



Fashion and Affect

Exploring Affective Method

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Fashion and Affect: Exploring Affective Method

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Abstract

This research explores the possibilities and consequences of approaching non-representational and material manifestations of fashion through the lens of affect theory. This is done by exploring the main tenets of affect theory, and its use for the study of fashion. Placing affect theory within a wider scope of new materialism and posthumanism creates a basis for a methodology that circumvents traditional dichotomies like mind-matter, and nature-culture. By exploring recently developed affective methodologies and by reassessing methods from the field of fashion studies a groundwork is provided for affective methods that investigate what fashion *does* instead of what fashion is. Three case studies concerning high fashion, the production of fashion, and the material qualities of fast fashion serve as testing grounds for an affective analysis that makes use of experiential data, combined with material or ethnographic approaches. Affective methods provide more insight in how fashion touches humans by attending to the unconscious, irrational, and emotional processes that drive the consumption and appreciation of fashion.

Acknowledgements

“To go on means going from here, means finding me, losing me, vanishing and beginning again, a stranger first, then little by little the same as always, in another place, where I shall say I have always been ...”

Samuel Beckett, *The Unnameable*.

I am fascinated by fashion, both as a designer and as a researcher. What is it that fashion does to us? How are humans touched by fashion’s materiality? How does fashion influence the world, and vice versa? When I started the research for this thesis I came up with the idea of using affect theory; does not affect theory deal with how humans are touched, in all kinds of ways? Not before long I was completely tangled up in abstract philosophies, concepts, and ideas that made my head spin. Moreover, I became aware of the fact that there is hardly any literature on fashion and affect, let alone a methodology for the affective analysis of fashion. I realized I had to develop my own way of doing research. This was at times exhilarating, at other times it was awfully stressful. The result of my experiments is presented here. Whether it is academically successful I will leave to others to assess. For me personally, it has learned me to go on, even when you do not know how. But most importantly, it learned me to get attuned to my own affective responses, a skill that will benefit me for the rest of my life.

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I dedicate this master thesis to my unofficial family guardian and friend,
Maaïke Dommissie †.

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Introduction

In Euripides' tragedy *Medea*, Medea's old child keeper reports back to her mistress, describing the events that took place after Iason's young bride put on the crown and robe that were gifted to her by Medea's innocent and unsuspecting children:

“The golden coronet round her head discharged a stream
Of unnatural devouring fire: while the fine dress
Your children gave her - poor miserable girl! - the stuff
Was eating her clear flesh. [...]
The more she shook her head the fiercer the flame burned.
At last, exhausted by agony, she fell to the ground;□
Save to her father, she was unrecognizable.□
Her eyes, her face, were one grotesque disfigurement;
Down from her head dripped blood mingled with flame; her flesh.□
Attacked by the invisible fangs of poison, melted□
From the bare bone, like gum-drops from a pine-tree's bark-□
A ghastly sight. Not one among us dared to touch her body.
What we'd seen was lesson enough for us.”

(Euripides, *Medea* 1187-1223)

This gruesome image stayed with me for more than twenty five years, after translating it in Greek class as a fifteen-year old. The scene affected me in a bodily, visceral way. It made me nauseous, and I could almost feel how the poisonous fabric scalded the skin of the poor princess Glaukè. The robe touching her skin made her perish, and this tragic occurrence set into motion a cascade of events, culminating in a tormented Medea killing and dismembering her own children. Affect is not only a bodily human experience, it is also an anonymous power that evokes action (Gregg and Seigworth 2).

Dress affects us in myriad ways. It elates, enchants, hurts, itches, restrains, liberates, enfolds, reveals, protects, provokes. It is a meeting of matter, body, and mind, an intermingling that opens up a world of possibilities, the promise of alternative identities and ways of being. We are touched by dress for the biggest part of our lives, from the first diaper to the shroud we are buried in. Yet how the physical, material presence of dress affects us is barely noticed. The body suppresses affects that are practically the same everyday and at all hours, as it is not functional for our survival to notice them. Only when

something is amiss do we notice our clothes; when the waist band is too tight after a meal, when skirts crawl up, when we try to put on woolen tights over damp skin.

On a macro level, according to theorists like Deleuze and Guattari, Massumi, Thrift, Barad, and others, affect is what sets off the emergence of complex, multilayered networks. In fashion, the networks of production, distribution, and dissemination are all invoked by affect. These phenomena are endlessly complicated gatherings of humans, non-humans, and their actions.

Fashion does not only affect humans. Animals, plants, organic and non-organic matter are influenced and changed by fashion's operations. The New Zealand merino sheep that is harshly shorn is touched by fashion, as is the dry soil in an Indian cotton field, and the tainted water in a China river. According to affect theory, such phenomena have all been precipitated by the anonymous force of affect.

Fashion has many faces, it is not just the clothes on our bodies, or material production. It also encompasses fashion imagery; photography, advertisements, online fashion shops, blogs and vlogs, etcetera. These appearances of fashion touch humans as much as the material fashion object, precipitating them to feel or act. The fashion image may provoke joy, an aesthetically pleasing experience, or it may be a driver for the consumption of fashion. Affect plays a role within fashion in many ways. Yet these affective encounters between our bodies, minds, and fashion are barely researched in fashion studies. The study of fashion has evolved as an interdisciplinary repository of different fields, focuses, and methodologies:

“as well as the old base of art and social history, we have academic texts about clothing from the specialisms of design history; ethnography; gender, feminist, film, and photography studies; and media studies as well as business and economic history, performance studies, geography, urban studies, colonial and postcolonial studies, literature studies, and on it goes” (Taylor 23).

Many of these approaches are *representational*; fashion is predominantly seen as a sign or symbol, referring to hidden social and cultural meanings, tendencies and structures that lie waiting to be unearthed, described, and theorized. Throughout the years, fashion has been studied in the light of structuralist and post-structuralist theory; postmodernism has drifted along, gender studies and queer studies have left their mark, discursive methods to study fashion have been put to practice, but throughout these theoretical ‘seasons’, fashion is mostly seen as a phenomenon that lays bare socio-cultural systems

and structures, instead of just 'being' on its own merit.

Now, things are shaken up again, with new materialism and post-humanism painting a new ontological and epistemological backdrop that opens up alternative methodological approaches towards fashion (Smelik "New Materialism"). This renewed interest in the pure materiality of things first arose within the fields of archaeology and anthropology, academic fields that are dependent on things to 'talk' (Woodward *Understanding Material Culture*; Hodder). For these disciplines, a carefully assessing and probing of matter is employed in order to come up with theories that describe and explain how humans live and lived. Material culture studies offers theory and methods for this undertaking. From a material culture perspective, things are still seen as clues towards some 'higher' knowledge; it is as if scholars instinctively try to get away from the burdensome pressure of actual matter, in exchange for getting the stamp of approval of 'real' science, with its emphasis on discovering grander systems and universal laws. Within a predominantly empiricist scientific paradigm the study of everyday objects must lead to distinguished thoughts about culture and society instead of conceiving "objects in their own right" (Atzmon and Boradkar 3). New materialism and posthumanism go back to matter as matter, thus offering a theoretical perspective to engage with materiality without being mainly preoccupied with meaning. Affect theory can be positioned next to the theory of posthumanism and new materialism (Ticinese Clough; Roelvink and Zolkos). A turning away from representationalism and essentialism is a theoretical position shared by both affect theorist and new materialist scholars (Fox and Alldred 118).

Representations play a major role in the fashion world. One could even argue that a fashion that is not depicted and used to communicate something cannot be fashion. Its material substrate though, the material object of fashion, is in most cases not a true representation. It is not made to look like something else, but it is designed as a functional object. The non-representational outlook of affect theory seeks to part from the emphasis on the conscious, the cognitive, the rational, the individual, and the textual in favor of a focus on the bodily, non-rational, and non-individual processes that shape human life (Leys). Affect theory thus may offer a tool to explore the non-representational side of fashion¹.

What affect theory can bring to fashion studies is a concentrating on unconscious, or

¹ This may suggest that I advocate for the use of affect theory for non-representational manifestations of fashion. But the representations of fashion can all be researched from an affect theory perspective. Affect theory has been proven of great interest for the study of film (see for instance Laura Marks, Vivian Sobchack, Steven Shaviro) and photography (Elspeth Brown). My point is that non-representational elements of fashion like design and production that are otherwise hard to assess from a cultural studies perspective can be researched using affect theory as an alternative point of view.

even ‘outside’ conscious processes, the forces that pull humans into action without their knowing. In the case of fashion this is more than necessary; when Dutch people buy forty six new garments a year while throwing away forty (*MVO Report*), rationality is clearly not involved. Yet those who seek to transform consumption patterns often appeal to rational thinking, to little avail, as humans tend to justify their behaviors (Eckhardt et al.). When calling on rationality fails to change people’s consumption habits, it might be more viable to look into pre-rational, pre-conscious and pre-personal processes in fashion.

Fashion’s product marketing relies heavily on the unconscious, on bodily sensation, and on emotion². According to most affect theorists, affect precedes these bodily sensations, emotions, and the action that may follow (Shouse). Affect can be seen as the catalyst of this cascade, meaning that it is a major force that deserves specific attention. Fashion, as all worldly phenomena, is propelled by affect, whether it is in the design studio, on the land of the cotton farmer, on the catwalk, in the office of the fashion researcher, or in the department store where teenage girls compare bikinis.

Research Question and Thesis Outline

Adopting affect theory as a starting point for looking at fashion means a break with the methods I used in cultural studies and fashion studies; I will not be able to fall back on the tested methods I learned to use, like semiotic analysis or discourse analysis. A non-representational approach asks for new methods. In this thesis I will venture out into unknown territory, embarking on an expedition to explore what the benefits of an affective approach could be for the study of fashion. I am not looking for solid outcomes or conclusions; this is an experiment. That means things can go wrong, that some of my prepositions can turn out to be useless, while others might work out well where I do not expect it.

The main objective of this thesis is to examine whether an affective, non-representational approach to research the material manifestations of fashion is advantageous. With this question as a guideline, I will investigate existing affective methods stemming from fashion studies, sociology, and film studies. Putting into practice combinations of methods will help me assess whether the use of affect theory can open up

² There are other theories that deal with the unconscious. Psychoanalytical theories of desire try to unravel why and how subconscious drives influence human behavior. Psychoanalytic research into fashion has been undertaken by for instance Fluegel (1930), Arnold (2001), and Steele (1996). The fact that the literature on this subject is relatively rare might have something to do with psychoanalysis’ heavy reliance on the textual, on language, as noted by McDougall: “Since its inception, psychoanalysis, following Freud, has privileged the role of language in the structuring of the psyche and in psychoanalytic treatment.” (Mc Dougall 11).

new ways of studying non-representational aspects of fashion. I choose to focus on materiality; on the creation of fashion, or the material products that result from it. The essence of fashion's material objects seems to escape from customary forms of material analysis, as I described in my bachelor thesis (Van Tienhoven). This master thesis can be seen as a continuation of my exploration of approaches for the analysis of fashion's material manifestations.

In chapter one, I will describe and explain affect theory and its main tenets. The following part of the chapter is devoted to assessing affective theories that could be beneficial for fashion research. Lastly, I will evaluate existing literature on fashion and affect theory.

The question of methodology will be extensively treated in chapter two. This chapter is dedicated to exploring the groundworks of method, and the alternative scientific paradigms of new materialism and posthumanism that create space for the development of affective methods. I will give a short overview of the main propositions of new materialisms, including posthumanism, in order to arrive at methodology, and method. Next, I will look at texts concerning method from a new materialist and affect theory perspective. In the following part I reassess three methods from fashion studies that have a strong affective undertone; ethnography, auto-ethnography, and object-based research. In the last part, I will discuss Laura U. Marks' affective method, designed for the affective analysis of art. A proposal for combining this affective method with elements of material analysis will mark the end of this chapter.

In chapter three I will test affective methods, using three case studies. The first case study consists of an affective analysis of a Jan Taminiau dress, exhibited at Centraal Museum in Utrecht. I will then move on to the investigation of the production of fashion in an analysis of the proceedings at Studio Ryn, a small fashion production studio run by Dutch designers Sjaak Hullekes and Sebastiaan Kramer, using the ethnographic interview, observation, and Marks' affective method. The last case study concerns an example of fast fashion from Primark and its material and affective appearance. The methods I will test in this case study are Marks' affective method, and material analysis. I will end the chapter with an assessment of the the methods I used.

In the conclusion of this thesis I will evaluate my experiences with affective methods for the research of fashion's material appearances, and elaborate on the possibility of further investigations and developments.

Chapter One: Affect Theory and Fashion

1.1 Introduction

On a grey day in the spring of 2001, at the Rue Rivoli in Paris, models were meticulously painted black by make-up artists. Preparations were in full swing for the Viktor and Rolf fashion show presenting the ready-to wear Fall/Winter collection named *Black Hole*. The atmosphere was giggly and loaded with an expectant tension. At the back room, crammed with clothing racks carrying black clothing, I was waiting for the show to start, hoping the model I was assigned to as a dresser would be easy to deal with. Tension slowly began to rise as the venue started to fill with journalists and fashionista's. Fully dressed models crowded backstage, waiting for their cue. Big screens were placed near the entrance to the stage, so those backstage could see what was happening in the main hall. It was dark in there, pitch black, and we could feel the tense expectation of the crowd, mingling with our own high pitched nerves, so common for the backstage fashion show experience.

When the music started and the first model walked onto the stage, arms and faced painted black and dressed in black as well, we could feel the collective gawking of the audience, a moment of surprise and bewilderment that seemed to travel through the blacked-out space, a shared feeling of awe and astonishment. This was a deeply visceral experience; I felt how the little hairs in my neck stood on end, how I held my breath, how a deep shiver got hold of my body. It was the first time I truly understood the intense power of affect created through the spectacle of fashion.

