Uniformity vs. Uniqueness:
Personal Styles in Contemporary Fashion

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When it comes to people’s personal fashion styles, uniformity and uniqueness stand opposed to each other. Initiators of fashion trends and further factors of influence to one’s sense of style have changed substantially in the recent decades due to the effects of modern time lifestyles, communication patterns and technology inventions to the global fashion system. Thus, it is not always clear what it means to be unique in today’s society. My project approaches this matter through a social experiment. I have designed a garment aiming for it to be fitting to various people, and have had a number of participants wear it, adapting it to their own personal style utterly unrestricted of any rules. Participants have communicated their approach to fashion through three means: questionnaire, photo shoot and interview. A thorough analysis of the experiment’s results has shown that the main factors influencing the participants’ personal styles can be both external and internal, while the personal sense of individuality is connected utmost to the inner perception of self, with less connections to the visual distinctiveness from others.

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Introduction

FRAMEWORK

With the fashion system changing and thus evolving constantly, the complex relationship between people and fashion evolves according, changing the relations between people the way they approach clothes, style themselves and perceive different brands. Following fashion today doesn’t have the same meaning as doing so a couple of decades ago. Both the role of a brand and of a consumer have evolved, adapting to the ever-changing society.

Diana Crane (2000) states: “Consumers are no longer perceived as “cultural dopes” or “fashion victims” who imitate fashion leaders, but as people selecting styles on the basis of their perceptions of their own identities and lifestyles. Fashion is presented as a choice rather than a mandate. The consumer is expected to construct an individual appearance from variety of options. An amalgam of materials drawn from many different sources, clothing styles have different meanings for different social groups.”

One could argue that today, the way someone looks is more important than ever, due to the utmost presence of fashion and its role in our everyday life. As fashion followers are no longer considered to be a small group of specific people but the majority of society, fashion is becoming something so important that it can even be seen as obligatory, as a person needs to create his/her personality using aesthetic symbols and creating a context in order to achieve certain recognition within society.

Fashion sometimes still attracts a negative aura, being considered as a non-necessary aspect of everyday life and is thus seen as superficial or trivial, but it is gradually becoming more and more recognized as something that presents a valuable tool in presenting oneself and interacting with others.

The area of my interest consists of different aims contemporary people have when deciding upon how to look and how to dress, the level of common
people’s interest in trends and their influence on general public, what elements are the main factors that determine someone’s taste and views on fashion, are a person’s ethnic culture, origin and income still playing an important role in this process. Do people of contemporary societies prefer to fit in a specific social cluster or do they strive to reach uniqueness and stand out from others, and if so, is uniqueness even achievable in the globalized society?

I have recognized the main questions of my work to be: What means to be unique today? In the time when trends spread faster than ever, due to technology and various changes within the fashion system itself, is it possible to reach individuality? Do contemporary people actually strive towards uniqueness, even if they think they are doing so? Are there particular universal sources of influence that are shaping one’s style? Do they come from one’s culture and background, or are they coming from the recent social developments of the globalized fashion system? Up to which point are people susceptible to external factors and are they aware of those influences?

PROJECT REALIZATION

To better understand these points I’ve decided to conduct a specific kind of a social experiment. I plan to begin with the research about the previous knowledge about this topic and further continue with finding interesting and relevant case studies connected to the main questions of this project. After completing this, I will proceed to the more practical part of the project by designing a garment that will then be worn by multiple people.

The participants of the project will use the garment freely, adapting it to their own style, and their looks will be preserved through a photo shoot. They will give information about their opinions about their choices regarding the garment and the photo shoot, about their style in general and about the role of fashion in their everyday life both in the written form through filling in a questionnaire and verbally through getting an interview.

First I will cover all the main topics of my work through writing about the knowledge and attainments that is been accomplished so far in this area. In the “Uniformity vs. Uniqueness” chapter I plan to write about the basis of this project’s topic, starting with the main principles of fashion, about the opposite forces driving one towards uniformity and individuality,
and about the evolution of the role of fashion trend initiators through time, starting with Georg Simmel’s work and ending in the contemporary age.

“Local roots, global consequences” is analyzing the complex bond between fashion and globalization through the examination of fashion before, during and after globalization, the presence of culture in fashion, the role of fashion capitals, the way internet, social media and fast fashion influence the industry and the position designers have in today’s industry.

“Self-branding and brand-branding” goes deeper into matters of importance of having a particular lifestyle, one’s image of self and its connection to dress and to society, forming of an identity and the possibility of identity manipulation and the role fashion brands have in the creation of one’s identity.

Further, I plan to include three different case studies connected to the topic of this project in various ways. First one is about the experiment conducted by Dutch artist Roy Villevoye, which questions if people have to be completely cut out from the modern world in order to have a fresh and different approach to fashion items. The example of Calvin Klein’s 2016 underwear campaign shows a campaign that praises individuality of a people while promoting a basic underwear product, having a diverse cast and stating that it is the person that wears it who gives the final touch to the product and not the other way around. The final example is following the work of Dutch photographer Ari Versluis and profiler Ellie Uyttenbroek, and their project Exactitudes book, a collection of photographs of individuals organized into stylistic clusters, arguing how no one can really be unique and everyone can be sorted in a group of lookalikes.

For the practical part of the project I will design a particular garment that will be, even if simple in form, special in its possibility to be worn by people of different body shapes and sizes. I plan to make five garments of the same cut, and changing just the garment’s color and pattern. In that way I will present an array of choice, as some colors and patterns can carry and express diverse meanings for different people.

I have chosen a target group of twenty female design students at Politecnico di Milano to take part in this project. Target group is homogenous in the interest of studying and future profession that is connected to fashion, visual arts and communication, but on the other hand the group was heterogeneous when it came to ethnicity, countries of origin of participants and their cultural background.
The participants will be presented with all five garments in advance of the photo shoot, and they will be free to pick one of the garments individually. Then they will be asked to create a look for themselves, where the only rule is to include the garment itself in it, but the style, meaning and aesthetics of the look is completely up to the participants themselves.

When arriving to the photo shoot they will be asked to fill in a questionnaire about their personal idea what their style communicates and what is it influenced and impacted by. While taking pictures, participants will be completely free to pose in whichever way they wanted and even use props in order to better explain and communicate their look and understanding of the garment. After the photo shoot they will be interviewed, and the interviews will be preserved in audio format. The interview will include questions about the look participants chose for themselves for the shooting, reason why they've selected their garment of choice, and it also covered other topics such as their opinions on the role of clothing in their life etc.

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Later on, I plan to analyze all three parts, them being: the questionnaire results, visuals from the photo shoot and stories and information gathered from the interviews. First I will analyze them separately and when that part of the examination is completed, I will try to explore the results further, studying all three parts at once. During the analysis I will use the following methodologies.

I will analyze the questionnaire by applying three different methodologies. The questionnaire will be organized to have various questions with fixed response options, in order to make it simple and clear for the participants to fill in, but also to make it possible for the answers to be put under quantitative analysis. Some of the questions will have multiple-choice answers, while others will expect only one answer to be selected when responding.

First I plan to use the quantitative method of analysis, examining the participants’ answers through counting, pointing out the similarities and differences within the questionnaire results. Quantitative research focuses on the assembly of numerical data and its generalization across groups of people or an explanation of a particular occurrence.
Second, I will cross-analyze some of the answers with the others, with cross-analysis being a quantitative research method appropriate for analyzing the relationship between two or more variables in order to gain more complex information and point out some of the findings that are considered relevant.

In the end, if some of the questionnaire results of different participants will have certain similarities I will try forming clusters according, and examine their results further, trying to understand if they have more resemblances. Cluster analysis is defined as a way of analyzing data by grouping objects in such a way the ones in the same group (cluster) are more similar to each other than they are to the ones belonging to other clusters.

Photo shoot visuals will be studied via content analysis method, following the main principles of content analysis that are stated by Gillian Rose in Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials (2001). I will seek for similarities and differences within photos of participants, and try to understand is there a particular reason that would clarify them, or that would open some further questions. During the photo analysis I will also use the method of forming cross tabulations. Cross tabulations present a tool that allows the comparison and assessment of relationships between variables and is most often used to analyze categorical data.

Initially preserved in the audio form, I will transcribe the interview into written notes which I will then use as a basis for writing a more in deep chapter about experiences of the participants. I intend to approach this part of the analysis following the ideas of content analysis. Content analysis is defined as a research method used to create replicable and valid implications by interpreting and coding textual materials. I have decided not to use the names of the participants when writing about them, but instead to put just the numbers following the order in which the participants were organized during the time of participating in the project.

According to the order and themes of the interview questions, I will form a couple of main topics to address in this chapter. I aim to do this while explaining and describing some of the common answers and also illustrating some of the particular experiences of the interviewees in order to get a fuller picture of their attitudes, opinions and personal backgrounds.

After analyzing the three parts separately, I plan to gather all of the analysis results together and to see if I can comprehend and realize a more complete picture when studying them all at the same time. At that point, I will compare
the analysis results without introducing new methods of analysis, but just trying to detect some similarities within them, or to find some results that are contrary to each other and further figure out is there a particular reason for these relations, thus going more in deep about the main questions of the thesis.

The aim of this project is to help me understand the views the participants have on fashion. During this endeavor I hope to gain knowledge about their feelings towards being unique on one hand or on the other fitting in with the others, the way they approach fashion in everyday life compared to the way they prepare for special occasions. I will try to understand if they pay attention to the way others in their surroundings look, thus if they feel that the different external influences from their environment have impact on their style. I will learn if they have ever experienced a negative experience caused by the way they dressed and finally, have they ever went through a radical change of taste, and what is their opinion on the what are the factors that have initiated it. The “Conclusion” chapter will serve as a recapitulation of the whole process, starting with the theoretical research and finishing with the conclusions reached through different methods of analyzing the participants’ words, looks and behavior.
Uniformity vs. Uniqueness

Action and contra-reaction

GLOBALIZATION OF EVERY KIND OF KNOWLEDGE, EMPHASIZED THROUGH INTERNET, MEDIA AND SOCIAL NETWORKS BRINGS MORE AWARENESS TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC. EVERYTHING IS BEING LAID OUT TO US ON A VIRTUAL SILVER PLATTER, ALL ONE NEEDS IS TO TYPE THE DESIRED WORD IN A SEARCH ENGINE AND IT WILL END UP IN HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF RESULTS IN A PARTICLE OF A SECOND.

This phenomenon translated into the world of fashion makes it easier than ever to follow trends, be up to date with new tendencies, brands, designers, models, bloggers, etc. Trends are numerous, they are spreading out so fast and fading even faster. “After all, fashion is based on the constant replacement of goods (clothes and other artifacts) that do not need to be replaced.” (Godart, 2012:2). Briefness has always been one of the main characteristics of fashion, adding an additional aspect of attraction to it, but today it has risen to a completely new level, sometimes even taking over some other aspects such as meaning and quality.

