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Practises of Handling

On Embodied Methodology in Professional Fashion Design



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Abstract

While few will dispute the idea that fashion designers relate to the notion of the body in their work practice, the actual embodied engagement of the designer, and the role that the personal bodies of the designers play in processes of fashion design, is an underexposed although nascent area within fashion research.

This paper proposes an understanding of the work process of fashion designers as *practices of handling* comprising a number of embodied methodologies tied to both spatial and temporal dimensions. The term *handling* encompasses four meanings. As a verb it is literally to touch, pick up, carry, or feel with the hands. Figuratively it is to manage, deal with, direct, train, or control. Additionally, as a noun, a handle is something by which we grasp or open up something. Lastly, *handle* also has a Nordic root, here meaning to trade, bargain or deal. Together all four meanings seem to merge in the fashion design process, thus opening up for an embodied engagement with matter that entails direction giving, organizational management and negotiation. By seeing processes of handling as a key fashion methodological practice, it is possible to divert the discourse away from a dichotomized idea of design as combined, alternating or parallel processes of *thinking* and *doing*. In other words, the notion of *handling* is not about reflection in or on action, as brought to the fore by Schön (1984), but about reflection *as* action.

Below the methodological macro level of *handling*, the paper introduces four ways whereby fashion designers apply their own bodies as tools for design; a) re-activating past garment-design experiences, b) testing present garment-design experiences c) probing for new garment-design experiences and d) design of future garment experiences by body proxy.

The paper is based on the Ph.D. thesis *Addressing the Body – methodological practises in professional fashion design* finalised October 2014 (Ræbild, in press)

Introduction

What does the notion of the body entail in the fashion design practise? Most likely all designers will say that they somehow make use of their body, when they design. Either as physical bodily skills or embodied knowhow obtained through years of practise or even as bodily engrained sensibilities towards the aesthetic and functional design they work with. This is due to a number of factors: 1. Close proximity of the design to the body. 2. Constant presence of the body as the physical template for design. 3. The design is dependent on the body to ‘exist’ in the sense that the form and meaning only is brought out when worn. 4. The material used to design with, the fabric, interacts with the body i.e. they are both of a flexible nature.

Where one might find some of these factors individually within other fields of design, the high number of different embodied interactions could point to a significant bodily role that is particular to fashion. Thus, the aim of this paper is to look further into the particular role of the body, especially the fashion designers’ own bodies, in order to explore how embodied fashion design methodology unfolds in practise. The study from which the paper builds is a qualitative case study on fashion design methods and

methodology conducted in Denmark and UK where interview, observation and video were employed for data production.

One of the designers in the study said during interview:

“You need to work with the body, coz these are just diagrams (pointing to a dummy) they don’t mean anything, so you need to see and you need to know, and I try on myself. (...) the minute you start moving it (the garment), it becomes something completely different, and I think it is very important.” (utterance 4/25).

The idea expressed in the quote, ‘you need to see *and* you need to know’ somehow indicates towards the embodied practices that where not all together articulated by the designers themselves in the interviews yet became visible through video and observation.

Background and Methodology

The study builds on a number of previous studies. Hallnäs (Berglin, Cederwall, Hallnäs et.al. 2007), propose with colleagues the notion of *use* and the *expressiveness of use* as core to fashion design, and they are accordingly interested in “the perspective of act design” (Ibid. p. 27) In a later article Hallnäs (2009) pursues the idea as notions of *wearing intentions* (what we generally do wearing the garment and *wearing expressions* (what the garment generally does when we wear it). These are elaborated on and tested in a number of diagrammatic models, which can “provide us with tools to talk about the directions of creativity” (ibid. p. 65) Hallnäs thus points to how embodied aspects of fashion design take a central role, and also how this role needs to become visible and operational in the design process.

The notion of the body as pivotal for fashion design innovation is even more articulated by Lindquist in his study *On the Logic of Pattern Cutting* (2013). The author investigates how fashion design can unfold in a dialogue with the body, and poses a critique of more traditional pattern cutting concepts. Lindquist’s reflections on this matter began while working at Vivienne Westwood. Here he observes processes of making entirely based on the three-dimensional aspect of the body. That is “the centre of attention was always, however, the body that we were dressing (...) Iris, the senior cutter, approached this pragmatically by working just as much on her own body in front of the mirror as on the dress-stand or on the cutting table while creating” (ibid. p.30) The realisation of Lindquist had to do with how the cutter needed the direct linkage to her own body. Its movements and engagement with fabric and form.

Looking to the humanities, similar observations of an embodied influence are visible. In the study of everyday fashion design practices at Danish fashion brand Mads Nørgård Copenhagen, Melchior (2013) looks at the way in which their design occurs and unfolds. Here she notes how “a great deal of the decision making surrounding fashion garments – its design and its buy-is based on a tactile engagement with the clothes. It is about tacit processes that are closer connected to the individual garment, than to the brand identity and image of the company”. (Ibid. p.146) (own translation). Melchior grounds the

observation in the notion of fashion as an embodied situated practise, as coined by Entwistle (2000) and thus emphasises how the direct embodied engagement and handling of garments seem to take an influential role in the making of fashion design, as well as how said engagement can out rule more conceptualised branding strategies.