Within fashion, not only these carefully designed events are loaded with affect. From the most humble piece of daily clothing to the elaborate and sumptuous creations of haute couture, fashion touches its wearer, both physically and emotionally. Within the fashion industry, marketing specialists are all too aware of this, researching the effects of clothing on the human body, the way in which the experience of clothing and shopping can be optimized, the way in which brands can effectively use emotion to connect with the customer (see for instance Wu et al.; Parsons; Cho and Fiore). In academic circles, the intricate relation between fashion and affect has hardly been touched upon although the affective relation between clothing and memory though has been a point of interest (see for instance Stallybrass; Jones and Stallybrass). More in general, an affective interpreting of cultural memory related to fashion has been presented by Toussaint and Smelik. A specific

approach towards fashion that takes into account affect and affective processes is hardly used in fashion studies, even though there is agreement on the great importance of the emotional connections people have with what they wear and the importance of this affective bond for promoting a more sustainable consumption of fashion (see for instance Chapman). The fashion industry with its immense problems concerning overproduction, pollution, unethical working conditions, and spilling of water and raw materials, will use the strong affective properties of fashion to carry on promoting consumption. Researchers of fashion concerned with sustainability issues are challenged to understand and use the affective ‘weapons’ of the industry to establish a counter movement, focused on finding alternatives for a “self-sustainable system”, preoccupied with its own “illusionary and grandiose Ego” (Bruggeman 7). According to Bruggeman, it is time for fashion “to open up its transformative potential in order to re-engage with all the people and material involved” (8). Trying to understand the affective power of fashion might offer such an opening.

Within cultural studies, philosophy, queer studies and gender studies, the interest in affect has been on the rise since the early nineties of the last century. In this chapter I want to look into affect theory, and its possible use for theorizing about affect in fashion. I will start out with describing the emergence of affect theory and its main propositions. Next, I will look into several theories of affect that may be useful to look at fashion in an affective manner, starting with Sara Ahmed’s book chapter “Happy Objects”, which contains the notion that affect is sticky, and that certain objects are imbued with affect through association. The second idea of affect I will discuss is Teresa Brennan’s notion of contagious affect, explicated in depth in her book *The Transmission of Affect*. A third theory on affect that has implications for the study of fashion concerns the relation between affect and aesthetics, a question addressed by Simon O’Sullivan in his article “The Aesthetics of Affect”.

I will then discuss two articles on affect and fashion, one written by Stephen Seely, and another text by Lucia Ruggerone. I will end the chapter with an outline, gathering together the discussed concepts of affect that could benefit the study of fashion.

1.2 Affect Theory

According to Frykman and Povrzanović Frykman “affect encompasses the various capacities of bodies to affect and be affected, and ... it therefore refers to forces and intensities that are visceral” (12). This notion of affect originates from the 17th century philosophy of Baruch Spinoza. Spinoza’s ideas on affect have been reevaluated by philosophers Deleuze and Guattari. Brian Massumi defines their interpretation of affect in his “Notes on the Translation” accompanying his translation of Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*:

AFFECT/AFFECTION. Neither word denotes a personal feeling (sentiment in Deleuze and Guattari). L’affect (Spinoza’s affectus) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act. L’affection (Spinoza’s affectio) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include »mental« or ideal bodies)” (Massumi xv).

Deleuze and Guattari mostly use the term ‘affect’ to describe a force that produces “a change of state or capabilities in a relation” (Fox and Alldred 18).

In 1995, Massumi’s article “The Autonomy of Affect” appeared, a year that according to Gregg and Seigworth caused a “resurgence of interest and intrigue regarding affect ...” (Gregg and Seigworth 5). In his article, Massumi defines Deleuze and Guattari’s affect as “intensity”, “disconnected from the subjective, signifying, functional-meaning axis to which the more familiar categories of emotions belong” (Leys 441). In that same year Sedgwick and Frank published the essay “Shame in the Cybernetic Fold”, a reintroduction of the work on affect by the American psychologist Sylvan Tomkins, who proposes a bio-evolutionary interpretation of affects as “automatic responses of the organism that have evolved for survival purposes and lack the cognitive characteristics of the higher-order mental processes” (Leys 437). These two understandings of affect, the first describing affect as an autonomous force, the second defining affect as an innate human biological response, differentiate the two main positions within affect theory (Leys).

To substantiate his perspective on affect, Massumi makes use of neuroscientific research that supposedly shows that there is a lapse between bodily affect, and the

response to this same affect. Massumi takes this ‘split-second’ as a moment where intentionality is not present, where everything that could happen is still undefined. All possible actions reside in this short time period, a “realm of *potential*” (91, italics in original) which he describes as the *virtual*. The virtual is “a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect” (Ibid.) as opposed to the *actual*; the concrete expression of a single possibility in reality. But if the virtual is located in the unconscious, in the body and outside (or prior to) language, how can it be expressed? Leys mentions this paradox; in order to describe “non-intentional, bodily reactions” (437) we need language. This means that the bodily affective experience gets ‘overwritten’. Moreover, Massumi’s reliance on one single example of cognitive research is dubious, according to both Leys and Angerer. Several other neuroscientific studies of cognition have shown a close intertwining between affect and cognition (see for instance Damasio; Schachter and Singer). Neurobiological research into perception teaches that perception, affect, and memory are linked: the brain predicts the affective value of perceived objects “based on prior experiences with those objects, and these affective representations shape the person’s visual experience and guide action (Barrett and Bar 1331). In this light, one could wonder if a division between affect as pre-personal, feeling as embodied experience, and emotion as social and cultural is helpful. The division seems artificial, and somehow undermines the monism of new materialisms to which affect theory is linked. Ruth Leys writes: “Massumi et al. adhere to philosophies that oppose dualisms, [but] Massumi’s conclusions about affect can only be reached by adopting an idealized image of the mind as completely separate from the body” (Leys 455). This means that the traditional mind-body divide is let back in through the back door. When working with abstract notions of a pre-conscious affect the researcher needs to be attentive to these possible inadvertent reintroductions of binaries and hierarchies.

The approach to affect adopted by Sedgwick and Frank originates from the psychobiological theory of Sylvan Tomkins, written in the early sixties of the last century. Tomkins postulated that there are nine separate affects, which are innate and serve evolutionary purposes. Its origins “can be traced back to the work of Charles Darwin and William James” (Leys 437). Sedgwick and Frank emphasize the affect system as self-regulatory, which they connect to the concept of freedom. “Affect ... has a degree of competency and complexity that affords it the relative ability to motivate the human to a greater degree of freedom” (35). Because the affect system operates independently from social and cultural restraints, its biological incentives open up possibilities for self

expression. The polemic tone of the essay by Sedgwick and Frank suggests that the concept of innate, biological affects would have been controversial. When placed in a historical context, their re-appreciation of affect came in a time when the academic discourse was dominated by poststructuralism and discourse theory. A return to the body and its innate function was not obvious in an academic climate focused on language. As Leys states, affect theory is also a reaction against “what has come to be seen as the straitjacket imposed by the poststructuralist emphasis on language and psychoanalysis, a reaction also motivated by the view that the body in its lived materiality has been neglected in the humanities and social sciences” (Leys 440, 441). In practice, the reintroduction of Tomkins’ theory induced a renewed academic interest in affect and emotion.

In the introduction of *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Gregg and Seigworth, affect is consecutively described as *impingement*, *extrusion*, *intensity*, *force*, *encounter*, *bodily capacity*, *attunement*, *potential*, *atmosphere*, *promise*, *shimmer* and *the in-between*. The term appears elusive and vague; affect seems to have the uncanny ability to metamorphose constantly. The ambiguity of the term affect is noted by different theorists. As the material culture scholars Frykman and Povrzanović Frykman note: “the fact that the words affect, emotion, feeling and sentiment are often used interchangeably makes dialogue across disciplinary borders difficult and confusing” (10). Eric Shouse offers an account of affect theory that tries to untangle the knot of different connotations of the term, while following Massumi’s definition of affect as an *intensity*. Shouse defines affect as a “prepersonal intensity corresponding from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act” (2). Massumi describes emotion as a “qualified intensity”; an intensity translated into “function and meaning” (88), in other words, emotion is caught up in culture and language. Shouse further differentiates between feelings, emotions, and affect: “Feelings are *personal* and *biographical*, emotions are *social*, and affects are *prepersonal*” (2, italics in original). Still, in the literature on affect these terms are sometimes used interchangeably. It will depend on the context whether affect needs to be interpreted as describing human bodily experiences, emotions, or as an autonomous force that induces change.

1.3 An Affect Without a Subject

Affect theory steps away from the notion of humans as perfectly rational beings. According to Leys “cognition or thinking comes ‘too late’ for reasons, beliefs, intentions,

and meanings to play the role in action and behavior usually accorded to them” (Leys 443). This suggests that humans are spurred into action by anonymous forces, and not by their own conscious decisions. The concepts of pre-social affects adopted by Sedgwick, Massumi and others create several problems for researchers, as firstly, the pre-conscious, pre-social concept of affect disables any attempt to describe affect, and secondly, the mind-body dualism is covertly put back into position. According to Massumi, affect is a “concentration of bodily forces” (27), unqualified and located at a pre-subjective level. Emotions emerge as “the socio-linguistic fixing” (Massumi 28) of a “personal experience of a relation, a subjective and qualified intensity, sensed and recognized by a subject” (Ibid.). This means that whereas affect is an impersonal and a more or less formless ‘force’, the emotion that arises from the affective impulse is shaped by cultural norms and the former experiences and biography of the subject. The notion of affect as pre-personal, pre-social and pre-conscious has several advantages. The first I want to mention is that the universality of an impersonal affect that is located outside culture means that this affect is the same all over the world, a claim which is also laid by Tomkins. Such a notion of affect reduces the chance of cultural biases clouding research, and is in line with the inclusiveness that lies at the base of the political project of many scholars that use affect theory (see for instance Sedgwick, Berlant, Stewart, Braidotti). The second benefit of looking at affect as an anonymous power is that it places affect neither within the human subject, nor in the object. Affect in this sense is deeply relational, it arises in the in-between. This line of thought undermines the automatic assumption that only humans have agency and power, a way of thinking that has proved to be a *carte blanche* to usurp, conquer, deplete, demolish and exhaust all that is not human in the world.

It has to be noted though that an anonymous, relational affect, placed outside of human consciousness, raises some serious methodological issues. Brown and Tucker mention that “if we define affect as in essence beyond ordinary experience, ... then we are in effect pushing the motive core of affective phenomenon outside of analysis” (238). Affect then becomes, as they write, “ineffable and inexpressible” (Ibid.).

The ‘subjectless’ affect may have another more hidden property; it functions as a watershed between mundane ‘ordinary’ emotion, and a highly theoretical, abstract philosophical affect, thus underlining “a suspicion or denigration of the *merely* felt” (Colebrook 75, italics in original). For this reason I prefer to identify affect, feeling, and emotion as essentially entangled. I do recognize affect as the force that sets off feeling and emotion; there may be no hierarchy, but there is a sequence.

Whereas affect can not be physically located, translated, or perceived in the world, the feelings and emotions that are provoked by affect can be observed. In these, traces of affect can be found. For that reason it is of importance to take feelings and emotions seriously. Emotions are evidence. They show that someone or something has been touched by affect. Affect can not be pinpointed, but by reasoning backwards, we can know that any feeling or emotion that emerges points to an affect that must have preceded it: “affect is disclosed in atmospheres, fleeting fragments and traces, gut feelings and embodied reactions, and in felt intensities and sensations” (Blackman 25).

1.4 Ahmed’s ‘Happy Objects’

In the book chapter from the *Affect Theory Reader* “Happy Objects” Sara Ahmed introduces the term ‘sticky affect’ to describe how objects can get imbued with happiness through causality; we expect objects to do certain things to us based on earlier experiences with that same object: “we apprehend an object as the cause of an affect” (40). This attribution is done retrospectively: “Once an object is a feeling-cause, it can cause feeling, so that when we feel the feeling we expect to feel we are affirmed” (Ibid.). We then start to link the object with a feeling of well-being: “Certain objects are attributed as the cause of happiness ... we anticipate that happiness will follow proximity to this or that object” (41).

In fashion, this can mean that I may have experienced that a certain product has managed to make me feel happy, for instance a jacket by a certain brand. Now I will expect the same to happen in the future, based on my former experience, which leads to a doubling of affect: “If we arrive at objects with an expectation of how we will be affected by them, then this affects how they affect us, even in the moment when they fail to live up to our expectations” (Ibid.). This might also explain why the objects in a store that sells my preferred brand automatically suggest happiness to me; I will associate the store with the presence of ‘happy objects’, and the fact that the goods are present in that specific store means they must be conveyors of happiness.

For the marketing of fashion, the association between certain fashions and happiness is an important tool. A quick survey of some major fashion magazines shows that fashion advertising leans heavily on the association of products with happiness. The depicted pieces of clothing become ‘happy objects’ through association with a (supposedly) happy model, or the fashion image shows scenes that are regularly associated with happiness; get-togethers with friends, family dinners, time spent with children. The

fashion object which is now imbued with a 'happiness by proxy' becomes all the more desirable for the customer, as its supposed affective properties are expected to reflect onto the buyer of said object.

Ahmed mentions the word 'promise' in connection with her theory of sticky affect; "the promise of happiness takes this form: that if you have this or have that or do this or do that, then happiness is what follows" (41). Objects in this sense refer to "anything that we imagine might lead us to happiness, including objects in the sense of values" (Ibid.).

Happy objects come into existence in a social surrounding; they are confirmed by social practices that are ingrained through habit. The circulation of affect-charged objects also incurs an affective process which can 'glue' together social groups, or subcultures. The discussing, obtaining, and exchanging of special items of specific sneaker brands is an instance of group culture that revolves around 'happy objects'.