The endless field of pictorial inspirations that can be found everywhere around us often tends to in some way culminate in visual uniformity. Maybe because it is so simple to copy one another. As Georg Simmel stated in Fashion (1904), imitation gives to an individual an opportunity to be a part of a group. But as we know from the main rules of physics every action induces an equal opposite reaction. Meaning that uniformity should awake individuality. These two social tendencies are crucial to the existence of fashion, one being the need of union and the other being the need of separation.

What means having a personal style? Does it mean to fit in or to stand out?

What causes a wish to blend in with the others, to be a follower rather than a leader? One of the main reasons is that as an imitator, one isn’t responsible for his/hers actions. “Whenever we imitate, we transfer not only the demand for creative activity, but also the responsibility for the action from ourselves to another.” (Simmel, 1904:3). Imitation is deprived of power, responsibility and even
creativity, it is passive but also easy and safe. The imitating individual is not standing alone, but is a part of a whole.

Opposing to the imitators, some individuals feel the need to change the rules, to try new things and move borders of taste and fashion by themselves alone. They are not afraid to be different and to stand by their own personal beliefs, always striving towards change and advance, thus obtaining new visual outcomes. They set trends, regardless of the general opinion.

WHAT IS FASHION?

"Fashion is the imitation of a given example and satisfies the demand for social adaptation; it leads the individual upon the road which all travel, it furnishes a general condition, which resolves the conduct of every individual into a mere example. At the same time it satisfies in no less degree the need of differentiation, the tendency towards dissimilarity, the desire for change and contrast, on the one hand by a constant change of contents, which gives to the fashion of today an individual stamp as opposed to that of yesterday and of tomorrow, on the other hand because fashions differ for different classes - the fashions of the upper stratum of society are never identical with those of the lower; in fact, they are abandoned by the former as soon as the latter prepares to appropriate them." (Simmel, 1904:4)

Joanne Entwistle in The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Social Theory (2015:45) defines fashion as a general term that is referring to any kind of systematic change in social life, architecture or academia. Wilson depicts fashion to be “dress, in which the key feature is rapid and continual changing of styles: fashion in a sense is change.” (Wilson 2007:3). Entwistle explains how different styles aren’t equally influenced by fashion, but states how styles are determined by various social factors, as class, ethnic origin, sex, age, profession, pay and looks of an individual. Class is defined as an important factor, by impacting clothing choices not only by determining income but also by defining the individual’s taste.

Entwistle (2015:82) traces the factors of creation of the fashion system in the evolution of medieval and Renaissance court society, extension of trade throughout the world and appearance of new social classes. She links the advancement of fashion with social transformation, since a variation in fashion usually appears in societies going through a change, while the stable societies are less likely to go through a revolution in the way its members dress. According to Braudel (1981) a fashionable society is the one striving to make an impact to the world, breaking with traditions and cus-
Corner thinks fashion, since its earliest days, has been centered not only on the self-presentation, but also about the love for oneself. “At heart, Fashion is all about art of self-adornment: the visual presentation of ourselves to the external world. What we choose to wear reflects how we view the world and how we want the world to view us. The prehistoric cave-men with the latest beads, the post-war woman in Dior’s New Look, the latest fashion blog recording street style as it happens – they are all tied to our very human need to express individuality.” (Corner, 2014:7)

INITIATING NEW TRENDS: FROM UPPER CLASS TO STREET SUBCULTURES

Simmel (1904) wrote how through history, new fashion has affected mainly the upper class. Naturally, the lower classes would strive to imitate the, for them unreach-able, high class society. But as soon as they would start to copy the new style, as soon as the example would have been universally adopted, the upper class would turn away and present a new style, again separating themselves from the masses, and the circle would start again. Since those times, fashion has been driven to exclusivity, because as soon as it spreads it is no longer considered fashion, it is already finished and new fashion must arise.

Is fashion still a privilege as it has been since the start of its existence? Privilege of the rich? Of the Caucasian? And, since the second half of the 20th century, privilege of the skinny and of the young?

In Fashion, Culture, and Identity, Fred po (1994) writes about first social researches of fashion done by Veblen (1899), Tarde (1903), Simmel (1904) and Sapir (1931), and how all of them put socially fragmented society to be the main initiator of fashion. Simmel argues that fashion is both product and a mean of class distinction. It signifies union with those in the same class, the uniformity within it, and at the same time the exclusion of all other groups. It has been a way to distinct classes even in the pre industrialization era.

In Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing, Diana Crane (2000) describes how clothing of a person revealed not just the class and gender, but often also the wearer’s occupation, religion and re-
gional origin. After industrialization, the specific costumes for each occupation were replaced by clothes for types of occupations and by uniforms signalizing a certain rank. Later, during 19th century, clothes were used mainly to distinguish different social classes. Gaps between upper, middle and lower classes were huge. Joanne Entwistle in The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Social Theory (2015:115) describes these clothes showing one’s occupation, claiming that during the 19th century things changed as new kind of social classes started being visible and eventually substituting the old ideas of class.

Crane (2000) describes a change in fashion, in the end of 19th century, when clothes started becoming cheaper and more accessible to middle and working class. The lower classes became closer to the upper class through possibility to indulge in clothes. Fashion gained a new role, it appeared as a way for a person to enhance his/hers social position. In the 20th century clothes gradually lost their economic meaning, but not their symbolic one. Lower prices of clothes made it possible for those with limited recourses to visually resemble the wealthier members of society.

In his book Street style (1994), Ted Polhemus describes fashion at its peak, during the 1950s, having a huge influence on almost everyone, with the latest trend presented by top designers and color of the year announced by Vogue. Polhemus explains this saying that there was no alternative to the main trend. Polhemus states three main principles of the then fashion: “its celebration of The New, its singularity and its diffusion from high society to mass market” (Polhemus, 1994: 9), and claims that all three lose importance in the next couple of decades. He originates the change in fashion in the change of the society.

Veronica Manlow in Designing Clothes: Culture and Organization of the Fashion Industry (2009) explains that with the expansion of middle class and growth of its income, more of its member started feeling a need of distinction. Joanne Entwistle (2015) writes that in the more contemporary society, mass production of fashion and influence of the working class made it possible for a greater number of people to approach fashion, blurring boundaries between classes. Fashion industry took advance of the situation, adapting the upper class markers and symbols to fit the new audience. The new markers are easily read and are more symbolic than the old ones. They are often embodied as logos of important brands of the time (Manlow, 2009).

Diana Crane argues how Simmel’s top-down model of accepting fashion has been accurate until 1960s, when demographic and economic factors made
possible for youth of all social statuses to increase influence resulting in a new bottom-up model of initiating trends. Old hierarchy has come to an end and in time new bottom up model took over, in which lower and middle class groups have become the initiators of new fashion, while the upper class is accepting and following. Consumers, with youth in the center, took over the lead from creators and manufacturers, as they became capable to create new styles and to be the initiators, rather than followers as before. The rise of youth markets, pluralism and heterogeneity lead to consumers wanting to dress differently in order to communicate a distinct type of message rather than conforming to a mass regime. Another phenomenon, primarily influenced by youth culture, directly affected the order and tempo of the fashion industry itself, was the seasonal change and undesirability of clothing. This meant that fashion products could be considered outdated, even if in perfectly good working condition and therefore no longer be wanted or used.

The young, who had not known the pre 2nd world war Britain, were identifying with the new, changing world and opposing the old rules. Styles started being produced by adolescents taking part of subcultures with explicit visual rules, or sometimes being part of specific communities such as homosexual or artistic. As youth groups had categorically diverse styles and ideologies, this further gave rise to the birth of subcultures. In this new order, the only part of the top-down model left unchanged was the fact that as soon as it is widespread a trend was no longer considered to be relevant. Entwistle (2015:136) claims the post-war subcultures that stood out the most were usually working class and male, with oppositional stand to the white middle class values, and notes that young girls of the period have tried to exclude themselves from groups which are on the streets late at night.

Ted Polhemus (1994) speaks about this shift arguing that there was a big difference between the original street style and its interpretations that would appear on the runway, as the designers of the period would get inspiration from the subcultures of the moment. The difference was in the context, of how it was used and what it meant, Polhemus thinks that even if street style and fashion seemed alike, they were actually contradictory. Entwistle (2015) believes the style of the subcultures of the time addressed certain issues and problems that the youth subculture wanted to point out or resolve.

Polhemus (1994) describes a further decline of importance of the three main fashion principles from the 1950s happening during the 1990s, with the rise of popularity of timeless classics, pieces of clothing that were considered to
overcome the change of trends. At that period, following fashion and always being up to date with the latest trends could have even been considered to be a bad thing, and such individuals were labeled as “fashion victims”.

FLUCTUATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY FASHION

21st century seems to be without rules. Godart (2012) argues that the lack of understanding what is fashion, actually is knotted with the way fashion is and a part of the fashion itself. But at the same time, not long after the 1990s as the period where fashion followers were fashion victims, Godart (2012) believes that in the beginning of the 21st century fashion became so omnipresent that it stands as a natural part of one’s life, and almost no one can escape its influence. Social Media, Internet, cheap mass production, online shopping represent an important part of today’s fashion world. New trends are accepted as soon as they appear. Range of choice on the market is always in the rise, thus contributing to the general state of disorder. What does that mean for fashion? As the circle of creation, trendsetters, mass adoption and doom is turning faster and faster, will it even exist anymore? Will it be obliged to evolve in to something new? Or will the life of a trend end before it has even started?

But even if the fashion system is incomparably more complex than it was a few centuries ago, have we finally overcome the routine of class distinction being visible through one’s clothes? Manlow (2009) claims that even though fashion has become much more democratic, it doesn’t necessarily mean it has also become less hierarchical. “Fashion remains, despite its democratic embrace, a vehicle which marks distinctions and displays group membership or individuality.” (Manlow, 2009:5). Manlow continues to elaborate on this, pointing her opinion that even though fashion is not originating only in the upper classes, that ultimately it is the fashion designers and fashion editors who have a final say of what is in fashion and what isn’t. This would mean that some of the remnants of Simmel’s old top-down model may still continue to exist even in the contemporary society.

Entwistle (2015) explains the intricate relationship between fashion and everyday dress. “Fashion sets the parameters around dress, while dress is the embodiment of fashion, since only when they are worn in sufficient numbers can a style be said to be fashionable.” (Entwistle 2015:246). Entwistle further states how even though it seems impossible to understand why are
some fashions highly successful while some others fail to be, it could be explained through ideas of Blumer (1969) and Braham (1997) that for a fashion to be successful, it has to catch an emerging mood or taste within society.