Lastly, I wish to draw in the *Fashion Thinking* methodology presented by Nixon & Blakley (2012) particularly for its emphasis on the temporal aspects of the design work, which in this paper connects to the active use of embodied experiences. The authors state that “Fashion Thinking involves a three-part methodology: (1) acknowledging and utilizing history; (2) mobilising design thinking’s user-centred approach to comprehend the present: and (3) anticipating what is next. (Ibid.p.158-9) The Fashion Thinking methodology thus draws out how the practise of operating in different temporal settings of past, present and future is vital to the design work, although there is no direct linkage made to embodied aspects.

The above studies show, that embodied practises takes place, and that they might have an important role to play in fashion design. Yet how these practises are actually performed, from a methodological perspective, is less transparent. As a mean for methodological evaluation on the embodied aspects of fashion design, the paper also draws on proposals from the discourse of Design Thinking represented by Brown (2008) and Cross (2011).

The study is build as qualitative case-based inquiry into how fashion designers practise design from a methodological perspective, with a particular interest in exploring the influence posed by time, body and the collection format. Overall it employs a phenomenographic inspired approach, which has formerly been used to explore ways of learning in fashion design (Drew et.al. 2001; 2002). Phenomenography was developed in Sweden during the 70es, as an empirical method for researching within higher education (Dall ‘Alba, 1996, p.7) and can be seen as a package solution in the sense that it offers both a research approach and methods for producing and analyzing data. It is derived from the Greek words phainonmenon (appearance) and graphien (description). Thus, phenomenography is a description of appearance (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997).

As an approach, it represents a non-dualistic ontology that Åkerlind referring to Marton & Booth (1997) describes as: “There is not a real world ‘out there’ and a subjective world ‘in here. The world (as experienced) is not constructed by the learner, nor is it imposed upon her; it is constituted as an internal relation between them” (Åkerlind, 2005, p. 322). The non-dualistic ontological view stems from the phenomenological core concept of intentionality, emphasizing a subjective perspective, in which you cannot separate the human from the world and the world from the human. The intentionality dissolves the separation between man and world. (Jacobsen, 2010, p.187) Where phenomenology is preoccupied with phenomena itself, phenomenography has as its objective to describe interaction between a given actor and phenomena. Orgill defines the difference as follows: “...we can either choose to study a given phenomenon, or we can choose to study how people experience a given phenomenon. Phenomenography is the latter kind of approach. Its aim is to define the different ways in which people experience, interpret, understand, perceive, or conceptualize a phenomenon, or certain aspect of reality”. (Orgill,

2007) Thus, phenomenography looks to elucidate the various ways in which people describe or conceive a phenomenon as opposed to finding the truth about a phenomenon.

It is thereby a way to enter an empirical field with a focus on obtaining variations in experiences without having to define a clear hypothesis in advance i.e. an attention towards emergence. Additionally, phenomenography entails the development of an 'outcome space', meaning an iterative process of categorisation and subsequent mapping of relations. As such, phenomenography offers a way of entering and obtaining individual ways of experiencing a phenomenon, while also providing a way to analyse data across cases through processes of categorisation. I found this relevant and beneficial in order to penetrate the area of performed fashion design methodology.

There are two primary qualitative tools applied for data production.

1. Semi-structured interview: Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) define it as an interview that is "designed to obtain descriptions of the interviewee's life world in order to interpret the meaning of the elements described" (ibid. p.19) (own translation). In this definition the authors lean against both the concept of a life world, which is known from phenomenology and the more hermeneutic interpretation approach. Yet, they themselves advocate a pragmatic approach to interviewing by seeing it as a skill. (ibid. pp. 30-31) According to Brinkmann & Tanggaard (2010), the interview can provide the researcher with in depth, detailed and intensive information of a relatively limited amount of people's experiences of particular events and situations. They describe the core intention of interview based research as follows: "the aim of an interview study is to get as precisely and close as possible to the interviewee's experiences and ultimately to formulate a coherent and theoretically well-informed third-person perspective on the experience." (ibid.p. 31) (own translation) By this description we are able to see how and why the interview as a method has been well suited for phenomenographic research. In both cases the study begins with the individual(s) in close up, after which the data gets analysed and transformed into more general models or theories.

