter

fig. 5.2 Viktor&Rolf, *Atomic Bomb* (A/W 1998-99) photography: Peter Stigter

fig. 5.3 Viktor&Rolf, *Upside Down* (S/S 2006)
photography: Peter Stigter

fig. 5.4 Viktor&Rolf, *Upside Down* (S/S 2006)
photography: Peter Stigter

fig. 5.5 Viktor&Rolf, *Upside Down* (S/S 2006)
photography: Peter Stigter

fig. 5.6 Viktor&Rolf, *Upside Down* (S/S 2006)
photography: Peter Stigter

fig. 5.7 Viktor&Rolf, *Budget-cut-Couture* (S/S 2010)
photography: Peter Stigter

fig. 5.8 Viktor&Rolf, *Budget-cut-Couture* (S/S 2010)
photography: Peter Stigter

fig. 5.9 Viktor&Rolf, *Russian Doll* (A/W 1999-2000)
photography: Peter Stigter

fig. 5.10 Viktor&Rolf, *Russian Doll* (A/W 1999-2000)
photography: Peter Stigter

fig. 5.11 Viktor&Rolf, *Glamour Factory* (A/W 2010-11) photography: Peter Stigter

fig. 5.12 Viktor&Rolf, *Glamour Factory* (A/W 2010-11) photography: Peter Stigter

fig. 5.13 Viktor&Rolf, *Glamour Factory* (A/W 2010-11) photography: Peter Stigter

fig. 5.14 Viktor&Rolf, *Glamour Factory* (A/W 2010-11)
photography: Peter Stigter

fig. 5.15 Viktor&Rolf, *Long Live the Immaterial* (A/W 2002-03)
photography: Peter Stigter

fig. 5.16 Viktor&Rolf, *Long Live the Immaterial* (A/W 2002-03)
photography: Peter Stigter

fig. 5.17 Viktor&Rolf, *Long Live the Immaterial (A/W 2002-03)*
photography: Peter Stigter

fig. 5.18 Viktor&Rolf, *Long Live the Immaterial: Karolina (A/W 2002-03)*
photography: Peter Stigter

fig. 5.19 Viktor&Rolf, *Long Live the Immaterial (A/W 2002-03)*
photography: Peter Stigter

06. Dutch Hybridity

The Cases of Oilily and Mac&Maggie/ Cora Kemperman

Whereas the previous chapters increasingly focused on embodiment and materiality, this chapter investigates the topic of 'national identity' in Dutch fashion. As José Teunissen argues, 'major companies and commercial brands had started to exploit their national identity' in the 1980s (2005: 17). For instance, the Dutch children's label Oilily used its patchwork as 'a clear reference to traditional Dutch costume' (Ibidem). Oilily's head designer, the late Marieke Olsthoorn, explicitly stated that Dutch folklore and regional dress were important sources of inspiration for her designs (Arts 2010: 49). Another example is Dutch lingerie designer Marlies Dekkers who, as I have shown in the chapter 'Embodied Experiences', regularly refers to Dutch history, a Dutch artistic tradition and to stereotypical elements of Dutch national culture. For her Paris Fashion Show – called *So Dutch* (2007) – the models were adorned with typical elements of Dutch national heritage, such as little clogs inscribed with the text 'Holland', miniature windmills, Delft Blue prints and folkloric crafted hats. We can thus find interesting examples in contemporary Dutch fashion of well-known designers and brands referring to or playing with symbols that we perceive as Dutch.

Moreover, as I have pointed out in the Introduction to my dissertation, the recent rise of a Dutch fashion culture possibly coincides with the construction of a 'national identity' in Dutch fashion, which is often explicitly related to a style called 'Dutch Modernism' (Teunissen 2011: 158-159).[40] Although it may seem paradoxical, this focus on national identity should be understood in relation to the globalised context of fashion. Several fashion theorists have fruitfully explored the ways in which fashion can play a central role in shaping the identities of nations in the context of economic and cultural globalisation (e.g. Teunissen 2005, 2011; Goodrum 2005; Paulicelli and Clark 2009; Craik 2009; Feitsma 2014). In *The National Fabric: Fashion, Britishness, Globalization* (2005) Alison Goodrum argues with regard to Britishness that 'the task of defining Britishness has come to be a national preoccupation, with fashion assuming a central function as one of the key material and symbolic resources required in its production and sustenance' (2005: 17). Furthermore, in *The Fabric of Cultures: Fashion, Identity, and Globalization* (2009), edited by Eugenia Paulicelli and Hazel Clark, different scholars examine the ways in which fashion, as both a manufacturing industry and a cultural industry, 'shapes the identities of nations and cities' in relation to processes of economic and cultural globalisation (Paulicelli and Clark 2009: 2). While taking into account the global dimension of fashion, these scholars explore the interrelationship between fashion and a 'national fabric'. This lies at the heart of the research project *Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World*, in which we aim to understand the cultural dynamics of Dutch fashion. Based on my analyses of two case studies – (1) the children's label Oilily and (2) the brands Mac&Maggie and Cora Kemperman – this chapter will critically reflect on the problematic issue of a national fashion identity.

Although 'national identity' has become a popular notion, it is quite a complex term in itself, and requires clarification. The concept of 'national identity' consists of many layers which move from legal and spatial, geographical and territorial understandings to conceptions of 'national identity' as a cultural, symbolic and imaginary construction (WRR 2007: 43-45).

40 See the dissertation by my colleague Maaike Feitsma, *Nederlandse mode? Een verkenning van mythevorming en betekenissen* ('Dutch Fashion? An exploration of myths and meanings') (2014), for an elaborate discussion of the myths and meanings of 'Dutch' fashion.

As my aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural dynamics that affect the idea of who "we" are in a national context, how that idea is constituted, and specifically of the role of commodified signs and objects of fashion, it is worthwhile focusing on national identity as a symbolic socio-cultural construction. I will build upon the notion of 'national identity' as developed by one of the founding figures of cultural studies, Stuart Hall (2002), who draws on Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony', Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida, and whose work has been influential within post-colonial studies. Hall's cultural concept of national identity also builds upon Benedict Anderson's notion of 'imagined communities' (1983):

> It is important to remember that the nation-state is both a political and territorial entity, *and* what Benedict Anderson has called 'an imagined community'. Though we are often strangers to one another, we form an 'imagined community' because we share an *idea* of the nation and what it stands for, which we can 'imagine' in our mind's eye. A shared national identity thus depends on the cultural meanings which bind each member individually into the larger national story (2002: 74).

As Hall continues, he stresses the discursive practice of the formation of a national identity, while reflecting on the crucial role that specific objects, symbols and representations play in that process:

> In fact, what the nation 'means' is an ongoing project, under constant reconstruction. We come to know its meaning partly *through* the objects and artefacts which have been made to stand for and symbolize its essential values. Its meaning is constituted *within*, not above or outside representation. It is through identifying with these representations that we come to be its 'subjects' – by 'subjecting' ourselves to their dominant meanings. What would 'England' *mean* without its cathedrals, churches, castles and country houses, its gardens, thatched cottages and hedgerowed landscapes, its Trafalgars, Dunkirks and Mafekings, its Nelsons and its Churchills, its Elgars and its Benjamin Brittens? (2002: 74).

Hall's cultural perspective of national identity, whose imaginations and meanings are under constant reconstruction as they are discursively produced *through* objects and *within* representations, opens up an understanding of the role commodified objects of fashion as well as fashion images may play in relation to a national identity. As Hall draws on Barthes' semiotic methodology, this helps us to understand that the Dutch connotation of, for instance, clogs or windmills, is arbitrary, and unveils Dutch identity as a cultural and ideological construction. I propose to synthesise Hall's notion of national identity with the concept of 'performance' to theorise the performative constitution of identity on a national level. Here, Butler's work on performative identity dynamics (1990) is especially useful as she views identity as a *doing*, as being performatively constituted through a process of repetitive and discursive practices, which are naturalised and normalised. As I have pointed out in the chapter entitled 'Creative Performances', this notion of performance is related

to subjective identity and embodied performances. Nonetheless, I will extend this useful analytical tool to a national level in this chapter in order to theorise the ways in which fashion objects and images can discursively constitute and thus perform – an inherently fluid, non-essential – national identity. In a similar vein, I extend my conceptualisation of 'fluid concepts of the self' in Chapter 2 to a national level. Since the notion of national identity may suggest a unified whole, I prefer to think in terms of a national 'conceptual self', which consists of different concepts that can be performed. Whereas there is a fundamental fluidity underlying the conceptual self, fashion objects and representations can perform and thus solidify specific concepts of the national self. For example, when Dutch designers Viktor&Rolf presented the clogs on high heels on the catwalk (A/W 2007-08), they were playing with symbols that we have come to perceive as Dutch. Although this may have been an ironic gesture by the designers to comment on the ways in which they are always referred to as Dutch, Viktor&Rolf were simultaneously reiterating the idea that we share what the Netherlands stands for, participating in the ongoing project of the discursive production what the Netherlands means. As such, they were taking part in the performance of specific cliché concepts of a Dutch conceptual self.

In this chapter I critically assess this fashioned national conceptual self: what does it consist of, how is it performed, and to what extent is it Dutch? In addition, how does it relate to fashion's globalised context? In order to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural dynamics of Dutch fashion, this chapter focuses on two case studies: (1) the children's label Oilily; and (2) the brands Mac&Maggie and Cora Kemperman. Both Oilily and Mac&Maggie/Cora Kemperman have played a considerable role in the Dutch fashion industry. As I have pointed out in the chapter 'On Theory and Methodology', Mac&Maggie/Cora Kemperman won a 'Grand Seigneur Award' in 1987, as did Marieke and Willem Olsthoorn, the founders of Oilily (formerly known as Olly), in 1989. Before founding her own company in 1995, Cora Kemperman was the buying manager for women's wear at Mac&Maggie, a brand introduced by the Dutch retail chain Peek & Cloppenburg in 1976. Both designer Cora Kemperman and stylist Frans Ankoné have been essential to the development of the recognisable style of Mac&Maggie as well as the brand Cora Kemperman. There are several resemblances between Mac&Maggie/Cora Kemperman and Oilily. We can, for instance, detect striking similarities in the ways in which these brands use bright and vivid colours, which Cora Kemperman's stylist Frans Ankoné considers to be characteristic of Northern European countries (Interview FA 2009), and can be traced back to a colourful Dutch clothing tradition in regional dress (Feitsma 2014). In addition, as I will demonstrate, highlighting travelling to exotic places and a fascination for different cultures is a recurring theme in both Oilily's and Mac&Maggie/Cora Kemperman's fashion designs and promotional material.

My visual analyses of these case studies are first and foremost based on their promotional material, and my study is supported by interviews with key people in all three brands. The *Oilily magazines* – from the very first magazine in 1984 through to the mid 2000s – have

been the primary source for my study of Oilily.[41] In addition, interviews were conducted with the founders of Oilily, Marieke and Willem Olsthoorn (Alkmaar, 3 September 2010) and with the graphic designer and initiator of the *Oilily magazines,* Jean Philipse (St. Michielsgestel, 21 April 2011). My analysis of Cora Kemperman is based on the company's website; an online archive of image material; promotional picture postcards in the shops; several editorial articles found in fashion magazines; and on the book *Cora Kemperman. Ten Years* (2005). The promotional material for the Mac&Maggie brand that I analysed consists of advertising and fashion editorials in the Dutch women's magazine *Viva*, a young and trendy magazine at the time, spanning 1976-1996.[42] Furthermore, a selection of Mac&Maggie's brochures that were found in the company's archive and the book *20 Seasons Mac&Maggie* (1986) provided me with relevant research material. My analyses of both Mac&Maggie and Cora Kemperman are supported by interviews with Cora Kemperman herself (Amsterdam, 3 March 2010) and stylist Frans Ankoné (Amsterdam, 8 December 2009).

Based on my analyses, I will argue that the current interest of Western fashion countries in their national roots cannot be separated from a fascination for cultural 'otherness' and other local traditions. For instance, Kemperman and Ankoné share a fascination for exotic places, faraway countries and other cultures, which they actively translate into their designs, styling and promotional material. By doing so, they exemplify a cultural dialogue by Western fashion designers with cultural 'otherness' which they eclectically incorporate into their Dutch brands Mac&Maggie and Cora Kemperman. This should be seen in the context of how fashion, operating in global flows of consumerist capitalism, commodifies objects from a wide variety of local traditions and cultures. It is because of globalisation that 'diverse and remote cultures have become accessible, as signs and commodities' (Barker 2012: 159). The global flows of capitalist modernity thus lead to a renewed interest in what is local – i.e. our own local roots as well as 'other' local traditions. While consumerist global flows may, at the same time, cause a process of cultural homogenisation, 'mechanisms of fragmentation, heterogenization and hybridity are also at work' (Barker 2012: 164). Roland Robertson refers to this as a process of 'glocalization' (1992: 173-4), a concept that he popularised after adopting it from marketing and business discourse. He uses this term to articulate the dynamics through which the global and the local are reciprocally constitutive as 'mutually "interpenetrating" principles' (Robertson 1995: 30). This is evidently essential to the formation of concepts of local, national 'selves', as their meanings are always constructed in relation to the global flows that introduce us to local 'otherness'. Interaction with 'other' local traditions and the 'fascination of "otherness"' (Hall 1997: 225) are not only phenomena of contemporary processes of globalisation. In *Global Fashion, Local Tradition* (2005) José Teunissen asserts that 'fashion [...] has always sought inspiration from other cultures, starting with the importing of silk from China and later cotton and cashmere from India' (2005: 13). In this sense, 'dress has long expressed an intense multiculturalism *avant la lettre*' (Martin and Koda 1994: 11). This can be traced back to colonial times in

41 These *Oilily magazines* were provided to the research group 'Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World' by Marieke and Willem Olsthoorn, the founders of Oilily, as well as by Jean Philipse, the graphic designer and initiator of the *Oilily magazine* in 1984.

42 According to Rob Plas, a former fashion editor of *Viva*, '[t]he Viva-girl just like the Mac&Maggie customer is very fashion-conscious as well as cost-conscious' (Plas 1986: 18).

which Western trading companies were travelling around the world, importing products and non-Western clothing styles from the Orient. As Sandra Niessen argues, '[f]ashion's ethnic novelties generate a false sense that the global, multicultural nature of fashion is unprecedented' (2005: 157). Yet, today, we can clearly see the paradox of globalisation which gives rise to an increased interest in our "own" local roots as Western (fashion) countries, while simultaneously offering us objects, commodities and traditions from other local cultures.

As I will argue, both case studies – Oilily and Mac&Maggie/Cora Kemperman – show the contradictory dynamics of the ways in which fashion is 'othering' non-Western clothing styles on the one hand, and appropriating them on the other hand. These dynamics of assimilation operate on several levels: (1) on the level of brands, (2) on a national level, and (3) on the level of Western fashion dynamics. 'Others' are incorporated into these specific brands, as part of the Dutch fashion industry, and consequently they are taken up into the dynamics of Western fashion. This chapter, by using post-colonial theory, explores the complex dynamics of how these fashion brands relate to the ways in which 'otherness' cannot be separated from a Dutch 'self'. Within post-colonial theory the notion of the Other is conceived as a cultural construct, enabling the self to build up a self-image, and vice versa. This notion of the Other was already an important issue in the writings of Franz Fanon (1952) – who has been an inspirational source for more recent post-colonial studies – on racism and colonialism, in which he refers to Hegel's Master/Slave dialectic and to a psychoanalytic, Lacanian understanding of a subject's relationship with the Other. Within this post-colonial discourse, I draw on Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), and on the way in which Hall uses the work of Said (and Foucault) in relation to representations of Otherness (see e.g. Hall 1992, 1997, 2002). As Hall asserts, the Other cannot be separated from the self as 'the "Other" is fundamental to the constitution of the self' (Hall 1997: 237). In this sense, the Other and the self are always already interrelated, as they are mutually constituting principles. Our local, national roots (a Dutch conceptual self) and our others (e.g. other nations, other cultures, other traditions, other symbols, other commodities, other fashions, etc.) are thus necessarily involved in a reciprocal interplay. In some cases they are interconnected to the extent that the binary opposition between self and Other cannot be maintained. This is my reason for using the notion of cultural 'hybridity', which is one of Homi Bhabha's (1990, 1994) central concepts in post-colonial theory. Influenced by Hall, Said and post-structuralism, Bhabha's cultural 'hybridity' serves as a helpful analytical tool to move beyond the self/Other dialectic, and to theorise the ways in which colonial pasts are intrinsic to hybrid national identities.

First I will discuss the ways in which the brand Oilily performs a specific kind of Dutchness, while arguing that this brand simultaneously incorporates otherness into itself as a Dutch brand. Secondly, I will discuss Mac&Maggie and Cora Kemperman in relation to the theoretical perspective of Orientalism (Said 1978), as they perform cultural memories of colonial pasts as part of the dynamics of Western fashion. Thirdly, I will discuss the cultural hybridity (Bhabha 1990, 1994) inherent in Dutch fashion dynamics. This approach enables a constructive interpretation of the hybrid cultural dynamics underlying contemporary performances of concepts of a national self, and performances of Orientalised concepts of otherness.

Oilily: Performing Narratives of Unity and "Dutchness"

The very first *Oilily magazine* (1984) expresses the spirit of the Dutch children's label Oilily, founded by Willem and Marieke Olsthoorn in the 1960s, by explaining 'The Oilily Principle':

> The Oilily collections of children's wear are designed with the world in mind as seen through the eyes of a child: a world full of life and action. Oilily's clothes are easy to wear, good-looking and give children all the freedom they need. They trigger the child's imagination. Oilily always comes up with surprising details. The most striking aspect is the colourfulness of our clothes. We use bright and cheerful colours, which children find attractive. A loud variety of pink and turquoise are found in all our collections (*Oilily magazine*, 1984, vol.1, nr. 1, pp. 4-5).

An important aspect of Oilily's brand philosophy is thus to dress children *as children*, tuned into their needs and worlds of fantasy and curiosity, instead of dressing them as little grown-ups (Arts 2010: 102). Although Oilily started to develop women's wear collections in 1986, the children remained 'at the heart of the company' (Interview W&MO 2008).[43] Moreover, its relation to traditional Dutch costume is regularly considered essential to the brand. Oilily's head designer, the late Marieke Olsthoorn, claimed that Dutch regional wear was a sustained source of inspiration for her designs (Arts 2010: 49). Graphic designer and initiator of the *Oilily magazines*, Jean Philipse, also connects Oilily's aesthetic signature – its particular use of colour and extraordinary combinations – to its 'origin' in Dutch folkloric costumes (Interview JP 2011).[44] While Marieke Olsthoorn acknowledges the presence of 'typically Dutch elements' in Oilily's designs, she emphasised in our interview that other cultural elements are also part of the brand (Interview MO 2010). She has written extensively on the ways in which she was also inspired by a wide variety of other clothing traditions, such as the 'dazzling colour combinations of women in the pink desert of Rajasthan as well as the wonderful multicoloured clothes in South America' (Olsthoorn 1992: 7). This points to a complex relationship between Oilily's often explicitly suggested connection with traditional Dutch costume and the brand's explorations of other local dress styles that are also incorporated into Oilily's designs and promotional images that I will explore further.