Georg Simmel (1904:8) argues how the more nervous the age is, the more rapidly its fashions change, simply because the desire for differentiation, one of the most important elements of all fashion, goes hand in hand with the wakening of nervous energy. Entwistle (2015:63) refers to the common opinion of various authors that fashion changes according to social and political changes. But in the recent years, having the sole nature of the order within fashion system changed, together with the behavior of individuals, the way they see fashion, adopt new styles and respond to them, it is questionable whether this principle is as strong as it used to be. “Contemporary fashion is more ambiguous and multifaceted, in keeping with the highly fragmented nature of contemporary postindustrial societies.” (Diana Crane, 2000:6)

How can one achieve to be unique in today’s fashion? Must uniqueness still be connected to exclusivity? Is individuality even reachable in the contemporary world? As the overall society is contained mostly out of “imitators” rather than “trendsetters”, is the over developed fashion system killing trends in the moment of making? Entwistle (2015) thinks that today one can use dress to evoke his/hers sense of uniqueness and show difference from others, but as a part of a certain class or culture, it is equally likely for him/her to strive towards a style that would make him/her recognizable to the other members of the group and also connect him/her to the others. “Thus when talking about individuality and identity and the role played by fashion and dress it is important to recognize that identities are socially meaningful. The individual may want to ‘stand out’ but she or he also wants to ‘fit in’ with a group.” (Entwistle, 2015:139)
Local Roots, Global Consequences

The role of tradition in the Fashion world

FASHION IN THE TECH ERA

Fashion is a product of social demands, even though it is primarily based on needs of individuals. As stated in Global Fashion, Local Tradition: On the Globalisation of Fashion, fashion is a mirror of its time, thus through fashion many social and cultural changes can be recognized (Brand, Jan et al, 2005). Fashion objects are material goods that have cultural content, which refers back to tradition (Malossi, 1998).

Fluctuations in the modern time fashion induce various cultural consequences. The two main influencing factors on today’s fashion are the Internet and the spreading of the Fashion Week events in all continents, opposed to concentrating only on the western part of the world as in earlier decades (Brand, Jan et al, 2005). Starting from the 1980 towards nowadays, there has been an upswing of Japanese, African and Arabian designers. They have a distinctive fashion sense, different from the western one, and are often much appreciated for that fact. New designers are spreading parts of their culture by adding their traditional clothing customs, aesthetics and craftsmanship to fashion trends of the western world.

Fashion has always strived to be international, if not global. Since the 18th century it has been inherent with communication, and since the arrival of magazines and newspapers, has been filling pages with newest trends, advertising the latest tendencies and aesthetics. Since those times, elite and general public have had different ways of getting information about fashion. The elite would be invited to fashion studios and shows, and the general public had to rely on secondary mediums. Annette Lynch and Mitchell Strauss (2007) describe how in the beginning of 18th century in France access to fashion information greatly increased with the reign of Louis XV, and social rules became much looser than before. Social events started mixing different classes, and lower and middle classes were able to see what the high class of the period was wearing, sometimes even through secondhand markets selling belongings of the newly deceased. At the time, the main medium of fashion were small dolls dressed in the latest style, being sent to tailors around the world to inform
them of the newest trends. Fashion journalism started existing in the end of the 18th century, and in the 19th century dolls were slowly substituted with newspaper. Magazines were first showing fashion drawings, which then turned into fashion photographs in time. Democratization of fashion information has made it easier for diverse social classes as well as ethnical to affect fashion changes.

Today all kinds of fashion images and videos are available either on the Internet or in a printed form. The Internet has changed the process of informing the masses. Using it as a medium means one can follow all the latest happenings such as Fashion Weeks, front rows and street style photos, momentarily as they appear online, and from any place in the world. Many brands are using the advantages of online sale, some of them even as an only channel of sale, without an actual physical retail store.

This overflow of information and global availability of trends, clothes and style do make it possible that people in different parts of the world, having unalike lifestyles, backgrounds, professions and culture to each other end up using the same products in the same way, having similar habits and strives. “Today, someone in Moscow, someone in Buenos Aires, someone in Sydney and someone in Bangalore can all eat the same meal in the same fast food restaurant, drive the same car, struggle with the same computer software, drink the same beer, lust after the same pop star and wear the same clothes, shoes and watch. In this sense, not only the world is interconnected, it is culturally continuous, amalgamated, united.” (Brand, Jan et al, 2005:83)

The direct form of access we all have today has had a huge impact and has brought many consequences. In the world of fashion, it also resulted in increasing the number of Fashion Weeks all over the world. The new Fashion Weeks in less developed countries and regions give local talents a chance to promote themselves and also support commercial enterprises, and finally, they put their country on a fashion and cultural map. But even though now every continent has its Fashion Week events, not much has changed regarding the role of the West. Paris, London, Milan and New York are the Fashion capitals, and the West is still considered to be the initiator of fashion.

**FASHION CAPITALS – GLOBAL POWER CENTERS**

Godart (2014:43) states that a formal definition of a ‘fashion capital’ doesn’t exist, and defines a fashion capital by the presence of Fashion Week shows that are largely covered by main global fashion publica-
tions. Godart implicates that this simple condition shows that a fashion capital occupies a dominant place in the worldwide power structure of fashion and at the same time makes hard for new fashion capitals to emerge and join the existing ones. But even so, historically, some changes have occurred through time, and the power structure of fashion has changed a lot since its beginning in Italy and following development in Paris. Paris was undoubtedly, from a historical perspective, and still is even now, a major center of fashion. The structure of power with Paris as the only center of fashion monarchical regime was slowly replaced by an oligarchic model of power that included London, then New York, and finally Milan. In the years before the WW2, just London and Paris were worthy of the fashion capital title. After the war, things changed with New York making its way into becoming the third fashion capital. This came as a consequence of impact of Paris and London becoming smaller than before, due to their weakened postwar economies (Godart, 2014). And at last, Milan joined them as the fourth in the late 1970s and early 1980s, driven by influential Italian fashion and luxury industries.

Even though many different cities tried joining the famous quartet through years, none of them has had success in it so far (Godart, 2014). With examples of failure being Florence, Rome, Dublin, Barcelona and Madrid, Godart (2014:46) concludes that “The rise of a fashion capital cannot be facilitated by designers only and requires the involvement of other actors, and economic policies at different levels, from local to nationally.” Godart believes the main reason of current oligarchic structure in fashion industry can be traced to the idea of sharing power among main fashion capitals. Having just four fashion capitals makes it much easier for the industry professionals to be in touch and on the other hand, customers have easier time by identifying legitimate products and are not overloaded with information. For these reasons, some of major social forces back up the existing oligarchic model of power. But although it hasn’t happened so far, Godart reasons that in the twenty first century it is likely for the list of fashion capitals to expand, by adding an Indian and at least one a Chinese city. In her opinion, this would come as an aftermath of changes in the global fashion market with Asian market taking a bigger share, and would allow fashion to better connect with consumers in emerging markets.

CULTURE AS THE BASIS OF INSPIRATION

Fashion in the modern sense of the term is a Western phenomenon, as it is
considered to be invented in Italy and developed in France (Godart, 2014), but it has always looked in to other cultures while searching for new and inspiring elements to use. First it was through importing new fabrics, such as silk from China and cashmere from India. In the beginning of twentieth century, Poiret was inspired by Greek and Oriental clothes when liberating women from corsets. Non-western influences emerged again in the search for authenticity during the sixties, through second hand shops, working men clothes and genuine items like Indian slippers and Afghan coats. For the first time it becomes a trend not to follow trends, people turn to styling the clothes they have in the right way instead, all in the need to support the local products and craftsmanship, almost distinct in the era of clothing industries.

Since the 1970s, fashion has been changed drastically, under the influence of a new group of Japanese designers taking part in the Paris Fashion Week, and thus becoming the first non-Western designers to be included in the official fashion world. Initiated by Issey Miyake, and then followed after a decade by Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo from Comme des Garçons, they proposed a new view on creativity and clothing (English, 2011). They broke all the fashion rules of the time, bringing new aesthetics, shapes and treatment of fabric, thus challenging long held ideas of gender and beauty. Kawamura (2004) describes the clothes may have looked like rags, but it was intentional and how, especially since the beginning of 90s, a lot of consumers implemented this new rule breaking style into their look. Instead of building their name in already strong Japanese market and becoming a relevant competitor to the Western Fashion shows, they’ve decided to join the Fashion capital, bring their unique sense of clothing there and incorporate it in to Western culture.

Non-Western designers are not the only ones to reach in to their origins while searching for visual identity. Some of western brands strive to a whole imaginative world in order to stand out and attract the customer. For a lot of brands, the starting point of creating their world is their actual country of origin. It serves as a backdrop, a base for all the ideas, dreams and desires which make the imaginary world complete. One of the most iconic Fashion names, British designer Vivienne Westwood, has emerged from her own original punk style to a new approach, and since the 90s has been using English Costume history as a main source of inspiration. Westwood combines elements such as tailored jackets, English checks and Royal Family symbols in a new, rebel and punk way, and in that way supports the traditional English craftsmanship. Then again Burberry, a well-known British fashion house, depicts a more traditional image of the English upper class. Vivienne
Westwood and Burberry are both originated in England, and both have incorporated their origin in to their story but in different ways. Dolce & Gabbana, an eminent Italian designer duo founded in Milan, are recognizable through their Sicilian aesthetic expressed with vivid colors, feminine silhouettes and bold prints inspired by nature and architecture. Each brand picks and chooses from the wide range of their country’s motives in order to create their perfect vision. By wearing them, one feels like a part of their story, and thus a part of that specific culture in a way, even if living in Canada, or Ukraine.

Westwood Burberry and Dolce & Gabbana are not alone in this kind of expression, her example is joined by many other designers, also from Western countries. National and cultural characteristics often serve as a backdrop when setting a brand identity. "How far will we go in promoting and propagating our own local crafts in the future? Why has there been such a great need since the eighties to anchor fashion in one’s own culture? With the rise of lifestyle in the eighties, even major companies and commercial brands have started to exploit their national identity.” (Brand, Jan et al, 2005:17)

Other brands have the opposite approach, consciously negating their origin. Diesel, Italian fashion house, takes part in every culture but Italian, the country it is originally coming from. It nurtures a carefully planned image of a brand that takes part of different cultures, refusing to settle. So even its wearers take part in all those transitions, wearing messages of the American South, India, Africa, depending on the season.

This kind of flow gives a chance also to the small, local businesses that are still using outdated techniques, to become competitive and a part of the global fashion market (Brand, Jan et al, 2005). This opportunity has grown especially since the rise of the mass usage of Internet, since it is a major way of communicating and promoting this kind of brands, making them reachable to everyone. One of many examples is Dene Fur Clouds, Canadian Indian community, producing their authentic nomad clothes in an ecological way. Since the moment they appeared online, the clothes have been a huge selling success and they have even been shown in the Canadian and Paris Fashion Weeks.

Usage of cultural heritage and identity is not linked only to countries but also to specific cities, with rich background that can easily be weaved into a brand identity. Paris is maybe the best example, being considered as the fashion capital for the last couple of centuries. Even after 1960s, when fashion went through a major change (from top mar to bottom up and decentralization due
to new fashion centers occurrence), the stereotype of Paris remained to exist (Diana Crane, 2000:132). “Paris as a fashion capital has survived World War II, notably because of the role played by the New Look of Christian Dior in 1947, which reasserted French style on the global stage. French haute couture, which today gathers no more than 1000 clients around the world, has managed to successfully make the transition in the 1960s to new ready-to-wear.” (Godart, 2014:41). This myth about Paris is supported by mass media as fashion magazines, and popular movies and TV series (Rocamora, 2009).