2. Visual ethnography (video): Raudaskoski (2010) notes that usually, observations are done to monitor how people act in different contexts. Therefore, focus lies on the direct-read features of the situation, ie. participants' interaction with the material and social environment. The analytical gaze is not on the inner processes. (Ibid. p.82) According to him we have seen "growing interest in methods of observation in various qualitative approaches in the humanities and social science disciplines. The interest in these different areas focuses on the human actors' actions and interactions in different work and leisure situations, ie. the practices they are in. The researcher's reflexivity (vs. objectivity) in relation to how he / she forms the object of study, has been a central issue in all forms of qualitative observational studies". (ibid. p.81) (own translation)

Thus, visual observation is an increasingly applied method for producing data on actions and interactions in human practice, aided as well by discourse as by technological development, as the 'visual' element has moved from mainly consisting of observational field notes to embracing both photographic and video footage. Raudaskoski observes that

the various methods often enters into an ethnographic research design, where observational methods are combined with e.i. interviews and questionnaires (ibid. 81)

What has been particular relevant here, is the suggested potentials in using the newer media as, and I quote:

“materials that can incorporate "movement" or "*appearance*", so that it can be reproduced in its exact, multimodiale form in the analysis. That is, that the various forms of embodied, contextual action maintains: We are interested not only *in* what people say but also how they specifically use their body and the physical surroundings when talking or doing other "*silent*" action. The analyst, *in other* words do not rely on either the participants or their own interpretation of the interaction, such as would be the case if the participants were interviewed a posteriori, *or if* the researcher had written down his own notes about what was happening in the situation” (ibid. p.87) (orig. italics, own translation)

By this, Raudaskoski illustrates the appropriateness of using visual ethnography in the process of exploring embodied practices in the fashion design studio, as well as it sustains the choice of combining methodological tools i.e. interview and observation. The interview and video data has been supplemented with field notes and diagrammatic sketching.

The study comprises five cases i.e. five different fashion designers. Three of them worked in Denmark, two in the UK. All of them are born and raised in Scandinavia. Two participants have taken their education in Denmark; one in UK and two have a mixed international background, but neither of them from exactly the same educational context. Three of them work in their own companies under their own brand and two are employed in larger companies. In this particular framing of the informants, my objective has been, on the one hand to establish a relative homogenous socio-cultural background for all five cases in order to create a level of compatibility in the dataset. On the other hand, my objectives for selecting cases with different educational backgrounds, working in companies of a different scale and set up and for including cases from abroad, is to increase the scope of possible variations with regard to fashion design methods within the selected group. The assumption being, that different design schools advocates different approaches to methods applied in the design process, and that different type and scale of company leads to different strategies for creating design. The interviews have been conducted with the selected designers, while the observational data often include other members of the design team as well, as fashion design often takes place in a context of teamwork.

As strategy for analysis, the study applies the approach of *bricolage*. Bricolage is described by Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) as a way of analysing interviews, which in this case is expanded to include all of the data. The authors identifies bricolage as an eclectic approach for meaning creation in that it applies a number of ‘ad hoc methods and conceptual approaches’ (ibid. p. 259) (own translation) and they therefore see it as juxtaposing more rigid systematic ways of analysing such as e.g. conversation analysis.

Combined methods applied in such a process can thus entail zooming in on particular utterances, using quantitative counting, writing narratives, developing metaphors to cover core understandings, and producing visual diagrams (ibid, pp. 259-60) (own translation) The part of the work, which this is based on, has primarily been developed by phenomenographic categorisation of actions, and interpretation by analogy.

Fashion Design as Practises of Handling

When analysing the video material I have looked for patterns of doing and repetitions in actions in order to build categories. Additionally it has been a process of looking synchronous at what the designers do, as well as towards how they do, in their physical inter-actions with matter. As the footage is both visual and oral i.e. the designers at times talk as part of what they do, not as part of an interview, some categories emerged from a combination of oral and physical utterances. The process eventually ended up with a grouping of 19 categories intersecting the cases. Naturally, within a studio design methodological actions happen in many places simultaneously, and consequently the recordings are only a section of this reality.

The categories that surfaced (see below) reflect the embodied perspective. This is perhaps not surprising given the focus on actions, yet I will say that the categories reflects a different perspective than the fashion normative process of inspiration, drawing and prototype making (Dieffenbacher, 2013 p.10) In the following I shall address two aspects of the emerging categories. First, I will look further into the categories, which had not been visible in the interviews (written in bold). Secondly I will address the notion of handling as a core methodological practice for fashion designers, due to how varied practices of handling seemed to permeate the design work.

The action categories:

1. Shifting between the two- and three dimensional
2. Personal preferences as directional
3. Handling fabrics/ materials
4. Fitting /testing on other bodies
5. Drawing on body/toile
6. Improvisation on dummy
7. Own body as design testing tool
8. Collection groups, fabrics (also verbal)
9. Time/pace/continuity (also verbal)
10. Own body as design innovation tool

- 11. Personal fashion/body experiences (also verbal)
- 12. User body
- 13. Handling clothes on hangers**
- 14. Improvising by handling together**
- 15. Indicative 'drawing' with hands**
- 16. Seeing with hands**
- 17. Design by verbal improvisation (mainly verbal)**
- 18. Mirror**

The categories in bold represent methodological actions that the designers themselves have not mentioned in the interviews, nor have I asked specifically about them, which could point towards the actions either being taken for granted, and found not worth mentioning, or being situated in the tacit.