Based on my analyses of Oilily's magazines from 1984 until the mid-2000s, I argue that cultural otherness is at least as significant to the brand as its link to traditional Dutch costume. In these magazines, Oilily's clothes are frequently worn by children or women from various ethnicities, photographed in different countries, cultures and traditions. For instance, on the cover of the A/W edition of Oilily's children's wear magazine in 1993-

43 Interview, Willem and Marieke Olsthoorn, 8 February 2008. This interview was conducted by Jos Arts for the publication of his book *Oilily* (2010), Zwolle / Arnhem: D'jonge Hond / ArtEZ Press.

44 See the dissertation by my colleague Maaike Feitsma, *Nederlandse mode? Een verkenning van mythevorming en betekenissen* ('Dutch Fashion? An exploration of myths and meanings') (2014), for an elaborate discussion of Oilily's bright and vivid colours in relation to traditional Dutch regional wear.

94, we see a small Bolivian girl, sitting on piled rocks, presumably in front of her home in La Paz (see fig. 6.1 > p. 212). She wears a buttoned dress with a Scottish tartan check in red, white and blue, an abundantly multicoloured thick sweater with a combination of different flower-like motifs, and orange and blue striped socks. If this photograph had not been presented in an Oilily magazine, accompanied by the Oilily logo, it could well have been of an ordinary Bolivian child, dressed in bright colours and wild patterns – typical for Bolivian traditional dress. In the accompanying text in the magazine, the resemblance between Oilily's clothes and traditional Bolivian dress is explicitly emphasised: 'In Bolivia you still see a lot of traditional clothing worn by people of a particular family, village or district. Some of it is just as colourful as Oilily clothing' (A/W 1993-94, p. 39).

Oilily's clothes are frequently presented within the context of prominently visualised other local traditions, different cultures and native people. Each magazine from 1987 until 1996, with only a few exceptions, is photographed in a different country, region or city, such as Ireland (A/W 1987-88 women), Istanbul (A/W 1988-89 women), Sweden/Lapland (A/W 1989-90 children), the Spanish Pyrenees (A/W 1989-90 women), Bali (S/S 1990 children), Marrakech (S/S 1990 women), Guatemala (A/W 1991-92 women), New Mexico (S/S 1991 women), Hong Kong (S/S 1993 children), Bolivia (A/W 1993-94 children), or Slovakia (A/W 1995-96 children). Specific motifs and colours in Oilily's collections are regularly positioned in such a way that they highlight the remarkable similarities to the motifs and colours inherent to that particular cultural setting. Oilily's motifs resemble the motifs in, for instance, wallpaper, blankets, tablecloths, or carpets in other countries, suggesting that there are links between Oilily's and other patterns in the most unexpected places. The question is how should we interpret these links, considering that Oilily often highlights its connection to Dutch folkloric colours and patterns? Why does Oilily represent faraway countries and different cultures, with people dressed in Oilily's clothes? Is it simply because of Oilily's commercial necessity to appeal to a wide variety of different customers worldwide, as it exported its products to at least 20 different countries? Is it because 'cultural difference sells' as Martin Davidson argues in *The Consumerist Manifesto* (1992: 200)?

Although these arguments might be true to a certain extent, I want to argue that there are deeper cultural dynamics underlying these representations. To learn more about the effect of dressing children or women from different ethnicities and countries in Oilily garments, I will first explore the parallels between Oilily and the brand Benetton, which is a link explicitly made by graphic designer Jean Philipse (Interview JP 2011). While Benetton originally started with the aim of producing colourful sweaters and primarily focused on the representation of the products themselves (Lury 2000: 147), the brand became well-known for its controversial way of addressing highly 'charged social and political issues' in its advertising campaigns shot by Oliviero Toscani (Giroux 1994: 7; Smelik 1999: 12). However, in his early photographs for Benetton (1984-1991), Toscani focused 'on culturally diverse young people dressed in Benetton attire and engaged in a variety of seemingly aimless and playful acts' (Giroux 1994: 9), aiming to celebrate multiculturalism and diversity (Ibid.: 8). Toscani's early photographs thus convey Benetton's aim of celebrating cultural difference by 'representing children of diverse races and colors dressed in Benetton clothing' (Ibid.: 9). The slogan 'United Colors of Benetton' expresses this purpose:

> Linking the colors of Benetton clothes to the diverse 'colors' of their customers from all over the world, Toscani attempted to use the themes of racial harmony and world peace to register such differences within a wider unifying articulation. In 1985, Toscani adopted the 'United Colors of Benetton' as a recurring trademark of the Benetton ideology (Giroux 1994: 9).

In this sense, Benetton paradoxically aims to celebrate and acknowledge diversity while at the same time trying to unify these differences. As Celia Lury argues, 'across all its product ranges, clothes, perfume, accessories, the theme of the Benetton brand provides a unity in diversity, syncopating the moment of exposure (just or almost) in time for the production and consumption of a global panhumanity' (Lury 2000: 169), also pointing out this paradoxical aspect of Benetton's imagery. There is a fine line between portraying different ethnicities in a stereotypical way, confirming deep-seated hierarchical representations of the races rooted in colonial history, and using a more positive, effective strategy to break with these hierarchical oppositions (Smelik 1999: 44-45). As Anneke Smelik argues, Benetton employs a positive strategy in their visual representations by choosing people from a wide variety of different ethnicities and thus emphasising cultural diversity (Ibid.: 45-46). Although Benetton, in contrast to Oilily, has explicitly defined its aim of critiquing socio-cultural and political issues and celebrating diversity, I do see an interesting parallel between Benetton's 'United Colors' to connect people from all over the world and Oilily's colourful clothes dressing children from a wide range of ethnicities, as represented in their magazines.

As Jean Philipse claims, even before Benetton introduced its slogan, there was a text on one of Oilily's first bags that read: 'United Colors of Oilily' (Interview JP 2011). Based on my analyses, I want to argue that Oilily's magazines suggest that this brand connects the children all over the world through its specific colours, functioning as a universal visual language, which appeals to every child. The links that the photographs in the magazines suggest between Oilily and the motifs and colours already present in other cultures emphasise the idea that Oilily's aesthetic signature has a universal quality. For instance, in the magazine photographed in Guatemala (A/W 1991-92 women), a presumably Caucasian model dressed in a richly decorated sweater with different colourful motifs by Oilily sits next to native men wearing traditional Guatemalan dress (see fig. 6.2 > p. 212). The woman in this photograph is positioned in such a way that she accentuates the resemblance between Oilily's designs and the native dress style with similar elaborately decorated and multicoloured stripes. Another example can be found in the magazine photographed in Slovakia (A/W 1995-96 children), in which numerous Slovakian children, whose names are explicitly mentioned, wear Oilily's clothes. In one of the images, we see a little girl, Lenka Genová from Poprad, sitting on a richly decorated couch with orange and yellow ochre coloured flowers (see fig. 6.3 > p. 213). Again, the colours of her sweater and the shape of the flower on her clothes are comparable to the design of the textile cloth covering the couch. Native children from different countries are thus photographed dressed in Oilily's clothes, expressing the idea that these clothes connect children all over the world. Even when the photographs for the magazines are not taken in specific other countries, children with different ethnicities

are regularly brought together in a playful way, which is comparable to Benetton's way of celebrating cultural difference in the 1980s.

The idea that Oilily's colourful designs appeal to all the children in the world is supported by specific texts accompanying the photographs in the magazines, such as 'Oilily, a language they all understand' (1985, vol. 2, nr. 2, p. 10); 'Colours and comfort for all characters' (1985, vol. 2, nr. 2, p. 14); 'Oilily, a colourful look on life' (A/W 1987-88 children, nr. 7, p. 20); 'Your colours speak for themselves. Oilily, fluent in all languages' (S/S 1987 children, nr. 6, p. 9); 'It's a world of colour' (A/W 1986-87 children nr. 5, p. 3); 'Students of Oilily; the colourful university' (S/S 1989 children, nr. 10, p. 17). These texts thus suggest that the Oilily colours speak a "universal" visual language that all children are able to understand, which maybe even unites all children worldwide, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or gender. However, post-colonial theory criticises this claim to universalism, which is conceived of as 'universalist pretentions of Western knowledge systems' (Loomba 2005: 206). This post-colonial rejection of universalism suggests that Oilily's "universal" visual language must be understood as a Western or perhaps Eurocentric phenomenon.

In some cases it can be quite alienating to see, for instance, native Bolivian children wearing clothes with the logo of the expensive Dutch brand Oilily. As logos have become central to the politics of identity and are used to connect individual identities (Giroux 1994: 13), I would argue that the Oilily magazines express the idea that these children's identities are connected as they are all labelled with the Oilily logo. This is an expression of 'logo-forged global links' as part of the global 'village where we are indeed connected to one another through a web of brands', which Naomi Klein discusses and criticises in *No Logo* (2000: xvii-xx). As mentioned before, Oilily has a clearly defined view, as 'The Oilily Principle' explains, of what children like and how they experience the world, which conveys a supposed "universality" of the Oilily child. When children from a wide variety of different countries and ethnicities are dressed in Oilily's clothes, they are simultaneously fashioned with the meanings attached to Oilily's commodified vision of what a child is. In this sense these children are mere carriers of meaning. Although it might seem a noble purpose to unite all children through Oilily's colourful clothes, post-colonial theory undermines this false universalist claim (see e.g. Loomba 2005). In addition, one could also present the critical argument that this proposed unification reduces cultural differences as it constructs an idealised homogenisation of cultures through colours and patterns of commercial brands.

Here again we see the paradox that is also inherent to 'United Colors of Benetton': the aim of celebrating cultural diversity while simultaneously trying to unify such differences. In her analysis of *Colors: A Magazine about the Rest of the World* (1991-1995), a promotional magazine published by Benetton, Ann Tyler argues that although this magazine is designed to stimulate the acceptance and appreciation of cultural differences, it does so 'through a realization of sameness: "they are basically like "us"' (Tyler 1996: 75): 'Are we really all the same, but different? Are we like a collection of Benetton sweaters - one large batch, just dyed different colors?' (Tyler 1996: 75). I would not contend that Oilily communicates sameness in a similar vein as Benetton or *Colors,* since the native people represented in Oilily's magazines are often photographed in their particular local cultural settings. In this

sense, it could be argued that Oilily's photographs do more justice to the different cultures represented than Benetton's advertising campaigns, which emphasise a fundamental sameness due to the neutral settings of the photographs, such as white studios. However, at the same time, Oilily's focus on travelling around the world and their representations of different cultures could be understood as a 'fascination for "otherness"' (Hall 1997: 225) to which popular representation is so frequently drawn, as Hall argues. This must be understood in the context of Orientalism, which reinforces the difference of the exotic Other as subordinate to the dominant West. As this discussion is relevant to fashion's fascination for cultural otherness, I will further elaborate on these issues in the next section.

However, the point that I want to make here is that other cultural traditions and dress styles are significant to representations of the brand Oilily. In this sense Oilily presents itself as a global brand with roots in different countries. While Oilily's magazines show an interest in these different cultures and cultural differences, they are, at the same time, assimilated into the Dutch brand, and hence become part of the dynamics of Western fashion. All these local others are thus unified into the self (i.e. Oilily as a Dutch brand) as Oilily is continuously creating 'narratives of unity', to borrow Barker's term (2012: 259), in its magazines by emphasising the "universality" and global appeal of its visual language.

The question then is how this interconnection with other cultures relates to what is often considered the Dutchness of the brand, namely Oilily's suggested connection to traditional Dutch costume (Olsthoorn 1992: 33; Arts 2010: 49). In her book *On Children's Clothes* (1992), Olsthoorn explained, for instance, that traditional regional wear from Marken, a former island in the Zuiderzee (Southern Sea), is her favourite dress style because of its colourfulness (1992: 35).[45] Although these traditional regional dress styles are highly codified, as Jos Arts emphasises in his book *Oilily* (2010), Oilily takes the liberty of interpreting these motifs in a more creative, cheerful and playful way (Arts 2010: 67-68). One of Oilily's magazines (A/W 1994-95 children) explicitly highlights the shared imaginations and meanings of Dutchness. A little girl on the cover wears a lace hat, which traditionally stems from the old fishing village of Volendam, and sits in front of a painting of a woman wearing a similar traditional Dutch hat (see fig. 6.4 > p. 213). This hat is presented in the context of the magazine's representations of, for instance, Delft Blue vases and tiles, windmills, farmers and cows, the Royal Dutch airline KLM, the Dutch national flag, and clogs – objects and representations symbolising the shared idea of what the Netherlands stands for. In this magazine Oilily is thus explicitly *performing* cliché concepts of Dutchness. On another page, a little girl is positioned in the middle of numerous colourful and richly decorated textiles, and the accompanying text suggests that these fabrics are used for traditional Dutch dress as well as for Oilily's clothes: 'Very pretty, all those colourful materials. Are they for old Dutch costumes? But you can also use them for new clothes, can't you?' (A/W 1994-95 children, see fig. 6.5 > p. 213). This image exemplifies the recurrently suggested link between the fabrics of Oilily's collections and traditional Dutch costume, performing the "Dutchness" of the brand.

45 Marken (as well as Volendam) is a traditional fisherman's village where people still sometimes wear traditional costume, and which many tourists visit nowadays.

However, we need to critically assess the extent to which both Oilily's collections and Dutch regional wear are actually Dutch. In relation to traditional Dutch costume Marieke Olsthoorn claimed that the chintz particularly caught her attention because of its designs and colours (1992: 31). Interestingly, the origins of chintz are not quite Dutch. Chintz was originally a 'hand-drawn, mordant- and resist-dyed cotton fabric from India' (Crill 2008: 8), and it was brought to the Netherlands in the 17th century by Dutch traders of the *Dutch East India Company* (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, VOC) (Hartkamp-Jonxis 1987: 6; Breukink-Peeze 2000: 58), a controversial trading company that also engaged in colonialisation, slavery and violence. Most of these chintzes were made in south-east India, in the area called 'Coromandel Coast' (Crill 2008: 10). In the third quarter of the 17th century, chintz became fashionable in the Netherlands and was worn frequently in the northern part of the country near the North Sea and Zuiderzee coasts (van Zunthem 1987: 67-72; Breukink-Peeze 2000: 64; Arts 2010: 52-53). Since the 17th century, but especially in the 18th century, chintz was used in all types of clothing, such as children's clothes, gowns, skirts, jackets, handkerchiefs, capes, etc. (Breukink-Peeze 2000: 57). As Niessen explains,

> India was able to 'clothe the world' because she possessed the winning combination of textile features known at the time. [...] She was specialized in cotton fabrics that were well-woven, lightweight and cool; they were decorated with diverse and sophisticated patterning; the bright colours didn't run or fade in the light or during washings (Niessen 2005: 159).

In the Netherlands the popularity of chintz was a result of the prosperity of the country during the Dutch Golden Age (Olsthoorn 1992: 31) when the textile trade of the Dutch East India Company reached its peak in India (Breukink-Peeze 2000: 58). In addition to dress, chintz added 'an exotic touch to the 18th-century Dutch interior' as the large cloths were also used as, for instance, bed-covers (Hartkamp-Jonxis 1994: 6). Interestingly, the appearance of specific motifs on Indian chintzes was 'decisively influenced by European customers, eager for fabrics which would give their rooms an exotic character' (Hartkamp-Jonxis 1994: 20), which illustrates the exchange between East and West in a colonial context.

Chintz was popular in different social classes in society, from the urban elite to farmers and fishermen (Breukink-Peeze 2000: 58), and increasingly became part of Dutch regional dress styles (Van Zunthem 1987: 65). After the fashionable chintz largely disappeared in the Netherlands during the 19th century, it was still used for folkloristic purposes (Van Zunthem 1987: 65; Arts 2010: 53). Herman Roodenburg argues specifically with regard to the old village of Marken that chintz was 'already solidly integrated into the Marken costumes of the 1850s' (Roodenburg 2007: 249). As Marieke Olsthoorn was particularly inspired by the use of Indian chintz in Dutch regional dress, she integrated the motifs and colours of these chintzes into Oilily's collections. Not only does chintz serve an inspirational purpose, but the fabrics produced in India – where they are still designed by hand using block-printing techniques – are also used in Oilily's collections, as these, in Marieke Olsthoorn's view, cannot be replaced by any kind of European textile (Olsthoorn 1992: 32). Paradoxically, Oilily's link to Dutch regional wear is often presented as an important

part of the "Dutchness" of the brand, while the designs of this "Dutch" traditional costume have been greatly influenced by Indian chintz from colonial times.

The bright colours and richly decorated motifs of chintz primarily had an impact on Dutch traditional costume which subsequently became part of a Dutch fashion narrative, as Maaike Feitsma argues (2014). Although chintz was originally an exotic textile, it was soon integrated into Dutch regional wear (Van Zunthem 1987: 65) and 'is nowadays viewed as an icon of Dutch national identity, similar to the ways in which Delft earthenware was inspired by Chinese porcelain' (Feitsma 2014). An interesting exchange is created here between cultural otherness (i.e. objects, fabrics, motifs, and colours from other countries and cultural traditions) and narratives of Dutchness. This exemplifies the complex dynamics of the ways in which otherness – in this case specifically chintz from India – is incorporated into the self on a national level. Chintz has become part of performances of Dutchness. Here the distinction between the self and the Other cannot be maintained because 'the "Other" is fundamental to the constitution of the self (Hall 1997: 237). Moreover, the Other has become an intrinsic part of the national conceptual self.

The example of chintz thus demonstrates the paradoxical process of assimilating the Other into a national self which is fundamental to the dynamics of 'national identity' as a way of 'unifying cultural diversity' (Barker 2012: 260). As Hall argues,

> [i]nstead of thinking of national cultures are unified, we should think of them as a discursive device which represents difference as unity or identity. They are cross-cut by deep internal divisions and differences and 'unified' only through the exercise of different forms of cultural power (1992: 297)

Internal differences are often disregarded as the national conceptual self presents itself as unified. As I have argued, fashion objects and representations can contribute to these performances of specific concepts of the national self, solidifying these inherently fluid concepts and unifying internal divisions.

In the case of Oilily, we can find similar dynamics of assimilation that take place on the level of the brand, as Oilily incorporates cultural otherness into itself as a Dutch brand. This pertains to both the material dimension of the fabrics and the representational dimension of the fashion images in Oilily's magazines. Oilily continuously performs 'narratives of unity' (Barker 2012: 59) as a brand by, as argued above, aiming to unite all children through Oilily's colours, while simultaneously performing specific concepts of

Dutchness by highlighting its link to Dutch regional wear.[46] Yet we cannot dismiss the strong presence of otherness underlying these performances of unity and Dutchness. In

46 In the article 'The whole world in our clothes' (in Dutch: 'De hele wereld in onze kleren') in the Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf* written by Katina Stavrianos (22 September 2001), a former commercial director of Oilily, Boudewijn Schipper, claims that Oilily's trade mark – its abundantly colourful clothes – is typically Dutch. Also, graphic designer Jean Philipse connects Oilily's use of colour to its 'origin' in Dutch folkloric costumes, and asserts that people in foreign countries perceived Oilily as 'typically Dutch' due to its use of bright colours (Interview JP 2011)

order to gain a deeper understanding of the colonial and political dimension of fascination for otherness, I will now discuss the second case study of this chapter – Mac&Maggie/Cora Kemperman – in relation to cultural otherness and Orientalism in fashion.