In Global Fashion, Local Tradition: On the Globalisation of Fashion (Brand, Jan et al, 2005) it is described how, on the other hand, many designers have taken part in a different kind of movement. They tend to use various ethnical and cultural heritage, not just their own, but from cultures from all around the world. They take it as an inspiration and learn from it, but then use it in a new way, mixing with other sometimes contrasting cultures, thus altering or completely changing its meaning. One of the most recognizable illustrations and a good example of this kind of cultural interpretation are John Galliano’s works from his Dior era. He was famous for creating vivid and theatrical collections which would one season be based on Russian fairytale and stories, the next one could equally be inspired by geishas or pirates, or both. But even the much smaller, ready-to-wear companies like Scotch & Soda, an Amsterdam based high street brand, follow the same ways of creating. They travel to different countries and learn their culture, during the trips they collect different items, which they then use as an inspiration for their designs.

Fashion world’s obsession with tradition could be explained in different ways. It could be that it is used just for the sake of learning from it and using it in a new way. The other way could be that it serves as a main point of inspiration from, or it could be the will to support the local craftsmen. Maybe it is a result of a need to gain individuality, so hard to reach in today’s world, or even to escape from fashion’s fickleness. Because a traditional piece has a timeless meaning, it is not so easy disposable as many of the new trends ruling the runways.

But at the same time, a traditional piece, coming from a far away, exotic part of the world, carries another message, bringing a different kind of value simply by having a different origin and even more by seeming not to be easily reachable. “As a matter of fact the exotic origin of fashions seems strongly to favor the exclusiveness of the groups which adopt them. Because of their external origin, these imported fashions create a special and significant form of socialization, which aris-
es through mutual relation to a point without the circle.” (Simmel, 1904:136)

CONSEQUENCES OF THE TRANSITION FROM CLASS TO CONSUMER FASHION

Fashion world went through many changes in the last century. It isn’t as simple as it used to be, with its Western hierarchical top down system of what is in style and when a trend is born, as described by Diana Crane (2000). In the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the then dominant “class fashion” required a strongly centralized fashion system, with a small group of designers having a common idea of what was in fashion and what not, creating haute couture, changing the styles steadily from a season to the next one, concentrated on dressing the elite. They made the rules, from what to wear, to when and how to wear it. Not conforming to these rules meant that a person is not in line with the correct way of behaving himself/herself.

English author, critic and art historian James Laver in his work focused mainly on the idea of a certain fashion style, which what was thought of as a fashionable one at one moment, becomes weird and ridiculous and can then again start to appear appealing as time goes by? Laver (1945) summarized a lifecycle of a trend as it was at the time, transforming an aesthetic from indecent if worn ten years in advance, to daring one year in before its time, smart in its time, then ridiculous twenty years after its time and then finally after a century and a half beautiful. In his opinion, in modern times things are progressively susceptible to a change, and the importance of the role that fashion plays is evidence of the amount to which time has replaced place as the major impact on clothing styles.

During the 20th century “class” fashion was replaced by “consumer” fashion which brought a much wider choice, stylistic varieties and also less strict rules about what is fashionable at the moment. The main focus wasn’t the elite like before, but all social groups from different class levels. Haute couture wasn’t the only fashion genre anymore, it was joined by industrial fashion and street style. Haute couture is still considered as the purest form of fashion and it is made in some countries, but it was highly outnumbered by industrial fashion, producing similar products for related social clusters in one or sometimes many countries. Braham (1997) states that haute couture has lost its position as the center of fashion to other types of fashion, and thus no longer directs the next direction of fashion. Industrial fashion has been
highly connected to the media since its beginnings and has created value for the consumers mainly by advertising. Street style is created by urban subcultures and generally has no defined rules about what is to be worn and how.

Since the sixties, street style has become as important as the runway, as new subcultures are being born all the time and they are creating new styles in fashion. Today, one could even say that as much as street style stars find inspiration from the catwalks, the designers equally rely on their innovative way of interpreting trends while creating. Veronica Manlow (2009) argues that today's fashion brands elevate and use street style elements when making new high fashion. Manlow continues to elaborate on this, pointing her opinion that even though fashion is not originating only in the upper classes, that ultimately it is the fashion designers and fashion editors who have a final say of what is in fashion and what isn't.

Nowadays, west is no longer the only initiator of trends, but they can be born anywhere in the world. As inspiration is found everywhere, and local traditions are used in numerous different ways and contexts, the borders between traditional and modern clothing are starting to fade. Motivation to accept a certain style is caused mainly by the wish to fit in a specific social group, not to fit in the rules made by designers, as in the beginning of the 20th century. Diana Crane (2000) states that media culture brings new role models, such as entertainers, music, film and sports stars.

This chaotic and always changing structure of modern time fashion is described by Barthes (1967:33) “Unlike traditional clothing, fashion is never based on fixed principles handed down within a particular culture. Fashion adheres to nothing. Each season it creates a completely new ambience with new interpretations that are superficially inspired or derived from fashion history, art or exotic cultures and bent on its will.”

One of the new occupations that started existing in the second half of 20th century is fashion forecasting. At one point in the 20th century a problem occurred in the fashion world. Even if creating independently from each other, designers would often come up with designs looking alarmingly alike one to another. Reason for that was probably in the fact that all of them have drawn inspiration from few similar sources, such as old fashion trends, media, or recent artworks. As a consequence, fashion forecasting became a new way of predicting future trends. Fashion forecasters would gather all kind of information from around the world and then predict colors and fabrics that would be popular two years in advance.
The profession has developed and expanded a lot in the last decades, and became a serious part of the creation process. Forecasting used to be in the form of bulky books that were distributed twice a year and that would predict comprehensive trends for colors, prints and silhouettes in the following seasons. In the late 1990s, with a lot of businesses switching from physical to online working, those books were replaced by websites. And in the last years some of the companies are even leaving behind the classic approach of fashion forecasting and moving on to big data analysis. They gather online information for a vast range of garments and accessories and collect comments from social media. Those information are then converted to data, assembled and repackaged into analyses that explain competitors’ product assortments, prices, consumer mood and emerging trends.

TRACING MODERN-DAY TRENDS: FROM ORIGIN TO EXPANSION

In the last decades, the aggressive side of fashion, where the new trend ruthlessly dethrones the previous ruler, has been transforming into relativism. One ruling trend has been replaced by many, all coexisting and overlapping. Fashion brands of all kinds propose a wide range of choices to the consumer. Choices are often inconsistent and contradictory, generally influenced by street styles and different cultures. James Laver’s law, with a clear timeline of a rise and fall of a trend and of time linearly influencing the trend’s lifecycle hasn’t been valid for some time. People mix and match, putting a very fashionable item with a non-fashionable or mixing a designer piece with a cheap one, making a new meaning for both of them and creating new aesthetic on the way.

Ana Martínez Barreiro (2004) argues that in a more democratic society of today, trends flow from top to bottom, from bottom to top and among the middle class, and they do it so constantly they overlap each other. Many different trends of different intensities coincide, forming an even more complex fashion system. Braham (1997) claims that now multiple fashion systems coexist, as trends can move up, down or sideways, coming from diverse starting points and having different directions.

Two different theories about the ways of spreading of trends today confront each other. First one, as described by Martínez Barreiro, compares a fashion trend to a virus, says that a new trend spreads like a virus, and the source of a specific trend is generally untraceable. It replicates itself by jump-
ing from one person to the next one as an endless line of imitation, in that way ending the old seasonal trends dictated by fashion brands. The other theory, argues that even if society appears to be more democratic than before, the pyramidal model of spreading trends still exists and that people have an illusion of being free to choose, but are actually being inevitably influenced by constant advertising, media and popular culture. By this theory, the popular media influences not only common individuals but also designers.

“Today, trends are born and die within an infinitely faster and more turbulent environment, in which brands, celebrities, magazines, bloggers and end consumers on social media all jostle for influence over what’s ‘in’ and ‘out’ of fashion.”, states Kate Abnett in Do Fashion Trends Still Exist? article for Business of Fashion website, describing the modern fashion world. Popular singers, models, actors and others could be seen as one of main influences in fashion today, as they have immense fan groups following their appearance as well as their work, with internet making it easy to reach a global audience.

This idolization is only emphasized by the social media platforms as Instagram, putting stars and their fan bases in a more direct relationship. Whether a celebrity actually posts on his/hers own account or not doesn’t actually make a big difference, as long as the fans have a feeling of being able to look into the personal, everyday life of that persona, and in that way connect and identify with their idol, and learn about him/her even more. Except the accounts run by the celebrities or their teams, countless fan pages exist, following their person of choice and posting pictures of their everyday looks, whereabouts, beauty routines and style choices.

Instagram praises not only the regular celebrities, but also creates its own. As the profession of a fashion blogger started being relevant in the fashion system, it raised much arguments within professionals and nonprofessionals. It is considered to be one of the most commercially successful and publicly visible forms of digital cultural production and has a long term influence on the fashion world itself. In the last years, a huge number of blogs have been created, not just in the fashion, showing the right way to dress and look but also many other types giving tips and showing the right way to do make up, work out, cook, travel, and live. Bloggers live their life in front of a camera lens and by documenting and sharing perfectly planned pictures and posts, they often set quite unrealistic standards about how life should look.

Whether bloggers, singers, models or some other kind of celebrities, many of

Rihanna Fenty Puma's Fall 2016 campaign
Photo by Willy Van deperre, styled by Alastair McKimm
them find various channels of collecting revenue from their fans and followers. Some of the most important revenue channels are selling merchandize with their own signature, and promoting brands and collecting profit for that. This means that they often collaborate with brands, take part in designing collections, advertise them as the face of the brand’s campaign, or sometimes just mention them while posting and in that way bring attention to the product. As vast majority of them are not designers by profession, it is questionable to which extent can they take part in the designing process, but sometimes just by putting their signature on already existing products ends up in huge profit on the market. And while some celebrities choose to collaborate with existing brands, others decide to start their own. Rihanna, one of the most well-known singers of today, sets an example of how collaborating with brands can be a big success, as she’s designed with brands such as Puma, Dior, Manolo Blahnik and Chopard and has been the face of campaigns for Armani, Dior, Gucci and Chanel. She won Shoe of the Year award, at the 30th annual Footwear News Achievement Awards in New York for her Fenty Puma Creeper design. Gigi Hadid, member of the Instagram era supermodel generation, has been highly prosperous in her designer collaborations with Tommy Hilfiger and Vogue Eyewear. On the other hand, Chiara Ferragni, maybe the most popular Italian originated blogger, has started her own brand, designing shoes and other merchandise, with a lot of commercial success, and has even been appointed as a costume designer for annual Intimissimi on Ice show for 2017.

FAST FASHION: LEGAL COPYCATS SHAPING THE INDUSTRY

Another consequence of globalization is division of fashion brands in two directions, luxury and fast fashion. Fast fashion is described in Cultures and Globalization: The Cultural Economy of fashion (Brand, Jan et al, 2005), through depiction of high popularity of mass retail brands such as Zara or H&M selling wide variety of more accessible clothing options. With having a completely different approach to the market and sole design process itself, with a different customer target, price range, politics and sales channels, the fast fashion companies have made a big impact to the way fashion industry works.