Not only do objects affect us through their own material properties and the socially induced promises of happiness that are connected to them, how we feel when we encounter such objects affects the object in return. As Ahmed states: "... if we are always in some way or another moody, then what we receive as an impression will depend on our affective situation" (36). When for instance we are burdened with grief, our grief 'leaks' into our surroundings, affecting the objects we encounter. The sweater last worn while breaking up a relationship will become a grief-and-anger-sweater. Affects travel, they trade places, they interconnect and get entangled. The sociologist Margaret Wetherell calls this affect in flux 'affective flow':

"the ongoing flow of affective activity can take shape as a particular kind of affective performance, episode or occasion ... affective practices unfurl, become organised, and effloresce with particular rhythms. Understanding the chronological patterning of these figurations, along with their sequencing and 'parsing', is crucial" (12).

For the fashion researcher this means the goal is not to pinpoint *where* affect is located, freezing it in time and place, but to follow how affect influences bodies and objects, and having an eye for how affects take (temporary) shape. When we look at fashion in its social forms, i.e. the fashion show, fashion advertisements, fashion magazines, design processes, production of fashion etcetera, looking at general formations of affect and the emergence of 'happy objects' can give valuable insights on how fashion 'works'.

1.5 Brennan's 'Transmission of Affect'

In her book *The Contamination of Affect* (2004), Teresa Brennan uses the term 'transmission of affect' to signal a process that is "social in origin but biological and physical in effect" (3). Affects are in essence social; they are not only personal but they arise through "interaction with other people and an environment" (Ibid.). In effect, they are physiological; they create bodily sensations. By using the term 'transmission of affect' Brennan points to how "emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another" (Ibid.). Brennan's notion of an affect that can travel from one body to another might be of help to shed more light on certain processes within fashion that have to do with the spreading of fashion trends. If fashion's affects are contagious, the spreading of trends can take place on a bodily and unconscious level. The bodily sensations caused by the strong affective flow during the Viktor and Rolf fashion show I described earlier are an example of such a process. In that specific case, a strong affective reaction emerged in the audience and spread through the room, causing a collective reaction and an emotionally charged atmosphere that is hard to describe in words.

Affective contamination might also play a role in how certain shops gain the status of fashion hot spots, depending on how affect is shared in these spaces. A first example is the legendary French boutique Colette, which used to be the epitome of cool³. Entering the white space of the store meant entering a fashion temple, filled with worshippers. Being described in the Guardian as a "place of pilgrimage", its status, reiterated again and again in newspapers and fashion magazines affected the way in which customers emotionally experienced the store (Cochrane). Colette's consecrated atmosphere affected not only its visitors, but also the goods that were on display. The tiniest pocket knife, or a pen, or a pair of simple sneakers, could become an object of aesthetic pleasure and trendiness because it was 'chosen' by the purchasing department 'initiates' of the store. The pricing of a product also influences its desirability; if a note book at Collette's costs fifty euros, this price also signals that it is a 'happy object' for the avant-garde in-crowd. The possession of such an object enhances both cultural and economic capital of the owner.

The fashion exhibition is another example of a fashion phenomenon loaded with potentially transmissible affective qualities. The design of the exhibition, the lighting, the

³ Colette was a high segment concept store on Rue Saint-Honoré, opened in 1997 by Colette Rousseaux. It sold small selections of the collections of carefully picked fashion and product designers, as well as books on design. Colette closed its doors in December 2017.

placing of the mannequins, the use of audiovisual techniques, the color schemes that are used, the route that is proposed, all these elements have affective properties that influence the visitors. Moreover, these affects can be transmitted; when for instance some visitors are particularly interested in an object, onlookers will feel invited to go on and study that same object with more scrutiny. When visitors show awe and reverence, the atmosphere at an exhibition will become subdued, almost devoted. Exhibitions with a light touch, like the Bas Kusters exhibition at Museum Arnhem, invited its guests to react with gaiety and hilarity. According to Brennan, in such cases affects are socially shared. For the research of affect in fashion, this is an interesting concept that may help to understand how certain fashions are successfully disseminated, taking into account the socially transmitted affects that surround those fashions.

1.6 O'Sullivan's 'Aesthetics of Affect'

The question whether fashion is to be seen as an art form has been addressed by several fashion scholars (see for instance Hollander; Miller "Is Fashion Art?"). According to Hollander "dress is a form of visual art, a creation of images with the visible self as its medium" (Hollander 311). Other scholars contest this positions, referring to conceptions of art that have their foundations in art history and philosophy (Carroll 241). When fashion is looked at from an affective aesthetic point of view it is the *experience* of fashion that is foregrounded. The work of Simon O'Sullivan on the aesthetics of affect offers an aesthetic theory that can be of use for the interpretation of fashion's affective qualities.

In his article "The Aesthetics of Affect, Thinking Art Beyond Representation", O'Sullivan approaches art from a Deleuzian perspective, focusing on an art that is inherently affective, in the sense that art's purpose is to incite change: "... art does what is its chief *modus operandi*: it transforms, if only for a moment, our sense of our selves and our notion of the world" (Sullivan 128). The question "What is art?" is not important: "what becomes important is what a particular object can do" (130). For O'Sullivan, affects are "extra-discursive and extra-textual" (126). They are "moments of *intensity*, a reaction in/on the body at the level of matter", occurring "on an asignifying level" (Ibid., italics in original). Building on the works of Deleuze on art, O'Sullivan takes the position that art *produces* affects. For fashion, an aesthetics of affect means that non-representational, material aspects can be approached by observing what an object of fashion *does*, what kind of affects it produces. Moreover, this approach means seeing the fashion object as a

phenomenon that is inherently affect-producing, whether it is traditionally seen as art or not. The indicator that points towards a fashion that behaves as art will be whether the object in question has the power to transform, to function as a “portal, or access point to another world (our world experienced differently), a world of impermanence and interpretation, a molecular world of becoming” (128). Certain types of high fashion can be recognized as having this potential. The work of Rei Kawakubo or the fantastic couture creations designed by Viktor and Rolf are obvious candidates to be looked at from an aesthetics of affect approach. But, as O’ Sullivan writes, art is a “bundle of affects waiting to be reactivated by a *spectator* or *participant*” (126, my italics). It is the viewer, or the wearer, that has the last word. A piece of fashion that for one person may not be aesthetic might set off a transformative process in another spectator. It may seem probable that the products of fast fashion will not function as a portal to a world of ‘becoming’, but this can only be ascertained by researching these objects and their users in an affective way.

1.7 Seely: “How Do You Dress A Body Without Organs?”

In his article “How Do You Dress a Body Without Organs?”, Stephen Seely argues that the haute couture fashion of Alexander McQueen, Rei Kawakubo, Hussein Chalayan and Gareth Pugh provide remarkable examples “of the use of fashion to decenter the human, to imagine the future otherwise, and to transform the body in nonhuman or other-than-human ways” (249), a point of view that coincides with O’Sullivan’s writings I discussed in the preceding paragraph. Seely also draws on the theory on ‘becoming’ and the Body-without-Organs by Deleuze and Guattari, but he relates this theory directly to fashion. Seely is not the only fashion scholar to look at fashion through the scope of the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari. In her article “Fashioning the Fold; Multiple Becomings”, Anneke Smelik approaches folding and pleating in fashion using Deleuze’s concept of the ‘fold’; “a dynamic and creative force that opens up the subject to a process of infinite becoming” (38). Smelik’s book chapter “Gilles Deleuze: Bodies-without-Organs in the Folds of Fashion” concentrates on the Deleuzian concepts of ‘becoming’, the fold, and the Body-Without-Organs as theoretical tools that have the capacity to revitalize the study of fashion.

Seely identifies fashion as affective when it has the capacity to transform the wearer into a Body-Without-Organs, or a ‘becoming’; he uses theatrical and spectacular examples from high fashion to underline his argument. Affective fashion is to Seely a “fashion that

seeks to harness the body's capacities for transformation and connection (i.e., affect), in order to force it to become-otherwise, beyond the dominant modes of organizing and imagining bodies" (250). Through affect, fashion and humans can get entangled in a process of becoming within an assemblage: "The matter, forces, and capacities that produce bodies constantly connect with other matter, forces, and capacities in a perpetual process of becoming, as assemblages between bodies form and then deform to produce further assemblages" (252).

I propose taking a step back though, for by looking only at the big gestures of fashion, the fact that other, more modest forms of dress have a transformative potential can get overlooked. Seely's use of the theory of Deleuze and Guattari to point out the transformative powers of high fashion is bold and interesting, but in my view these same principles are at work on a much more intimate and pedestrian scale, being at least partly responsible for the infinite lure of fashion. It is the promise of change, of transformation, that drives people to buy new things, even when their closet is already filled with clothes. Even when this transformation does not completely undo the conventional demarcating and categorizing of bodies in the way Deleuze's *Body-Without-Organs* undoes "the organization of the embodied 'self' as a fixed form or identity" (Smelik "Gilles Deleuze: Bodies-without-Organs" 172), these small, daily transformations do have the potential to express a fluidity of identity. For instance, cross dressing or androgynous dress undermines common categories of bodies on a less spectacular level.

Seely's affective fashion is also a highly elitist fashion, a fashion as an art that has the "power to resist a complete capture by capitalism" (263). This form of high fashion is not available to most people. In many cases this fashion is not even designed to be worn, but it is made first and foremost for the spectacle of the catwalk, which functions merely as a showcase that has to stimulate the sales of perfume and accessories on which fashion companies rely for profit. On a more modest, day-to-day level, people may not experience a 'becoming-animal', which "undoes the rigid stratifications between animals and humans by placing them in so close a proximity that their differentiation is no longer possible or simple" (255), but they do become 'something' else.

Seely does acknowledge that "all clothing, even in its most quotidian, transforms the wearer, producing assemblages with the body (253). This is a notion of affective fashion that is more inclusive, acknowledging the ability of certain fashions to induce a transformative process without this transformation having to be extreme for the outside eye. From the marginalized place of a minority group, 'becoming-confident' might mean an

life-changing event that equals the transformational qualities of the philosophical Deleuzian ‘becoming-animal’⁴.

Moreover, the small transformations caused by the affective material properties of clothing are worthy of attention as well. The material characteristics of the clothes people wear daily affect the wearer; an understanding of these very specific small-scale affective events can offer important clues on how to implement changes in design and production that influence consumer behavior. As Danielle Bruggeman notes, in order to offer alternatives for the current fashion system, it is of great importance that both fashion researchers and designers “explore the affective and sensorial dimensions of fashion” (52). From my point of view as a designer and a researcher, this means taking note of these ‘micro-affects’ as well as affects on a larger scale, recognizing that fashion always has an “embodied and emotional dimension” (Bruggeman 38). I will investigate some of these material affective properties of fashion in the Primark case study in chapter three.

1.8 Ruggerone: “The Feeling of Being Dressed”

Lucia Ruggerone proposes a new way of examining fashion through “the investigation of the body-clothes assemblage; in particular, the notion of body as a composition of forces and the approach to practices (in this case dressing practices) as ways of becoming” (574). The ‘becoming’ Ruggerone mentions is again a referral to the philosophical concept devised by Deleuze and Guattari. The idea of becoming entails a “different way of thinking about human identity; not rigid and fixed from cradle to grave, but fluid and flexible throughout life. Human identity is capable of morphing into new directions ...” (Smelik “Gilles Deleuze: Bodies-without-Organs” 167).

Ruggerone argues that fashion studies have mainly be focused on “semiotic, structural and sociological practices” (577) while leaving “non-rational, sensory ones implicit, glossed over, unexplored” (547). While she acknowledges Joanne Entwistle’s research on fashion as an embodied practice Ruggerone argues that although the body is taken into account, Entwistle’s focus is on social practices, not on the real flesh and blood body. Ruggerone does underline the importance of the research of Joanne Entwistle for foregrounding the embodied practices of dressing, a research that recognizes the “extra-cognitive (emotional and/or affective) dimensions of our relationship with clothes” (578),

⁴ An example of how dress can transform lives is the *Sew Swag* project in Los Angeles, set up by 17-year old Dylan Eislan. Eislan ‘upcycles’ second-hand clothing which is then handed out to homeless youth, so they can go to school or apply for a job with more confidence. Source: BBC III Solutions Lab: The Teen Upcycling Clothes for the Homeless. YouTube. 5 June 2018.

but she argues that this still keeps in place a strict division between mind and matter, presenting a dualism where “a thinking agent (a sense-making mind) adorns his/her body (the material, natural part of the ego) to give the world an intellectually orchestrated representation of the self” (579).

According to Ruggerone, the Deleuzian notions of becoming, and of the *assemblage*, a network of humans and non-humans entangled in “clusters of connections between a variety of material and immaterial elements: molecules, neurons, cells but also ideas, signs, cultural symbols, etc.” (Ibid.) break open this dualism in favor of a more fluid understanding of the material world. This means that the affective potentials that arise between bodies become a focus for research in fashion by interrogating not what a body is, but what it *does* in encounters with other affective bodies (Ibid.).

What makes this affective approach complicated is that affect lies outside of language, and that it is constantly moving. One can only ‘translate’ affect into emotion through language (and thus culture) after the affective moment has passed. Ruggerone’s main argument is that how people select and wear clothes can “be interpreted as an encounter between a human body and objects that initiates a process of mutual becoming with either a positive or a negative outcome” (580). This is a viable proposition, but the question that arises is: *how* are these assemblages to be studied? Ruggerone advises to use methods to study affect like “auto-ethnography or a narrative account produced by the affected person” (587). These methods then should allow for “styles of expression produced either on the spur of the moment (increasingly available through digital social media) or creatively suggested with the aid of metaphors, pictures, drawings, analogies etc”, thus creating new affective relations (587). A possible danger in getting too caught up in trying to describe the “perpetual becomings, events in which our bodies transform as a result of encounters with other bodies (human and non-human)” (580) is that the researcher gets ‘stuck’ at subjective descriptions of such processes, without a clear research target. Unfortunately, Ruggerone does not present a case study that could give more insight in how to this methodology for looking at fashion through an affective perspective would take shape.