Mac&Maggie/Cora Kemperman: a Fascination for Otherness

Mac&Maggie (1976-1996) and Cora Kemperman (1995-present) are two Dutch fashion brands which are especially known for their distinctive style, unique combinations of intense colours, and the way they play with different shapes, fabrics and motifs. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, both designer Cora Kemperman and stylist Frans Ankoné have been essential to the development of a recognisable style for the brand Cora Kemperman, as they had also been for the brand Mac&Maggie in the late 1970s, the 1980s and the early 1990s. Although Mac&Maggie and Cora Kemperman share many stylistic similarities, some differences between both brands can be found as well. Cora Kemperman deliberately chooses to remain a small company and be exclusive by operating only nine stores, whereas Mac&Maggie was part of the chain store Peek & Cloppenburg and had as many as 42 stores at its peak.[47] In addition, Cora Kemperman only designs for women, in contrast to Mac&Maggie which sold both men's and women's wear. Nonetheless, a focus on travelling to faraway countries and a fascination for different cultures is a central theme for both brands. Before elaborating on their shared fascination for cultural otherness, I will briefly introduce each brand separately.

Mac&Maggie: Youthful Explorations of Foreign Cultures

According to stylist Frans Ankoné, Mac&Maggie was a trendy, young, Dutch fashion brand that sold 'super fashionable clothes for a very reasonable price' (Interview FA 2009). This brand was part of the new youth movement at the end of the 1970s and in the 1980s. The magazine *Viva* – at the time a trendy, popular and young women's magazine – frequently published fashion editorials with clothes by Mac&Maggie combined with other brands, such as C&A, Cinderella, Benetton, and later also Hennes&Mauritz, Mexx and InWear. In *Viva*, Mac&Maggie is often presented in the context of affordable, ordinary fashion. It is precisely this context that was important to its success: 'Mac&Maggie always translated the most striking international fashion trends into affordable fashion for the general public' (Plas 1986: 18). However, the influence of international fashion trends did not prevent Mac&Maggie from creating its own recognisable look. This brand increasingly developed its own aesthetic signature, which is epitomised today in the brand Cora Kemperman.

The bright, bold and intense colours of the clothes are what especially attract attention in Mac&Maggie's advertisements. As Cora Kemperman emphasises in the book *20 Seasons Mac&Maggie* (1986), the typical 'Mac&Maggie colours' are bright blue, turquoise, curry yellow, olive green, red and bright pink, complemented with lots of black without ever using pastel colours (1986: 4). Furthermore, loose-fitting, flowing skirts and turbans are recurrent

47 More information on the organisational structure of both companies can be found in the dissertation by my colleague Anja Köppchen, *Mind the Gap. Balancing design and global manufacturing in Dutch fashion* (2014).

elements in Mac&Maggie's collections and various fabrics and motifs are often playfully mixed into different compositions (see fig. 6.6 > p. 214). Vertical-striped pants are easily combined with vividly patterned sweaters, or yellow trousers with checks are worn with a shirt with stripes and dots. In addition to these formal elements of the garments, we can trace many visual references to the spirit of the age, popular culture, and other cultures. The spirit of the age is expressed by, for instance, the influence of rock culture and Mac&Maggie's portrayal of gender themes. The new, idealised image of a strong, independent woman is underlined in Mac&Maggie's advertisements. In some cases, the advertisements invert conventional hierarchical gender relations and role patterns in favour of a new powerful portrayal of femininity. Ankoné describes a woman who buys at Mac&Maggie as 'someone who makes her own decisions, who is capable of travelling by herself, who is not afraid of different cultures or atmospheres' (Interview FA 2009). Moreover, this brand increasingly expressed an interest in foreign countries and different cultures. As Mac&Maggie grew to be a successful company, and as it became more profitable, Kemperman and Ankoné were offered the opportunity to develop their fascination for exotic places, faraway countries and other cultures (Interview FA 2009). As they were seeking interesting locations and special places to photograph new collections, the brochures increasingly presented Mac&Maggie's clothes in different settings such as India, Arizona, Egypt, the Canary Islands, or New York. India especially was an important source of inspiration for Kemperman and Ankoné, affecting their sense and use of colour (Interview FA 2009).

These different countries and cultural traditions are integrated into Mac&Maggie's designs (see fig. 6.6-6.8 > p. 214-215). We can clearly see the influence of, for example, Japanese designers (e.g. S/S 1978; S/S 1983), classic Chinese Mao-suits (e.g. S/S 1981), Indian ikats (e.g. S/S 1982; S/S 1986), or Indian uniforms, colours and turbans (e.g. S/S 1984; S/S 1986). As Teunissen argues, in the context of the new youth culture, 'the 1960s saw a renewed interest in non-Western clothing', such as 'Indian dresses, Afghan coats, Palestinian shawls, and Indian slippers' (2005: 13). Mac&Maggie's eclectic incorporation of Indian and Asian styles into its collections is thus also rooted in these developments, against the backdrop of youth culture. This fascination for other cultures and countries was furthermore expressed by Mac&Maggie's choice of models from different ethnicities in their advertisements. As Ankoné explains, they often used models from a variety of ethnicities for Mac&Maggie's advertising campaigns, and regularly worked with, for instance, the Indonesian-Dutch model Linda Spierings (Interview FA 2009). While Caucasian models and Dutch landscapes were also used in Mac&Maggie's photography, foreign countries and different cultures and ethnicities regularly take centre stage visually. In the 1990s the success of Mac&Maggie came to an end and all the shops were sold in 1996. Cora Kemperman had already left Mac&Maggie in 1994, and started her own retail brand together with business partner Gloria Kok in 1995.

Cora Kemperman: Performances of Authenticity and Otherness

Cora Kemperman's and Frans Ankoné's visual style further developed as their collaboration continued when Cora Kemperman started her company in 1995. In view of the fact that Mac&Maggie was part of the chain store Peek & Cloppenburg, the independent brand Cora Kemperman presumably had more freedom to shape its own aesthetic signature. In

the same vein as Mac&Maggie, Cora Kemperman's collections are characterised by intense and bold colours, and the playful treatment of different materials, fabrics and motifs. Loose-fitting skirts, different layers of clothes, turbans, and implicit and explicit references to other countries are still abundantly present. Cora Kemperman furthermore plays with the themes of gender and different ethnicities and cultures in its promotional material, which is also comparable to Mac&Maggie. For instance, in the photographs of the Spring/Summer collection of 2007, we see images of an Asian woman, dressed in white, her face covered with a white veil, suggesting that she is about to get married (see fig. 6.9 > p. 216). A presumably Dutch woman is standing beside her, dressed in black, wearing a masculine hat, presumed to be the groom, and yet wearing feminine red lipstick, which could be read as an expression of a liberal view on same-sex marriage. In addition, the brand experiments with the theme of gender in the design of the clothes, by, for example, designing clothes for women based on garments that male Indian Maharadja's wear – again integrating external influences into Cora Kemperman's collections.

Whereas Mac&Maggie was part of the new youth movement and could be viewed as 'fast fashion *avant la lettre*' (Interview FA 2009), Cora Kemperman developed into a more mature brand emphasising exclusivity, originality and authenticity. Designer Cora Kemperman frequently expresses the extent to which she values having a unique, individual identity: 'The only thing that it [the brand] conveys is [...] that you are not part of the masses, that you have your own identity' (Interview CK 2010). As Constantin-Felix von Maltzahn demonstrates in his dissertation, the firm Cora Kemperman 'attracts a rather special audience whose relationship with the brand is based on product uniqueness, exclusivity, and individuality' (2013). It is the clothes' 'unique and expressive appearance' that connects consumers to the brand (Von Maltzahn 2013). In this sense, I would argue that Cora Kemperman actively engages in creating a paradoxical 'performance of authenticity' (Smelik 2011: 76).
As Smelik asserts, '[a]uthenticity is fashionable today. It is important to present oneself as an individual who stands out from the crowd' (2011: 77). In their book *Authenticity. What Consumers Really Want* (2007), Joseph Pine and James Gilmore argue that authenticity is what consumers crave: 'Practically all consumers desire authenticity' (2007: 6). They offer an explanation of this desire by discussing the ways in which the 'world [is] increasingly filled with deliberately and sensationally staged experiences – an increasingly unreal world' in which 'consumers choose to buy or not buy based on how real they perceive an offering to be' (2007: 1). Yet, although consumers crave the real, the original and the authentic, this is necessarily an illusionary, staged authenticity. Drawing upon Guy Debord's notion of a 'society of spectacle' (1967), Geoff King's 'spectacle of the real' (2005) and the postmodern philosophy of Jean Baudrillard, Smelik argues that 'nostalgia for the real, or the authentic, is the result of modern mass media turning everything, including reality, into a spectacle' (Smelik 2011: 78-79), which is particularly true for the spectacularised world of fashion. As Smelik demonstrates, '[a]uthenticity is nowadays constructed and performed, and it has therefore become an illusion that can no longer be true or genuine' (Ibid.: 77). From this perspective, Cora Kemperman seems to provide an illusionary answer to the contemporary desire for authenticity by constantly performing authenticity, selling the idea that consumers can perform this authenticity when wearing the brand's clothes.

In addition, as I will argue, the influence of different cultures in Cora Kemperman's promotional material and designs also plays a part in the *staging* of authenticity. Cora Kemperman's collection 'Jump Around the World' (S/S 2010), for example, illustrates how different countries, cultures and traditions often encounter each other in her designs (see fig. 6.10-6.12 > p. 217-219). As explained on an information sheet that is sent to loyal customers of the brand, this collection is inspired by traditional kimonos from Tokyo, the glamorous city of Paris, eccentric London, and by headgear worn by men in Jaipur and Udaipur, India. In addition, the warm and intense colours are supposed to remind us of the colourful markets in Goa, India and Zanzibar. This playing with different cultural traditions and folklore creates unexpected new connections and combinations, which is an important element of fashion. As Svendsen argues, fashion decontextualises and recontextualises while 'the fashion items that are appropriated from other traditions no longer have any fixed origin' (Svendsen 2006: 32). Regional folkloric dress styles from different cultures are thus decontextualised, combined, reinterpreted and recontextualised in Cora Kemperman's collection through a process of 'bricolage' – a process in which material objects or commodities are 'used in a variety of improvised combinations to generate new meanings within them' (Hebdige 1979: 103).

Again, India is a central theme to the brand. For instance, the presence of Bollywood images on bags, images of painted hands with Indian henna, and the abundance of bold colours help to create a sense of India. This sense of India is evidently staged for consumers. As Teunissen argues, 'the "exotic" authenticity of a product is so important in fashion at the moment' (2005: 11). This "exotic" authenticity must be understood as a performance of the "exotic" as otherness. In this sense, I would argue that this presence of "exotic" cultural otherness plays an important part in Cora Kemperman's 'performance of authenticity' (Smelik 2011: 76). By referring to, for instance, India, Zanzibar or Tokyo in its collections and promotional material, the brand Cora Kemperman thus enacts *performances of "authentic" otherness*. As Cora Kemperman often emphasises the exotic originality of a wide variety of dress styles, countries, cultures and traditions – even though these are reinterpreted in her collections – exotic otherness is central to the company's staging of fashionable illusionary authenticity. I will now further explore the dynamics of Orientalism inherent to fashion's fascination for otherness.

Mac&Maggie / Cora Kemperman and Fashion's Orientalism

As I have argued, different cultural traditions and folklore are continuously assembled in the promotional material and designs of both Mac&Maggie and Cora Kemperman, which exemplifies the ways in which cultural otherness is eclectically incorporated into these Dutch brands. Other local clothing styles travel in tandem with global flows of capitalism, become part of Western fashion dynamics, and are subsequently integrated into glocal fashion brands. As Paulicelli and Clark argue, this focus on the global is inherent to fashion: '[t]ied to a "national fabric," but also aiming to widen its remit, fashion is always travelling and ultimately aims at a global market' (2009: 2). Nonetheless, this explanation of fashion's global orientation is insufficient with regard to Cora Kemperman, a company that aims to remain small and exclusive by only operating nine stores in the Netherlands and Belgium with no need to expand its business. Ted Polhemus offers another possible explanation by

pointing to the contradictory ways in which Western fashion is often centred on local non-Western clothing traditions:

> Local – usually 'exotic' and traditional – textiles and designs have been spotlighted throughout the long history of fashion as a way of paying a kind of homage to distant lands while, at the same time ultimately underlining the power and glory and reach of Western fashion – celebrating Peruvian peas and embroidery one season, capriciously discarding it as passé the next (2005: 89).

This points to an Orientalist perspective of fashion's interest in the "exotic" – emphasising its otherness – to confirm the power of Western fashion as the ultimate Self. Here, the Other is, again, fundamental to the constitution of the self in a hierarchical sense. As I already mentioned in the section on Oilily, there is a fine line between representations of otherness – celebrating difference – and Orientalism in visual culture (Smelik 1999: 41), which reinforces the difference of the exotic Other as subordinate to the West, or to dominant Western fashion dynamics. Hence, Orientalism is important to gain an insight into fashion's fascination for cultural otherness.

Edward Said theorises the Orientalist discourse in his book *Orientalism* (1978), often regarded as one of the most influential books in post-colonial studies. In this book he scrutinises the complex relationship between the West and the East (or Middle East) in relation to political, economic and socio-cultural power relations and ideologies as part of colonial hegemony. Said argues that Orientalism is a 'Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (Said 1978: 3). This is inextricably connected to deep-rooted colonial imaginations of the Other:

> The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience (Said 1978: 1-2).

Although Said's book received harsh criticism, it has been significant to post-colonial research into the ways in which the Orient, the Other, helps to define the West as well as to reiterate its hegemony.[48] In his Afterword, written in 1994, Said further clarifies these dynamics:

48 Some critics of Said's Orientalism argue that his theoretical assumptions on constructions of power relationships are arbitrary and historically invalid. See, for example, Aijaz Ahmad, 'Between Orientalism and Historicism' (1991); Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (1993); John MacKenzie, 'Edward Said and the Historians' (1994); Ziauddin Sardar *Orientalism* (1999); Ibn Warraq, *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* (2007); Daniel Martin Varisco, *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* (2007).

> The construction of identity – for identity, whether of Orient or Occident, France or Britain, while obviously a repository of distinct collective experiences, is finally a construction in my opinion – involves the construction of opposites and 'others' whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from 'us'. Each age and society re-creates its 'Others'. Far from a static thing then, identity of self or of 'other' is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual, and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies (Said 1994: 332).

Said's argument helps us to understand the ways in which the construction of (Dutch) national identity cannot be separated from its others, which are continuously re-created. As he points out, this is manifest in contemporary culture as 'a wide variety of hybrid representations of the Orient now roam the culture' (Said 1978: 285). Drawing upon the work of Said and Foucault, Stuart Hall reflects on these cultural dynamics in relation to representations: 'Said's discussion of Orientalism closely parallels Foucault's power/knowledge argument: a *discourse* produces, through different practices of *representation* (scholarship, exhibitions, literature, painting, etc.), a form of *racialized knowledge of the Other* (Orientalism) deeply implicated in the operations of *power* (imperialism)' (Hall 1997: 260, original emphasis). This opens up an understanding of the role that fashion – its material objects as well as fashion images – may play in the Western discursive production of its others, which I understand as a way of performing Orientalised concepts of the Other.

These dynamics of Orientalism are indispensable when trying to understand fashion's fascination for cultural otherness. As Clark argues, '[f]or the last 400 years, Western fashion has flirted with Orientalism as a source of reference and "inspiration" for a diversity of designs' (2009: 177). This was for instance evident in the 1990s, when John Galliano's collection for Christian Dior (A/W 1997-98) 'echoed an Orientalist theme that had appeared regularly on the Paris catwalks since about 1993' (Clark 2009: 178; Steele and Major 1999: 69) with models parading the runway like 'exoticized "China Dolls"' (Clark 2009: 178). John Galliano is often taken as an example of fashion's interest in 'exoticism', as he 'travels all over the world like a modern explorer' (Teunissen 2005: 19). In her discussion of fashion designers who eclectically combine 'cultures, continents and centuries', Caroline Evans also refers to Galliano, arguing that 'Galliano's neo-colonial fusions invoked images of empire and otherness from the displays of nineteenth-century world fairs and department stores. Like them, Galliano's fusions reduced non-European cultures to exotic spectacle' (Evans 2003: 29). Thus, Orientalism is still relevant to fashion today.

It is often argued that the textile trade marks the beginning of 'a typically Western view of the world', which emerged in parallel with Western industrial dominance (Niessen 2005: 157). The textile industry was 'at the core of the social, political and economic transformations' as well as 'at the heart of colonialism; and central to the consequent struggle for independence from colonial empires, as in the case of India' (Paulicelli and Clark 2009: 2). Moreover, '[i]ndisputably, textiles and dress were a part of the economic system that adventuring

created and colonialism sustained. [...] The West has tested Eastern materials and ideas in dress and has approved and immediately assimilated them' (Martin and Koda 1994: 11). These dynamics rooted in the textile trade are still relevant to the contemporary fashion industry. Clark places design strategies of contemporary fashion designers in a broader historical context by referring to Arjun Appadurai who theorised the 'cultural economy of distance' as being the 'driving force of merchants, trade, and commodities, especially of the luxury variety', since the sixteenth century (Appadurai 1996: 71; Clark 2009: 178). As Clark continues, she asserts that

> [i]n this process 'distance' connotes the cultural and economic capital of the consumer, who has both the taste and the money to know of and be able to purchase goods from faraway places. Such treasures are designed to signify their 'exotic' origins while being modified to suit the Western Orientalist gaze (Clark 2009: 178).

The interest in "exotic" objects and the Orientalist gaze are rooted in textile trade, yet are still present, albeit often implicitly, in contemporary fashion.

The eclectic incorporation of elements of other cultures and faraway countries into the brands Mac&Maggie and Cora Kemperman cannot be separated from this perspective. Explicit references to colonial pasts can be detected especially in the images and designs of Mac&Maggie. For instance, in the magazine depicting the Spring/Summer collection in 1986, a photograph of a couple wearing black and white pants and shirts, shot in India, is accompanied by the text: 'colonial black and white' (1986: 73, see fig. 6.13 > p. 220). In addition, the text describing the Spring/Summer collection of 1984 in the book *20 Seasons Mac&Maggie* (1986) explicitly refers to colonialism: 'Still classical forms from other parts of the world are more or less important. India, and the familiar Nehru suits and sarouels, but also with memories of the colonial uniform [...]' (1986: 49, see fig. 6.14 > p. 221). While this collection is, according to the text, also inspired by Japan, America, and Russia, these explicit colonial references are remarkable. Memories of the uniforms of colonial pasts are present in these collections, which is an expression of the way in which fashion performs cultural memory by actively 'transferring and migrating visual motifs from the past to the present' (Smelik 2011: 80). As Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik argue in *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* (2013), 'not only is memory shaped by media, but media are also shaped by memory' (2013: 10). Moreover, they argue that 'the medium itself also remembers' (2013: 11). From this perspective, the media of fashion – on both a material level and a representational level – thus remember these 'ghostlike' colonial memories, 'hovering between presence and absence, substance and insubstantiality' (Plate and Smelik 2013: 18). As cultural memories are continually 'contested, formed and re-formed time after time' (Plate and Smelik 2009: 6), fashion plays a pivotal role in the constant process of remaking cultural memories of the past (Smelik 2011: 81). In this case cultural memories of colonial pasts are explicitly performed and thus remade and renegotiated in Mac&Maggie's collections.