Zara’s huge world success is considered to be due big part to their innovative business model. Their creation process includes a big number of designers that are following trends and applying them to the new collections, which are updated many times during a season. Their production has also been affect-
ed by globalization of the industry. The old tailoring system was too strict and costly for the new dynamics of fashion, and was substituted by more flexible production, making it possible for them to create more personalised products according to the needs of their customers. Inditex Corporation, owning Zara, is one of the most successful in applying this production model, taking a step further by JIT system, which connects their logistics centre real-time to their stores which are reporting on the success of each article sale every day. Those information are used during restocking of articles, making it possible for the company to be always in line with the latest trends and wishes amongst customers. And even if their products are often direct copies of designer pieces that are shown on the runways, it doesn’t influence the big sale rate or the company's success. One of the extraordinary parts of their business model is lack of advertising campaigns, instead they rely on word of mouth and retail space positioning with their stores always in the strict center areas, such as Fifth Avenue in New York City, and Oxford Street in London.

Exclusiveness has for a long time been one of the main attributes and strivings of fashion, but since the rise of fast fashion brands, a lot of things have changed in the industry. A question arises, if anything can still be considered exclusive today? One can argue that a unique, haute couture, custom-made item, designer made and thus highly expensive should be still seen as an exclusive item. But how can the original design defend and differentiate itself from countless cheap copies that will emerge as soon as a demand on the market appears?

On one hand the modern democratized fashion brings fashion items closer to the common customer, even if through cheap copies of the actual designs. This makes the customer feel that he/she can look according to the latest trends and follow the newest aesthetics and also gives a more open access to the person’s favorite brands via internet and social media. But on the other hand it is maybe even more exclusive than before and made that way by the economics of mass fashion improving its fickleness, and by the hardly reachable circle of celebrities and fashion influencers, who are making trends, collaborating with brands and initiating new styles, due to their substantial visibility and popularity. Without big investments, new or smaller brands can hardly reach international or global level, and tend to stay local unless acquired by a bigger company. If they don’t succeed in creating a distinctive and unique products and in using their small size as an advantage in speed of creation and decision making, it is hard for them to last.

Fashion designers are in an unenviable position of having to fit in this new
order of fashion system, where almost all high fashion brands are owned by a couple of conglomerates that are switching the emphasis from creation to income, where celebrities are massively turning into designers, where mass retail brands copy designer looks creating cheaper copies that will reach their store 'racks in a few weeks, much before the actual original which will be sold months after the fashion show. Haute couture mainly serves as a marketing tool that brands use to differentiate their image from others, and rare brands are taking part in haute couture fashion weeks that still take place twice a year. Instead, they focus on ready to wear collections which are increasing in number, and now include at least four shows a year. Prêt-à-porter collections are pressured by the enterprise owners to be simple enough, in order to be appropriate of getting copied by high-street brands (Davis, 1994). Entwistle (2015) explains how couturiers now participate in everyday fashion more than ever before, through alliances of their companies with other brands, fabric and garment producers and with financial sponsors. Entwistle makes an example of Italian couturiers getting a notion if their new designs complies with the ideas of major garment manufacturers, which will then reproduce them for their brands.

Since the number of shows has grown and also the involvement of mass production brands works in a different way, this puts much stress on the designer. Global companies stand as the strongest competitors on the market, due to their large capacities to invest in production, advertising companies and distribution. In Cultures and Globalization: The Cultural Economy of fashion Helmut K Anheier and Yudhishthir Raj Isar (2008) describe how the level of competition in the industry has evolved from rivalry in producing quality items to rivalry in the place they occupy in customer’s mind.

The always escalating competition in the fashion industry reflects badly on designers as they are consequently becoming less important and more disposable. Fashion professionals often feel overwhelmed by the pace of change in the industry, as well as by the pressure exerted to squeeze a living out of an inherently creative process that is undoubtedly a form of artistic expression." (Godard, 2012). Corner (2014) describes this matter writing about the suicide of Alexander McQueen and public embarrassment of John Galliano, attributing both to the growing amount of pressure towards designers in the industry today, too high expectations and exploitation of designers’ creativity to the point of breaking. Either they are working in a small studio, mass production enterprise or high fashion company, they are always under pressure to be in consistent with the latest ideas and aesthetics.
This pressure on designers easily results in them copying each other’s works, although with a different approach in high fashion companies, which are usually more subtle than mass production brands. Sometimes just a certain feature of a product is copied, as cut or color, but in other cases the entire garment is copied. Helena Pike writes in The Copycat Economy article for Business of Fashion website about the copying in the fashion industry: “Copying is as old as the fashion industry itself. As early as 1903, Charles Frederick Worth began sewing labels bearing his signature into his clothes as a means of authenticating his designs. Coco Chanel considered knock-offs so inevitable that she described them as “the ransom of success.” Pike continues to make a parallel with today’s copying within the industry describing how during Coco Chanel’s time, plagiarists had to sneak into fashion shows and then after draw her designs just from memory, while today anyone can see all pictures of the latest shows just moments after they’ve been presented on the catwalk. Kal Raustiala and Christopher Sprigman in The Knockoff Economy: How Imitation Sparks Innovation (2012) explains two roles of copying in the modern fashion system, first being the existence of less expensive versions of a product which are affordable to a bigger number of consumers, and second creation of variations of a good design. Even though it seems contradictory, many economists agree upon that copying within fashion actually speeds up trend cycles, since it makes people adopt trends faster. The more rapid diffusion of a trend leads to a more rapid decay, and as decay becomes more rapid so the appetite for new trends rises. This again puts even more pressure on designers to come up with new ideas, meaning that copying boosts both consumption and inventiveness. Fashion design is considered to have a mainly functional role, and anything considered utilitarian can’t be copyrighted. Copyright protection doesn’t cover fashion designs in most of the countries, but only labels and patterns, since it harms the original design creator but benefits the industry in general. For emerging designers, their design being copied by other brands leaves greater consequence than just reduced income. In most of cases, they still don’t have strong reputation and loyal client base and consumers often don’t even know that they’re buying a copy, because they have never seen the original design either. Given this, it is up to the customer to decide is the originality of a design relevant, but even if it they find it relevant, it is questionable if they are in a position to find out the origin of the design in question.
“One of the surest tests is the way in which a poet borrows. Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different than that from which it is torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion. A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest. Hunt for visual motifs is a constant preoccupation of not only students but also architects, both imaginative and the not so imaginative, the former resorting to stealing so to speak and the latter to copying.” T. S. Eliot

Relying on bestselling products as in former long tail business model that was common in fashion world isn’t efficient as it used to be. Since social media is taken over the say in what is in fashion and what isn’t, many trend forecasting companies are no longer in the business of predicting trends in the traditional sense of it, but now they advise fashion companies, provide inspirations, track trends as they evolve and help clients to find the right trend out of the vast array of things that are considered to be in fashion in that given moment, considering their brand identity and market. Brand identity in most of the cases overpowers bestseller items, and trends are the mean of showing clients how the brand fits in the world today. In today’s fashion market, brand differentiation is a necessity. In Cultures and Globalization: The Cultural Economy book (Brand, Jan et al, 2005) this problem is identified, and it is presumed that the best way of making one product more desirable than another is through generating value, brand identity and emotion based purchases, collaborations and customization of products and experiences. Diana Crane (2000) argues that in the modern time fashion system, products themselves are less important than frames that are used to sell them.
Self-branding and Brand-branding

RISE OF LIFESTYLES AS A MEAN OF SELF-EXPRESSION

While social scientists agree upon the fact that the Western society has changed in the last decades, also influencing the way fashion is interpreted, they have different views on the change itself. Diana Crane (2000) describes some of these opinions, of several scientists claiming that social classes aren’t visible through appearance as before and that the cultural interests are the main fragmenting element. Fragments are multiplying and overlapping, resulting in a highly fragmented society where every lifestyle belongs to its niche. Others think that lifestyles form “image tribes” without overlapping with each other. Another opinion would be that those lifestyles change and evolve in time, but also that individuals move from one to another. The main difference to social classes, is that lifestyle can be chosen, while a social class depends on many factors and is hard to overcome.

Today, a person choses a lifestyle and builds a sense of identity by making narratives which are meant to explain and present elements of his/hers past, present and future. This identity changes continually as the person changes the way of understanding and projecting his/her ideal self. Diana Crane (2000) argues how it is a consequence of modern culture and society that are becoming more complex than they were, and are hard to understand.

Corner (2014) claims that nowadays everything can be fashion, and all areas of life tend to be flooded by it. “Fashion matters. To the economy, to society, and to each of us personally. Faster than anything else, what we wear tells a story of who we are – or who we want to be. Fashion is the most immediate and intimate form of self-expression.” (Corner, 2014:4). What happens when the borders between fashion and non-fashion fade even more?

There are practically no fashion free fields left, as it is constantly expanding. Lifestyle is defined by style, the non-verbal language of one’s identity. Meaning that every item we own, whether it is a couch, a pair of shoes or a cellphone, in a way speaks about us. Stephen H. Riggins (1990) writes
about the way our activities are intervened by tools and how we tend to fill our life with symbolic items. We choose items we believe present us in the best way. Objects were once bought primarily for the reason of looking nice, but now it is more important for them to ‘say the right things’. Our style should visually explain our opinions, ideals and desires. The main objects of our self-branding are the ones that are portable (one can’t bring a sofa to a bar), thus clothing and accessories play the main role in the skill of self-expression (Corner, 2014). Fashion and fashion design present us with not only choices of what we can wear and how we can present ourselves to others, but can represent whole lifestyles.” (Wolfendale and Kennett, 2011:5).

Ted Polhemus (1994: 7) speaks about the practice of using the way we look to signal important messages of the moment. Throughout history the message was about projecting an image of richness and power, while in the modern age it is more about projecting authenticity. Is style one’s chosen self? Can we choose who we are? Considering that self-advertising through projecting the right message with one’s style and look is no more honest than any other form of advertising (Corner, 2014), the only thing that matters is what people believe. Wolfendale and Kennett (2011) argue that fashion is also a central part of how we self-identify internally and also on the external level, how we express and identify ourselves within our community and communicate our opinions, ideas, political and social views to our surroundings. Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1995) have a similar view and claim the communicated message of one’s look depends also on each person’s subjective interpretations of it.

THE IMAGE OF SELF AND ITS CONNECTION TO DRESS

The term to dress is defined by Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1995) as a collection of alterations and modifications of the body and/or additions to the body, such as styled or colored hair, pierced ears, and perfumed skin, as well as clothing, jewelry, accessories, and other kinds of items added to the body as enhancements. Entwistle (2015:117) describes dress as the means by which an identity is shown and maintained. We choose the items that should visually explain to the others what we want to express. “Fashion and dress articulate the body in culture: fashion produces discourses on the body and how to adorn it, dress is the translation of fashion into everyday practice.” (Entwistle, 2015:245). Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1995) further conclude that the image of self is constructed by two components first one being one’s
identity, which an individual obtains as a result of various biological, social and physical settings, and second one being the way the individual dresses himself/herself. Annette Lynch and Mitchell Strauss (2007) consider self to be a slowly evolving and developing process of having knowledge and sense of who we are equally internally and externally. They state that the process starts in early childhood days and is constant throughout an individual’s life.