Ruggerone states that the promise of ‘becoming’ that is inherent to the assemblage of body and clothes “may well be the element that attracts the attention of the (potential) wearer and excites his/ her desire to buy it and put it on” (581). As I argued earlier an understanding of these potentials of fashion is of great importance for any research that is invested finding alternatives for the current fashion system. Ruggerone’s interest in the

daily process of choosing what to wear is promising. Next to adopting a new way of thinking about the affective processes that lie behind these daily choices a more detailed look at how these affects arise is needed, including a methodology that helps to unpick these processes. From all the objects humans use to express their identity, fashion objects are the closest to the body; humans almost merge with what they wear. Dress dictates how people move around, how they sit, stand, take position in a room. Ruggerone paints this reality in a beautiful sentence:

“Dress is something that will morph into my body and into which my body will change when I go out into the world, something that will open up or close down for me possibilities of becoming, of immersing in the flow of worldly practices more or less easily, equipped with energies or devoid of them, feeling (albeit inexplicably) strong or ill-adjusted, and all this depending on a series of affects that I cannot anticipate, but might come to consciously perceive in the form of positive or negative emotions” (585).

What is not addressed by Ruggerone is how the affective processes of wearing clothes are mediated by the skin; the haptic element of wearing clothes. The understanding of the affective relations humans have with clothing will benefit from taking into account this haptic element, as it is a vital actor in the body-clothes assemblage. Affects can only arise through external stimuli, and touch is fundamental in the case of fashion. As Bruggeman remarks: “In the field of fashion, sight -the visual- is often privileged. Yet, our embodied experience of fashion and of wearing clothes engages all the senses” (53). In a more general sense, Mark Paterson notes that Western culture ignores the haptic: “Despite the inescapable nature of everyday touching and tactile experience, it is astonishing how under-theorized even the immediacy of tactile sensation remains” (3).

To assess whether the clothes we choose suit us we do not only use vision, it is a combination of sensorial stimuli that makes us decide whether a particular piece of clothing is ‘right’ or not. Ruggerone does indicate that what we *see* in the mirror when trying on something new might not be what we expect, resulting in a negative feeling. All too often it is what we *feel* on our skin that informs us a skirt or sweater is not right; it itches, it is too tight, the fabric is clingy. Although the senses work interdependently, for fashion touch is of special importance as it is worn directly on the body.

Thinking in assemblages as proposed by Ruggione can be of help to include touch as a vital element in fashion research. Looking at affect in fashion could mean researching

how the haptic plays a role in the perception and experience of fashion. As Bruggeman suggests “dissolving the Ego of fashion thus also means moving beyond the dominant focus on the visual -it entails drawing more attention to the other senses as well” (Ibid). A better understanding of how affect and touch relate to each other could bring new insights into what makes the assemblage of body and clothes a successful one⁵.

1.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed affect theory and its main propositions. Several theorists offer ideas on affect that can be of use for the study of fashion. Sara Ahmed’s notion of ‘happy objects’ explained how affect can be ‘sticky’; how objects can be imbued with certain affective qualities by social practices, and how these qualities are then consolidated by iterative processes. Certain objects are pre-sorted to become ‘happy objects’ through social practices. The notion of a ‘sticky affect’ can be useful in studying how certain fashion trends get a foothold. Teresa Brennan’s description of the contamination of affect showed how affects travel, how the bodily reactions of affect can be transmitted to other bodies. Envisaging affect as a force that is contagious can help to see certain patterns in affective processes in fashion, mainly those that involve social interaction, for instance at the level of the production of fashion in design studios, or at large facilities in low wage countries. Simon O’Sullivan’s ideas on the aesthetics of affect can be of help to foreground what fashion *does*. His point of view offers a new perspective on the discussion whether fashion is art or not.

Seely proposed a notion of affective fashion as being inherently transformative. According to him, some high fashion designs have the ability to evoke processes of ‘becoming’. I argued that these transformations also take place on a more humble level. O’Sullivan’s view on affect as a process that takes place *within* the spectator can point the way to research that is inclusive of less obvious ‘becomings’.

Ruggerone’s perception of the affect of fashion as inherently embodied, and taking place within complex assemblages of human and non-human bodies opens up fashion research by having more attention for how we *feel* about fashion. I argued that there is a need for more specificity; by incorporating haptics into these assemblages the research into affect and fashion can become more complete, more inclusive.

⁵ Sara Chong Kwan, PhD candidate at the London College of Fashion, is currently writing a thesis which “emerges from the conviction that multi-sensory perception is fundamental to the experience of everyday dress as worn by a feeling, sensing body and the resulting desire to integrate this into our understanding of the complex role dress plays in our personal and social lives” (Chong Kwan n.pag.).

In the next chapter I will explore how these different takes on affect can be used as starting points to come up with practical affective methods for analyzing fashion.

Chapter Two: Developing Affective Method

2.1 Introduction

Theorizing affect is compelling, but theory alone is not enough to research affect in fashion. A solid methodology is needed. In this chapter, I will look into the foundational elements of method. I will discuss how affect theory can be linked to new materialisms, and how this affects methodology, and method. I will present several takes on method that are versed in a new materialist onto-epistemology. A next step is the revisiting of methods used within the study of fashion that have a strong affective component, in order to investigate whether elements of these methods can be used as building blocks for an affective method for the analysis of fashion. In the last paragraph of this chapter I will elaborate on the affective method designed by Laura U. Marks. I suggest adding elements of material analysis to this research approach in order to further facilitate its use for fashion.

2.2 Method: Groundworks

Methods do not just appear from nowhere. They are grounded in presumptions about what constitutes reality, what can be known about this reality, and how such knowledge is obtained; ontology and epistemology. According to Scotland, there are three basic scientific paradigms, underpinned by onto-epistemological assumptions. The most common scientific paradigm today, especially within the natural sciences, is positivist realism, based on a realist ontology; the world is out there, prior to our existence, and it can be objectively known. Methodologies tend towards gathering objective data through quantitative methods. Scotland formulates the basics of this approach:

“[The] aim is to formulate laws, thus yielding a basis for prediction and generalization. A deductive approach is undertaken. Correlation and experimentation are used to reduce complex interactions of their constituent parts. Verifiable evidence is sought via direct experience and observation; this often involves empirical testing, random samples, controlled variables (independent, dependent and moderator) and control groups” (10).

Then there is the interpretative paradigm, versed in an ontology of relativism; the

world does not exist independently from human consciousness, it is individually constructed, and shaped by language (Ibid). All knowledge is constituted in a relative position: it is “culturally derived and historically situated” (12). Interpretative methodologies are “directed at understanding phenomena from an individual’s perspective, investigating interaction among individuals as well as the historical and cultural contexts which people inhabit” (Ibid.). Methodological approaches include case studies, ethnography, hermeneutics, phenomenology, etcetera. The methods used are mostly qualitative in nature.

According to Scotland, the third paradigm, the critical paradigm, is based on an ontology of historical realism; “reality has been shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values” (13), in short, they are socially constructed and subject to constant change. A critical methodology is “directed at interrogating values and assumptions, exposing hegemony and injustice, challenging conventional social structures and engaging in social action” (13). Discourse analysis, critical ethnography, and ideology critique are all examples of methodologies that fit within a critical paradigm. Methods derived from this methodology might include the use of interviews, focus groups, observations, and journals.

Within fashion studies, an interest in methodology has emerged relatively late (Jenss 1). In 2011 Kawamura’s *Doing Research in Fashion and Dress* was published, an oversight of method in fashion studies. Kawamura is of the opinion that qualitative research within fashion studies should be done “empirically, scholarly, and scientifically” (2), but she does not elaborate on the implications of this statement. It is as if an empiric scientific approach should elevate the status of fashion studies, of which she writes:

“One of the reasons why fashion/dress studies is not taken as seriously as the scholars would like ... is that there are no clearly articulated theoretical framework and methodological strategies to study fashion/dress. Nor do we recognize various methodological tools and options to investigate fashion/dress, especially when it is treated as an abstract concept rather than raw materials of clothing” (1).

These sentences show an unspoken adhering to the standards of scientific research that are rooted in an empiricist, positivist tradition. In Jenss’ *Fashion Studies, Research Methods, Sites, and Practices* Heike Jenss does elaborate on questions of ontology and epistemology, and their importance for method. She sees “modes of doing research” as essentially “intertwined with ontological assumptions about the world” (2). The chapter by

Kaiser and Green in the same book explicitly attends to philosophical questions concerning knowledge. Kaiser and Green summarize: “quantitative methods tend to be aligned with positivist approaches, while methods such as discourse analysis sit well with critical approaches, and ethnographic methods tend to be associated with interpretive approaches” (161). They acknowledge the importance of positioning method within an epistemological paradigm, but they do not connect epistemology to assumptions about reality. Most research is implicitly built on one of the three paradigms mentioned: positivist, interpretative, or critical, and in many cases this can be easily derived from the research. An object-based approach is embedded in a positivist paradigm, fashion research on gender and queer culture is based on a critical paradigm. But where should an affective approach towards fashion be located? Thinking about a research method for fashion based on affect theory means I have to reorientate and locate affect theory between old paradigms and alternative paradigms that can give room to a perspective that does not put humans in a central position, and that has an eye for the non-representational⁶.

Affect theory can be placed in a critical paradigm; its preoccupation with politics, the position of minorities, gender, (neo-liberalist) capitalism, and globalization is obviously socially critical. The paradigm of positivist realism is hardly suitable for affect theorists; if affect is either pre-individual and pre-conscious, or located within the body, questions concerning objective knowledge are hardly of relevance. The interpretative paradigm is also less suitable; its emphasis on language and constructivism is exactly what most affect theorists are rallying against, in favor of an approach that foregrounds bodily experiences and non-human forces that function as catalysts for all that happens. The relatively young paradigm of new materialism departs from a place where these old hierarchies are set aside.

2.3 New Materialisms

According to Fox and Alldred, new materialism offers a new perspective on the world through its 'flat', or monist ontology, meaning that new materialism steps away from the dualisms that define how humans classify reality: culture-nature, mind-matter, human and non-human. The new materialist approach, by “challenging any distinction between the materiality of the physical world and the social constructs of human thoughts and

⁶ This does not mean older paradigms have to be let go of completely, but a new paradigm will offer fresh points of entrance to look at fashion and its myriad appearances.

desires, ... opens up the possibility to explore how each affects the other, and how things ... can be social agents” (Fox and Alldred 7). In new materialist thinking, matter is not fixed, but in constant motion. Coole and Frost write:

“It is in ... choreographies of becoming that we find cosmic forces assembling and disintegrating to forge more or less enduring patterns that may provisionally exhibit internally coherent, efficacious organization: objects forming and emerging within relational fields, bodies composing their natural environment in ways that are corporeally meaningful for them, and subjectivities being constituted as open series of capacities or potencies that emerge hazardingly and ambiguously within a multitude of organic and social processes” (10).

This long, evocative quote holds several of the main propositions of new materialism; the de-centering of humans, matter as emergent and in constant flux, the inherent relationality of things coming into existence, realities that are enacted within assemblages, and the forces that propel all this; affects. John Law describes assemblages as “a process of bundling, of assembling, or better of recursive self-assembling in which the elements put together are not fixed in shape, do not belong to a larger pre-given list but are constructed at least in part as they are entangled together” (42). In these assemblages, matter is *enacted*: Barad introduces the concept of a ‘performative metaphysics’ (Barad “Posthumanist Performativity”). She proposes the concept of agential realism, based on the idea that matter comes into being only through performative, enacted, ‘intra-actions’. Although Barad does not mention the term affect, the intra-action could be seen as an affective process, where “agential intra-actions are specific causal material enactments that may or may not involve ‘humans’” (817).

Posthumanism is often positioned next to new materialism (Ticinese Clough 47). Coole and Frost capture posthumanism under the umbrella of the plural ‘new materialisms’ (Coole and Frost 4). According to Braidotti, “posthuman theory is a generative tool to help us re-think the basic unit of reference for the human in the biogenetic age known as “anthropocene”, the historical moment where the Human has become a geological force capable of affecting all life on this planet” (5). It is “concerned with the consequences for all life forms, not only humans” (7). Posthumanism takes a critical position towards capitalism and globalization, processes that “exacerbate the colonization of earth in an unsustainable and unethical way” (Ibid.). Affect theory, with its centering of non-human affect, and the foregrounding of affective, non-rational and

embodied processes that shape the (social) world, fits in the new paradigms of new materialism and posthumanism, while still being partly connected to the older interpretative and critical paradigms.

2.4 New Materialisms, Matter, and Meaning

The monist ontology of the new materialisms creates new room for thinking about things. When matter is not opposed to meaning, but part of it (and vice versa) the semiotic is simply a part of the material assemblage. A less rigid division between matter and meaning could be of use for the material analysis of fashion artifacts. Moreover, a new materialist approach could help to break down the division between a strictly visual and a material analysis. According to Malafouris, there is no such thing as a purely 'material' object; "a material sign can be seen to operate simultaneously as a signifier and a signified. It can be used both as something in itself and as a representation of something other than itself" (117). Jules Prown, who devised the method of object-based research to analyze artifacts states that "the methodology of material culture is also concerned with semiotics in its conviction that artifacts transmit signals which elucidate mental patterns or structures", and that "artifacts serve as cultural releasers" (Prown 6), meaning that the division between the material and the semiotic may never have been very strict. New materialist theory offers arguments for the inherent intertwining of semiotics and the material.