In contrast to actual historical colonialism and its social, economic and political oppression and exploitation, in contemporary fashion we can find signifiers of the *performance* of colonial attitudes and memories. As Mac&Maggie embraced clothing styles of the exotic Other, while acknowledging the colonial legacy of these practices, I argue that this brand is part of the tradition of Western fashion that has 'flirted with Orientalism' (Clark 2009: 177) by performing and commercialising colonial, neo-colonial and post-colonial tropes. In addition, the power of Western fashion is confirmed by the fact that the designers and stylists at Mac&Maggie were able to travel to a wide variety of different countries for each new season – thus celebrating a specific local clothing style one season, and perhaps implicitly 'discarding it as passé the next' (Polhemus 2005: 89) – as modern explorers operating as part of fashion's cultural imperialism. These dynamics are also rooted in the textile trade which instigated Western industrial dominance, which was at the heart of colonialism.

While these colonial references were significant to Mac&Maggie, the brand Cora Kemperman no longer explicitly refers to colonial times, yet still shows an interest in other cultures and local dress styles. Cora Kemperman expresses intercultural exchange in a playful and implicit way, as a continuous process of appropriating elements from diverse cultures, traditions and time periods. In Cora Kemperman's collections we can find images echoing, for instance, Japanese kimonos, Indian sarouels, embroidered suits of the 18th century, Moroccan shoes, African colourful bracelets, and Indian turbans. Its collections express a cultural dialogue comparable to other fashion designers who morph 'references and motifs from different periods and cultures into single fusions' (Evans 2003: 29).

By assembling clothing styles from a wide variety of cultural traditions and folklore, this brand also intertwines and juxtaposes different cultural histories and memories, creating playfully mixed new compositions. With regard to the intertwining of cultural memories, Michael Rothberg offers an interesting theoretical perspective as he proposes 'that we consider memory as *multidirectional*: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing' (2009: 3). As Rothberg continues, he argues that '[m]emory's anachronistic quality – its bringing together of now and then, here and there – is actually the source of its powerful creativity' (2009: 5). In its process of performing and mixing cultural memories, Cora Kemperman also brings together now and then, here and there. By so doing, Cora Kemperman also expresses the ways in which cultural memories are assimilated into fashion's capitalist dynamics and system of signification, and illustrates fashion's multidirectional character – constantly negotiating, cross-referencing, and borrowing diverse clothing styles which are inextricably connected to a wide variety of cultural memories.

Cora Kemperman enacts performances of otherness as performances of authenticity, as argued above, appropriating and integrating these other cultural and local traditions into its collections. The images of the collection 'Jump around the World' (S/S 2010) exemplify this mix as the clothes presented are inspired by Indian sarouels and turbans, and are inventively combined with, for instance, Moroccan shoes. Instead of focusing on the difference of the Other, Cora Kemperman here expresses a playful dialogue between different local traditions and ethnicities, which is a form of appropriation that contributes to the company's staging of a sense of authenticity. By so doing, the brand presents these multidirectional others as an integral part of its self as a Dutch brand, as part of Western

fashion dynamics. Here, the binary opposition between self and the Other, and between the West and the Orient, can no longer be maintained. Local clothing traditions become part of the global dynamics of fashion and are incorporated into a glocal Dutch fashion brand. Although Orientalism offers a significant deeper insight into fashion's contemporary fascination for otherness, at this point it is more constructive to think in terms of cultural hybridity (Bhabha 1990, 1994), as I will argue in the next section.

Cultural Hybridity

Both case studies show the contradictory dynamics of the ways in which fashion is othering non-Western clothing styles on the one hand, and appropriating them on the other hand. Others are incorporated into these brands, as part of the Dutch fashion industry, and consequently taken up into the dynamics of Western fashion. Fashion brands may participate in the discursive reproduction of national narratives of unity, disregarding its internal differences, and thus performing unified and solidified concepts of a national self. Nevertheless, I want this chapter to highlight the cultural diversity and otherness underlying these performances. The notion of cultural 'hybridity' as theorised by Homi Bhabha (1990, 1994) helps to do so.

In *Nation and Narration* (1990) Bhabha, following Benedict Anderson, stresses the ambivalence of the idea of a nation which he views as 'an agency of *ambivalent* narration that holds culture at it most productive position' (1990: 304, original emphasis). This ambivalence of the narratively constructed nation is related to the ways in which 'the "other" is never outside or beyond us', but instead 'emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse' (Bhabha 1990: 4). Bhabha asserts that national culture can never be unified or unitary, and neither can it 'simply be seen as "other" in relation to what is outside or beyond it' (1990: 4). Rather, as he argues, the issue of self/Other or inside/outside must be seen as a process of hybridity (1990: 4). He discusses structures of cultural liminality *within* the nation (1990: 299), which are *in-between* spaces, through which cultural and political meanings are negotiated (1990: 4).

As Barker points out, some have argued that the concept of hybridity 'implies the meeting or mixing of completely separate and homogenous cultural spheres' (2012: 265). However, '[e]ach category is always already a hybrid form. [...] Thus, hybridization is the mixing of that which is already a hybrid' (Ibid.: 265). Narrative constructions of nations thus arise from the internal hybridity of different cultural constituents, as the nation is 'a space that is *internally* marked by cultural difference and the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities, and tense cultural locations' (1990: 299, original emphasis). Although Bhabha's theory has been subject to criticism, he has theorised hybridity as a useful analytical tool to overcome the binary opposition between self and Other specifically in relation to colonial and post-colonial discourse – which helps to clarify the ways in which colonial pasts are inherent to hybrid national identities.[49]

49 Several scholars have debated the notion of 'hybridity'. See, for example, Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (1995); Katheryne Mitchell 'Different Diasporas and the Hype of Hybridity' (1997); Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood, *Debating Cultural Hybridity. Multicultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism* (1997)

As Bhabha claims in *The Location of Culture* (1994), 'the Western metropole must confront its post-colonial history, told by its influx of postwar migrants and refugees, as an indigenous or native narrative *internal to its national identity*' (1994: 9, original emphasis). From this perspective, post-colonial histories and contemporary debates on cultural diversity are thus an integral part *within* hybrid national cultures. These dynamics are crucial to understand the process of assimilating the Other into the self on different levels (e.g. the nation, the West, or fashion brands), which we can also detect in fashion. Hybrid forms of cultural otherness are internal to fashion brands that operate in a particular glocal context, as well as internal to fashion dynamics. I therefore propose to clarify the ways in which Dutch and other fashion brands incorporate and renegotiate diverse clothing styles, and perform post-colonial cultural memories attached to these styles and traditions, from the theoretical perspective of these processes of cultural hybridity.

Clothing – especially when produced elsewhere – materialises the cultural hybridity of global fashion dynamics, while fashion images can visually represent these dynamics. For instance, the assimilation of Indian chintz into Dutch regional wear, which became part of the shared imaginations and narratives of Dutchness, and subsequently of contemporary Dutch fashion through Oilily's use of chintz, demonstrates the way in which fashion expresses and contributes to the cultural hybridity internal to the Netherlands. As it operates in global flows, fashion is fundamentally characterised by intercultural exchange. A focus on the post-colonial notion of cultural hybridity to approach fashion thus demonstrates that the idea of national fashion, or of Western fashion – as a binary opposition to non-Western fashion – is untenable since fashion transgresses national boundaries and is necessarily characterised by a cultural hybridity.[50]

While fashion may perform national narratives of unity, fluid and hybrid cultural dynamics of diversity are always already simultaneously present at a deeper level. In *Hybrid Cultures* (2010) Ulrike Linder et al. point out the complexity of these dynamics:

> whereas colonial and traditional nationalist discourses on culture and identity, for obvious reasons, have often projected an image of cultures as essentially static, neatly bounded, mutually exclusive and hierarchized, cultural realities have always been much more complex, with multiplicity, border-crossing, border-permeability, intermixture, and dynamic change being the actual norm rather than an exception (Lindner et al. 2010: xv).

50 This argument pertains to fashion as a visual style and a system of signification. Evidently, one could argue that there is a strong Western-based design industry that focuses on the immaterial production of fashion (e.g. design, images, advertising, meanings, etc.), whereas the actual manufacturing of fashionable clothing is outsourced and located in non-Western countries – which could still render this distinction relevant. See the dissertation by my colleague Anja Köppchen, *Mind the Gap. Balancing design and global manufacturing in Dutch fashion* (2014), for an elaborate, socio-geographical discussion of the actual location of clothing manufacturing in relation to a Western design-based industry.

Lindner et al. emphasise that cultural boundaries are necessarily blurred due to their fundamental hybridity. This is particularly relevant to national identities in Europe 'which have been so profoundly challenged by increased migration and cultural diversification since the second half of the twentieth century' (Lindner et al. 2010: xix). Colonial and post-colonial histories are thus internal to narratives of national identities in the West, and nowadays cultural diversity is an important cause of the hybridity of European identities. This cultural hybridity is significant to the formation of concepts of a Dutch national self, which fashion – in its representations and through its material tools – can help to reproduce, expose and perform. It is also important to acknowledge the current political, economic and cultural interests of *performing* concepts of a national self, which we can also see reflected in contemporary fashion. At the same time, as the cases of Oilily and Mac&Maggie/Cora Kemperman show, fashion also expresses an interest in multidirectional cultural otherness, performing cultural memories of colonialism and post-colonialism, while discursively reproducing or playing with the cultural hybridity inherent to glocal "Dutchness".

Conclusion

In relation to the quest for a Dutch national identity it is essential to take into account the others *within* it and thus the cultural hybridity inherent to national cultures – especially in relation to the globalised context of fashion. The point that I want to emphasise in this chapter is that the dynamics underlying the urgency of creating unifying narratives of "Dutchness" cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration cultural otherness, cultural hybridity and internal differences. Moreover, I would argue that it is precisely the increased cultural hybridity – which is, crucially, *perceived* as otherness – within the Netherlands, that instigated the performance of unifying narratives and definition of inherently fluid national identities. The increased perception of internal differences *as* otherness – emphasising the *difference* of the Other and contrasting us vs. them – thus goes hand-in-hand with the self-created "need" to define our Dutch self. The notion of cultural hybridity helps to overcome the untenable binary, hierarchical opposition between self and the Other.

We must take into account the fundamental fluidity underlying fashion's performances of concepts of cultural otherness as well as its performances of concepts of a Dutch self. In these times of globalisation, these dynamics are often related to global flows of capitalism, which commodify fashion objects from a wide variety of local cultural traditions. Yet, fashion's fascination for otherness can also be traced back to the beginning of the global textile trade in the 17th century – which was at the core of Western industrial dominance, colonialism and the Western Orientalist gaze. This historical perspective on the reciprocal interplay between the 'Western metropole' (Bhabha 1994: 9) and other cultural traditions, symbols and commodities helps to scrutinise the cultural hybridity inherent to today's glocal cultures and global fashion dynamics. As the 'medium itself also remembers' (Plate and Smelik 2013: 11), the Orientalist gaze still echoes in the media of fashion that focus on otherness and cultural hybridity in design (on a material level) and in fashion images (on a representational level). This is an inextricable part of the cultural dynamics of a hybrid Dutch fashion identity in a globalised world.

fig. 6.1 Oilily (A/W 1993-94) cover magazine children

fig. 6.2 Oilily (A/W 1991-92, p. 23) magazine women

fig. 6.3 Oilily (A/W 1995-96, p. 23) magazine children

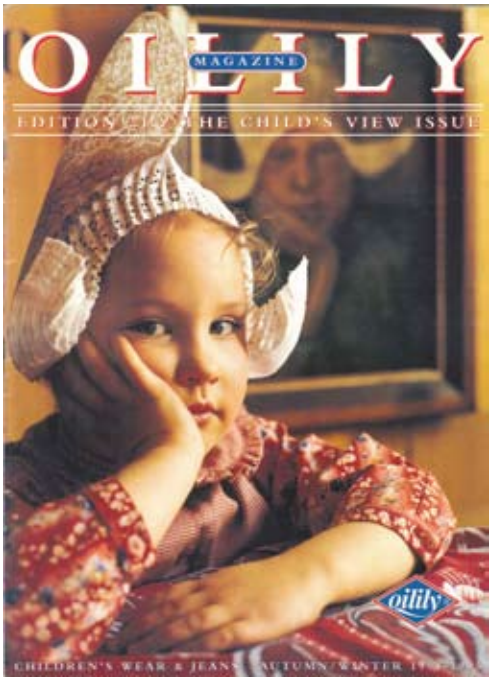

fig. 6.4 Oilily (A/W 1994-95) cover magazine children

fig. 6.5 Oilily (A/W 1994-95, p. 11) magazine children

fig. 6.6 Mac&Maggie (S/S 1986)

fig. 6.7 Mac&Maggie (S/S 1981) scan of *20 Seizoenen Mac&Maggie*

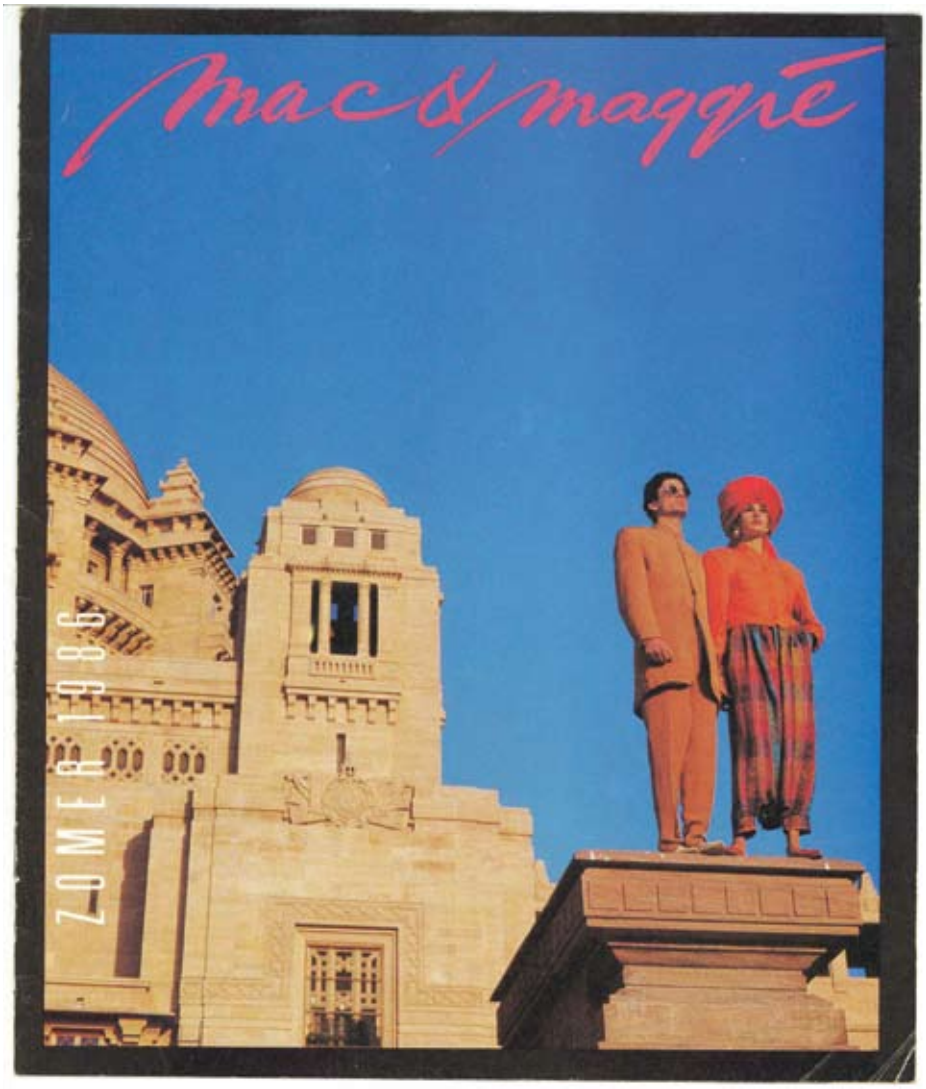

fig. 6.8 Mac&Maggie (S/S 1986)

fig. 6.9 Cora Kemperman (S/S 2007)

fig. 6.10 Cora Kemperman (S/S 2010)

fig. 6.11 Cora Kemperman (S/S 2010)

fig. 6.12 Cora Kemperman (S/S 2010)

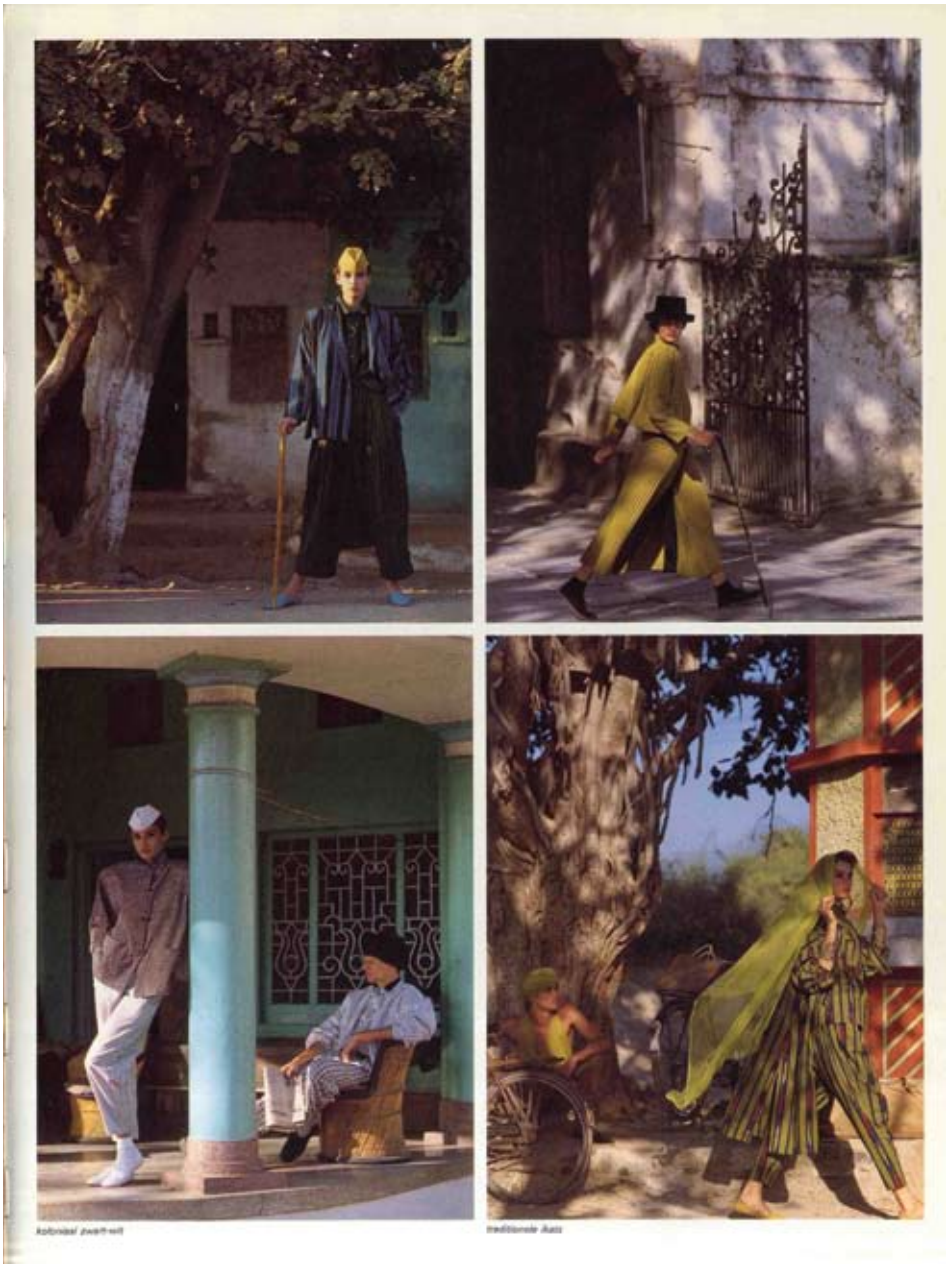

fig. 6.13 Mac&Maggie, 20 Seizoenen Mac&Maggie (p. 73)