Handling clothes on hangers



Fig.1. Handling clothes on hangers. Footage from Part Two/Skriver

The act of handling clothes on hangers seem kind of strange to mention, as in ‘is this a design method?’ Never the less it came out as one of the bigger groups time wise (together with *Handling fabrics and materials* and *own body as design testing tool*) ergo as a much-applied methodological practice. The garments that are in the process of being designed, as toiles, prototypes or completed garments, hang in the studios on hangers, but they don’t hang in peace. They are frequently being ‘handled’, felt up, held up against the body, folded over etc. in a manner, which enables evaluation as well as probing for solutions. Sometimes the handling takes place in appointed run through meetings, but just as frequent they seem to take place ‘of the radar’ as daily impulses and as a way of reflection by handling. The hanger is in a sense a body replacement, but for the designers to reflect and evaluate the garment it could seem like ‘viewing’ is not sufficient. They need to draw in the garment physically and perceive it physically as well as visually. This physical involvement does not necessarily have any direction or articulated reason, but

come to the fore as non-sensical actions by which the designers probingly handle the garments in order to evaluate and finalize the designs.

Improvising – handling together



Fig. 2. Improvising by handling together. Footage from Part Two/Skriver and Barbara I Gongini

As an extension to the actions of handling garments on hangers, exists the actions where the designers improvise together through processes of physical handling. These can play out in different contexts, and not only by involving garments, but also samples of different kinds such as color samples, tear sheets, fabrics or the like. But the practice also takes place while ideating styles for instance on dummies, where the designers work together in an open and improvised manner, their hands performing actions along each other without former verbal agreements. Thus, the methodological practice can resemble the method of brainstorm; only here it takes the form of a ‘body-storm’. Although actions do not take place entirely without speaking, it is through the physical actions that the improvisation is led on.

The practice can suggest, that not only are few areas in the design process performed alone, but also that a design team over time can evolve in to a kind of unified ‘body’

Indicative 'drawing' with hands



Fig. 3. Indicative drawing with hands. Footage from Part Two/Skriver and Henrik Vibskov

Overall in the data set, it is significant that apart from drawings used for production and traditional hand sketching, drawing as a method is to a large degree applied in a way where it relates to the three-dimensional. This is seen in the methodological practice of drawing directly on to the toile or prototype using chalk, tape, pens or pins.

Present category, which I have named ‘Indicative drawing by hands’ similarly has to do with three dimensional drawing, although not in any traditional meaning of the word and

it is a methodological practice that I had not in any way been aware of until I re-viewed the video data. What I found was that the designers use their hands and fingers to fictitiously create lines, silhouettes, details and volumes by indicating on their own body. The practice takes place when the designers either wish to clarify something to others, or while they are exploring ideas and options. The hands thus become a methodological tool for portraying what is not yet there, as if they are the developer between the user body and the fictive future garment.

Watching this practice in the video data it comes across as a way of sketching. It has the same nature of exploring by defining, only here the body replaces the paper, and the sketch is immaterial. Drawing by hand thus gets a new meaning. It is actually the drawing of something with the hand by indication. It is not a physical sketch. It is lines in the air surrounding the body.

Seeing with hands



Fig. 4. Seeing with hands. Footage from Barbara I Gongini and Henrik Vibskov

This practice is a variation of the former three, in the sense that it similarly engages in actions to do with handling. The foundation for this category is the observation of the designers almost scrutinizing fabrics and other material objects with their fingers, in a manner resembling a blind person. The practice involves a fine motor control as the fingers move with the material in order to absorb all tactile information. It is thus a method, where it is the hands that are applied, in themselves, as a means for 'seeing' closely at something with a sensorial focus.

Design by verbal improvisation

The fifth method to be mentioned here is actually not about the physical actions of the designers, unless speaking and verbal improvisation is seen as physical action. Design by verbal improvisation, as I have named it, stems from the observations in the video, which show a particular open-ended use of sentence making. At times the practice takes place parallel to processes of handling, at times on its own. What signifies the methodological practice is that the language seems to become a kind of material that is applied in a team in order to jointly explore something. The way the language is applied is by leaving all sentences open and this way 'passing it on' for someone else in the group to elaborate further. It is like passing a ball round, keeping it in the air, by not closing the process or concluding anything until a common ground seems to have been found, or the main designer makes a choice.

Mirror

The last method involves the use of mirrors. Granted, the use of mirrors seems indeed obvious, and perhaps this is why it is not mentioned by any of the designers in the interviews. However, using mirrors when working with the design of garments hold some important properties, and should therefore not be left out.



Fig. 5: Use of mirror. Footage from Henrik Vibskov and Barbara I Gongini

For the designers mirrors afford distance in a number of ways, and distance is necessary when having to evaluate something. This we know from e.g. drawing and painting. Fashion designers also use the act of plainly creating some space between themselves and the embodied garment in development, but mostly they involve the use of a mirror as well. The mirror offers some additional types of ‘distances’. Firstly the mirror allows the designer, when wearing the garment, to evaluate simultaneously what is seen and what is felt. Secondly, the mirror somehow offers a fresh sight. When seeing something mirrored, it is far easier to identify if proportions are wrong or if lines and details are misplaced in some way. Thirdly, the use of a mirror allows the designer to work directly on a garment while at the same time being able to see the garment at a distance by looking in the mirror and lastly, the mirror allows a designer to try on a garment and discuss what is seen with other members in the team, as the designer can see the complete style. The uses of mirror thus seem as an important fashion methodological practice.