The same accounts for the discursive; when matter comes into being through intra-active enactments (Barad "Posthumanist Performativity") the discursive element is part of this enactment; it is enacted in the coming into being of all matter, humans, and spaces. As Barad writes: "discursive practices are specific material (re)configurings of the world through which local determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted" (821). In other words, "discursive practices are boundary-making practices" (Ibid.) that shape matter. The ontology of new materialism thus offers a way out of constraining contrapositions. Situated embodiment, the performative, the referential, the spatial, the haptic, the affective, all can arise as points of interest within the affective research of a phenomenon or object. It becomes a question of becoming attuned to what element takes the upper hand, or setting out with a specific research question that focuses on a particular quality within the assemblage. When affect is the starting point, this does not mean that semiotics have no place within an analysis; they are entangled. It is simply

not possible to disjoin these qualities. In the introduction of Patrizia Calefato's *The Clothed Body* she writes about fashion as "that particular synergy of signs and senses which the practice of dressing has always produced. A garment exposes the body to a continuous transformation, organizing in signs – that is, in culture – what the natural world possesses as mere potential, as the tendency of the sensible to become significant" (Calefato 1, 2). Wearer and fashion object are entangled in a web of matter, meaning, and affect.

2.5 New Materialisms and Fashion Studies

What does this new materialist/posthuman take on reality mean for the study of fashion? According to Smelik, there are several reasons why a new materialist perspective is relevant for fashion studies. In the first place, she acknowledges that fashion studies has always been preoccupied with the materiality of fashion: "fashion studies has always privileged the materiality of clothes and the relation between clothing and the body" ("New Materialism" 34). Fashion's materiality may have been overshadowed by the implicit assumptions of the prevailing positivist and interpretative paradigms but it is recognized nevertheless, and has always been. I would like to note here that even the elements of fashion that are seen as 'immaterial' or purely representational always have a material substrate; before the weblogger in cyberspace can picture herself wearing the trendiest dress, the cotton has to be grown, the fabric woven, the dress designed, made, and distributed. There is no such thing as an immaterial fashion, unless it is purely imaginary.⁷ Woodward and Fisher underline the materiality of so called immaterial fashion media (online fashion media, fashion photography, fashion shows). They see these fashion phenomena as forms of materialization: all elements of mediated fashion serve "to make fashion material in particular ways" (4); they all have their own specific materiality.

Secondly, the onto-epistemology of new materialism offers the chance of letting go of conventional dualisms, for instance nature-culture and subject-object. Smelik writes: "In rethinking matter through the prism of new materialism, the classical divisions between the material and immaterial, the human and non-human, animate and inanimate, begin to break down" ("New Materialism" 37). The premises of new materialism also allow for a refusal of the traditional opposition between the material and the semiotic. This means new spaces can be opened up for devising methods.

Another reason why a new materialist approach can be beneficial is because of its

⁷ Literary fashions are an interesting example.

deep concern with ecology. As the fashion industry is growing fast, issues concerning sustainability are getting more pressing. The division nature-culture has resulted in a splitting off of humans and their environment, leading to an unsettling situation of cognitive dissonance wherein humans eat away at the same world that has to sustain them. An outlook on fashion that takes into account the entanglement of humans, non-humans, nature and culture might offer new visions that give insight in the material processes of producing, designing, and consuming fashion. The knowledge obtained in this way could, in the best case scenario, be used to propagate a more sustainable fashion. According to Bruggeman “a new materialist approach to fashion thus allows to take into account living, fashioned bodies, embodied subjects, and the actual materiality of fashion” (3). A new materialist take on fashion should then be helpful to put a spotlight on fashion’s blind spots; the strange omission of the experience of actually wearing fashion, and the tactile relationship humans have with clothes.

Affect theory can serve like a wedge through its focus on embodied experience, feelings, and emotions, and on the other side through its understanding of a humanity that is less rational than it would like to be, as it is moved by non-human forces and unconscious affects. In fashion studies, research methods that depart from a material approach (for instance object-based research) is still rare, as noted by Smelik (“New Materialism”), Palmer, Taylor (“Fashion and Dress History”), and others, including myself. Affect theory could help finding a way to combine an understanding of fashion’s manifestations as both material and affective.

2.6 New Outlooks on Method

I return shortly to my first paragraph on the basis of research; ontology and epistemology. According to Hay (2002), methodology follows from foundational considerations on being and knowledge. A methodology is concerned with how knowledge is obtained. From this follows the actual method, the tool to produce knowledge. In the ideal situation, methods should be devised in such a way that they are in line with the ontological and epistemological tenets of a particular theory. Affect theorists, like new materialist scholars, are interested in how certain phenomena emerge, not so much in what they are. How do affective processes take shape? How is affect distributed? How does affect travel through minds and bodies? Any method based in affect theory then must be designed to deal with the processual, not the particular. However, parts of the method still

can consist of assessing singular objects, events, or phenomena. The interpretation of the data obtained through the use of the method can then be used to cover a bigger picture.

Coole and Frost make an important remark regarding research done from within a materialist paradigm. They propose a “multimodal methodology, one congruent with the multitiered ontologies, the complex systems, and [a] stratified reality” (32). Furthermore, a new materialist analysis “traces the complex and reversible causalities that run between different levels of the social system and especially between the microlevel of everyday, and the macrolevel or structural” (32). Smaller, everyday fashion phenomena, like choosing what to wear (Ruggerone) can be connected with theories of affect that are concerned with the greater picture of biopolitics, political economy, and geopolitics (Coole and Frost 28).

The question of a new materialist methodology has been taken up by scholars within the field of sociology, and of late, also cultural studies. In 2017, sociologists Fox and Alldred published a book on how to approach research from within a new materialist paradigm called *Sociology and the New Materialism, Theory, Research, Action*. They propose a type of research focused on ‘the how, not the what’: the social phenomena to be researched are not of interest in themselves; it is the way in which phenomena come into being that is the focus of research. By studying how assemblages emerge and disassemble, how agency is distributed, how affective powers influence the processes studied, the researcher can collect knowledge on her fields of interest. Fox and Alldred suggest that the researcher should attend to assemblages of humans and non-humans, and the affective flow within the assemblage, and not put the focus on “individual bodies, experiences or sensations” (169). Secondly, they suggest that the researcher should explore “how affects draw the material and the cultural ... into assembly together” (Ibid.). The objectives of research then would be the revealing of “relations, affects and affect economies in assemblages, the capacities (and limits to capacities produced in bodies, collectivities and social formations, and the micro politics of these capacities and limits” (Ibid.).

I should note here that their aim is to propose new directions for research within the study of sociology, not fashion studies or cultural studies. Their proposals are of use even though within cultural studies and fashion studies the qualitative research of “specific bodies, experiences and sensations” is an everyday and much accepted element in research practice. A small assemblage of for instance researcher and fashion object engaged and entangled within the enactment of research is still an assemblage, after all. Bigger assemblages can be perceived in complex systems like the production and distribution of fashion.

The question of method within a new materialist paradigm has also been treated by sociologist John Law. His book *On Method*, published in 2004, is completely dedicated to the question of method in sociology from within a what he names a ‘post-positivist’ perspective. He argues for what he calls a ‘messy’ use of method; a method that reflects the inherent untidiness and constant changing of the world that surrounds us. He pleads for the study of embodied practices, for the use of literary tools to describe the assemblages that are researched, and an overall acceptance of the inherent incompleteness of research findings.

2.7 Revisiting Existing Methods in Fashion Studies

As fashion studies is such a wide ranging project, “figuring out one’s methods in the conducting of fashion research is anything but a straightforward process” (Jenss 2). Jenss therefore advises to take into account the approaches of other researches, and to carefully study their way of doing research: “by looking closely into what their use of sources and methods (and theories) make possible” (12). By scrutinizing existing methods and the way in which affect plays a role in them I hope to find some useful suggestions that will help me to experiment with affective methods for approaching the fashion object. I will look at three methods with a strong affective undertone that are commonly used within the study of fashion and material culture. These methods are ethnography, auto-ethnography, and object-based research.

In his book *Stuff*, the anthropologist and material culture pioneer Daniel Miller describes what it ‘means’ (culturally and from a material perspective) to wear a sari. He literally writes: “First, let’s consider how it feels to wear a sari”(23). His interest lies with the affective material qualities of the sari, and how these affects interact with cultural identity. He then offers a very detailed and convincing description of the physical sensations that come with wearing a sari; it is as if he has tried on a sari himself, and lived in it for some days. Further on, it becomes clear that he has used interviews to collect his data. Another example of ethnographic research that focuses on matters of affect is Sophie Woodward’s research into jeans, the *Global Denim Project*. Woodward’s material culture approach towards fashion opens up all kinds of new possibilities to take into account the affective properties of clothing. Wardrobe studies are now a tested and tried way to do research into the everyday practices of dressing (see Fletcher and Klepp). The ethnographic methods (interviews, surveys, questionnaires) used by Woodward are

effective in unearthing the affective relationships between wearers and clothes.

A different research method that is used within the study of fashion that has clear affective elements is autoethnography. Fashion scholar Brent Luvaas describes the task of the autoethnographer as follows; “In autoethnography, self-reflexivity is a mechanism for creating a more honest, situated, and grounded form of social scientific research” acknowledging “how one’s own background and experience have shaped the account produced”, and “paying particular attention to one’s thoughts, feelings and physical sensations as a subject of inquiry” (89, 90). These affective reactions can be used as data in their own right. Luvaas uses the method of autoethnography to explore fashion blogging by using his own experience as a blogger. This is a research practice that is multi-layered, involving many different experiences, skills, routines, circumstances, humans, and material objects. The analysis of a single fashion object by an involved researcher may be less wide-ranging, but the self reflection of autoethnography can be a relevant point of departure to research the affective power of the material fashion object. However, there is the danger of the research becoming a ‘one (wo)man show’, a private and self-indulgent navel gazing. Cultural studies scholars Knudsen and Stage muse on autoethnography in their book *Affective Methodologies*: “Can knowledge production become too local and subjective and thus signal a leap backwards from the desire to produce evidence-based knowledge to the less ambitious desire to produce knowledge about the researcher and his/her desire?” On the other hand, they recognize that autoethnography has the power to “acknowledge the fact that we need to use and be honest about our own bodily involvements and reactions as a part of affective research, instead of covering it up and trying to disguise the fact that researchers also have bodies with a capacity to be affected” (17). As ever, the best way will probably be the golden mean. A well-considered and sensible research question will be helpful to reign in possible excesses of the all-too-personal. Paramount is the relevance of the data that are obtained, and the quality of the analysis based on these same data.

The last method I want to revisit is object-based research. When I wrote my bachelor thesis on this subject I concluded that this was not the most convenient method to approach the material fashion object. I concluded that object-based research in fashion tends to stick too close to the object to provide insight in the meaning of the fashion object. It generates stacks of data that are hard to manage and hard to interpret (Van Tienhoven 18). Smelik notes that “a focus on the gathering of data for description and documentation can no longer be the most appropriate approach for analysing fashion now that fashion

studies encompasses such diverse issues” (“New Materialism” 35, 36). When looking at object-based research from an affective perspective, certain elements of the method could be reassessed for its affective qualities. A reevaluating of Jules Prown’s original writings on this method shows that he insists on taking into account the affective and the emotional. The second phase in his method is dedicated to *deduction*, involving “the empathic linking of the material (actual) or represented world of the object with the perceiver’s world of existence and experience” (Prown 8). The researcher is encouraged to become aware of her own reactions to the object in question, to explore her feelings and reactions, as these can give valuable information on how to place the object in a cultural perspective. Prown suggests that “the methodology of material culture with its affective approach that aspires to the objectivity of scientific method, affords a procedure for overcoming the distortions of our particular cultural stance, and ... makes visible the otherwise invisible, unconscious biases of our own cultural perspective” (5). Overcoming cultural biases may not be viable as such, but a greater awareness can be of relevance for the acknowledging of the researcher’s own position within affective research.

An example of an object-based approach connected with affect can be found in the work of Francesca Granata. Granata uses Prown’s method to analyze the fashion of Martin Margiela. Smelik justly remarks that “Francesca Granata (2012) has reinstalled Prown’s method of ‘reading’ clothes, but in her case this method can only work by critically combining it with theories from film studies and cultural studies” (“New Materialism” 36). Object-based research on its own simply does not allow for enough entrance points to analyze the complex fashion artifact.

Granata describes how she used object-based research for her project; “I closely examined, photographed, measured, and whenever possible, handled, surviving dress in museums and private collections” (145). This was necessary to gain knowledge of construction techniques, the textiles and alternative materials that were used, and “the effects that these materials might have ultimately produced”(Ibid). Granata shows a deep interest in what Margiela’s clothes *do*, how they influence, or affect, the viewer/wearer. The seemingly dry measuring and assessing how the clothes are constructed are immediately linked to what effect these garments have on an audience; their specific construction allows for “gargantuan dimensions”, suggesting enormous bodies. The close analysis of the material qualities of the fashion objects is “allowing a theorization of the collections’ relation to normative sizes and body types” (147). This example shows that the specific material properties of the fashion objects can be affective, they are able to invoke

feelings, thoughts, and in the end, even theories.

Other fashion scholars underline that object-based research should not be used on its own, but that it can be useful as a supportive method (Taylor “Fashion and Dress History”; Steele “A Museum of Fashion”; Mida and Kim). When affect is the starting point of research, the deduction stage of a material analysis can be particularly helpful to map both the affective qualities of the fashion object, and I would suggest using this material element of research as part of an affective method within the study of fashion.