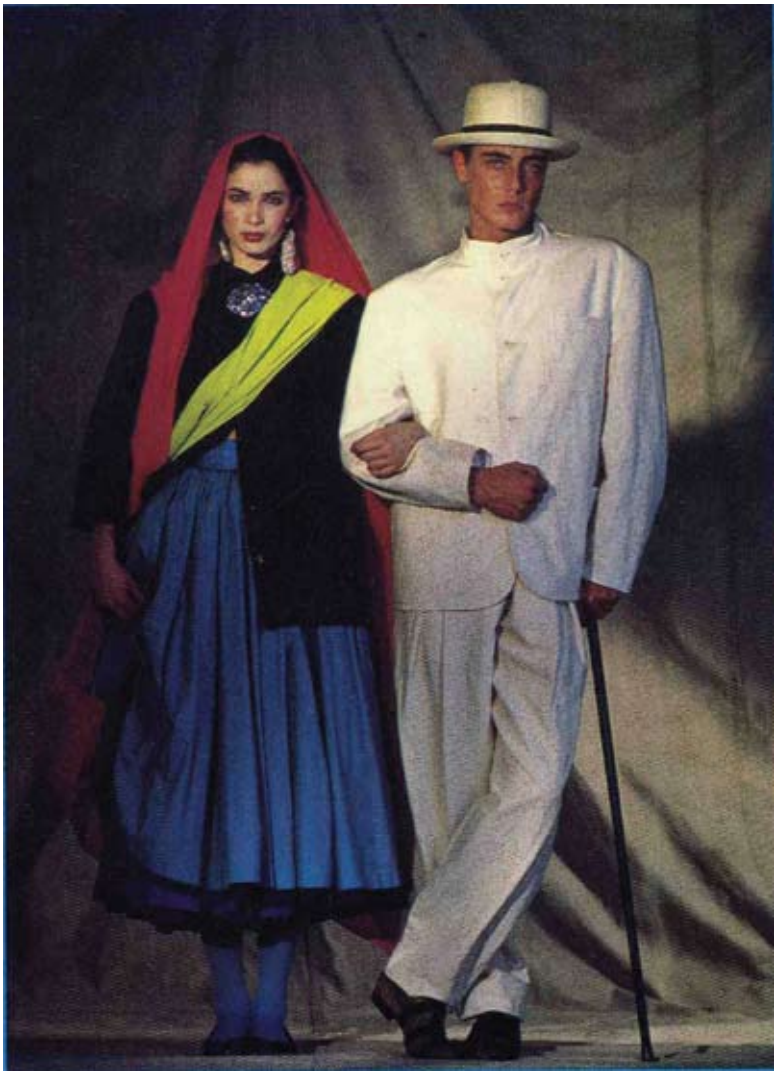

fig. 6.14 Mac&Maggie (S/S 1984)

Conclusion

In *More Than Meets the Eye* I have explored different dimensions of identity expressed in the representational realm of contemporary Dutch fashion. Starting from the idea that identity in fashion is a problematic notion, I have sought to challenge the prevailing interpretations of identity, searching for productive ways of gaining a deeper insight into identity and of reconceptualising its relationship to fashion and the clothed body. This required a critical assessment of prevailing linguistic and semiotic methodologies of reading identities and bodies in fashion discourse, while it also necessitated the exploration of additional methodological tools which could disentangle the complexities inherent to identity.

In this Conclusion, I will reflect on my findings in relation to my central aim and sub-aims and will present my answer to the central research question:

How can we reconceptualise the complex relationship between fashion, identity and the clothed body as it is expressed in the representational realm of contemporary Dutch fashion brands and media?

The research question is based on the idea that identity in the field of fashion is often conceptualised in terms of how it signifies socio-cultural categories such as gender, class, ethnicity or age. Contemporary fashion theory focuses on the discursive construction of identity through the consumption of clothing objects imbued with signs, codes and meanings of the fashion system. Postmodern cultural theory in particular has led to an understanding of identity as a never-ending game of changeable identities within fashion as a realm of self-referential signs. The dominant thread is thus to define identity in relation to fashion as a semiotic, discursive, representational system, often reducing identity to outer appearance, a signifying surface and to a mere image. This is also a result of the ways in which fashion presents itself through the dominant discourse of media and visual communication. However, as there is more to fashion than meets the eye, there is an urgency to reconceptualise and develop a more elaborate understanding of the dynamics of identity within fashion and to bring back embodiment and materiality to fashion's visual, representational domain.

I aimed to do so by exploring different dimensions of identity based on my analysis of a selection of Dutch fashion brands and fashion-related media as case studies. I investigated two of the most well-known contemporary Dutch fashion designers working in an international context: (1) lingerie designer Marlies Dekkers; and (2) the design duo Viktor&Rolf. I also studied two Dutch fashion firms which have been in existence for at least 30 years: (3) Oilily, especially known for its children's wear; and (4) the companies Mac&Maggie and Cora Kemperman. Moreover, I analysed a selection of fashion media that reflect on the dynamics of identity: the 'Fashion According to Aynouk Tan' columns (April 2009 until March 2011) in the weekly magazine supplement of *NRC*, a leading Dutch newspaper; and a selection of fashion images and photographic series shot by Dutch photographers such as Inez van Lamsweerde and Erwin Olaf, who visually play with identity and the body in relation to fashion.

Here, based on my analysis of the case studies, I will first present my findings that pertain to the critical argument of my dissertation on the reconceptualisation of the notion of identity and its intricate relationship to fashion and the clothed body. While offering insight into how specific Dutch fashion brands and media express and play with identity, these findings also enable the further development of scholarly work regarding how fashion and dressing function in the construction and performance of identity, at an individual, social and national level. My case studies have illustrated the importance of reconceptualising identity in terms of its fluid, performative, embodied, material and culturally hybrid dimensions. As each chapter functions as a building block for developing a more elaborate understanding of identity, I will summarise and reflect on the most important findings chapter by chapter. This will help to explain the ways in which each chapter adds another dimension to my reconceptualisation of identity. I will expand on these different dimensions and discuss the ways in which they are interrelated in order to develop an integrated answer to my research question.

Secondly, I will address the methodological implications of my research, reflecting on which methodologies are productive when studying the relationship between fashion, identity and the clothed body, and challenging a mere focus on the semiotic, discursive, representational facets of fashion. I will thus discuss my meta-critical argument for a move towards methodologies that focus more on embodiment and materiality. In my view, the theoretical discourses on 'new materialism' offer useful analytical and conceptual tools for analysing the interrelationships between signifying representations, discourse, embodiment and materiality. The methodological insights of my research have been crucial to my reconceptualisation of identity, and are at the same time the most important contribution of this dissertation to fashion theory and future fashion research. While reflecting on my methodological contribution to fashion studies, I will thus simultaneously offer suggestions for possible future directions for fashion studies and argue the importance of a new materialist approach.

Reconceptualising the Relationship between Fashion, Identity and the Clothed Body

The selected case studies delivered insights that allowed for the discussion of various dimensions of identity. Throughout my dissertation I have aimed to unravel these complexities inherent to the notion of identity by highlighting a different dimension – particularly relevant to the case study – in each subsequent chapter. Nevertheless, these dimensions should be understood in relation to each other. The selected case studies highlighted the following dynamics of identity:

- the fluidity of specific concepts of the self (Dutch fashion photography);
- the performative formation and expression of concepts of the self and the performative power of the clothed body (Aynouk Tan);

- the interconnection between concepts of the self and the physical body, and the ways in which embodied experiences affect the performance of concepts of the self (Marlies Dekkers);

- the material basis of concepts of the self and the inextricable intertwinement between material, semiotic and social flows (Viktor&Rolf);

- the fluidity and cultural hybridity inherent to performances of national identity through fashion objects and representations (Oilily and Mac&Maggie/Cora Kemperman).

These dimensions play an important part in my reconceptualisation of the relationship between fashion, identity and the clothed body. In order to answer my main research question, I will now discuss my findings and theoretical arguments by reflecting on the case studies and their respective approaches. I will do so chapter by chapter, discussing the various dimensions of identity while exploring the interrelationships between them. This helps to provide an understanding of how each chapter contributes to building a more elaborate – and increasingly new materialist – theoretical interpretation of identity. As such, this offers insight into the development of my integrated answer to the central research question, which I will present towards the end of this Conclusion.

Fluid Concepts of the Self

Chapter 2 focused on the fluidity of identities and bodies as expressed in the fashion images and photographic series of Dutch photographers. I have analysed the work of several internationally renowned Dutch photographers, such as Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin, Erwin Olaf and Ari Versluis and Ellie Uyttenbroek, as well as the work of lesser-known Dutch photographers, such as Freudenthal/Verhagen, Marcel van der Vlugt, Edland Man and Bart Hess. Moving in between commercial, editorial and artistic fashion photography, these photographers all experiment, albeit in different ways, with concepts of the self, raising questions about identity, the body and fashion. My analysis of their work revealed a double dynamics of identity. On the one hand, specific photographic series illustrate how the signifying surfaces of clothing can reduce identity to fixed and codified concepts. For example, this is clearly expressed in the *Exactitudes* project by Ari Versluis and Ellie Uyttenbroek, who visualise the power of the fashion system and of clothing to codify social groups based on shared dress codes and to construct and fixate specific concepts of the self. On the other hand, fashion photography demonstrates that there are infinite possibilities to undo these seemingly fixed, codified concepts and to play with their fluidity within the representational realm of fashion.

In order to conceptualise these dynamics, I used a synthesis of Bauman's (1991, 2000, 2011) and Lipovetsky's (1994, 2005) sociological perspectives on the fluidity of identity and Neisser's psychological approach to the 'conceptual self' (1988). The conceptual self consists of numerous, socially formed concepts of the self that pertain to the roles we play in society, the concepts of our appearance and physical bodies, or the traits we assign to ourselves and other people. Moreover, as the conceptual self is relational and always negotiated within a socio-cultural context, this analytical tool proved useful in approaching the formation of

fluid identities by means of clothes within the fashion system. Crucially, this approach has opened up the possibility to think in terms of the fluidity of *specific concepts of the self,* instead of the fluidity of every aspect of identity or of each facet of the self. As I have argued, it is precisely *because* of an underlying fluidity of specific concepts of the self that clothing has the power to shape and temporarily freeze those concepts. Using this approach has helped to show that, in fashion representations, photographers experiment only with specific visible concepts of the self, playing with the dynamics of specific concepts and demonstrating how clothing can temporarily solidify specific fluid parts of the conceptual self.

My analysis has also shown how the face in particular plays a crucial role in fixating concepts of the self. This is expressed in a selection of photographs by Edland Man, for instance, in which he plays with a literal liquidity and fluidity of (concepts of) the body and with the face as a signifier of identity. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of the 'face' (1987) offered important insights into how clothing objects can be 'facialised', i.e. taken up into a system of signification and subjectification. Clothes thus serve as visual sur-*faces* that can subjectify individuals and codify their clothed bodies within the context of fashion and commodification. As I have argued, clothed bodies can also become 'faceless' in a process of desubjectification which breaks with the face as the centre of signification. In this sense, the representational realm of fashion also functions as an imaginary realm that produces a fluidity of specific concepts of the self, including concepts of the body. Examples of this can be seen in the work of Bart Hess, who experiments with the fluid boundaries between the human body and material objects in an alienating way.

Chapter 2 highlighted the ways in which fashion photographers play with specific visible concepts of the self and with visual surfaces of the body, operating at the level of the conceptual self. A focus on the fluid dynamics of identity is a first step towards moving beyond the dominant semiotic and linguistic methodologies of reading identities merely in terms of what they mean. It is also a first step towards the performative and embodied dimensions of identity. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, 'Creative Performances', it is precisely the fluidity of concepts of the self that allows them to be performed and come into being *through* embodied performative practices of wearing clothes. This points out the interrelationship between the fluid and the performative dimensions of identity, which is essential to my development of a more elaborate notion of identity in the field of fashion.

Creative Performances

My analysis of the columns and accompanying self-presentational photographs of Dutch fashion journalist Aynouk Tan, as well as the interview I conducted with her, underlined the importance of the notion of 'performance' for my reconceptualisation of the relationship between fashion, identity and the clothed body. The notion of performance is generally conceived as an *artistic, theatrical on-stage performance* (e.g. Goldberg 1979; Stern and Henderson 1993; Auslander 1999; Jones 1995, 2000; Carlson 2004), and as a *performance of identity in daily life* (e.g. Butler 1990, 1993; Goffman 1959). As my analysis has shown, both levels of performance are enacted in Tan's columns. On the one hand, Tan's performances demonstrate the blurring boundaries between fashion and the artistic dimension of performance. On the other hand, Tan's theatrical performances offer

insight into the everyday practice of dressing *as* a performance of identity which is implicitly enacted daily in the public sphere. Therefore, I have argued that Tan's performances in the fashion arena need to be theorised at the intersection of staged theatrical performances and embodied identity performances in daily life. In this sense, she operates in the realm of fashion's 'theatrical sociality' (Baudrillard 1976). Baudrillard's view of fashion as a self-referential game of signification helps to theorise how Tan performs specific concepts of the self within fashion's theatrical sociality, operating in between theatrical performances and performances of socio-cultural identity.

At the same time, however, this philosophical perspective dismisses the actual embodied and material basis of the clothed body, which required additional theoretical tools. Especially Elena del Río's notion of 'affective performances' (2008) proved productive as it puts even more emphasis on the affective, creative and performative power of actual, living bodies – aiming to 'shift the emphasis from the organized body, slave to morality and representation, to the ethical and creative potential of the expressive body' (Del Río 2008: 16). As I have argued, Del Río offers the conceptual tools for studying the affective-performative qualities of the body in the field of fashion. This has helped me to understand how Tan presents fashion as an imaginary realm full of creative potential in which clothing – the clothed and adorned body – can exert the affective-performative power to explore, transform and experiment with numerous fluid concepts of the self. Moreover, I have argued that Del Río's approach enables a move beyond a semiotic, discursive and representational approach to the identity performances of clothed bodies in the field of fashion. My synthetic approach to performance in that chapter led to theoretical insights on the interconnection between theatrical performances and identity performances, while drawing more attention to the creative, affective and performative power of the clothed body.

Chapter 3 adds another dimension to my interpretation of fluid concepts of the self in Chapter 2, as it offers a deeper insight into the performative constitution of these concepts within the realm of fashion. This shows the relationship between the fluidity and performance of identity. Here I want to again point out the double dynamics of identity in relation to the notion of performance. On the one hand, individuals can perform codified concepts and continuously reiterate them through the embodied practice of dressing. In doing so, concepts of the self are performatively constituted and solidified which coincides with a process of the clothed body's facialisation, i.e. subjectifying and signifying encoded identities within the socio-cultural, political and economic structures of the fashion system. On the other hand, individuals – as Tan has shown in her weekly columns and photographs – have the expressive agency and the affective-performative power to transform and undo concepts of the self by playing with their fluidity and with the free-floating non-signifying signs within the realm of fashion. This double dynamic can pertain to performances of concepts of the self within fashion representations as well as through embodied practices of wearing clothes in daily life. Performance is a crucial notion as it helps us to understand that performative practices are *embodied* practices. It is this focus on embodiment in relation to performances of concepts of the self that I further explored in Chapter 4, 'Embodied Experiences'.

Embodied Experiences

Based on my analysis of the case of Dutch lingerie designer Marlies Dekkers, Chapter 4 concentrated on the ways in which specific concepts of the self are closely connected to the body and to embodied experiences of wearing clothes. I approached the body in two ways: (1) as visually represented in Dekkers' fashion photography and advertising campaigns; and (2) as a corporeal reality in everyday life by conducting in-depth interviews with a selection of loyal customers of the brand to learn more about their actual, subjective embodied experiences of wearing the lingerie. My analysis and interviews revealed the importance of exploring the relationship between the wearers' embodied experiences and the specific kind of femininity that the Dekkers brand visually stages.

Drawing upon (post-)feminist theory (e.g. Levy 2005; Genz 2006; Gill 2007; Genz and Brabon 2009; McRobbie 2009; Walter 2010), I have argued that Dekkers' visualisation of the female body dressed in lingerie expresses a post-feminist femininity, appealing to the consumers' imagination of embodying this post-feminist experience and performing post-feminist concepts of the self when wearing the lingerie. The interviews that I conducted with female wearers allowed me to investigate the interplay between the actual, subjective embodied experiences and the representations and experiences of post-feminism staged by the Dekkers brand. My approach to the embodied experiences of the wearers was informed by two areas of focus: (1) a phenomenological view on subjective embodied experiences, and (2) a perspective on how consumers perform when using experientialised goods by specific brands in the context of the contemporary 'experience economy' (Pine and Gilmore 1999). Using this approach to interpret the results of my interviews has helped me to understand that the material object of lingerie designed by Marlies Dekkers is experientialised and heightens the wearer's awareness of their bodily self and experience of femininity. Moreover, the concepts and experiences of post-feminist femininity staged by the brand (e.g. in the fashion photography) play a part in the discursive constitution of embodied experiences as well as the wearers' performative expressions.

The feminist theory of fashion developed by Ilya Parkins (2008), who draws upon the new materialist work of Karen Barad (1996, 2003), has been helpful to the interpretation of my findings. As I have argued, her theoretical approach offered insights into the ways in which, in the case of Marlies Dekkers, the phenomenological experience of post-feminist femininity is produced through the interplay between material (i.e. the material object of lingerie and the physical female body) and discursive factors (i.e. the staged meanings and experiences of post-feminism in Dekkers' fashion images). For the reconceptualisation of the relationship between fashion, identity and the clothed body, it is essential to take into account the embodied experiences of wearing clothes, also in relation to what is expressed in fashion representations. The body should not merely be understood in terms of its epidermis communicating identity since this reduces identity to outer appearance or to a mere (visual) image. Rather, it is important to recognise that bodily experiences of being dressed with the material tools of fashion also affect one's sense of self and one's performances of concepts of the self. This illustrates the interrelation between the embodied and performative dimensions of identity.

The formation of specific fluid concepts of the self through fashion's material tools dressing

the physical body is a performative and embodied process. Discursive systems and material objects of clothing affect both one's experience of the self and performance of identity in relation to others. While operating within the socio-cultural, economic and political structures of the fashion system, consumers' clothed bodies can be facialised and subjectified when they embody and perform commercialised concepts of the self while using experientialised products. As argued in Chapter 3, 'Creative Performances', individuals can also exert the performative power to play with the expressions of their clothed bodies, transforming fashioned concepts of the self through embodied practices of dressing. However, my analysis has demonstrated that most of Dekkers' loyal customers embody and perform the experiences staged by the brand, fashioning their bodies with the paradoxical meanings and values of post-feminism. My approach helps us to understand that Dekkers' lingerie is thus not only a visual expression of post-feminist femininity, but that wearing the material object of lingerie on the phenomenal body also affects the wearer's subjective experience and thus how they act, feel and perform. It is this emphasis on the physical body and on the mutuality of matter and discourse that corresponds to my argument on the intertwinement between material, semiotic and social flows in Chapter 5, 'Towards a New Materialist Aesthetics'.