Granville Stanley Hall, American psychologist and educator, described the beginning of a sense of self, which he marked to be at the moment when one notices his/her physical extremities. Hall explained the process from its start around the age of twelve months, when a baby notices external features such as fingers, toes and hands, to the more elaborated phase between three and five years, when the baby puts attention to internal organs and skin. After that achievement, the attention goes to the elements put on the skin, such as clothing and accessories, going from the body to the elements used to cover the body. He presumed that it results in that what covers one’s body becomes a part of who the person feels he/she is. He also noticed the amount of excitement connected to clothes in the early days of one’s life, as children would react with a lot of passion when their clothes were to be complimented and commented upon.

Gregory Stone (1962) considered communication of self through dress to be an individual’s conscious action, and claimed that every time one puts clothes on it is to address a certain audience. Stone thought that there are two responses to the wearer’s look, one by others and the second by the wearer himself/herself. The assessment by others of the wearer’s self, Stone named review. On the base of former experience which individuals gain in time, they have ideas of how others are likely to respond to their dress, in advance of interaction. If the predictions turn out to be true, by Stone it would result in a validation of the self, leading to satisfactory social interaction, and if the predictions would be wrong that would lead to interaction difficulties or even the end of the interaction. He gave examples, such as in the attire one chooses for a job interview, stating the importance of the impression one makes by his/hers appearance. He also mentioned contrary situations, with an example of teenagers dressing deliberately in a way they would expect to be received negatively by their elders but positively by their friend group.

“The objectification of the self in signs through which a mind can reflexively attend to them need not be confined to linguistic signs in the strict sense of the term. In fact, visual signs are used simultaneously with verbal signs to identify and disidentify the self.” Stephen H. Riggins (1990). Riggins de-
scribes how through the fashion system, as a structure of visual signs, one identifies with specific structures of people and misidentifies with other structures. For this to be done, one must first be aware of himself and the others.

Joanne Entwistle shares her view on this aspect of dress (2015), as she speaks about dress being a way of making one’s body social, and giving it meaning and identity. She describes the process of getting dressed as a deeply personal act, but also a way of preparing the body for social surroundings, with a goal of making it suitable, adequate and desirable. Meaning that, even if we dress ourselves thinking it is to please our criteria, that process is also connected to the external factors, our surroundings, social and other factors. Entwistle connects dress both to the personal and the public experience of one’s body. “Dress is a way in which individuals learn to live in their bodies and feel at home in them. Wearing the right clothes and looking our best, we feel at ease with our bodies, and the opposite is equally true: turning up for a situation inappropriately dressed, we feel awkward, out of place and vulnerable.” (Entwistle, 2015:7)

RELATION OF SELF AND SOCIETY

Entwistle continues to explore the connection between dress and society, describing the way dress converts body into something recognizable to a culture, and explain how a body that doesn’t conform to the rules of this culture is considered offensive and inappropriate by other society members. As a consequence, dress can also be seen as a matter of one’s morality, since if dressed unsuitable, the person is open to social disapproval and attack. “Dress needs to be understood as a situated practice that is the result of complex social forces and individual negotiations in daily life.” (2015:65)

Goffman (1971) also speaks about the way society and its norms influence dress and impact the way a person presents himself/herself to others. By getting dressed, a person tends to respect those norms, no matter is it happening on a conscious or unconscious level, thus staying within bounds of a culture and its idea of what presents a dressed body, all that in order to be accepted by society.

Fred Davis (1994) claims that clothing, together with jewelry, accessories and makeup could be seen as a sort of code. He compares the codes communicated through fashion in the modern Western culture with those in arts and crafts, saying that different combinations of apparel combined with their wearer’s attitude create various outcomes and meanings both for the wearer
and viewers. Davis (1994) sees the meaning of clothing as a cultural one, linking it and comparing with music, food, and everything he thinks is open to having a common understanding. He argues how collective identity ambivalence, the inner uncertainties and fluctuations, similar to Simmel's opposing forces within a person, is an important reason of constant changes within fashion world. Furthermore, the vagueness of fashion gives space to alternative, sometimes contradictory interpretations of those symbolic codes.

Entwistle (2015) frames dress in everyday life between social constrains of time and space. Time being the constant change of fashion, its temporality and fickleness. While getting dressed, a person has to be aware of the moment in time, created by the fashion system. Fashion presents an image of self and the body in a particular moment and this makes impact on one’s personal experience of it. Space brings different kind of constraints, connected both to the external rules imposed to individuals, and also internal experience of how the individual is impacted by those rules. When dressing oneself, a person also has to take in consideration different spaces, imposing diverse rules of how should one look. Goffman (1956) differentiates spaces of the street, shopping mall, office and their rules of how to look which regulate the way an individual presents himself/herself and how he/she interacts with others. The rules of a space can even change according to the time of the day, as a street has one atmosphere during the day, full with people, while on the contrary, during the night time, it can even be experienced as a dangerous place to be alone. By considering the rules of a social space, one has to understand its dress code, to understand who is he/she going to encounter in that space, what activities will be included, and also decide up to which level he/she wants to be visible in the occasion. Entwistle (2015) argues that when we consider these rules consciously, we adopt some of the norms and continue to employ them on an unconscious level. She further goes on to explain the bond existing between the dress, social interactions and the inner self, stating that dress is a crucial part of creating a personal identity.

IDENTITY: CREATION AND ALTERATIONS

Daniel Bell, in his book The Coming of Post-Industrial Society (1976), states that, in contemporary society, a person has an unlimited freedom in choosing new identities. He suggests how people create a different identity for themselves in their workspace and in their leisure time. According to Bell (1976),
this comes as a consequence of the decrease of time a person spends working during life and increase of time spent in education and leisure during 20th century. In the workspace, depending on the type of one’s occupation, there are still some elements remaining from earlier times, which discretely separate one working class from another. Outside work, identities are now shaped based on various values and personal views, age, race and ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, as described also by Wolfendale and Kennett (2011) earlier in the text. Gilles Lipovetsky argues in The Empire of Fashion (1994) that in the second half of the 20th century the private, leisure time has become more important than the work time, calling the change “the second individualist revolution”. This change brings hedonistic values along, connecting fashion not only to the desire of being seen and cherished by others, but also to an individual’s own hedonistic pleasure. Anyone can choose a kind of fashion to replicate, and do it in order of feeling a sense of pleasure on a personal level and also as a confirmation of their freedom of choice.

Joanne Entwistle (2015:72) addresses various authors’ writings about the transformation of identity under conditions of rapid changes within fashion in the modern times. Entwistle states that modernity has made creating an identity easier by not having individuals fixed to traditional communities but instead put under the influence of the heterogenic atmosphere of a city. Entwistle further explains the reputation cities had during the 19th century, when they were seen as dangerous places filled with strangers and how that resulted in the importance of appearance as the only mean of reading and estimating one another. Wilson (2007) describes dress as the “technique of survival” in the modern city, it is dress that brings an individual into contact and interaction with others. Wilson (2007) thinks that today, style has the role of highlighting the sense of one’s connection to particular groups and communities. Style is the mean by which one can tell if the other is a member of the same group.

Joanne Finkelstein (1991) claims the modern individual to be aware of being read and assessed by his/hers appearance, dress and body. Understanding that, Finkelstein (1991) thinks that increasing number of people choose to manipulate their appearance, either through dress or in some cases even through plastic surgery. Entwistle (2015:113) argues that the modern self is aware of itself, and therefore prone to conscious modifications, as we deliberately and knowingly strive to make a good impression and present the best version of ourselves to others. We attempt to do this by using dress, fashion, fitness, diets and cosmetic surgery as tools.
Understanding the awareness of an individual of his/hers and its changeability and flexibility, one may wonder if someone’s appearance is actually authentic. Entwistle (2015:123) addresses this matter claiming that we still try reading others by the look of their body, dress and complete appearance, even in the contemporary society. As people are becoming more and more aware of the importance of their appearance, as a consequence they become more concerned with controlling it through dress and manner. Featherstone (1991) claims that the contemporary body has become the main source of identity and thus is under much attention. Taking care of the body through exercising and eating healthy, once connected to wellbeing, now is all done in the attempt of looking good. People strive to have a beautiful body, as the beautiful body the one that is much appreciated and cherished. It seems that through having a beautiful body, one can improve his/hers social status. Wilson (2010) claims that one attends to his/hers body image in an instrumental way, as his/hers status and social acceptability and suitability depend on the looks. “It is generally assumed that consumer culture asks people to take an instrumental attitude towards their bodies, to scrutinize themselves for imperfections, to measure up to the ideal bodies presented in media advertising, the models, celebrities, and beautiful people of leisure.” (Featherstone, 2010:207)

Diana Crane (2000) describes different social and market researches, and most of them show how usually the younger part of the population is more strike by deliberate identity changes and obsession with a good appearance, which they strive to achieve through consumption of goods. Some researches argue how age groups are even sufficient to separate different views on lifestyle culture. Crane (2000) claims that obsession with identity, sometimes described as narcissistic postmodernism consumerism, and is typical for some but not all lifestyles. Again, younger people, being less stable in the society and more affected by media culture, are the ones more susceptible to it.

BRANDS AND THEIR ROLE IN THE CREATION OF AN IDENTITY

Fashion adds to the never ending evolution of social and cultural identities by always giving a new meaning and symbolic to items. Brands play an important role in this process. As much as the style of the garment itself says about us, by its color, fabric, shape and cut, so does the brand we wear. A studded biker jacket may say “young, rebel, free” and red stilettos could mean “feminine, powerful and sexy”. Furthermore, Benetton logo carries mes-
sages of the brand expressed in their past and current campaigns, such as anti-racism, social, ecological responsibility and a wish to be a part of a united global culture. Brands strive to project their own imaginary utopian world, to depict the way the perfect life should look like. Their worlds are sometimes even without too much reference to the real life and other cases they depict a lifestyle which could be reached through making the world a better place, like in Benetton campaigns. By wearing a certain brand, one can incorporate their lifestyle implications in to his or her own style statement.

Due to huge competition in global market, sometimes the clothing itself is less important than the means that are used to sell it. Fashion is no longer a mandate but it is presented as a choice, the consumer chooses garments which they believe present their identity and builds a specific appearance from a lot of options presented. A brand needs to communicate its particular message, which will attract its target group of consumers, minding that for different cultural groups, the same garment could have different meaning. As the consumerism has evolved from purchases based on needs to the ones based on dreams in the 1920s, its beginning was initiated by Edward Bernays’s application of Freud’s principles to consumer behavior. He was the creator of applying psychology to the field of public relations and propaganda.