2.8 Affective Method

Developing practical methods to study affective processes means setting up strategies. In 2015, cultural studies scholars Knudsen and Stage edited the anthology *Affective Methodologies*. They define affective method as an “innovative strategy for (1) asking research questions and formulating research agendas relating to affective processes, for (2) collecting or producing embodied data and for (3) making sense of this data in order to produce academic knowledge” (1). Their goal is to help researchers come to terms with doing research from within a non-anthropocentric, non-representational epistemology by providing a set of tools, a framework for designing ‘inventive methods’ that “enable the happening of the social world – its ongoingness, relationality, contingency and sensuousness – to be investigated” (Lury and Wakeford 17).

When devising an affective method the researcher should be aware of “where and how affect may be traced, approached and understood” (Knudsen and Stage 2). Secondly, the researcher needs to reflect on “the production or sense-making of data through the use of new analytical and conceptual approaches” (1). Their general position is that the creation of affective methods should be “regarded as an interesting zone of inventiveness, a zone raising reflections about what ‘the empirical’ produced tells us about the world and about the research setting, and a zone allowing us to generate new types of empirical material ...” (3).

Knudsen and Stage offer several strategies to work with affect. The first is a *situational* approach towards the research; an acknowledgement of “the researcher’s intertwinement with the knowledge produced” (5). Secondly, Knudsen and Stage advise an active involvement with the research and the social contexts it takes place in, being aware of the ‘performativity’ of cultural research practices (7). For the collection of embodied data they recommend using involved observation as a tool, while trying to trace affective processes

by focusing on formal or stylistic characteristics of communication, in speech as well as in written texts, and an attentiveness to non-verbal language and gestures as signs of affective processes in action (9).

In her book *The Skin of the Film* Laura Marks coins the term 'haptic visuality', an embodied, involved way of seeing "that uses the eye like an organ of touch"(79). This touch is not just that; it is an *affective* touch that stirs us. At the same time we do not necessarily understand what it is we touch upon: "Haptic visuality sees the world as though it were touching it: close, unknowable, appearing to exist on the surface of the image" (Marks 80). Although Marks developed this concept in the context of film studies, she proposes its use for other art forms as well. When Marks writes that "haptic criticism is a kind of criticism that assumes a tactile relation to one's object — touching, more than looking" (79), she opens up a way of assessing any art object with a focus on the tactile. This is about sensing, not about making sense; a method based on the concept of haptic visuality takes note of what happens in the body first and foremost. In the case of fashion this is not a hard task. Humans relate to clothes in a tactile way; when we see a piece of clothing we immediately imagine how it would feel to our touch. This assessment takes place instantly, and hardly ever enters our conscious mind. It can be made conscious though.

In *The Routledge Handbook of Interdisciplinary Research Methods*, Marks presents a method for an affective analysis based on haptic visuality. Marks' affective method is based on a halting of interpretation in favor of a more or less objective registering of the researcher's bodily reactions to the studied object (Marks *Handbook* 152). The goal of the affective analysis is to "identify our responses along continua ... from the non-discursive to the discursive; from those parts of experience that seem free of culture and ideology to those that are clearly cultural and ideological" (153). With this form of analysis, Marks tries to get away from the representational in favor of affect, while at the same time acknowledging that the representational impulse is part of how humans perceive; "perception is already informed by culture" (Marks *The Skin of the Film* 145).

Although affective analysis uses the body of the researcher as an instrument, it is, according to Marks, "objective, because it identifies empirical, sometimes physical data that arise in the aesthetic encounter ...using our bodies to do philosophy" (153). The analysis is done by accounting for "the experience within individual sensation of forces that come from without" (*Handbook* 153). Marks' methodology is inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy on art and perception. In the book *What is Philosophy?* they introduce the terms Percept, Affect, and Concept. According to Deleuze and Guattari:

“Percepts are no longer perceptions; they are independent of a state of those who experience them. Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them. Sensations, percepts, and affects are *beings* whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived” (164).

Their notion of concept is harder to explain, but can be seen as a philosophical and abstract construct of ideas (Marks *The Skin of the Film*). Marks’ method builds on a notion of affects as forces that do something to the individual from the outside. In trying to analyze what is experienced in the body the affective force that was the catalyst for this experience is acknowledged, and the sequence affect-experience-feeling-emotion can be put to use to analyze an artifact.

In practice, this is how affective analysis works: the researcher chooses a moment in the experience of an artwork, setting aside any immediate thoughts. The analysis consists of three main steps: Affect-Percept-Concept, which can be broadened to Affect-embodied response-feeling-Percept-Concept. In the Affect stage the researcher identifies the affective responses or non-cognitive thoughts that are experienced. These can consist of autonomous bodily responses like sweaty hands, goosebumps, blushing, a rush of adrenaline, etcetera. If these responses are not there, the next step is identifying embodied responses that are likely learned and culturally grounded; face movements like smiling or grinning, laughter, cringing, moving away, and so on. The category of feelings is used by Marks in an undetermined way to indicate responses that fall somewhere in between embodied response and emotion. Examples would be elation, longing, etcetera. The Percept step consists of describing impartially “all that you perceive with your senses” (*Handbook* 155). Marks acknowledges that perception is contaminated with convention, but states that it is “rich with singular data nonetheless” (Ibid.).

The third step is Concept. In this step what was found during the Affect and Percept steps is compared, in the best case leading to a well-formed concept, or idea. If no real conclusion is reached, this might be of interest as well, as it asks for a reassessing of data and analysis. A material analysis can be easily accommodated within this affective analysis by paying attention to the affective *material* properties of the object that is analyzed. For this, I propose some slight adjustments to Marks’ affective method. Taking into account the material properties of the object can help to get more attuned to specific material characteristics that influence affective reactions. Points of interest that may be looked at are color, form, weight, texture, material, dimensions, pattern, and wear and tear. A

description of how these material properties are affecting the researcher can be included in the Affect and Percept phases of Marks' approach.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the methodological consequences that arise when adhering to a new materialist approach. I described how new materialism gave way to a renewed thinking about method in sociology (Law; Fox and Alldred), cultural studies (Knudsen and Stage) and fashion studies (Smelik "New Materialism"; Bruggeman *Dissolving the Ego*). The premises of new materialism allow for a handling of method that offers more freedom to the researcher than a strictly empiricist approach, as traditional dichotomies fall away. The material, the semiotic, and the discursive are all intertwined, and enacted within assemblages of human and non-human actors.

Several methods that are used in fashion studies (ethnography, auto-ethnography, and object-based research) have strong affective qualities, and elements of these methods can be incorporated in an affective method. To set up an affective method it is helpful to focus on designing relevant research questions related to affect, to think about how to collect affective data, and how to interpret these data. Moreover, the researcher needs to be aware of where affective traces can be observed, and on how affective processes emerge within the research.

A practical affective research method is devised by Laura U. Marks. Any material aspects that are of importance can be noted down within the perception stage of the analysis, allowing for a research that takes into account the specific material qualities that set apart fashion from other forms of art. The next chapter will be devoted to three case studies, allowing me to test this method in practice.

Chapter Three: Case Studies: Affect Theory in Practice

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will test some of the affective methods I discussed in chapter two, using the affective method designed by Laura U. Marks to analyze film, photography, and other works of art as a groundwork. As I argued earlier, a combination of methods will probably prove to be more fruitful than simply applying one method. Each case study asks for its own methodological approach, as I will explain case by case. In most cases I will apply elements of material analysis derived from object-based research as a complementary method. For the study of affect in fashion, it is of importance to become affectively attuned to the research object instead of describing or analyzing the object from a traditional empiricist approach. My approach is experimental; my first objective is to test methods, and to find out in practice whether they are helpful for describing, tracing, or locating affective processes in fashion. The second goal is to establish whether a personal, bodily attuning to the research object can produce meaningful data.

The first case study concerns a dress from Jan Taminiau's *Poetic Clash* Collection (2012), exhibited at a retrospective exhibition of Taminiau's work at the Centraal Museum in Utrecht in 2018. By using Marks' affective method with a focus on material qualities I seek to connect with my own affective reactions, which, according to Marks, can help me develop a concept to contextualize this particular fashion piece, making use of the theory by Massumi and O'Sullivan, and Deleuze's concept of 'becoming'. For the second case study I visited Studio Ryn, a small training company and fashion production studio, hoping to find traces of the contagious affects described by Teresa Brennan. The methods I used for this case are the ethnographic interview, concentrating on both non-textual and textual cues that point towards affects, and the affective method proposed by Marks. For the last case study, aimed at getting a better understanding of the affective properties of fast fashion in the form of a T-shirt from Primark, Marks' affective method will be deployed by tracing the affective reactions of a forty four year old male test subject, followed by a material analysis of the T-shirt. For this case study I will use Sara Ahmed's concept of the 'happy object' as a theoretical backdrop.

3.2 Case Study One: Jan Taminiau, Blue Dress from *Poetic Clash* Collection



Fig.1: Jan Taminiau, Dress from Poetic Clash Collection. Photo: M.A. Van Tienhoven.

In the spring of 2018, the Dutch designer Jan Taminiau had his second major solo exhibition in the Netherlands at the Centraal Museum in Utrecht. As Taminiau is one of the Netherlands' most revered contemporary fashion designers, this was an excellent occasion to find a suitable case study. I decided to enter the exhibition with the goal to locate the object that had the strongest affective power over me, which happened to be the first object I set my eyes on. The dark blue fluffy object near the window of the room struck my senses instantly. The complete exhibition was impressive, showing Taminiau's great skill, painstakingly intricate handicraft and eye for detail, but in my mind I kept coming back to the first exhibition room. I felt an urge to go back there and just sit with this strange object. Somehow, it pulled me closer while I also feel a kind of reverend awe. I realized that this particular object would be of interest for an affective analysis. The method I chose is based on Marks' format of Affect-Percept-Concept, with the addition of some remarks on specific material properties that influence the affective process.

3.2.1 Affective Method

Affect: On entering the first room of the Jan Taminiau exhibition in Centraal Museum, I am immediately struck by the sudden presence of objects that do not look like fashion, and at the same time do. The first one is a big dark form. As I move closer to it, I feel some kind of wavering, an internal hesitating. A feeling of unsettlement takes hold over me. My breathing seems to stop for a moment. The dark blue color has a strong effect on me; it feels oppressive, threatening. I can sense a very slight tingling of the skin on my arms. The object feels menacing as it hovers over me, being slightly taller than me. Yet I feel a strange longing to stay close to the object. Then curiosity takes over and I move forward to inspect the object from a close range. The affective phase has clearly passed, as I feel myself moving into my 'fashion professional' persona.

Percept: I now see this thing is a dress, but exhibited in such a way that the neck opening and arm holes are either hidden, or become part of a play with forms that works disorienting. The dress/form is made out of hundreds of small colored tulle pieces, folded together like the paper crepe flowers used for traditional Dutch wedding garlands. It looks different from all sides, undulating and meandering like a wave. It is motionless, yet in motion. It has no beginning and no end, it looks massive yet weightless, although I recognize the tulle and know from experience it is airy and light. The silver belt at one third of its height seems to refer to women's dress, but it seems out of place, and the rest of the thing is just form on its own merit. I have no point of reference, as it is not placed on a mannequin but seems to stand on its own there has to be some sort of frame inside, holding it up. Color and form cooperate to create a slightly menacing figure that somehow is reminiscent of the female body yet at the same time moves away from such notions; the object cannot be categorized.

Concept: When I compare the analysis of affect with the analysis of percept, I notice how hard it is for me to keep apart. My 'style of experiencing' immediately links affect, feeling, and language. When I inspect my writing I notice the language I use is fairly affective, pointing to a tendency towards thinking in a mesh of images and emotions. I feel this is not of help for the analysis. As Marks writes, the whole point of an affective analysis lies in postponing immediate judgements and conscious thoughts informed by culture, but I cannot make much sense of my affective responses. I need to connect these to the conscious thoughts I set apart when seeing the object for the first time.

When I place my analysis within the context of affect theory, several concepts spring

to mind. The delay in reaction I felt when trying to identify the object might point to Massumi's 'split second' of affect; that moment where the virtual as a "realm of potential" (91) has not yet been crystallized in the actual. In that fraction of a second all possible meanings are open. O'Sullivan argues that it is this "fissure in representation" that defines what art does; "it transforms, if only for a short moment, our sense of or "selves" and our notion of our world" (128). According to O'Sullivan "art is less involved in making sense of the world and more involved in exploring the possibilities of being, of becoming, in the world" (130). Knowing Taminiau's work, I expected luxurious embroidery, forms fitting the feminine body, and a sleek aesthetic. This object is nothing like that. It takes on a life of its own, outside of its functionality⁸. Following O'Sullivan's take on affective aesthetics, this fashion piece is a work of art, as it defies interpretation, albeit for just a split second. By defying interpretation and a clear 'fashionable' function, the dress has broken out of its boundaries by 'becoming' something beyond categories and confines. Both Smelik and Seely use the Deleuzian concept of 'becoming' as a theoretical tool to approach fashion, as I noted in the first chapter. Whereas Seely focuses on the idea of 'Becoming-Animal', Smelik uses the term in a broader sense. In her 2018 article "New Materialism: A Theoretical Framework for Fashion in the Age of Technological Innovation" Smelik makes use of Deleuze's concept of 'becoming' for her description of the technological fashion of Iris van Herpen. Her characterization of van Herpen's fashion objects as setting off of "a process of becoming, dissolving the distinction between inside and outside, depth and surface, being and appearing" ("New Materialism" 42) is fitting for this Taminiau dress as well. This 'dress as a becoming' defies common notions on fashion and dress: it is impossible to fix its meaning. It keeps changing and moving on different levels of perception and interpretation.