Towards a New Materialist Aesthetics

My analysis of Viktor&Rolf's fashion shows demonstrated how they play with the (im) materiality of fashion and explore the physicality of the clothed body on stage. Intended as criticism of the fashion system, their fashion shows set out to liberate the clothed body and fashion's materiality from the domain of representation and signification. While their work is conceived as artistic and conceptual, their artistic ideas and concepts are interrelated to the matter – the fashioned bodies and the garments – that expresses them. Since their fashion practices cannot be fully grasped with the existing vocabulary in fashion studies, they inspire and require an alternative, more material, reading. Therefore, I have built upon the work of Deleuze and Guattari, which offers analytical and conceptual tools for developing fashion theory along new lines, and have moved beyond the dominant representational and semiotic approaches in contemporary fashion studies (Smelik 2014). Moreover, I have drawn upon Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy as it has been used in the context of aesthetics (e.g. O'Sullivan 2006) and as it has become part of the theoretical discourse on 'new materialism' (e.g. Coole and Frost 2010; Bennett and Joyce 2010; Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012; Barrett and Bolt 2013; Smelik 2014). A new materialist aesthetics draws more attention to the actual *materiality* of matter, and can be viewed as a 'relationship "between" – between the human and non-human, the material and immaterial, the social and physical' (Bolt 2013: 6). Meanwhile, a new materialist approach to fashion allows us to take into account the living, fashioned bodies and the materiality of fashion objects – also as the material basis of identity.

This approach helped to theorise the ways in which Viktor&Rolf explore fashion's asignifying potential, which opens up ways for rethinking fashion in terms of material connections and transformative encounters, thus enabling a move towards a new materialist interpretation of fashion. Drawing upon the notion of 'encounter' (see e.g. Massumi 1992, O'Sullivan 2006), I argued that we can rethink fashion as a process of endless, transformative encounters between, for instance, fabrics, textiles, shapes, patterns, the hands and tools of

the designers and pattern cutters, or the bodies of the wearers. Moreover, I have highlighted the transformational element of Viktor&Rolf's work as they regularly play with fashion as a '*theatre* of metamorphoses and permutations', which Deleuze ascribed to the role of modern art in *Difference and Repetition* (1994: 56), challenging systems of representation and signification. I have suggested that Deleuze and Guattari's notion of transformational 'assemblages' is a productive next step in rethinking fashion in terms of encounters and connections. For example, in Viktor&Rolf's show *Glamour Factory* we see transformational assemblages performed and visualised on stage as they are continuously dressing and undressing the models, letting different clothes encounter each other as well as the models' bodies, thus producing new momentary constellations. These on-stage performances inspire a different way of conceiving, in a broader sense, what happens whenever physical bodies encounter material pieces of cloth within the field of fashion. As I have argued, this enables the relationship between fashion, identity and the clothed body to be reconceptualised in terms of transformational assemblages made up of 'semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 22-23, cited in: Bennett and Joyce 2010: 5). It is within these entwined semiotic, material and social flows that concepts of the self, as part of the conceptual self (i.e. identity), are formed, performed or transformed.

Hence Chapter 5 concentrated on the material basis – i.e. fashion objects and the bodily self – of fashioned concepts of the self. The bodily self, and its experiential bodily matter, is inextricably interrelated to the embodied dimension of identity, as theorised in Chapter 4, 'Embodied Experiences'. The material objects of fashion and the bodily self are simultaneously the material basis of the embodied performance of concepts of the self, which emphasises the interconnection between the performative, embodied and material dimensions of identity. A Deleuzean and new materialist approach can greatly contribute to fashion being regarded as a materialist aesthetics, also in relation to fashion as a realm of representation and signification. This approach thus helps to bring back embodiment and materiality into fashion's visual, representational domain, and vice versa – which is crucial to a new materialist reconceptualisation of the dynamics of identity in the field of fashion.

Dutch Hybridity

Whereas I focused on embodiment and materiality in the preceding chapters, in 'Dutch Hybridity' I explicitly investigated the topic of national identity based on my visual analysis of two case studies: (1) the children's wear label Oilily and (2) the brands Mac&Maggie and Cora Kemperman. I approached these case studies by using (post-)colonial studies and performance theory, which I related to the globalised context in which fashion operates.

Drawing upon the work of several fashion theorists who have productively explored the ways in which fashion can play a central role in shaping the identities of nations in the context of economic and cultural globalisation, I treated the concept of 'national identity' as a cultural, symbolic and imaginary construction (e.g. Teunissen 2005, 2011; Goodrum 2005; Paulicelli and Clark 2009; Craik 2009; Feitsma 2014). More specifically, I approached the notion of national identity as developed by Stuart Hall (2002), who draws on Benedict Anderson's notion of 'imagined communities' (1983), and highlights the discursive production of the meanings and imaginations of national identities *through*

objects and *within* representations (2002: 74). I suggested that Hall's approach to this construction of (Dutch) national identity could be conceptualised in terms of a *performance* of national identity. In a similar vein, I extended my conceptualisation of a *fluid conceptual self* in Chapter 2 to theorise national identity. This offered insight into how the performance of national identity in fashion objects and images can be conceived as a solidification of specific fluid concepts as part of a Dutch national conceptual self.

My visual analysis of Oilily and Mac&Maggie/Cora Kemperman revealed that the current interest of Western fashion countries in their national roots cannot be separated from a fascination for cultural 'otherness' and for 'other' local traditions. Both case studies show the contradictory dynamics of the ways in which fashion is 'othering' non-Western clothing styles yet also appropriating them. These dynamics of assimilation operate on several levels: (1) on the level of brands, (2) on a national level, and (3) on the level of Western fashion dynamics. My integration of post-colonial theory with art-historical and anthropological perspectives within the discourse of fashion has illustrated that fashion has a long history of assimilating 'the Other' into the self. This can be traced back to colonial times in which Western trading companies were travelling around the world, importing products and non-Western clothing styles from the Orient (see e.g. Niessen 2005; Teunissen 2005; Paulicelli and Clark 2009). In contemporary fashion, these dynamics can best be understood in terms of a cultural 'hybridity' (Bhabha 1990, 1994). For example, Cora Kemperman playfully appropriates a wide variety of cultures, traditions and time periods. Cora Kemperman's collections echoes, for instance, Japanese kimonos, Indian sarouels, embroidered 18th-century suits, Moroccan shoes, colourful African bracelets and Indian turbans. As fashion operates in global flows of capitalism, it is fundamentally characterised by intercultural exchange. My focus on the post-colonial notion of cultural 'hybridity' to approach fashion demonstrated that the idea of 'national fashion', or of 'Western fashion' – as a binary opposition to non-Western fashion – is untenable since fashion transgresses national boundaries and is characterised by a cultural fluidity and hybridity.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the current political, economic and cultural interests in *performing* national identity which are also reflected in contemporary fashion. There are interesting examples of Dutch fashion brands and designers who also perform national identity – i.e. specific clichéd concepts of a national self – such as Viktor&Rolf's presentation of high-heeled clogs (A/W 2007-08). Using a synthesis of post-colonial studies and performance theory enabled me to conceptualise the hybrid cultural dynamics underlying contemporary performances of concepts of the national self. The double dynamics of identity, as theorised in Chapters 2 and 3, also pertains to performances of national identity. On the one hand, commodified signs, representations and objects of fashion can perform rather encoded concepts of the self and of the Other. On the other hand, however, as the case studies discussed in 'Dutch Hybridity' show, fashion brands like Cora Kemperman also play with the fluidity and cultural hybridity underlying national identities by assembling and reinterpreting different cultural traditions and folklore. While this can reveal the cultural dynamics of hybridity inherent to national identities by mobilising and undoing performances of the fixed homogeneous concepts of a national self, the eclectic incorporation of cultural otherness into Dutch fashion brands is also problematic. Post-

colonial theory helps us to take a critical stance towards the ways in which the Orientalist gaze is often still present, and also commercialised, in contemporary fashion. When reconceptualising the relationship between fashion and national identity, it is important to take into account the hybrid cultural context of globalised fashion dynamics, in relation to which performances of fashioned concepts of the national self are defined.

Interrelationships between the Dimensions of Identity: An Integrated Answer

My theoretical arguments and findings, as presented in each chapter, contribute to the further theoretical development of the fluid, performative, embodied, material and culturally hybrid dimensions of identity, thereby challenging and simultaneously adding important dimensions to the prevailing view of identity in the field of fashion. While each case study has offered insight into the complexities of one particular dimension of identity, all of those dimensions should ideally be understood in relation to each other. In my view, the theoretical insights I have developed by analysing the case studies – especially with regard to individual and social identity – build upon each other and lead to theoretical dialogues in various ways. This in turn has led to the integrated answer to my central research question.

Based on my findings with regard to individual and social identity, I propose to reconceptualise the complex relationship between fashion, identity and the clothed body in terms of assemblages made up of semiotic, material and social flows. In other words, in the field of fashion, fluid concepts of the self operate within an entwinement of semiotic (i.e. signs and meanings of the fashion system), material (i.e. the matter of the bodily self and of clothing objects) and social flows (i.e. a socio-cultural context). As I have argued in Chapter 5, 'Towards a New Materialist Aesthetics', it is within this entwinement that concepts of the self can be formed, performed or transformed through material objects of fashion which dress the embodied subject. When a physical body (an assemblage in itself) encounters a material piece of cloth (another assemblage), different elements meet, form relationships, make connections, and create new assemblages in which social and semiotic flows are also intertwined. It is in this process that concepts of the self can temporarily come into being or become fluid. As material clothing objects are intricately linked to the discursive realm of fashion, they are continuously invested with numerous semiotic meanings, codes and signs that circulate within the socio-cultural, economic and political structures of the fashion system. When the physical body is dressed with pieces of cloth – or rather fashionable commodities – within a socio-cultural context, the clothed body will be facialised, and thus becomes part of a system of subjectification and signification. This is when semiotic, material and social flows meet and, crucially, when concepts of the self are (per)formed, embodied and materialised. At the same time, as I have argued in Chapter 5, concepts of the self can also be transformed since these assemblages of social, material and social flows are intrinsically transformational.

I thus propose a new materialist vocabulary to reconceptualise the relationship between fashion, identity and the clothed body. As there is more to fashion than meets the eye, this helps us to move beyond an understanding of identity in terms of its semiotic, representational and discursive facets which reduce it to a mere image, outer appearance or a signifying surface. Moreover, this does more justice to the complexities of identity and

allows us to take into account the bodily matter of embodied subjects and their experiential, living clothed bodies as well as the matter of clothing objects. While giving special attention to matter, new materialism allows for the study of matter and meaning in their entanglement (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012: 91). It is in this sense that the new materialist discourse enables to theorise the ways in which, in the context of fashion, concepts of the self are always material and immaterial, and social and physical. For example, as the case of Marlies Dekkers illustrates, post-feminist concepts of the self are materialised in Dekkers' brand of lingerie, yet at the same time the lingerie is invested with immaterial meanings and values of post-feminism. When wearing the lingerie on their corporeal body, the consumer physically embodies these post-feminist concepts which are simultaneously socially formed in relation to the gaze of others. The Marlies Dekkers case also contributes to an understanding that performances of concepts of the self are inextricably linked to one's subjective embodied experiences of wearing clothes, which are also mutually affected by the materiality of clothing objects and fashion discourse in the context of the contemporary experience economy.

Throughout this dissertation I have observed a double dynamic of identity: the formation or temporary fixation of concepts of the self, and the process of undoing these inherently fluid concepts. On the one hand, one can perform concepts of the self by solidifying specific concepts and facialising the clothed body. On the other hand, as the Aynouk Tan case demonstrated, one's clothed body also has the expressive agency, affective qualities and performative power to transform concepts of the self and to play with their fluidity within fashion as a realm of free-floating, non-signifying signs. This double dynamic must be understood in relation to the ways in which assemblages made up of semiotic, material and social flows operate in a constant process of transformation: continuously moving, changing, assembling, dissembling and reassembling, and encountering other assemblages. It is this process that we have quite literally seen visualised and performed on stage in Viktor&Rolf's fashion shows which, in a broader sense, have offered insight into what happens when physical bodies encounter material pieces of cloth. While clothed bodies can become facialised, the semiotic, material and social flows can at the same time always form new relationships with each other, and there are potential flows moving towards 'the realms of the asignifying, asubjective, and faceless' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 187). The ways in which clothed bodies can become faceless and desubjectified have literally been visualised in a photographic series by Erwin Olaf, which I discussed in Chapter 2, 'Fluid Concepts of the Self'. As the representational, imaginary realm of fashion is free from the limitations of the corporeal body, there are more possibilities in fashion photography than in everyday life to move towards the realms of the asignifying, asubjective and faceless. Yet, as shown in the Aynouk Tan case, the embodied and performative practice of wearing clothes can also play an important part in processes of undoing and liquefying specific concepts of the self.

There are numerous possible connections to be made between material, social and semiotic flows, which can either contribute to the temporary formation of concepts of the self or to playing with the fluidity of these concepts. With this conceptualisation, I have taken a first step towards highlighting the complexities of the interrelationships between different dimensions of individual and social identity, using conceptual and analytical tools of new materialism to theorise these dynamics. This has important methodological implications.

Methodological Reflections and Future Research

Whereas the integrated answer to my research question is based on the interrelationships between the fluid, performative, embodied and material dimensions of concepts of the self in the field of fashion, further research is needed to substantiate the relationships between all of the different dimensions of identity discussed in my dissertation. For example, I have not investigated the cultural hybridity inherent to national identity in relation to embodied performances. Moreover, my analysis is based on cases in the field of Dutch fashion, yet my findings regarding the relationship between fashion, identity and the clothed body are evidently not limited by national boundaries. Future research could focus on other international case studies to further investigate the fluid, performative, embodied, material and culturally hybrid dimensions of identity. Although these dimensions are not necessarily exhaustive, my research has offered conceptual and methodological insights that make an important contribution to fashion theory and to future fashion research.

While fashion is evidently also a discursive realm focused on representation, my analysis demonstrated the importance of highlighting the relationships between fashion's representations and significations on the one hand, and embodiment, embodied experiences of wearing clothes, the material basis of concepts of the self and the materiality of clothing objects on the other. Throughout this dissertation, I have therefore challenged the prevailing linguistic and semiotic methodologies of reading bodies and identities in the field of fashion, searching for methodologies that would facilitate taking into account the interrelationships between signifying representations, embodiment and materiality. It was precisely my focus on the representational realm of fashion that underlined the urgency of restoring the affective, performative qualities of the embodied subject – especially in relation to visual media – as well as the importance of developing theoretical frameworks which offer analytical tools to acknowledge and conceptualise the dynamics underlying identity in the field of fashion.

Although I recognise the relevance of understanding fashion, and especially its representational realm, as a system of signification (Barthes (1967), this dissertation highlights the importance of an interdisciplinary approach that builds upon discursive and semiotic methodologies and incorporates the bodily and material dimensions of clothing to develop a more nuanced and elaborate notion of identity. Thus, I echo the criticism of other scholars that fashion is often reduced to its significations and representations instead of recognising the importance of discussing fashion in terms of 'embodiment' and 'sensorial experiences', and in terms of its materiality (e.g. Entwistle 2000; Sweetman 2003; Smelik 2007, 2014; Woodward 2007; Negrin 2013; Lehmann 2013). As a methodological contribution to fashion studies, I have particularly argued for the importance of a new materialist approach (see e.g. Parkins 2008; Coole and Frost 2010; Bennett and Joyce 2010; Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012; Barrett and Bolt 2013; Smelik 2014). As part of such an approach, it is essential to foreground the expressive agency and the affective-performative power of the actual living (clothed) body (e.g. Del Río 2008), and to focus on the experiential, sensorial, phenomenal body in relation to visual culture and fashion (e.g. Entwistle 2000; Marks 2000, 2002; Entwistle and Wilson 2003; Sweetman 2003;

Sobchack 2004; Woodward 2007; Smelik 2007). A new materialist approach thus allows various facets of fashion's materiality – i .e. human matter (physical, lived, experiential bodies) and non-human matter (fashion objects) – as well as the interconnection between matter and meaning to be taken into account. In my view, fashion urgently needs a new materialist vocabulary.

The phenomenological, Deleuzean and new materialist approaches that I have highlighted in *More Than Meets the Eye* hold great potential for future research in the field of fashion. As matter and meaning, matter and discourse, and the material and immaterial are entwined, I want to emphasise the importance of the interplay between various theoretical perspectives. I thus call for interdisciplinary research methodologies in fashion research. There is a rising tendency to develop a new relationship with the fashion system and clothing objects that focuses much more on embodiment, experience and materiality. This is visible in academic discourse as well as in the field of fashion itself, such as in the fashion practices of Viktor&Rolf or the Marlies Dekkers lingerie brand, for instance. In contrast to the prevailing view of fashion as a self-referential system of images, representations, immaterial codes, values and signs, I underline the importance of this recent development to revalue the bodily, experiential and material dimensions of fashion and clothing. The theoretical discourse on new materialism offers additional, valuable conceptual and analytical tools to help future fashion research to move towards a renewed focus on embodiment and materiality in relation to fashion's representations and significations.

More Than Meets the Eye

In this dissertation, I have aimed to highlight the importance of recognising the complexities of how individuals interact with fashion and clothing in contemporary society. Fashion is much more than an ephemeral, superficial phenomenon. It is an important economic, political and socio-cultural phenomenon traversing various disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, art history and anthropology. As my research is rooted in the field of cultural studies, I want to stress that the dynamics of fashion are inextricably interconnected to the dynamics of contemporary culture as well as to the cultural dynamics of identity. It is thus crucial to develop constructive ways for critical theory and cultural theory to engage with fashion. Fashion and its material tools can greatly affect the conceptual images we shape of ourselves and of others, on an individual, social and national level. Moreover, dressing the physical body can affect how we feel, act and perform in everyday life. Fashion scholars and designers have taken a first step towards developing a new relationship with the capitalist fashion system. I hope my dissertation will contribute to a move beyond a mere semiotic, linguistic, discursive and representational focus of fashion studies. Instead of thinking in terms of idealised bodies and identities, outer appearances and signifying surfaces, it is essential to revalue the physical, experiential, embodied and material facets of the clothed body. A new materialist approach to fashion offers productive analytical tools to acknowledge that fashion is *More Than Meets the Eye*.

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Interviews

Case Study	Interviewee	Date	Location	Interviewer(s)
Aynouk Tan	Aynouk Tan (AT)	23 March 2010	Amsterdam	D. Bruggeman
Marlies Dekkers (MD)	Marlies Dekkers interview	3 February 2011 via e-mail	Written M. Feitsma	D. Bruggeman A. Köppchen C. Von Maltzahn
	Carin Verbruggen & Ferry Drenthem Soesman (CV&FDS)	12 September 2011	Amsterdam	D. Bruggeman
	Jos Arts (JA)	24 October 2011	Amsterdam	D. Bruggeman
	7 loyal customers (anonymous)	7 / 8 / 9 March 2013 & 5/ 10 June 2013	Amsterdam & The Hague	
Viktor&Rolf	Martin van (MvD) Dusseldorp	9 January 2013	Amsterdam	D. Bruggeman
Oilily	Willem & Marieke Olsthoorn (W&MO)	3 September 2010	Alkmaar	D. Bruggeman M. Feitsma A. Köppchen C. Von Maltzahn
	Jean Philipse (JP)	21 April 2011	St. Michielsgestel	D. Bruggeman M. Feitsma A. Köppchen C. Von Maltzahn
Mac&Maggie/ Cora Kemperman	Frans Ankoné (FA)	8 December 2009	Amsterdam	D. Bruggeman M. Feitsma C. Von Maltzahn A. Smelik
	Cora Kemperman (CK)	3 March 2010	Amsterdam	A. Köppchen C. von Maltzahn

Appendix

Interview Guide Marlies Dekkers

Dekkers brand in general:

- When and how did you first hear about Marlies Dekkers?
- When did you decide to start wearing Dekkers lingerie? Was this your own decision, or did your friends or partner play a role in this decision?
- To what extent do you view the lingerie as a functional product? To what extent does it serve a purely functional purpose?
- Could you share your experience of shopping in a Marlies Dekkers store, also compared to other lingerie stores?
- How long have you been buying Dekkers lingerie? How often do you buy at a Dekkers store?