The notion of handling

Towards the end of viewing and analyzing the video data, I realized that one particular term seemed to permeate my notes, namely the concept of *handling*. What I had experienced suddenly transpired as accomplished through diverse practices of handling. In the data the hands never rest. They explore, organize, test, evaluate, improvise, scrutinize and basically seem to comprise simultaneously existing acts of thinking and doing. Curious of whether the notion of ‘handling’ in it self could offer anything towards a deeper understanding I looked up the term.

Etymologically it stems from old English, *handling* meaning, "to touch or move with the hands," but ‘also "deal with, discuss’¹. As a verb it is thus literally ‘to touch, pick up, carry, or feel with the hand or hands; use the hands on’ or figuratively ‘to manage, deal with, direct, train, or control’². Additionally, as a noun, a handle is something by which we grasp or open up something (ibid.) As a note, *handle* also has a Nordic root, here meaning

¹ Online Etymological Dictionary

² Ordbogen.com

to trade, bargain or deal. With risk of over interpretation, it is still interesting how the idea of the design process as a negotiated team process comes in to play, where bargains are made and deals are struck in order to balance out interests.

All three meanings somehow makes sense in present context, where processes of handling opens up for a material engagement that entails direction giving and organizational management. Grounded in the outcome of the video analysis I propose that the fashion designer through out the working processes engages with the surrounding world by handling it, in all the meanings of the term i.e. as omnipresent physical engagement with matter, as a way of opening explorations and as an embodied form of negotiation, organisation and evaluation. The practise of handling comprises the notions of thinking and doing and thus challenges the idea of the two being separable. In this sense one could say, to paraphrase Schön (1983, 2001), that it is a notion of reflection *as* action, more than reflection in or on action.

The Analogy of the Body Lens

During the fieldwork, a notion of the body as a lens emerged; due to the way the designers seemed able to change between ‘bodily settings’. In other words, they seemed not only to be able to apply embodied knowledge in a variety of ways, but also to be able to shift effortlessly between them.

A lens is usually defined as something that we see through as the lens in the eye or as a photographic mechanism, which we can operate to shift focus or to zoom in and out or change altogether. The designers seemed able to somehow see with or through their bodies. A more appropriate term is then perhaps to *perceive*, given its etymological meaning of *laying hold of* or *grasping*, thereby suggesting the bigger bodily involvement. To perceive something is to become aware of, know, or identify by means of the senses. Or additionally to recognize, discern or understand³. These definitions resonate with what I believe I witnessed in the field with regard to embodied engagement. Save, when I here speak of a body-lens it is not solely as a device for looking and seeing through something. Instead the lens is proposed as a means for perceiving through something, the something being the body, and where perception includes seeing.

By following this understanding of the analogy, the body-lens becomes a design tool through which the design in making is brought out in a number of ways, depending on the settings and properties of the lens. The specifics of the properties have formulated in an iterative process aided by the action categories and established themselves in the following four body settings:

A) Activation of lived garment design experiences.

“Personally, I really like to work exactly a year in advance, because it gives you a strong sense of, say, what it is you wear in November”

Pernille Skriver

³ Random House Online Dictionary

This setting is about the fashion designer activating her or his lived garment experiences and projecting them into future garment experiences aka new design. (Fig. 6)

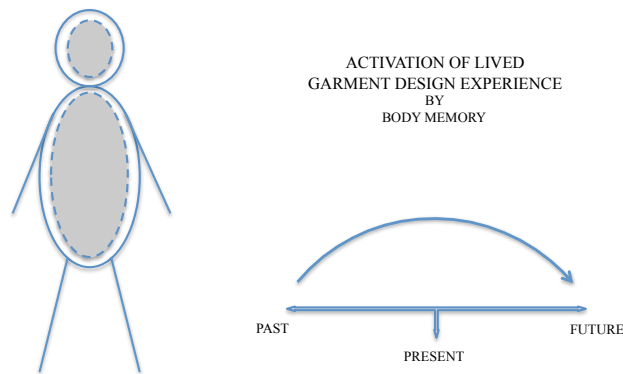


Fig. 6

When the designers work, not least in early stages of a process where no physical developments has yet been undertaken, they refer to and recapture past experiences of their own, by pointing to their own body, or talking about how it felt or affected them when wearing them. This comes across as a kind of re-activation of memories from a memory archive of bodily experiences that can be drawn from when needed. An archive of combined sensory memories stemming from the feeling the garment lends to the skin, the eyes and the touch and then the memories stored in the body muscles which speak of how it was too move with the garment. Bodily stored memories as a source for creation is something that is known from the dancing world, which is likewise a field where the body stands at the centre of the ‘design’ process. Something Tharp addresses as muscle memory (Tharp, 2006, pp. 64,67)

This setting thus depicts a practise whereby the designer uses body memory to recall past experiences of garments in order to project and apply them in appropriated measures for future garment experiences, hence the temporal activity is from past to future.