I now understand why I felt both awe and attraction; it *pleases* me that this thing cannot be classified. On the one hand this might be a common aesthetic experience; the not-knowing as a pleasurable event. But there is another side to it that almost went unnoticed. The dress escapes the pressure of convention, the oppressive demand for conventional beauty that is all-pervasive in fashion. I can only feel this when I compare it to the other fashion objects in the exhibition, dresses that stay docile objects even when they are shown on moving mannequins. The clothes on display do not affect me in the way this *thing-dress-becoming* does. This blob stands on its own; it does not need to be

⁸ See also Bill Brown's *Thing Theory*. Brown differs between things and objects: "we begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us ... when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested" (Brown 4).

admired and approved of. The dress is cut loose from its functionality, foregrounding its affective materiality; “the matter within us responding and resonating with the matter around us” (O’Sullivan 128). I look up the dress online and am disappointed to see it on a model. It becomes a usual dress; a voluminous gown meant for a model with a perfect figure, ticking all the boxes for regular concepts of glamour and beauty.

3.2.2 Assessing Affective Method

Although the steps of Marks’ affective analysis seem relatively easy to follow, in practice keeping apart affect and percept is not that simple; they are intertwined. The analysis lets me focus on what I experience and use this as a clue, leading me towards a conclusion I would otherwise not have made. It was my body that responded with elation on finding a dress that did not adhere to common notions of fashion, leading me on the path towards the concepts of the virtual, affective aesthetics, and Deleuzian ‘becoming’. Where Taminiau’s artful and impressive skill leads me away from consciously noting the gender conformity and conventional takes on female beauty that are omnipresent in the exhibition, the affective approach made me aware of what the dress *does*; it touches me on different levels. It stirs bodily reactions, sets off feelings and emotions, and lets me reorganize these different levels of affective input through the use of conscious thought, resulting in my acknowledging of a bodily understanding of the pervasiveness of gender issues in fashion. It is the concept of ‘becoming’, that makes me realize how closed off most of the categories of conventional aesthetics are.

3.3 Case Study Two: Affect and the Production of Fashion

To set up my second case study, I visited Studio Ryn, the educational project set up by Sjaak Hullekes and Sebastiaan Kramer in cooperation with ROC Rijn IJssel in Arnhem. At Studio Ryn a small group of students gets a professional training in tailoring. The studio is functioning as a professional atelier, where high end fashion is produced for labels like Humanoid, Maison the Faux, and Hul Le Kes, the new label by Sjaak Hullekes. This is a completely different undertaking than my first case study; analyzing what happens at the work floor is in no way comparable to the assessing of an object in a museum. The affective method designed by Marks is not designed for the analysis of a production process. I opt for an ethnographic method by taking an interview with Reinder Schmidt, the studio

manager who overviews the work floor. I will pay attention to not only what he says, but how he says it. Developing a sensitivity to affective textual 'trails' is a specific affective strategy mentioned by Knudsen and Stage (12). Not only the words in themselves but the way in which they are uttered also are of help in discerning affective content. For the second part of the analysis I decide to observe what goes on in the studio from a position of what Knudsen and Stage call 'affective attunement' (26). I come back to Marks' affective method to see whether this approach will result in a better integrating of affective bodily experiences as data.

3.3.1 Ethnographic Interview

Studio Ryn is a small scale studio with an informal atmosphere. I decide to let my experience as a production supervisor be a guiding tool for the interviews, maybe even provoke certain reactions in the interviewee. Researching affect demands for a more invested approach of the researcher, as argued by Wetherell, Knudsen and Stage, Trivelli, and others, meaning that I need to be aware of how I take my own experiences into the research.

My presence evokes a reaction in the students, of whom at this day eight are present. I can sense they keep an eye at me when I move around the studio, carrying a notebook and a pen. I can feel their relief when I start the interview with Reinder. Clearly, I am an intruder. The group members seem attuned to one another, and having people from outside walking around creates a kind of uneasiness. Many of the students wear earphones, which I find strange, but according to Reinder "This is just how it is. Attention is always fragmented with these young people." Their age varies from fifteen to twenty, according to their background in schooling. Reinder mentions that their lack of prolonged concentration sometimes interferes with the production process. The studio is not supported by subsidies; it has to be self-sufficient. This means that certain production targets have to be met. According to Reinder, the young age of the participants also means that they still have a rather subdued sense of responsibility, although this can vary per participant. This means that Sjaak and Reinder more actively have to create an atmosphere of enthusiasm and involvement. They do this by sharing breaks, and by being present in the studio.

I ask Reinder whether the atmosphere changes during the day. Reinder explains that he himself enters the studio carrying his own atmosphere, but when the work gets going he

‘forgets’ and the tasks at hand start to influence his mood. He is under the impression that the same accounts for the students. Still, sometimes people carry feelings with them that ‘flow over’ into the group. When people are dealing with stressful situations outside work, for instance a broken relationship, this is discussed in the break, or sometimes during work. Reinder says he tries to actively influence the mood at the studio floor; when discussions get a bit heated, both he and Sjaak tend to intervene. Both of them find it of great importance that the atmosphere at the studio is pleasant, as it makes for happy students who are more active.

I ask Reinder whether he picks up on changes in motivation during the day. He explains that during normal week days, people come in energized, and they work until lunch without lapses in activity. After the break people can still manage to keep a certain work pace. But after three o’clock the energy starts to seep out, and production gets slower. When people leave early, this immediately influences the rest of the group; they get restless and less concentrated when someone is already packing their stuff. On Friday afternoons motivation is notoriously low, as if the weekend has already started at noon. Reinder has the idea that people pick up on these low motivation levels, and that they are, in his words, “contagious”.

Keeping the pace up within the group is hardly done by words. Reinder tells me he and Sjaak sometimes walk into the studio, visibly stressed. The students pick up on this and they will increase their activity. Reinder mentions that he feels this is part of the learning experience; students have to learn to deal with stressful situations. Interestingly, he will rarely put pressure on them using words.

I then ask him about the relation between feeling and matter; are the products influenced by the feelings that float around? Reinder tells me about their experiences with a difficult client; this person brought a “negative energy” into the studio, making heavy demands and giving the students the feeling they could not do it right. The products suffered; stitches became untidy, things started going wrong. The students became stressed and the atmosphere became heavy, “almost as if it started raining inside”, according to Reinder. Everybody was greatly relieved when this client took his production elsewhere.

When students are confronted with high quality materials and designs that are attractive, the atmosphere also changes, according to Reinder. When expensive fabrics arrive for production, participants look forward to working with these materials. When students like a particular design, they work on it with more zeal.

I ask Reinder whether the fact that the studio functions on a commercial basis with hard targets has any influence. Reinder tells me that the students are expected to be able to reach certain targets. Of course they get the time to adjust and learn the basics, but they all know production is the core of the studio. There are four student supervisors on a group of maximum of fifteen people, and Sjaak and Reinder are also at hand when necessary. This means the learning curve is steep. Students can get nervous about having to reach high standards in a relatively short time, but mostly this does not cause any problems. When someone makes a mistake? Simply unstitch. This is such a common procedure no one gets anxious or depressed when something has to be done again. What Reinder notices that even when students do not reach very high standards or production numbers, they do feel proud. To be part of a team and to be able to create a difference, to be a functioning part of a production facility makes them feel good about themselves, even when they do not wish to obtain a career in fashion.

3.3.2 Collecting Embodied Data Through Observation

The interview shows that feelings and emotions, and thus the affects that precede them, play an important part in the day to day business at the studio. Taking a closer look the interview reveals the occurrence of several affectively charged words: feeling, mood, atmosphere, nervous, proud, stressed, happy, and so on. The description of these emotive states is preceded by bodily sensations, which I cannot register in others, but my own bodily reactions are accessible. When affect is not located in an individual body as most affect theorists put forward, my bodily reactions will tell me something about the autonomous flow of affects within the studio. This confronts me with the problem of non-representational theory I elaborated on in the first chapter; how can bodily and intuitive responses be translated into language? I know I can *feel* affective currents moving through the room, and I pick up on them in others. Yet this process is so subtle I have difficulty describing it in words. Moreover, I realize that I am not used to giving attention to these kind of affective flows. I decide to use a combination of close observation and Marks' affective method in an attempt to trace affect by using my own visceral, bodily sensations as a probing tool. By closing in on one event that happened during my visit to the studio, I hope to demarcate a manageable research object for this endeavor.

To observe what happens on the work floor at Studio Ryn, I take up a discrete position as not to interfere or disturb the students at their work. The students all go about

individually; there is little contact between them. The earphones they are wearing seem to act as deterrents for conversation. The atmosphere is calm, everybody works on their own task in concentration. As I ask Reinder another question, Sjaak enters the studio and inspects the work at the pattern cutting table. On it lies a piece of blue denim, with the paper patterns for a jacket attached to it with pins. Sjaak wonders whether certain patterns need to be turned around, to make sure the grain of the fabric is the same on all parts. The material properties of the fabric start to interfere with a process that seemed to be running smoothly. Suddenly, there is a shift in focus; earphones are unplugged, people turn around towards the cutting table, everybody drops what he or she is doing. Reinder and I are now moving in on the cutting table as well, trying to think of solutions. I forget that I am an observer, not a participant. I do manage to notice there is some tension in some of the students; their faces look somewhat strained. I pick up on this tension right away; I feel a kind of nervousness and expectation. Sjaak on the other hand stays very calm, trying to visualize the problem by imagining the step from two dimensions to three dimensions.

After some thinking Sjaak decides there is no real problem; as the parts are mirrored the end product will look completely normal to customers. The atmosphere at the studio is, for a short while, tangibly altered. But what strikes me more is the fact that the student get back to work as on an invisible cue, as if nothing has happened. The whole event reminds me of the dropping a stone in a pond; the ripples move outwards in ever bigger circles, until the surface is smooth again.

3.3.3 Affective Method

Affect: As I walk around the studio, I feel relatively at ease. My muscles are relaxed, and my heart rate is normal. At the moment that Sjaak notices the problem with the pattern parts, I feel my muscles tense up, and I detect a physical urge to turn around and help solve the problem. I can sense my breathing is more shallow. When Sjaak decides all is well, I feel a physical relief; my muscles relax and I take a deep breath.

Percept: I am witness to a regular occurrence within a production facility; a small hiccup in the process. The atmosphere is temporarily altered; people literally come into motion to see what is going on, and whether they have to do something to help out. When it is clear the problem is solved, the group that was suddenly formed disassembles and all individuals get back to their business.

Concept: Comparing Affect and Percept shows that there is a biological, bodily

component to being a witness of a small break in production. Moreover, the hard border between individuals seems to disintegrate; people move as if directed by an invisible force that guides them to where ‘something is happening’. This is in line with Teresa Brennan’s observation in *The Transmission of Affect* that “the travel of affect is social in origin but biological and physical in effect” (3). Brennan also notes that affect arises depending both on interaction with other people and on the environment (Ibid.). This acknowledgment of the active affective capacities of non-human entities fits with a new materialist insistence on the agency of matter. In this case, the material properties of the denim fabric sets off an affective process in humans that takes shape on both a bodily and a psychological level, but this affect is not contained *within* individuals; it travels autonomously from one body to the other. The affects floating around are influenced by both humans and non-humans, resulting in a shape-shifting ‘reservoir’ of shared affects. Not only do affective flows travel from body to body, according to Brennan they are also denied, displaced, or projected on others by the human individuals that experience them (13, 14). I would add that they are also actively utilized. Affective bodily, biological cues shape social life; humans do not only passively experience these cues but they also deploy them in an active way (see for instance Gibbs). We are so used to this we hardly notice when it happens. Reinder acknowledges he actively uses feelings to influence the atmosphere, but only after I give him some time to think about it.

Reinder’s account also shows how ‘sticky affect’, affect that “sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects” (Ahmed 29) influences the products made in the studio both in a positive and a negative sense. The clothes produced for the demanding customer became negatively charged through a social process; a collective sense of being pressured, a thoroughly negative emotion was ‘stuck’ to the products, both through the production ‘mishaps’ that started to occur which influenced the product negatively in a material sense, and through the strong feeling of being unfavorably and unfairly judged that was experienced not only by the students, but by Reinder and Sjaak as well. Brennan describes this transmission of affect as follows: “the energetic affects of others enter the person, and the person’s affects, in return, are transmitted to the environment”(8). The ‘group feel’ at the studio, which is so important for the functioning of the production facility is strengthened by being able to discuss and remember together, students and management, how negativity was brought into the studio by a demanding customer. The traces of these affects can be sensed in the wording used by Reinder. Reinder’s tone of voice becomes a bit higher and a little strained when he talks about this

specific customer, a sign that points towards affectively charged content.

It was challenging to find a way to deal with this case study; the ethnographic interview proved to be valuable, but at first I had no idea what to do with the data produced by the method. Introducing Marks' affective method, which I had not planned on using, proved to be the key for getting 'attuned' with my own feelings, opening up a new perspective that helped me get more attuned with the affective flows in the studio, while at the same time offering anchor points for Brennan's theory on the transmission of affect.

3.4 Case Study Three: 'Fearless': Fast Fashion and Affect



Fig.2 & 3: Primark Men's T-shirt. Photo's: M.A. Van Tienhoven.

3.5 Introduction

Within fashion studies, research on everyday clothes is scarce. Material culture approaches like those of Woodward and Fisher are used to study the practices surrounding daily dress, opening up a range of new research fields (Woodward; Woodward and Fisher). Moreover, wardrobe studies have become of more importance to fashion studies as they give insight in patterns of consumption, use, and the discarding of fashion items. (see for instance Fletcher and Klepp).

When affect is seen as an anonymous force that sets into motion all of life's

phenomena, then it must play a role in everyday dress as well. Ruggerone's article on affect and fashion concentrates on the act of dressing, which every person, no matter where, has to do every day. The clothes we wear affect us physically and mentally, all day long, even if we have learnt to disconnect from these feelings. Their material qualities profoundly influence how garments touch humans. For this reason I opt for a material affective analysis of a fast fashion item. I hope to gain more insight in how specific material properties can accumulate affect.