Experience of wearing Dekkers lingerie:

- What is your experience of wearing the lingerie on your physical body? Does it have a specific kind of feeling?
- Does wearing Dekkers lingerie affect the way in which you feel, behave, or present yourself in relation to others? If so, in which ways?
- When do you wear the lingerie, and when don't you?
- Do you often wear the lingerie with straps that are clearly visible? If so, why do you choose to do so? If not, why not?
- To what extent does the way in which you present yourself to other people play a part in your decision to wear lingerie with overtly visible straps?
- When wearing lingerie with clearly visible straps, how does that make you feel? What is the effect of these visible straps? How is it different from wearing lingerie that is not visible?
- Do you feel like you attract more attention to your body?
- Are you more aware of your physical body? Does it affect the way in which you experience your female body or your femininity? If so, in which ways?
- How do other people respond when they see the visible straps of your lingerie? And how does that make you feel?

Marlies Dekkers in relation to other brands:

- Do you wear lingerie by other lingerie brands? If so, which brands? If not, why only (or mostly) Marlies Dekkers?
- Does wearing Dekkers lingerie make you feel different compared to lingerie by other brands? If so, can you explain what the difference is?

Marlies Dekkers and self-expression:

- Do you think that wearing clothes in general, and specifically Dekkers lingerie, is a form of self-expression? To what extent does it affect what you express as a person?
- Does wearing the lingerie say anything about who you are? Does it say something about your femininity? If so, in which ways?

What Dekkers brand visually expresses:

- What does Marlies Dekkers express as a brand?
- Do you feel that she presents a specific kind of femininity? If so, what kind of femininity?
- In an interview that I conducted with Marlies Dekkers, she said "In my designs it is always about self-awareness, about power, about accentuating the power of the wearer. The woman is in charge of seduction [...]. Women are not tasty pieces of flesh, but self-aware, beautiful human beings" (Interview MD 2011). What is your response to this quote? To what extent does it correspond to your own experiences wearing the lingerie?
- When Marlies Dekkers launched her lingerie label, she was criticised for presenting the female body as an erotic object. What are your thoughts on this matter? Do you feel that you are sexualising your body when wearing the lingerie?
- How would you compare Marlies Dekkers to other lingerie brands [show photographs of Sapph, La Perla, Agent Provocateur, and Laura Urbinati]?

Final question to conclude:

- Is there anything else you want to add, or anything that you want to emphasise?

Nederlandse samenvatting

More Than Meets the Eye verkent de dynamische relatie tussen mode en identiteit zoals deze tot uitdrukking komt in visuele media van hedendaagse Nederlandse mode. Deze cultuurwetenschappelijke studie wil het wetenschappelijke discours op het gebied van mode en identiteit verder ontwikkelen en verdiepen. Aan de hand van een interdisciplinaire benadering biedt dit proefschrift inzicht in de complexiteit van identiteit (op individueel, sociaal en nationaal niveau). Het centrale doel is om de complexe relatie tussen mode, kleding, identiteit en het lichaam te doorgronden, door middel van een gedetailleerde visuele analyse van mode in visuele media, zoals modefotografie en modeshows van Nederlandse merken en ontwerpers. Deze hoofddoelstelling omvat drie subdoelstellingen: (1) het kritisch reflecteren op bestaande theorieën over de rol die mode en kleding spelen in de constructie en 'performance' van identiteit, (2) het leveren van methodologische bijdragen ten behoeve van de verdere ontwikkeling van modetheorie, en (3) het verkrijgen van inzicht in de manier waarop Nederlandse modemerken en media uiting geven aan en spelen met identiteit. Mijn centrale onderzoeksvraag luidt:

Hoe kunnen we de complexe relatie tussen mode, identiteit en het geklede lichaam, zoals deze tot uitdrukking komt via visuele media van hedendaagse Nederlandse mode, opnieuw conceptualiseren?

Deze vraagstelling is gebaseerd op het idee dat identiteit binnen modestudies een problematisch begrip is en dat het een genuanceerd theoretisch kader vereist. Hedendaagse modetheorie richt zich voornamelijk op de constructie van identiteit door de consumptie van kleding die onlosmakelijk verbonden is met de tekens, codes en betekenissen van het mode-systeem. De dominante methodologie is om identiteit te benaderen vanuit de semiotiek en in relatie tot mode als een systeem van betekenissen en visuele representaties (Barthes 1967). Deze benadering heeft geleid tot een interpretatie van het lichaam als louter een object waarop betekenissen staan ingetekend (Entwistle 2000: 7-8). Als gevolg van deze bestaande semiotische methodologieën wordt identiteit vaak gereduceerd tot een uiterlijke verschijningsvorm die betekenis draagt (Negrin 2008: 2). Hoewel een semiotische benadering relevant is in relatie tot de manier waarop kleding naar sociale, culturele en politieke structuren kan verwijzen, wordt er in modestudies vaak te weinig aandacht besteed aan de lichamelijke en materiële dimensies van kleding en identiteit (Entwistle 2000). In mijn proefschrift bouw ik voort op semiotische benaderingen en pleit ik voor een interdisciplinaire methodologie die mij in staat stelt een uitgebreider, dieper en genuanceerder begrip van identiteit te ontwikkelen, waarbij er meer aandacht is voor de belichaamde en materiële dimensies van kleding en identiteit.

In mijn proefschrift werp ik licht op verschillende dimensies van identiteit op basis van mijn analyses van een selectie van Nederlandse modemerken en mode-gerelateerde visuele media als case studies. Centraal staan twee bekende hedendaagse Nederlandse mode-ontwerpers die werkzaam zijn in een internationale context: (1) lingerieontwerpster Marlies Dekkers; en (2) het ontwerpduo Viktor&Rolf. Daarnaast bestudeer ik twee Nederlandse modebedrijven die al tenminste 30 jaar bestaan: (3) Oilily, vooral bekend als kindermerk; en (4) de bedrijven Mac&Maggie en Cora Kemperman. Bovendien analyseer ik een selectie van modemedia waarin gereflecteerd wordt op de dynamiek van identiteit: (5) de columns 'Mode volgens Aynouk Tan' (april 2009 tot maart 2011) in het NRC Weekblad; en (6)

een selectie van modefotografie van Nederlandse fotografen zoals Inez van Lamsweerde en Erwin Olaf, die visueel spelen met identiteit en met het lichaam in relatie tot mode.
Op basis van mijn analyses ontwikkel ik in mijn proefschrift twee centrale argumenten: (1) een argument over de conceptualisering van het begrip identiteit in relatie tot mode en het geklede lichaam; en (2) een methodologisch argument voor het belang van benaderingen die meer nadruk leggen op belichaming en materialiteit in modestudies. Deze argumenten kunnen niet los van elkaar worden gezien, omdat het methodologische argument zal bijdragen aan de conceptualisering van identiteit. Het eerste argument moet begrepen worden in de context van de huidige discussie over het begrip identiteit (op individueel, sociaal en nationaal niveau) in studies van mode. Zoals ik toelicht in hoofdstuk 1 'Over Theorie en Methodologie', heeft deze discussie betrekking op o.a. het statische dan wel dynamische karakter van identiteit; de mate waarin mode en kleding daadwerkelijk invloed hebben op de constructie van identiteit; hoe we de relatie tussen het lichaam, uiterlijke verschijning en identiteit kunnen begrijpen; en hoe de dominante interpretatie van mode en identiteit (in semiotische en tekstuele termen) zich verhoudt tot de belichaming van identiteit en het dragen van kleding als een lichamelijke praktijk. Dit debat ligt ten grondslag aan mijn benadering van identiteit.

Het tweede methodologische argument richt zich op de algemene tendens van modestudies om representaties en betekenissystemen vaak centraal te stellen. Om recht te kunnen doen aan de complexiteit van mode en identiteit is het van belang om meer aandacht te vestigen op belichaming alsook op de materialiteit van mode-objecten en het geklede lichaam. Hoewel ik mij in mijn proefschrift voornamelijk richt op de analyse van visuele media, wijzen mijn analyses op de noodzaak om tegelijkertijd de lichamelijke ervaringen van het dragen van kleding en de materiële dimensie van mode-objecten in acht te nemen. Zoals ik betoog, wordt de lichamelijke ervaring van het dragen van kleding ook beïnvloed door de beelden, representaties en betekenissen die circuleren in het modesysteem. Een focus op lichamelijke ervaringen en op de materialiteit van kleding en van het geklede lichaam is essentieel om een beter begrip te ontwikkelen van de complexe relatie tussen mode, kleding, identiteit en het lichaam. Daarom benadruk ik het belang van het theoretische discours van 'nieuw materialisme' (zie bijvoorbeeld Coole en Frost 2010) als een methodologische bijdrage aan modestudies. Deze theoretische benadering maakt het mogelijk om meer nadruk te leggen op de materialiteit van mode-objecten en op de interactie van mode-objecten met het fysieke, levende lichaam.

De geselecteerde case studies bieden inzicht in verschillende dimensies van identiteit en benadrukken het belang van de conceptualisering van identiteit in termen van fluïditeit, performativiteit, belichaming, materialiteit en culturele hybriditeit. In mijn proefschrift ga ik per hoofdstuk in op een dimensie van identiteit, die relevant is voor de betreffende casus. Elk hoofdstuk voegt een andere dimensie toe aan mijn conceptualisering van identiteit, en functioneert zo als een bouwsteen voor het ontwikkelen van een dieper inzicht in en een meer genuanceerd begrip van identiteit.

Fluïde concepten van het zelf: Nederlandse modefotografie

In hoofdstuk 2 'Fluïde concepten van het zelf' reflecteer ik op het begrip 'fluïde identiteit' in relatie tot Nederlandse modefotografie aan de hand van de analyse van fotografieseries en modefoto's van Nederlandse fotografen. Ik heb visuele analyses gemaakt van het werk van verschillende Nederlandse (mode)fotografen: Inez van Lamsweerde en Vinoodh Matadin, Erwin Olaf, Ari Versluis en Ellie Uyttenbroek, Freudenthal/Verhagen, Marcel van der Vlugt, Edland Man en Bart Hess. Deze fotografen bewegen zich vaak tussen commerciële en artistieke (mode)fotografie en experimenteren op verschillende wijze visueel met identiteit, het lichaam en kleding. Uit mijn analyses komt naar voren dat er sprake is van een paradoxale dynamiek van identiteit. Enerzijds zien we dat fotografieseries illustreren hoe identiteit vaak gereduceerd wordt tot een gecodeerd concept of tot een uiterlijke verschijningsvorm. Dit komt bijvoorbeeld duidelijk tot uiting in het project Exactitudes van Ari Versluis en Ellie Uyttenbroek. Dit project visualiseert de macht van het modesysteem om sociale identiteiten te categoriseren op basis van gedeelde kleedcodes. Anderzijds zien we in modefotografie of in artistiek werk van fotografen dat er oneindig veel mogelijkheden zijn om te spelen met deze schijnbaar vaste en gecodeerde identiteiten, en dus met de fluïditeit van identiteit.

Om deze dynamiek te conceptualiseren, baseer ik me op een theoretische synthese van Zygmunt Bauman's (1991, 2000, 2011) en Gilles Lipovetsky's (1994, 2005) sociologische perspectieven op identiteit en op Ulric Neisser's (1988) psychologisch begrip van het 'conceptuele zelf'. Ik betoog dat dit een productieve benadering is om goed te kunnen begrijpen hoe kleding specifieke fluïde 'concepten van het zelf' (Neisser 1988) kan definiëren, communiceren en vormgeven binnen het sociaal-culturele systeem van mode. Neisser's 'conceptuele zelf' bestaat uit een groot aantal, sociaal gevormde 'concepten van het zelf' die betrekking hebben op de rollen die we spelen in de maatschappij, op ons uiterlijk en ons fysieke lichaam, of op karaktereigenschappen die we toekennen aan onszelf of andere mensen. Bovendien gaat Neisser ervan uit dat conceptuele zelf relationeel is en altijd tot stand komt binnen een sociaal-culturele context. Deze benadering maakt het mogelijk om te denken in termen van de fluïditeit van specifieke concepten van het zelf, in plaats van de fluïditeit van elk aspect van identiteit of van elk facet van het zelf, wat vaak geleid heeft tot de misvatting dat mode elk facet van identiteit kan bepalen. Zoals ik betoog, is het juist als gevolg van een onderliggende fluïditeit van het conceptuele zelf dat kleding specifieke concepten kan vormgeven en tijdelijk kan stollen. In de verbeelding van mode en in moderepresentaties zien we hoe fotografen zoals Inez van Lamsweerde en Erwin Olaf experimenteren met de onderliggende fluïditeit van identiteit of met de manier waarop kleding bepaalde delen van het conceptuele zelf betekenis kan geven.

Mijn analyses laten zien hoe het gezicht in het bijzonder – zowel als lichaamsdeel en conceptueel (Deleuze en Guattari 1987) – een cruciale rol speelt bij het vastleggen en definiëren van concepten van het zelf in relatie tot mode. Dit komt bijvoorbeeld tot uitdrukking in een aantal foto's van Edland Man, waarin hij speelt met een letterlijke liquiditeit van (concepten van) het lichaam en met de manier waarop allerlei betekenissen en codes van identiteit geschreven staan op het gezicht. Gilles Deleuze en Felix Guattari's filosofische benadering van het 'gezicht' (1987) biedt inzicht in de manier waarop kledingobjecten als het ware een gezicht kunnen krijgen, en daarmee worden opgenomen

in een systeem van betekenisgeving en subjectivering. Vanuit dit perspectief kan gezegd worden dat kleding ook een gezicht geeft aan mensen, waarmee het individuen tot subject maakt, en het geklede lichaam codeert. Aan de andere kant is modefotografie een imaginair en virtueel domein waarin het gezicht fluïde gemaakt kan worden, en waarin de grenzen van identiteit opgerekt worden door visueel te spelen met de fluïditeit van concepten van het zelf en van het lichaam.

Creatieve Performances: Aynouk Tan

In hoofdstuk 3 'Creatieve Performances' ga ik in op het theoretische begrip 'performance' door het analyseren van de columns en de bijbehorende foto's van modejournalist Aynouk Tan in het NRC Weekblad (april 2009 tot maart 2011). Het concept 'performance' is cruciaal voor de conceptualisering van de relatie tussen mode, identiteit en het geklede lichaam. Performance wordt enerzijds opgevat als (1) een artistieke, theatrale performance op het podium (Goldberg 1979; Stern en Henderson 1993; Auslander 1999, Jones 1995, 2000; Carlson 2004) en anderzijds als (2) een performance van identiteit in het dagelijks leven (Butler 1990, 1993; Goffman 1959). Uit mijn analyses blijkt dat beide niveaus van performance relevant zijn in het kader van mode. Tans performances in haar fotografie tonen de vervagende grenzen tussen mode en de artistieke dimensie van performance, en bieden tegelijkertijd inzicht in de dagelijkse praktijk van het kleden als een performance van identiteit, die elke dag opnieuw wordt opgevoerd in het publieke domein. Ik betoog daarom dat Tans performances getheoretiseerd moeten worden op het grensvlak van beide niveaus van performance: mode als een 'theatrale socialiteit' (Baudrillard 1976). Daarnaast beweegt Tan zich op het grensvlak van mode als een systeem van betekenis en als een performance van sociaal-culturele identiteit. Hoewel Baudrillards filosofie inzicht biedt in mode als representatiesysteem, gaat dit theoretische perspectief volledig voorbij aan de werkelijke belichaamde en materiële basis van het geklede lichaam. Om die reden zijn er aanvullende theorieën nodig. Vooral Elena del Río's concept 'affectieve performances' (2008) is productief omdat deze theorie nog meer nadruk legt op de affectieve, creatieve en performatieve kracht van werkelijke, levende lichamen (2008: 16). Del Río biedt conceptuele instrumenten om de affectieve en performatieve kwaliteiten van het lichaam te bestuderen in relatie tot mode. Dit biedt inzicht in Tans spel met mode als een imaginaire wereld en met het creatieve potentieel van kleding om fluïde concepten van het zelf te transformeren. Bovendien betoog ik dat Del Río's benadering het mogelijk maakt om voorbij te gaan aan een semiotische benadering van de performance van identiteit, met meer aandacht voor de creatieve, affectieve, performatieve kracht van geklede lichaam.

In dit hoofdstuk voeg ik een performatieve dimensie toe aan mijn interpretatie van fluïde concepten van het zelf. Dit biedt een dieper inzicht in de performatieve totstandkoming van deze fluïde concepten binnen mode en toont de relatie tussen de fluïditeit en de performance van identiteit. Ook hier is weer sprake van een dubbele dynamiek van identiteit. Enerzijds kunnen mensen gecodeerde concepten 'performen' door de lichamelijke praktijk van het dragen van kleding. In dat proces worden concepten van het zelf performatief gevormd en gestold, een proces dat samenvalt met de betekenisgeving van deze concepten binnen de sociaal-culturele, politieke en economische structuren van de mode-systeem. Anderzijds

hebben individuen, zoals Tan laat zien in haar columns en bijbehorende foto's, de affectieve en performatieve vrijheid om te spelen met het creatieve potentieel van kleding – het geklede lichaam – om actief te experimenteren met fluïde concepten van het zelf. Deze opvatting van 'performance' is cruciaal omdat het helpt om te begrijpen dat performatieve praktijken belichaamde praktijken zijn.

Belichaamde ervaringen: Marlies Dekkers

Op basis van mijn analyses van de casus over Marlies Dekkers, richt ik me in hoofdstuk 4 op de manier waarop specifieke concepten van het zelf nauw verbonden zijn met het lichaam en met de lichamelijke ervaring van het dragen van kleding. Ik benader het lichaam op twee manieren: (1) als visueel weergegeven in Marlies Dekkers' modefotografie en reclamecampagnes; en (2) als een lichamelijke realiteit in het dagelijks leven. Deze laatste onderzoek ik door middel van diepte-interviews met een selectie van vaste klanten van het merk om hun subjectieve, lichamelijke ervaringen van het dragen van de lingerie te bevragen. Uit mijn analyses en interviews blijkt dat het essentieel is om de relatie te onderzoeken tussen de ervaringen van de dragers en het specifieke vrouwbeeld dat Marlies Dekkers als merk visueel uitdraagt.