B) Garment design testing by present bodily experience

“Some of it we try on ourselves, to kind of assess...what can this do?”

Pernille Skriver

This setting is about the designer using his or her own body to test out garment design throughout the design process in a direct interaction with the garment (Fig. 7)

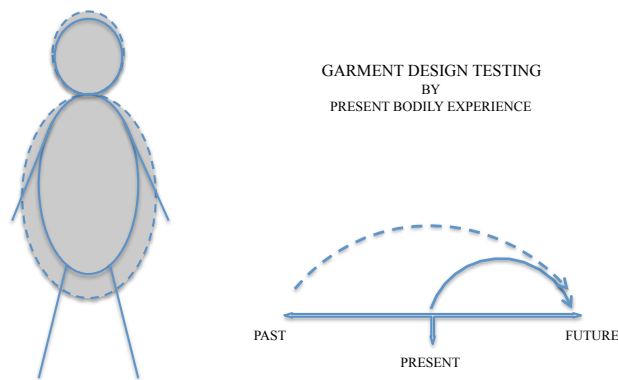


Fig. 7

Garments, whether toiles, prototypes or finished products, are frequently put on and tested out, often using a mirror in order to see and to physically assess. Thus, to adjoin what is experienced with what is seen. The personal body becomes a tool for testing. It is not enough to see, the garment design must be perceived through the body, through multiple senses, in order for the designer to truly understand if it is what it should be, or if it must be developed further. Often the further adjustments are decided on while the garment is on the body. This practise seems to play out parallel to the practise of using other body representatives e.g. dummies or fitting models as it secures a source of physical reference. The designer orientates in time from the present testing experience, via the body memory archive residing in the past and the result will finally be projected into the future garment.

C) Body probing for future garment design. (Fig. 8)

'Sometimes, when working with the constructor, you have a style that just doesn't work and then we turn it inside-out or flip it round and do all sorts of weird stuff to it...and then suddenly it is there!'

Pernille Skriver

The third setting is about the practise of body probing. The practise entails a rather constant embodied involvement with garments and 'stuff' in general, without any apparent and defined purpose. The fashion designers seem to use their own bodies to search in a probing manner for future experiences. Garments in all stages of make are iteratively being shifted around on the body, by processes of pulling, tucking, moving, folding, walking, cutting etc. The body is simultaneously the tool applied in order to conduct probing and the matter, which is probed into with the material and the garment as mediator or 'partner in conversation'. The designers are primarily situated in a present to

future temporal scenario, but own past experiences somehow underlies and inform the probing activities.

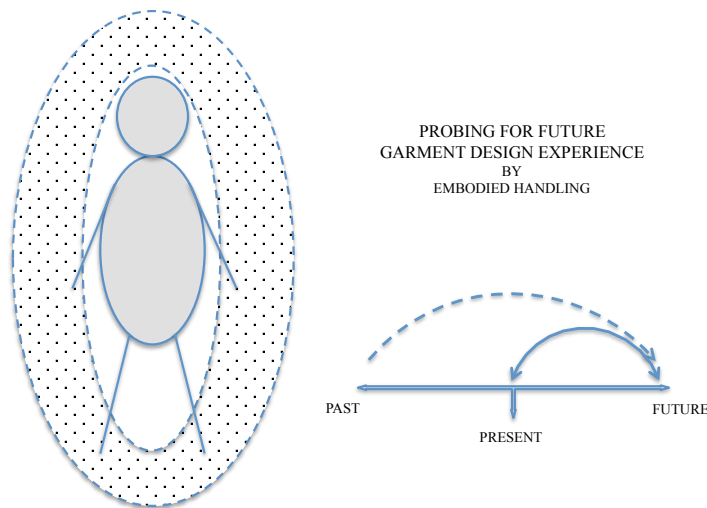


Fig. 8

D) Design of future garment experiences by body proxy (Fig. 9)

“When you enter the body, the style unfolds. But while it just hangs there, there are just all these layers and you can hardly see what it is or what it does...”

Barbara I Gongini

The last identified setting has to do with the use of body representation. Although the designers actively involve their own physiques in many ways, they also use ‘other bodies’ in their line of work. The use of dummies and fitting models is nothing new and there are many reasons for using a body representative. First of all you are able to see the design from all sides, as the three-dimensional form that it is. This is difficult when you wear it yourself as well as it can be very awkward to actually make precise adjustments without help anyway. Then there is the question of fit. Even if designers seem to often design for groups of people to whom they themselves belong (the case in this study) there still is the question of sex and/or shape to be considered which speaks for the use of ‘stand-in’.