In this case, I decide against using affective method myself. The experience with the Jan Taminiau case study made me realize that technical knowledge influences the analysis, making it harder to access the physical data that Marks sees as indispensable for affective analysis. I decide to use a test subject. My subject is a 44-year old male with a degree in mechanical engineering. The subject will probably look at a fashion object through a technical scope. I deliberately chose a male subject as they seem mostly socialized to have a less vivid opinion on fashion. My hope is that he will react more directly than someone with knowledge of fashion and trends. I will use Marks' affective method, combined with a material analysis that focuses on technical details.

3.5.1 Affective Method

I tell my subject to walk into the Primark store in the city center of Arnhem, and to look for the gentleman's department. I instruct him to find a garment that evokes strong feelings in him, either pleasant or unpleasant. We agree that he can pick only one garment. I then watch his reactions and sometimes ask questions, trying to recover his bodily reactions and feelings by observing and asking questions. We also agree that I am not allowed to show my affective reactions, so I do not influence his decisions. For this reason I decide to follow him around the department instead of staying next to him. As we approach the store, H. starts telling me what he experiences:

H: "Why are these people sitting on the sidewalk in front of the store? People never do that. It must be so cheap here that they can shake off all semblance of normality."

We enter the store. H. immediately is struck by the huge shopping baskets next to the entrance.

H: "So you are supposed to fill a basket instead of carefully picking something you like?"

I notice some discomfort in H. when we take the escalator to the second floor, where men's clothes are displayed. H. walks slowly around the racks of clothing, sometimes touching a

garment, or looking at a label.

H: “I see all these things from the eighties. Look at these sweaters, and those jeans jackets. Is that a trend now?”

He looks at some price tags.

H: “This is all really cheap, isn’t it?”

After about five minutes I can see H. already made up his mind. After some deliberation H. picks a t-shirt he finds very unpleasant.

H: “Look, these colors. They could be nice but the combination is ugly. The proportions of the color blocks, they are the wrong size. And the lettering is too small. Look, it says “Fearless”, but this small typo signals the exact opposite of the text.” He stretches the shoulder seams. “See this? This stitching will be undone after washing it two times. Everything is wrong with this shirt.” He picks at the transfer lettering. “See? You can scratch it off with your nails. The quality is just so horrible. And the design is off too. Although the colors could have been nice somehow.”

I ask him how he felt when he set eyes on the shirt. Did he notice any bodily reactions? He thinks for a while, and says: “I don’t know, it was not very clear. But I did feel a heaviness, like lead sinking into your shoes. And some sort of desperation. And some kind of incoherent thought: “Why is this even made?”

3.5.2 Material Analysis

After the test subject chose the item, I do a material analysis of the object, to find out if there are material properties to the garment that can explain the strong affective reaction in my subject. When I look at the T-shirt with professional eyes, the first thing I notice is the cheap quality of the fabric. The cotton jersey fabric is so thin I can see through it when I hold it up to the light. The colors of the fabric, dark blue, ochre yellow and white look slightly faded. The finishing at the neck is done neatly, but the stretch boarding looks like it will lose its elasticity very quickly. The shoulder seams and sleeves are decorated with stiff striped band in white and blue which looks a bit crumpled. The stitching of the shoulder seam is done in dark blue yarn while the fabric is yellow, which looks, as H. said, “Off”. This choice can be explained by the fact that the back side is blue so the stitching looks normal there. What is remarkable is that the stitching looks loose from the outside. When I look on the inside, it shows a regular industrial stitching, a double overlock stitch for stretch fabrics. It seems as if the tension of the overlock machine was not adapted to the

fabric. The bottom seam of the T-shirt has been stitched hastily, and at some spots the fabric has not been cut off properly, pointing to a blunt cutting knife on the overlock machine. The seams have not been pressed, which caught my eye instantly. It gives the garment a shabby look. As H. also noted, the heat transfer lettering on the front is small compared to the background. The transfer is cheap; it does not stretch with the fabric, meaning that it will indeed come off easily. At the places where band has been stitched on the stitching is very broad; it is not adjusted to the different fabric. All in all I count a total of eight material properties of the garment that induce a properly negative affect in my subject; the thin fabric, the neck boarding, the colors, the crumpled band, the loose stitching, the untidy bottom seam, the flimsy transfer lettering, and the broad stitches on the decorative band. These material aspects all point to hasty work, and a lack of interest, of investment. One could say these clothes show a lack of love.

3.5.3 “What’s Love Got To Do With It?”: Interpreting Affective Data

The garment was produced for Primark in Turkey, where, generally speaking, labor conditions are reasonable compared to the situation in Central and East Asia. But producing garments on an industrial scale with tight budgets like those of one of fast fashions biggest players simply means having to give up on any semblance of dedication to the product. One could argue that bringing love into the equation is a bit overblown, but as I stated in chapter one, positive affect is of great importance in the marketing and dissemination of fashion. Based on the affective and material analysis of the Primark t-shirt, I argue that material properties can underline or undermine this positive affect. Elaborate handwork like the embroidery on the dresses of Jan Taminiau or the intricate finishing of tailor made clothing is valued, not only because ‘time equals money’, although that is part of it. Tailor-made clothes show traces of affectionate touch of the maker, whereas, in the Primark case, this affective touch is missing. This is a result of the choices made during the design and production process, and the way in which production is set up. The fast fashion industry mostly makes use of a Fordist system of production, making an affective connection with the products near to impossible for the worker. The integration of love in the production process is a luxury, reserved for up-market, cosmopolitan design spaces. As Jan Taminiau discloses in an interview in the Dutch newspaper *Trouw*: “... The design process can be compared to falling in love. First there is the dating. You flirt a bit, get a bit nauseous, and then the touching follows. After that there is calm. Unfortunately,

you need to kill of this calm immediately. You need to step back and go on to something new ...” (De Baan n.pag, translation mine). The Primark designers have no access to this loving process; their targets mean that materials have to be cheap, and production methods have to be standardized. The hasty and careless stitching of the Primark t-shirt diminishes pleasurable affect in my subject. One could say that the presence or lack of loving dedication of a maker is ‘sticky’; the amount of dedication that has been invested in the garment influences how it is received, worn, and taken care of. Yet the fact that this garment can be acquired for nine euro may cover up these material affective traces.

3.5.4 ‘Sticky Affects’ Versus Material Affects

Sara Ahmed’s notion of ‘sticky affect’ can help to understand how fast fashion like the garments produced by Primark can gain so much popularity even though its material properties can evoke strong, negative emotions. Primark is a relatively young yet growing business in a year that saw H&M suffer a decrease in operating profit of 62% in the first quarter of 2018. (Hanbury n.pag). Primark hardly uses advertising; they do not make television commercials nor do they buy pages in (fashion) magazines. What is even more striking is that Primark does not operate a web store. Yet they have an active online strategy, making use of Facebook, Instagram, Google Plus, and Pinterest (Caffyn n.pag), a strategy that is very cost effective. The official Primark account on Instagram today has 6.1 million followers, offering slick photos of Primark products. Many of the images look as if they are made by enthusiastic customers. This visual strategy latches on to the popularity of the influencer phenomenon. The Primark products turn into Sara Ahmed’s ‘happy objects’ through suggestion; one can become part of a worldwide network of happy customers who all share their joy by buying Primark’s trendy clothing and home products. What is even more pleasurable, access to this network of happiness is not just for the happy few; one can buy a Primark t-shirt starting from 3 euros. Even though the affective analysis of the Primark t-shirt shows that its material properties exude unpleasantness, sticky affect as a phenomenon that emerges through social relations seems to be stronger, suggesting that the ‘promise of happiness’ that Ahmed describes takes over, despite the material signs that this object will not bring happiness on a sensuous, bodily level. How these affective properties are experienced will depend largely on the customer; if the prices of Primark mean that one suddenly has access to fashion, this positive feeling will obliterate any negative feelings evoked by the material object itself. Acknowledging that

fast fashion entails a whole world of joy and happiness, of feeling included, of offering the humble transformations I discussed in chapter one, may be of more help to opening up discussions on sustainability than a disaffected judging. Being attuned to bodily affects is not self-evident: my test subject stated that my questions made him actively attentive to how fashion *feels* for the first time in his life, leading him to rethink his fashion choices. Creating a greater sensibility to fashion's material affective properties may offer an alternative for the rational and often patronizing tone of the sustainability movement.

3.6 Affective Method and Material Analysis: Assessment

For this case study, I let my test subject follow through the steps of Marks' affective method. This worked well, as I could add my own observations to his remarks. The material analysis stood out in this case as a truly helpful tool. I was rather surprised I could find so many material characteristics that influence affective reactions to a garment. The combination of both methods was essential; the data reinforced each other, whereas a single use of one of these methods would not have offered much insight. The notion of 'sticky affect' helps to put the findings in perspective.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I used three case studies, not only to get more insight in the possibilities of affect theory for the study of fashion, but I also used them to test method. The task of working with a phenomenon that is inherently ineffable, an affect that is both pre-individual and pre-conscious, makes affective methods difficult. Yet I experienced that by trying to access experiential data, of my own or of others, functioned as a rather reliable tool that helped to trace affect. Initially, I was reluctant to accept bodily experiences as reliable data, but Marks' affective method helped me to get in touch with the affective reactions that I normally ignore or suppress, invalidating them as being 'just feelings'. In combination with other methods like the ethnographic interview and material analysis, the affective method proved a valuable tool that helps to pry out information that otherwise would stay locked away in the body. For the first case study (the Jan Taminiau dress), I could use Marks' affective method in a fairly straightforward way. The main difficulty was learning to attune to my own bodily reactions. The second case study (Studio Ryn) proved much harder: I struggled to find the right methodological approach, as I am not used to

analyze processes as a cultural studies student. The right combination of methods (interview and affective method) proved to be the key. Working on the last case study (Primark) was less challenging, as I now felt comfortable with Marks' affective method. Using my test subject to generate affective data and linking those to the material analysis of the garment proved an effective strategy, all the more as I could deploy my knowledge as a designer.

The case studies showed that affect in itself, as a "transhuman force" (O'Sullivan 128), cannot be identified, but the bodily experiences preceded by affect can be detected and described, thus laying bare the traces of affect. I will now wrap up this thesis with a conclusion in which I will evaluate my findings.

Conclusion

Whereas some affect theorists coming from a critical tradition demonstrate a fairly unfavorable attitude towards affect as a driver that pushes on passive formations of unsuspecting citizens as voters, taxpayers, and consumers in a late capitalist society (see for instance Massumi “The Future Birth”; Thrift; Ngai). These concerns are more than legitimate when taking into account the vast array of difficulties that face the world. Affect can, with equal right, be studied as a positive force, capable of transforming processes, humans and non-humans. There is freedom in the virtual and joy in the aesthetic touch of affect. The Deleuzian concept of ‘becoming’, precipitated by affect, opens up new forms of existence. When contemplating alternatives for a thoughtless consumption of fashion that is cut loose from concepts like rationality and functionality, the joy, happiness, and sense of inclusion that can be generated by fashion may offer alternatives to induce change, other than drawing on a form of morality that is built on guilt, shame, and individual responsibility.

When I come back to my research question “can an affective, non-representational approach to research the material manifestations of fashion be advantageous?” the answer is ‘yes’. Affect theory offers many different routes into the vast and wide-ranging topic of affect in fashion. Sianne Ngai depicts the multi-disciplinary project of affect theory on the back cover of *The Affect Theory Reader* as stemming from fields like “anthropology, cultural studies, geography, and psychology to philosophy, queer studies, and sociology”. As such, affect theory can offer the broad scope that is necessary to investigate affect in fashion’s many different guises. Moreover, affect theory’s insistence on the importance of feelings and emotions as valid data that can help to gain insight in complex social and cultural processes seems tailor-made for fashion research. The testing of affective methods showed that affect theory is a useful point of departure to research fashion’s non-representational elements; its materiality and the way in which it touches, moves, and influences humans and non-humans. Researching *how* fashion affects both humans and non-humans by taking into account affective, experiential data offers an alternative to the sociological and cultural approaches that have dominated fashion studies (Jenss 1).

The second goal of my thesis was investigating affective methods in practice. Within the scope of this thesis, I worked with only a few of the possible affective approaches; Brennan’s concept of a contagious affect, Ahmed’s idea of ‘happy objects’, O’Sullivan’s theory on the aesthetics of affect, and Deleuze’s ‘becoming’ as a transformational process brought about by affect. I used several combinations of affective method to get more

insight in the affective processes that emerge during the production and consumption of fashion. The outcomes of these methodological explorations was by no means predictable; I truly ventured out into the dark. I can say now that in all cases, I found the methods to be conducive, opening up data and leading to concepts that I could not have reached using conventional methods. From the methods I used for the case studies (ethnographic interview, affective method, material analysis, affective observation), there was not one that stood out as the most functional. It was the combination of methods that made it work. The use of affective method generated a new kind of data; embodied, experiential evidence. Estimating what combination of methods will be useful will depend from case to case. I placed affect theory within a new materialist onto-epistemological outlook in order to position affective method within a non-hierarchical, non-dualist perspective. This helped me avoiding the body-mind dichotomy, leading me to an acknowledgement of the value of embodied, experiential data.

My exploration of affective method as a practical research tool to examine these different affective processes is only a first tentative foray into an unknown terrain. To investigate affect in fashion, other tools and conditions are needed as well; a broader theoretical foundation, and a range of different methods to investigate the affects, feelings, and emotions that play a role in the production, distribution, and consumption of fashion. This experiment has been just one small step towards a wider investigation of affect in fashion.

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