Op basis van (post-)feministische theorie (Levy 2005; Genz 2006; Gill 2007; Genz en Brabon 2009; McRobbie 2009; Walter 2010), beargumenteer ik dat Dekkers' visualisatie van het vrouwelijk lichaam, gekleed in lingerie, een post-feministische vrouwelijkheid uitdraagt, en tegelijkertijd de suggestie wekt dat het dragen van de lingerie een post-feministische belichaamde ervaring zal creëren. De interviews met vaste klanten maken het mogelijk om de wisselwerking te onderzoeken tussen de werkelijke lichamelijke ervaringen van de vrouwelijke dragers en het post-feministische vrouwbeeld dat Marlies Dekkers als merk neerzet. Ik benader de ervaringen van de dragers vanuit twee invalshoeken: (1) een fenomenologisch perspectief op subjectieve, belichaamde ervaringen, en (2) een perspectief op de manier waarop consumenten 'performen' wanneer ze gebruik maken van producten in het kader van de hedendaagse 'beleveniseconomie' (Pine en Gilmore 1999). Deze benadering heeft geleid tot het inzicht dat Dekkers' lingerie een post-feministische ervaring met zich meedraagt die het bewustzijn, de belichaming en de beleving van de post-feministische vrouwelijkheid van de geïnterviewde vaste klanten verhoogt. De performance van een post-feministische vrouwelijkheid door het merk (bijvoorbeeld in modefotografie) speelt hiermee een belangrijke rol in de totstandkoming van de ervaringen van de dragers, alsook in de performance van identiteit van de dragers.

De feministische theorie over mode van Ilya Parkins (2008), gebaseerd op het 'nieuw materialistische' werk van Karen Barad (1996, 2003), is nuttig voor de interpretatie van mijn bevindingen. Deze theoretische benadering biedt inzicht in de manier waarop, in het geval van Marlies Dekkers, de fenomenologische ervaring van (post-feministische) vrouwelijkheid gevormd wordt door een wisselwerking tussen materiële (het materiële object en het fysieke vrouwelijk lichaam) en discursieve factoren (de betekenissen en geënsceneerde ervaringen van post-feminisme in Dekkers' modefoto's). Ik betoog dat zowel het materiële object dat de aandacht vestigt op het lichaam, als de sociaal-culturele waarden en betekenissen van het

post-feminisme, geënsceneerd door het merk, van invloed zijn op de lichamelijke ervaring van de vrouwelijke drager en op haar performance van identiteit. Bij de conceptualisering van de relatie tussen mode, identiteit en het lichaam, is het daarom noodzakelijk rekening te houden met de belichaamde ervaringen van het dragen van kleding, ook in relatie tot wat wordt uitgedragen in visuele representaties van mode. Het grootste deel van Dekkers' vaste klanten belichamen en 'performen' de ervaringen geënsceneerd door het merk, waarbij ze hun lichaam als het ware kleden met de paradoxale betekenissen en waarden van het post-feminisme. Dit illustreert de verwevenheid tussen de belichaamde en performatieve dimensies van identiteit. De totstandkoming van specifieke fluïde concepten van het zelf door middel van kleding is een performatieve en belichaamde praktijk.

Een nieuw materialistische esthetiek: Viktor&Rolf

Op basis van mijn analyses van Viktor&Rolf's modeshows en collecties benadruk ik in dit hoofdstuk de (im)materialiteit van mode en het geklede lichaam. Viktor&Rolf's werk wordt vaak gezien als artistiek en conceptueel, maar hun artistieke ideeën en concepten zijn onlosmakelijk verbonden met de fysieke lichamen en materiële kledingobjecten die deze concepten tot uitdrukking brengen. Omdat Viktor&Rolf breken met bestaande codes en systemen van betekenisgeving, kan hun werk niet alleen begrepen worden in termen van semiotiek. Viktor&Rolf's werk vereist een alternatieve, meer materiële, benadering. In dit hoofdstuk laat ik zien dat het werk van Deleuze en Guattari analytische en conceptuele instrumenten biedt om modestudies te verbreden, los van dominante discursieve, semiotische methodologieën (Smelik 2014). Ik baseer me op Deleuze en Guattari's filosofie als onderdeel van de theoretische stroming van het 'nieuw materialisme' (Coole en Frost 2010; Bennett en Joyce 2010; Dolphijn en Van der Tuin 2012; Barrett en Bolt 2013; Smelik 2014). Een 'nieuw materialistische' esthetiek vestigt meer aandacht op de materialiteit van fysieke objecten en lichamen, en benadrukt altijd de relatie tussen het materiële en immateriële, het sociale en fysieke (Bolt 2013: 6). Op deze manier maakt een nieuw materialistische benadering het mogelijk om lichamelijkheid en materialiteit – tevens de materiële basis van identiteit – opnieuw te waarderen en te theoretiseren.

Uitgaande van het Deleuzeaanse theoretische begrip 'ontmoeting' (Massumi 1992; O'Sullivan 2006), betoog ik dat we mode kunnen zien als een proces van eindeloze, transformatieve ontmoetingen tussen bijvoorbeeld stoffen, textiel, patronen, en de handen en instrumenten van de ontwerpers en patroonmakers, of de fysieke lichamen van de dragers. Bovendien interpreteer ik Viktor&Rolf's spel met mode als een 'theater van metamorfoses', een concept dat Deleuze koppelt aan moderne kunst die breekt met systemen van betekenis en representatie (1994: 56). Deleuze en Guattari's concept van transformatieve 'assemblages' is een productieve volgende stap om mode te begrijpen in termen van materiële ontmoetingen en verbindingen. In Viktor&Rolf's show *Glamour Factory* zien we performances van assemblages op de catwalk: een voortdurend proces van het aan- en uitkleden van de modellen, waarbij verschillende kledingobjecten elkaar en de lichamen van de modellen ontmoeten. Deze praktijken tijdens de modeshow inspireren een andere manier van denken over wat er in een bredere context gebeurt, wanneer een

fysiek lichaam een materieel kledingstuk ontmoet. Mijn argument is dat de relatie tussen mode, identiteit en het geklede lichaam geconceptualiseerd kan worden in termen van transformatieve assemblages die bestaan uit 'semiotische, materiële en sociale stromen' (Bennett en Joyce 2010: 5). In deze verwevenheid van semiotische, materiële en sociale relaties kunnen concepten van het zelf, als onderdeel van het conceptuele zelf, gevormd of getransformeerd worden.

Materiële modeobjecten en het lichamelijke zelf zijn de materiële basis van de belichaamde performance van concepten van het zelf door middel van kleding, wat het onlosmakelijke verband benadrukt tussen de performatieve, belichaamde en materiële dimensies van identiteit. Een Deleuzeaanse en nieuwe materialistische benadering kan een belangrijke bijdrage leveren aan de ontwikkeling om mode als een materiële esthetiek te beschouwen en om voorbij te gaan aan de dominante methodologieën van modestudies die zich louter richten op wat mode betekent. Dit helpt dus om de materialiteit van de mode terug te brengen in het dominante domein van immateriële en visuele representaties en betekenisgeving, en vice versa. Deze verwevenheid is tevens cruciaal voor een nieuw materialistische conceptualisering van de dynamiek van identiteit op het gebied van mode. In plaats van te vragen wat mode betekent, stel ik voor dat modetheorie meer aandacht heeft voor hoe mode functioneert als een netwerk van materiële, semiotische en sociale relaties.

Nederlandse hybriditeit: Oilily en Mac&Maggie/Cora Kemperman

In dit hoofdstuk analyseer ik het begrip 'nationale identiteit' op basis van mijn visuele analyses van twee case studies: (1) het kindermerk Oilily en (2) de merken Mac&Maggie en Cora Kemperman. Verschillende modetheoretici hebben onderzocht op welke manier mode een rol kan spelen in het vormgeven van nationale identiteit – als een culturele en symbolische constructie – in de context van economische en culturele globalisering (Teunissen 2005, 2011; Goodrum 2005; Paulicelli en Clark 2009; Craik 2009; Feitsma 2014). Ik bouw hierop voort en benader het begrip 'nationale identiteit' volgens de definitie van Stuart Hall (2002), die zich baseert op Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities' (1983), en wijst op de manier waarop culturele objecten en representaties vormgeven aan de betekenis van nationale identiteit (2002: 74). Ik benader deze constructie van een (Nederlandse) nationale identiteit als een performance van fluïde concepten van nationale identiteit, waarmee ik de centrale concepten 'performance' en het 'fluïde conceptuele zelf' toepas op het nationale niveau. De performance van een nationale identiteit door middel van modeobjecten en representaties kan zo worden opgevat als een stolling van specifieke fluïde concepten van een nationaal zelf.

Uit mijn visuele analyses van Oilily en Mac&Maggie/Cora Kemperman blijkt dat de huidige belangstelling van westerse modelanden voor hun nationale wortels niet los gezien kan worden van een fascinatie voor culturele 'anderen' en voor andere lokale tradities. Beide casussen tonen de paradoxale dynamiek dat mode enerzijds wordt gekenmerkt door een vorm van Oriëntalisme (Said 1978), maar dat westerse mode zich anderzijds ook graag niet-westerse kledingstijlen toe-eigent. Deze dynamiek van assimilatie vindt plaats op

verschillende niveaus: (1) op het niveau van de merken, (2) op nationaal niveau, en (3) op het niveau van de westerse mode-dynamiek. Mode heeft een lange geschiedenis als het gaat om het assimileren van de Ander. Dit is terug te herleiden naar de koloniale tijd waarin westerse handelsbedrijven producten en niet-westerse kledingstijlen uit het Verre Oosten importeerden (Niessen 2005; Teunissen 2005; Paulicelli en Clark 2009). In de hedendaagse mode kan deze dynamiek het best worden begrepen in termen van een culturele 'hybriditeit' (Bhabha 1990, 1994). Cora Kemperman bijvoorbeeld brengt in haar collecties op speelse wijze een grote verscheidenheid aan culturen, tradities en periodes samen. In Cora Kempermans collecties zien we bijvoorbeeld Japanse kimono's, Indiase sarouels, Marokkaanse schoenen, kleurrijke Afrikaanse armbanden en Indische tulbanden. Aangezien mode een globaal fenomeen is, is interculturele uitwisseling een fundamenteel kenmerk van mode. Het gebruik van het postkoloniale theoretische concept van 'culturele hybriditeit' toont aan dat het idee van 'nationale mode' of van 'westerse mode' – als een binaire oppositie van niet-westerse mode – onhoudbaar is, omdat mode nationale grenzen overschrijdt en wordt gekenmerkt door een culturele fluïditeit en hybriditeit.

Tegelijkertijd is het belangrijk om de huidige politieke, economische en culturele belangen te erkennen die ten grondslag liggen aan de performance van nationale identiteit. Er zijn interessante voorbeelden van Nederlandse modemerken en ontwerpers die ook de nationale identiteit 'performen' – specifieke clichématige concepten van een nationaal zelf – zoals Viktor&Rolf's presentatie van klompen op hoge hakken (A/W 2007-08). De paradoxale dynamiek van identiteit, zoals naar voren komt in de hoofdstukken 2 en 3, heeft ook betrekking op de performance van een nationale identiteit. Enerzijds kunnen visuele representaties en modeobjecten gecodeerde concepten van een nationaal zelf 'performen'. Anderzijds, zoals Cora Kemperman laat zien, kunnen modemerken ook spelen met de fluïditeit en culturele hybriditeit die ten grondslag liggen aan 'nationale identiteit', door verschillende culturele tradities te herinterpreteren. De eclectische integratie en toe-eigening van culturele 'andersheid' in de Nederlandse modemerken is echter problematisch. Postkoloniale theorie helpt ons om een kritische houding aan te nemen ten opzichte van de manier waarop de Oriëntalistische blik nog steeds aanwezig is, en in de mode gecommercialiseerd wordt. Zoals de casussen van dit hoofdstuk laten zien, is het bij de conceptualisering van de relatie tussen mode en nationale identiteit essentieel om erkenning te geven aan de hybride culturele dynamiek van mode in een geglobaliseerde wereld.

Een 'nieuw materialistische' benadering van mode

Mijn theoretische argumenten en bevindingen, zoals gepresenteerd in elk hoofdstuk, leveren een bijdrage aan de verdere theoretische ontwikkeling van de fluïde, performatieve, belichaamde, materiële en cultureel hybride dimensies van identiteit. Deze dimensies dienen in relatie tot elkaar te worden beschouwd. Op basis van mijn bevindingen met betrekking tot individuele en sociale identiteit, stel ik voor om de complexe relatie tussen mode, identiteit en het geklede lichaam te conceptualiseren in nieuw materialistische termen: als assemblages die bestaan uit semiotische, materiële en sociale relaties. Fluïde concepten van het zelf komen tot stand in een netwerk van semiotische (de tekens en betekenissen van het

modesysteem), materiële (het lichamelijke zelf en de kledingobjecten) en sociale relaties (de sociaal-culturele en maatschappelijke context). In dit proces komen fluïde concepten van het zelf performatief tot stand, en worden ze gematerialiseerd en belichaamd. Een nieuw materialistische benadering doet meer recht aan de complexiteit van identiteit, en in het bijzonder aan de performatieve, belichaamde en materiële dimensies van kleding, identiteit en het lichaam. Daarnaast gaat het nieuw materialistische discours uit van een onlosmakelijke verwevenheid van materie en betekenis (Dolphijn en Van der Tuin 2012: 91). Dit biedt inzicht in de manier waarop concepten van het zelf in het kader van mode per definitie altijd materieel en immaterieel, sociaal en fysiek zijn.

In mijn proefschrift heb ik een dubbele dynamiek van identiteit waargenomen: de vormgeving van fluïde concepten van het zelf, en het spelen met en opnieuw fluïde maken van bepaalde concepten. Enerzijds kunnen fluïde concepten stollen wanneer iemand zijn lichaam kleed met betekenisdragende objecten, en anderzijds heeft het geklede lichaam ook de performatieve kracht om concepten te transformeren en om te spelen met de fluïditeit van die concepten. Assemblages die bestaan uit semiotische, materiële en sociale elementen zijn continu onderhevig aan transformatieprocessen. Er zijn talrijke mogelijke verbindingen die kunnen worden gemaakt tussen materiële, sociale en semiotische stromen, die ofwel leiden tot de vormgeving van concepten van het zelf ofwel tot het spelen met de fluïditeit van deze concepten. Met deze nieuw materialistische conceptualisering hoop ik te wijzen op de complexiteit van de verschillende dimensies van individuele en sociale identiteit.
Mode is een systeem van betekenis, maar mijn analyses laten zien dat het belangrijk is meer aandacht te vestigen op de relaties tussen de immateriële representaties en betekenissen van mode enerzijds, en de materialiteit van mode en het geklede lichaam anderzijds. Mijn analyses van visuele representaties onderstrepen juist de urgentie om de lichamelijke, affectieve, performatieve aspecten van een belichaamd subject opnieuw te waarderen en theoretiseren. Het is daarom van belang om nieuwe theoretische kaders te ontwikkelen die erkenning geven aan deze complexiteit van de relatie tussen mode en identiteit. In mijn proefschrift benadruk ik het belang van een interdisciplinaire aanpak die voortbouwt op semiotische methodologieën, en meer aandacht vestigt op belichaming en materialiteit, om een genuanceerder begrip van de relatie tussen mode en identiteit te ontwikkelen. Hiermee bouw ik voort op verschillende wetenschappers die zich hebben gericht op mode in termen van performance, lichamelijke ervaringen of materialiteit (Entwistle 2000 Sweetman 2003 Smelik 2007, 2014; Woodward 2007; Negrin 2013; Lehmann 2013). Ik pleit daarnaast vooral voor het belang van een nieuw materialistische benadering als bijdrage aan modestudies (Parkins 2008; Coole en Frost 2010; Bennett en Joyce 2010; Dolphijn en Van der Tuin 2012; Barrett en Bolt 2013; Smelik 2014). Het is essentieel om meer onderzoek te doen naar de expressieve, affectieve en performatieve kracht van het (geklede) lichaam (Del Río 2008) op basis van fenomenologische perspectieven op het lichaam in relatie tot de beeldcultuur en mode (Entwistle 2000; Marks 2000, 2002; Entwistle en Wilson 2003; Sweetman 2003; Sobchack 2004; Woodward 2007; Smelik 2007). Een nieuw materialistische benadering maakt het mogelijk om meer recht te doen aan de materialiteit van mode – de materie van fysieke lichamen en de materie van kledingobjecten – en aan de verwevenheid van materialiteit en betekenis.

In dit proefschrift heb ik me gericht de complexe relaties die individuen aangaan met mode en kleding. Mode is niet zomaar een oppervlakkig fenomeen, maar het is een invloedrijk economisch, politiek en sociaal-cultureel fenomeen dat betrekking heeft op verschillende disciplines, zoals filosofie, sociologie, cultuurwetenschappen, kunstgeschiedenis en antropologie. Aangezien mijn onderzoek geworteld is in de cultuurwetenschappen, wil ik benadrukken dat de dynamiek van de mode onlosmakelijk verbonden is met de dynamiek van de hedendaagse cultuur en de culturele dynamiek van identiteit. Het is van cruciaal belang om een nieuwe theorieën en methodologieën te ontwikkelen om alle facetten van mode te bestuderen. Mode en kleding kunnen een grote invloed hebben op de concepten die we creëren van onszelf en van anderen, op een individueel, sociaal en nationaal niveau. Ik hoop dat mijn proefschrift zal bijdragen aan een beweging die voorbijgaat aan de dominante semiotische focus van modestudies. Waar het in de mode vaak gaat over geïdealiseerde lichamen, identiteiten en uiterlijke verschijningsvormen in visuele representaties en over immateriële waarden en betekenissen van het modesysteem, pleit ik voor een herwaardering van de fysieke ervaringen en materiële facetten van het geklede lichaam. Modestudies heeft dringend behoefte aan een nieuw materialistisch perspectief, waarbij er meer aandacht is voor beleving, materialiteit en het performatieve, affectieve lichaam.

Curriculum Vitae

Daniëlle Suzanne Bruggeman (1985, Ede, The Netherlands) started her studies at Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands, in 2003. After obtaining her propaedeutic diploma in Psychology (2004), she continued her education in the field of Cultural Studies and earned her MA degree with honours in 2008. She graduated with an MA thesis on the representation of the body in fashion photography and advertising, drawing upon the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. Between 2007 and 2009 Daniëlle was employed at Uniquole in The Hague, a company that organises exhibitions focused on promoting Dutch design, fashion and architecture. She started as an intern and developed into a full time project manager, and was involved in the concept development, organisation and communication/PR of several exhibitions, such as 'Into Dutch Design' in Stockholm and 'New Dutch Design' in Moscow, in collaboration with Dutch embassies. Daniëlle returned to the department of Cultural Studies at Radboud University Nijmegen in September 2009, where she worked as a teacher and junior researcher, and started her PhD research in January 2010. Her PhD research explores the fluid, performative and embodied dimensions of identity in various case studies of Dutch fashion, as part of the interdisciplinary project *Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World*, funded by The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). She participated in PhD programmes of the Netherlands Research School for Literary Studies (OSL) and the Research School for Media Studies (RMeS), and was a member of the RMeS PhD Council. In 2012 she was awarded the 'Frye Scholarship' (Executive Board, Radboud University Nijmegen), aimed at encouraging promising female PhD students to conduct research abroad. She has been a Visiting Scholar at London College of Fashion and at the MA Fashion Studies at the School of Art and Design History and Theory at Parsons, the New School for Design (New York City). She has presented papers at international fashion conferences and published on a variety of topics such as the performative power of fashion, and lingerie as an expression of post-feminist values. In September 2014 Daniëlle started working as a lecturer of the course 'Gender and the Arts' at the department of Cultural Studies, Radboud University Nijmegen, and at the Fontys Academy for Creative Industries in Tilburg, The Netherlands, where she teaches several courses on fashion, visual culture, identity and research skills.