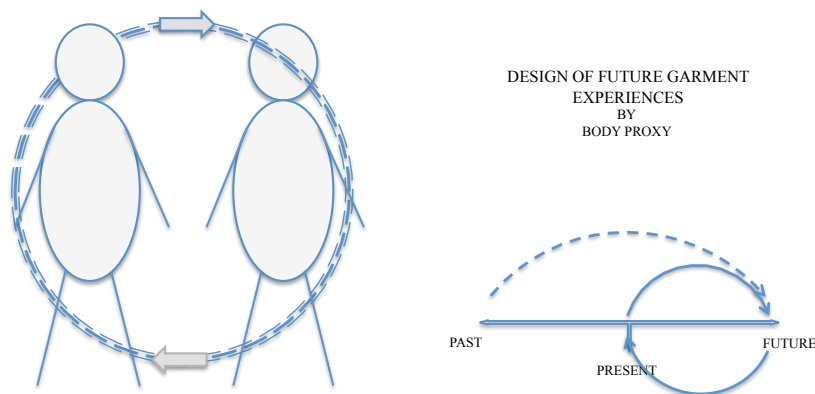


Fig. 9

What I wish to describe here is more the dimension of interaction that goes on, particularly the interaction that takes place when the ‘body-representative’ is a co-designer from the team or someone who is urged or allowed to express experiences in the process of wearing and fitting (fig. 9). The designers in the study seemed to do both. They involved each other as body-representatives, as well as they called upon friends, spouses and other staff in order to ‘use’ their bodies as templates, but also to somehow transfer the representative’s overall experiences of the garment back into the design process via the designers own understandings. It is a three-track process simultaneously applying verbal improvised and open natured dialogue, iterative handling and visual assessment. This process enables a shared build up of knowledge, not only with regard to how the future garment experience is *in use*, but likewise on how a future *user* might experience it. It is hence a practise of user involvement by ‘body’ proxy.

Temporally the designers move in cycles between the present and the future in co-processes with fellow involved, while also drawing on past experiences i.e. body-memories. The body settings, as described above, are proposals for understanding the multiple and complex embodied involvements that take place a cross type of company in the study. What is noteworthy, is that this kind of engagement is somewhat toned down in the interviews, the testing dimension perhaps being the most articulated of the four settings.

Reflection

The influential user-centred Design Thinking discourse, as coined by Brown (2008) has to some extend, due to the emphasis of *thinking* in the coining of the concept, somehow focused on the rationalities of the design thinking involved, and although perhaps unintended, the embodied knowledge stand in the background. But design, when carried out by designers and not as a tool for management, is inherently linked to making, doing and the physical world.

Cross (2011) reflect on how the processes of designing and making belong to each other yet seem to have separated and observes how “the activities of designing and of making artefacts are usually quite separate. The processes of making something does not normally start before the processes of designing it is complete” (p.4) While this might be true for some fields of design, it doesn’t seem to fit the methodological practise of fashion designers. Granted, few designers set up actual production in their own studios, but the processes of designing transpires in the study as inseparable with those of making, as making and doing comprises the innovative procedures surrounding the development of a garment in most instances. Thus, in fashion, design cannot be seen as something separate from the making, as making is designing. There are differences in the methodological approach to the making i.e. more or less outsourcing of particular prototype stages, but overall, all the designers in the study engage physically through almost constant handling within the various aspects of the design process, and with multiple purposes.

Without delving extensively in to the subject, Cross still makes a reflective loop in the same embodied direction, when citing cognitive design researcher Gedenryd (1998) on the idea of a full cognitive system that “comprises mind, action and world, or a combination of thinking and acting within a physical environment” (Cross, 2011, p. 28), thus affording room for an understanding that resembles that of handling. Along the same lines of etymologically rooted understandings, we find Nixon & Blakley, who traces the term *fashion* as a verb, in that “to fashion something is to take action, to create where something did not exist before” (p. 158) thus similarly addressing the embodied nature of the work. Fashion design methodology is thus in essence not a divided process of first thinking and then doing. Or thinking and then letting others do it. It does not compartmentalise thinking to purely mental activities, but make use of all of the designer’s physical sensibilities (including the mental)

It is significant, that the body is practically absent in Browns methodology. The designer is physically present as observer, but it is observation, which in its nature is at a distance to the matter or the actors to be observed until they reach the stage of prototyping. The embodied knowledge thus seems more to be appointed to specific areas of the methodology, perhaps especially towards the testing aspect of the design work, where the design thinker’s own experiences of the prototype becomes important to assess.

Maybe the notion of the body in fashion design is closely linked to that of experience? We see this viewpoint presented by Nixon & Blakley, who claims that fashion thinking is experience based value and meaning creation not least through a reliance of intuition (p.157) From the findings of present study I will argue, that the experiential value is less grounded in the notion of intuition (intuition being remarkably absent in the data) and more in the direct embodied engagement, unless one sees the body as a means for intuitive perception. It is not the focus of present paper to address the vast theme of intuition. Instead the relevance I wish to highlight is how the core idea of the experiential as pivotal for meaning making can support the notion of the body-lens, as an analogy for embodied methodological ways of creating useful garment experiences.