According to Bernays (1927:25), modern propaganda is a constant, lasting effort to create or shape events to impact the relations of the public to an enterprise, idea or a group, while “What are the true reasons why the purchaser is planning to spend his money on a new car instead of on a new piano? Because he has decided that he wants the commodity called locomotion more than he wants the commodity called music? Not altogether. He buys a car, because it is at the moment the group custom to buy cars.” (Bernays, 1927:55). In his opinion, the modern propagandist is an individual able to create circumstances which will alter that custom. Bernays successfully shaped the publics’ opinions and group habits, he effectively changed the view on several products, all with a goal of increasing sales of those products. “By playing upon an old cliche, or manipulating a new one, the propagandist can sometimes swing a whole mass of group emotions.” Bernays (1927:50). Since that time, it is important for brands to realize consumer’s wishes and use them, or even to create a sense of desire where there wasn’t one to begin with. Manipulating consumers to suddenly feel a formerly unrealized longing, they present the product to have the power of making the consumers feel better about themselves. As a consequence, brands strive to create perfect imaginative stories with their ideal consumer playing the main role, in order to pass the message and create a need.
One can wonder, does the brand define its customers, or it's them who give the final identity to the brand itself? There are many examples of brands having a certain image and meaning, and being deeply implemented into specific subcultures, social groups and ongoing aesthetics. For example Adidas, German fashion brand famous for its leisurewear and footwear which is highly present in today’s fashion, brings a message of cool casual style, youthfulness and is widely present among the street culture. Paul Wagenblast and Isabella Burley write about this connection between Adidas and street culture for Exclusive: The Cult of Adidas article for Dazed website, claiming that Adidas has made an undisputable contribution to the style codes of outsider subcultures, giving to the sneakers being worn by the subculture leaders a power resembling that one of holy relics. Today, Adidas is considered to have an almost cult-like respect and worship. Wagenblast and Burley’s interviewee, Adidas consultant and a big fan of the brand Gary Aspden, speaks in the same interview how in his opinion the image Adidas has, wouldn’t be possible to acquire through marketing, but that it is connected to culture for decades. Aspden believes that it is the young consumers of the period, who made the meaning and context of Adidas as we know it today. Sometimes it does seem that a brand image emerges straight from the customers, which choose to give a particular context and meaning to the garments they are using. Most recent example could be the one of quite forgotten street brands from the 90s, Fila, Champion and Kappa, which are now once again considered to be in fashion, even if almost no one has worn them in the last decade or two. The transformation of their image happened as a part of the 90s nostalgia trend in 2016, and young trendsetters started wearing the brands in a new way, often using their garments as a part of a sexy or bold look. The brands that were once popular mainly for their comfort and price, began having a different meaning, and standing for modern, raw and hipster. The brands in question embraced their new image and aesthetics, cleverly using the comeback moment to make collaborations with other brands, designers and popular models of the moment. But, as described in the previous chapter, trends today are hard to trace and we are most of the time not even sure of the way they initiated. Having that in mind, one can’t be sure if the 90s nostalgia is a trend that came spontaneously from the consumers, or it was carefully planned by some market strategists. In the end, are we just manipulated into thinking that it is us who are making the choice?
Stephen Harold Riggins (1994) defines socialness as a new word that describes the incorporation of objects into everyday life. Riggins argues that societies are consisting both out of people and artifacts. In his opinion, people don’t interact only with other people and animals, but objects too. Objects are defined by their relation to people. But what happens when an object is taken out of its cultural context?

The Asmat are an ethnic group of New Guinea, located in the coastal plains in the Papua area of Indonesia. The total Asmat population is expected to be around 50,000 as it was estimated in the year of 1996. From Western society’s point of view they live a very primitive life, isolated from the modern civilization. Across the world, they are mostly famous for their wood sculpting works of art. Living in a tribal community, members still take care of their basic needs in an authentic way. Without having a developed money economy, the Asmat engage in barters in order of getting elementary supplies. They are open for an exchange even with outsiders, if they come upon an encounter.

Roy Villevoye is a Dutch artist, and through years has been working with films, installations, sculptures and photography. In the 1992 he travels to the remote Asmat region of Papua for the first time and encounters the Asmat culture and learns about their habits. Villevoye made frequent trips to the area, equipped with photo and video cameras while seeking for Asmat real life situations that would enable him to express his artistic concerns and present the topic in a more direct and genuine manner. His photographs, which show the hybrid culture of the Asmat people, indicate a desire to uncover the myth of ethnography, to encounter the ‘real’ Asmat, who until the mid-20th century were widely believed to be head-hunters and cannibals. Villevoye’s representations of his encounters with the Asmat people speak about cultural taboos and prejudice.

As Villevoye was going there for the first time, he took with him some T-shirts as presents for the Asmat people. The presents were plain white T-shirts, representing classic American artefacts. Some of them were intervened on by the
artist, with holes punched in them, which were then surrounded by skin colored circles as a part of his artistic process. By accepting the gift and putting the T-shirts on, the Asmat would complete the work of art by placing various shades of skin colors next to their own. But what Villevoye didn’t expect was that the Asmat would take the whole experiment to another level (Brand, Jan et al, 2005).

BRIEF HISTORY OF A T-SHIRT

The T-shirt is arguably the most popular outer garment in the contemporary westernized society. The today so popular T-shirts started their life as a garment as low-cost, mass-produced underwear, sold through catalogues across America. They have evolved from a specific kind of long, all in one undergarment, which was made in flannel and was known under the name “union suit”. The union suit originated as women’s undergarment during the 19th-century, and was soon widely used by men too, especially workers in various industries.

Even though the union suit was highly successful in keeping men warm, it was quite useless at keeping them cool during warmer weather, unless it was cut in half, which many workers in the end did. Not after a long time, these warm undergarments started being experimented with, while companies tested different fabrics that could stretch back into shape, in order to make the product more comfortable. It resulted in the creation of buttonless undershirts that were made in wool and cotton and were thus able to be pulled over one’s head without stretching the collar permanently.

T-shirts started being advertised as a bachelor garment, since they were without buttons so they didn’t need any stitching. Soon after they became a part of WWI US army and navy uniform. Following World War II, they were worn by ex-navy soldiers as undergarments and it slowly became usual to see veterans wearing uniform trousers with T-shirts during casual occasions. They stood for youth, toughness and masculinity. The popularity of T-shirts as outer garments rose even more after the film A Street Car Named Desire which featured Marlon Brando wearing a typical T-shirt of the period. Brando’s performance caused a huge increase of sales of T-shirts, making the symbolic of masculinity even stronger.

In the fifties they were spread through Europe, becoming widely known through Hollywood movies. In Europe the meaning of the T-shirt was changed. It stood for a superficial American product, a consumerism icon like Coca-Cola or bubble gums. Young rebels started wearing them with
jeans, as an expression of protest against the conformist society. In the eighties the meaning changed again, this time to the role of a messenger.

It didn’t take long after for companies to understand the marketing potential of these simple, at the time usually blank, outer garments, with Roy Rogers and Walt Disney being among the first ones to start using them in this purpose. They started spreading the now omnipresent practice of putting designs or messages on T-shirts. T-shirts started having all kinds of logos and texts, enabling individual or corporate communication.

CHANGING THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF A GARMENT

Asmat accepted the T-shirts Villevoye brought for them. In time they incorporated those T-shirts into their everyday clothing, mixing them with their traditional clothes and adornment culture. On one hand, this has shown that they were more open to external influences than expected, and that the traditional clothing cultures are more open to change and innovation than it was thought by the Western society at that time. Until then, in the Western world the Asmat were seen as a specific and unique community. They were considered to be still uncompromised by the Western culture, and thought to be the ones that would surely defy the superficial temptations of the Western fashion. Roy Villevoye’s work refuted this idea. Today, Asmat prefer T-shirts rather than their traditional clothing, thus showing that they too aren’t immune to the Western goods.

But the Asmat weren’t just wearing the T-shirts like anyone from the western civilization would. Instead they were treating those T-shirts in a new, for us unknown and confusing way. Instead, they were scribbling on them, tearing or cutting them and making various holes in the fabric. For the Asmat, a T-shirt didn’t mean the same thing as for someone coming from the US, thus they used it in a new, different way. This experiment also underlined the fact that a garment can be given a new context, and it will take on a new local cultural meaning (Brand, Jan et al, 2005:128).

First arrivals of Western clothing to the Asmat, through colonization, were seen as a symbols of the Western style, behavior and power. Rare Asmat men who owned those clothes, stood out from the community and had a special status. Even when these garments became old or dirty, they still carried the powerful meaning. In time the Western clothing spread and wasn’t
that exclusive anymore. Since they are not a part of a culture of throwing a
way old and torn shirt in favor of buying a new one, their clothing is rarely
new or clean. The rags are their own and have a special significance, they
are very individual and customized. Each dress fits the wearer in a singu-
lar, unique way. They transformed the clothing into a cloth. The interventions
on the clothing are limited to the upper wear, leaving shorts and trousers in-
tact on men, and closed dresses on women. But the shirts are so different
from their prior state that they are barely recognizable. Most are dirty and dis-
colored, with holes and openings in various places and many other irregu-
larities. Some of them are existing just as a collar piece without the rest of
the shirt, or a simple cloth. The garments become more elaborate with time.

Seems that through accepting some Western clothes and customs, the As-
mat have also in a way accepted the Western convention of sexual decency,
and have started wearing garments in order to cover themselves. But some-
how, T-shirts have managed to escape from this role of coverage and have
become something else, not taken from Western culture but truly Asmat. This
opens a question whether even the most consumed and advertised prod-
ucts still have space and opportunity to evolve and transform, thus becoming
something entirely new, and is that kind of radical change only possible if the
garment is encountered for the first time, without knowing its original meaning.
Gayle Brewer (2011) describes how brand advertising planners develop diverse tactics in order to attract attention, express brand’s message and ideals, raise awareness and try to shape consumer attitude and behavior. Between different tactics, such as explaining the new aspects and improvements of the advertised product, comparing the product in question with the others on the market, or trying to entertain the audience in order to develop a positive relationship with the brand, the shock advertising stands out from the rest while aiming to provoke and appall the customer.

“The argument is an old one: does advertising reflect the values of society or does advertising undermine and change society?” (Hill, 2002:237). Daniel Delis Hall (2002) argues that certain social values tend to be more resilient to alteration than others are, such as the ones addressing politics, religion and, most of all, sex.

Hall (2002) continues to describe the controversy that has been surrounding sex related topics throughout 20th century, resulting in most of the brands avoiding to address the subject in any form. By addressing it, they would risk to lose customers, so they would decide rather to be safe than sorry. Some of the brands were still ready to take their chance. Those brands were usually coming from fashion or fragrance industries, or contemporary lifestyle services such as travel agencies, since the public disagreement wouldn’t be coming from their target group. Brewer (2011) explains how, even though the shock tactics can cause a backlash and a loss of customers, they tend to be more discussed by individuals, and thus worth the risk.