Here one of the main proposals from Fashion Thinking is almost directly transferable, although it deals with temporal and not embodied aspects. The body-lens came about as a

way of operating in temporal settings while creating garments experiences for multiple purposes and the analogy thus speaks well with how “fashion thinking entails a sophisticated grasp of the past, present and future”. (p.158) The similarities become even clearer as the authors elaborate on the different temporal settings as: “a. Acknowledging and utilizing history. B. Mobilizing design thinking’s user centered approach to comprehend the present. C. Anticipating what is next.” (Pp.158-59)

Although the analogy of the body-lens only covers a specific part of the fashion designers methodology, and the suggested utilization of the temporal by Nixon&Blakley covers in its phrasing a more general perspective, there are strong resemblances with the lens where *history* is activated through own past experiences, *user* by proxy or the designer as user is appropriated for creating present experiences, and the body of the designer is engaged for the anticipation or probing for the *future* experiences. The lens similarly speaks along the lines of Hallnäs, when he points to the influence of the intended action or as he says “the expressiveness of the acts that defines given clothes in use”.

The embodied knowledge and the way that the body of the designer influences the methodology thus plays a significant role when it comes to the mobilization of temporally placed design potential. Furthermore, I will argue, that the notion of handling and the particular embodied methods offers a more detailed understanding of what goes on when “a great deal of the decision making surrounding fashion garments – its design and its buy- is based on a tactile engagement with the clothes” as Melchior pointed to. That is, the findings explicate particular methodological actions that take place within the tactile engagement.

In closing I will allow the reflection on embodied methodology to make a specific touch down, which has to do with drawing. Drawing in design is generally seen as an important way for designers to ideate, collaborate, reflect and enter into dialogue with matter (see e.g. Lawson, 2006; Schön, 1983) and here Cross (2011) agrees: “The common elements (...) are the use of drawing not only as a means of externalising cognitive images but also of actively ‘thinking by drawing’, and of responding, layer after layer and view after view, to the design as it emerges in the drawings” (p.69) The reflection partially mirrors the notion of embodied handling, only in drawing, the matter which is responded to, is not the concrete form and material, but an abstract representation of it. Cross further claims that “An important feature of their (the innovative designer’s) strategy is parallel working – keeping design activity going at many levels simultaneously. The best cognitive aid for supporting and maintaining parallel thinking is drawing. Drawing with the conventional tools of paper and pencil ” (p.74)

I do not wish to discuss whether traditional drawing is the *best* method for fashion designers when they work within parallel collection processes, as I find what is best difficult to evaluate. Instead I wish to challenge the idea that drawing in fashion design needs to be done with the use of pen and paper as a flat representation of something, which is by nature three-dimensional. What is visible in the study, is that the fashion designers apply their own as well as other peoples physique in a kind of embodied practise of drawing, which sees some variations in methods. This entails indicative ‘drawing’ on their own body, drawing on garments while worn, ‘sketching’ with hands in

the air etc. So, while traditional drawing and sketching is present in the methodological practise, it is accompanied by far more direct 1-1 physical ways of drawing that seem to be connected to embodied experiences, both past and present. It is a way of drawing in 3D, which is different from actually making a 3D prototype, but closer to the 3D experience than a drawing on paper.

Conclusion

The use of video brought out additional types of methodological actions that had not been visible in interviews. These were about Handling clothes on hangers, Improvising-handling together, Indicative 'drawing' with hands, 'Seeing' with hands, Design by verbal improvisation and Using Mirrors. Yet, the most significant finding elucidated from the video recordings, was the notion of handling. In the data the hands never rest. They explore, organize, test, evaluate, improvise, scrutinize and basically seem to comprise simultaneously existing acts of thinking and doing. Hence, processes of handling opens up for a material engagement that entails direction giving and organizational management. Handling as doing design and thinking design as one.

By seeing the notion of *handling* as a key fashion methodological practice, it is possible to divert the methodological discourse away from the dichotomized idea of design as either a particular way of thinking or, as essentially about practice- and material based doing. The idea expressed in the participant quote, 'you need to see *and* you need to know' captures the embodied practices that became visible during the fieldwork, although not all together articulated by the designers themselves in the interviews. Seeing apparently doesn't provide 'knowing' in it self. Knowing is obtained through embodied interaction with the garments.

Through field observation, the notion of a lens emerged, due to the way the designers seemed able to change between 'bodily settings'. Or, in other words, they seemed not only to be able to apply embodied knowledge in a variety of ways, but also to be able to shift effortlessly between them. Thus the body lens holds properties that lie within an intersectional space of body and time. In this understanding of the analogy, the body lens became visible as a design tool through which the design in making is brought out in a number of ways, depending on the settings and properties of the lens.

The study identified four settings: A) Activation of lived garment design experiences B) Garment design testing by present bodily experience C) Body-probing for future garment design experiences and D) Design of future garment experiences by body proxy. The analogy of the body-lens in this way explicates how the fashion designers, while working, activate the past, the present and the future through embodied garment experiences.

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