Shocking and controversial advertising is a planned and well thought tactic of brand communication, and has existed from early days of advertising (Guttman, 2014). Guttman (2014) further addresses it as a way of gaining attention and create distinction from others. As one of the most renowned names in the clothing industry, the company Calvin Klein is known across the globe for its provocative, cutting-edge products and marketing strategies. Since sexuality
is deeply implemented into its DNA, the brand’s tendency has always been to release somewhat suggestive ad campaigns. But as Hall (2002) explained, even though conservative groups would criticize and condemn their imagery, it would also result in a boost of sales within the younger customers.

With brand’s roots in creating revolutionary advertising, their campaigns are known for raising eyebrows and causing a lot of divided views and opinions leaving no one indifferent. It is responsible for some of the most provocative campaigns in the last decades and many of them were considered highly controversial. During the 45 years of its existence, the brand has been disapproved many times and blamed not just for being too provocative, but even of promoting gang rape, violence, child pornography, and drug use. As the brand continues to strive towards younger customers, Calvin Klein advertisements still tend to put the product itself secondary to the message of the campaign, often stressing the body language of models and being on the verge of indecency.

NEW APPROACH AND NEW FACES

But in its latest campaigns, Calvin Klein has gone one step further, by not only provoking and moving boundaries of good taste, but also accentuating each model’s individual approach to the product. The brand has presented the company’s S/S 2016 global multimedia advertising campaign shot by photographer Harley Weir and A/W 2016 shot by avant-garde photographer and filmmaker, Tyrone Lebon. This campaign marks an evolution in Calvin Klein’s attitude.

For the first time, all of the Calvin Klein brands - Calvin Klein Collection, Calvin Klein, Calvin Klein Jeans and Calvin Klein Underwear are presented together though images and videos, in a big campaign started on Instagram. The campaign, which reaches 26 global markets, includes digital, mobile, print and outdoor advertising.

The visually powerful global campaign presents a diverse and varied cast, ranging from the ones that would be expected, to the ones not often seen in such a high-profiled advertisement. It is full of highly famous global superstars, actors, musicians and models: pop star phenomenon Justin Bieber, American model and social media star Kendall Jenner, hip-hop artist Kendrick Lamar, supermodel Kate Moss and others. But then again, it also stars some of much less famous individuals, such as journalists and activists: Vogue creative director and icon Grace Coddington, American musician, ac-
tor and comedian Henry Rollins and others. Finally it present ordinary people, street cast unknowns. All of the participants are of different sex, age, race, having their appearance and professions often contrasted to each other.

This is not the only time a famous brand has included unknown people in their campaign. One of the most known examples is Marc Jacobs Instagram campaign. The brand cast models for Marc by Marc Jacobs AW14 campaign via Instagram app. Users were invited to submit videos using the hashtag #CastMeMarc and over 70,000 people accepted the challenge, while nine of them finally stared in the ad. The challenge and the campaign were such a success that the same way of casting was repeated a year later for the brand’s AW15 campaign, and again in the end of 2016, looking for the next Marc Jacobs beauty social media sensation. But what is specific in CK campaign and differs it from other campaigns using non-famous people, is its mixture of high end celebrities with the ‘ordinary’ street casts and all of them being represented equally important in the images.

Not changing their well commercially approved shock advertising tactic the new campaign presents upskirt shot that is looking up actress Klara Kristen’s light slip dress, resulting in again being accused of sexual harassment promotion and even of glamorizing it, as described by Emma Spedding in an article for Telegraph website. But while at the same time keeping the recognizable controversial imagery and provocative aesthetics, the new Calvin Klein campaign manages to bring up a question of individuality and using their product in a particular way by each user.

The tagline of the campaign is an unfinished sentence: “I ___ in #mycalvins.” The language of the campaign was openly designed to put the power in the model’s, and thus the wearer’s, hands. Can one be original in the way he/she is wearing a simple and basic model of underwear? The wearers themselves decided what are they going to ‘do’ in their Calvins, they were free to interpret the product and make it their own, personalize it in order to fit their personality perfectly. The phrase “I ___ in #mycalvins” is included in the advertising visuals, and features a different verb in the phrase for each individual, underlining the model’s message and thought as all of them filled out the gap and finished the sentence by themselves.

Looking at the highly provocative images of the campaign that were combined with the messages of the models themselves, and examining their meaning, one of the main messages of the campaign could be the one that
one’s individuality is the ground for his/her attractiveness, sensuality and provocativeness. All of the models found something different in the experience of wearing the brand’s underwear basics, as they got a specific emotion and found confidence in different thoughts and ideas. The person wearing the underwear is the one that brings the sex appeal to the garment, and not the other way around. It is what the models make of the underwear is in the core of the campaign, they have the power of interpreting clothes and fashion in every way they want, and every one of them does it differently.

“This campaign is representative of how culture is evolving as we speak,” claims Melisa Goldie, chief marketing officer of Calvin Klein Inc for Telegraph website. “We’re bringing together a diverse mix of provocateurs with a unique collective of visual artists to create content that sparks and drives cultural conversation. Millennials reject labels when it comes to their own identities, and they want products that are personalized and individual, which we’re achieving as Calvin Klein moves toward further establishing itself as a lifestyle-centric global brand.” She said to do that, they have to recognize that people don’t want traditional one-sided advertising anymore. Instead, she believes, they want to participate in campaigns that capture their imagination.

On that basis, the brand plans to continue communicating through authentic and intimate messages with “I _______ in #mycalvins” in the areas of art, music and film and striving to connect with its audience on a more personal level, encouraging them to find something unique for themselves in the experience of wearing Calvin Klein. Whether it is only done for the sake of gaining attention or it is a genuine message about individuality communicated by the brand, this overall approach is the core of Calvin Klein’s strategy to engage consumers by encouraging them of being unique and true to themselves.
Exactitudes

An artistic negation of individuality

DETECTING AND DOCUMENTING STREET STYLE CLUSTERS

Photographer Ari Versluis and profiler Ellie Uyttenbroek have been working together ever since October 1994. Inspired by a shared interest, they have started experimenting together in an attempt to get to understand the social part of emerging and existing trends. They have systematically documented numerous striking dress codes of various social groups over the last 21 years. Rotterdam’s heterogeneous, multicultural street scene has been the first and is still a major source of inspiration for Versluis and Uyttenbroek, although since 1998 they have also worked in many other cities as well.

They call their project Exactitudes, as it is a combination of the words exact and attitude. Versluis and Uyttenbroek provide an almost scientific, anthropological record of people’s attempts to distinguish themselves from all the others, or in other cases, their wish to take part of a certain group identity. The apparent contradiction between individuality and uniformity is, however, taken to such extremes in their striking although objective looking photographic evidence and stylistic analysis.

The main concept for the project always stays the same: Versluis and Uyttenbroek scan the streets, clubs, cafés, churches and malls for looks that stand out and seem especially connected with their wearers’ identity. Versluis and Uyttenbroek claim not to be interested in trends, or even in what people wear, but in the way how they wear it.

When noticing certain styles repeated enough times, they approach the representatives of those styles and ask them if they are interested to visit their studio for a photo shoot and an accompanying interview, which is a mean to discover the particularities of their lives. The only requirement is that the invited representatives wear the exact outfits in which they were spotted on the street. Participants range in age, race and sexual preference depending on their group. According to its specifics, each group is given a name to further explain and point out its characteristics, from Donna Decaffeinata

Photos from the book “Exactitudes”
of Milan to the long-haired Reli-Rockers (religious rockers) of Rotterdam. Each name comes with a short poetic description, written by the artists.

The photos are taken in the studio. By registering their subjects in an identical framework and putting them in similar poses, Versluis and Uyttenbroek further highlight the group’s conformity to a specific dress code. The photo shoot is done in front of a white background. This is explained by Versluis in an interview with the Dutch art magazine Kunstlicht: “Photography is a language of signs, the space around the individuals is usually full of signs, whereas with the neutral background there’s room for more layers of meaning.”

12 portraits taken for a specific style group there are chosen for the final edit. These photos are arranged in a simple 3x4 grid, thus putting all of the portraits on one canvas and killing the visual individuality of each of them. In the end, no matter how peculiar a person looks on her own, his outfit, when placed amid many others with similar looks, clothes and hairstyle, he or she becomes unoriginal, cliché and blends in with the others.

RECOGNITION AND INFLUENCE WITHIN FASHION WORLD

The way the authors put it, their concept is not meant to be criticism, and it is a simple attempt to gather anthropological evidence. No matter who we are, how alternative or conservative we appear, we’re all drawing from something bigger than ourselves. No one, it seems, is quite unique in the end. “Fashion is a language. It can be a very delicate language, or one that you can shout out loud, and there’s always an identity aspect connected to it. We try to find identities rather than trends but, of course, the first thing you see is fashion, clothing and apparel so we try to be very precise with what we portray, because styling is all in the details with these groups.” Ari Versluis

The project is recognized in the art circles, as Antoni Ferrer reviews Versluis and Uyttenbroek’s work stating that they are able to encode the contemporary dress codes and behavior patterns within society. Ferrer further compares their work to natural scientists categorizing different specimens through a strict methodology of patient observations, categorizations and documentations.

“Exactitudes is an inquiry on how the self is constructed in such a highly volatile and complex social environment like ours in which a great number of opposing forces are continuously at play. Notions such as uniformity and individuality are
at the core of Ari Versluis and Ellie Uyttenbroek’s concern—how our desire to differentiate ourselves is also matched by a need to belong to a specific group—. Identity, which has been described by many authors as an eminently fragile, fractured and problematic notion, operates on many levels. Ari Versluis & Ellie Uyttenbroek have narrowed their scope of inquiry to analyze the way identity manifests itself through dress codes and shared attitudes that on a wider stance points out to neatly differentiated social groups.” Antoni Ferrer

Versluis and Uyttenbroek receive praise and recognition even within fashion industry itself, as Richard Buckley from Vogue’s Hommes International, Paris describes the project to be realistic in depicting the state of today’s fashion world: “Individualism is an overused concept, especially by the industry media, in an effort to separate fashion from clothes. Let’s face it, a jacket is a jacket is a jacket, and no amount of customization is going to make it anything else. On top of which, nothing in our cyber-connected world stays unique for very long, as yesterday’s dernier cri is today’s mass-market cliché. There is no denying that, no matter where you go people are looking more and more the same. Interpretation, of course, is what modern dressing is all about. It is how a man chooses and wears key pieces that sets him apart from everyone else.”

The Exactitudes project is not just widely known in the fashion circles, but it also went to inspire the Vetements’ AW17 collection. Vetements’ being a particular, highly successful non-fashion brand that tries to depict real street style, it is no wonder that it looked for inspiration within the street style archive and report. Vetements’ designer Demna Gvasalia showed a cast of stereotypes on the runway. The stereotypes, among others including the punk, the emo, the gabber and the chic Parisienne, are presenting a study of clothes as signifiers of constructed identities. Gvasalia, a self-declared sociology fanatic, described the collection as a response to his “fascination with social uniforms and how people dress,” citing Exactitudes. The brand questioned on of the main messages of fashion, choosing to base their collection on a project that negates individuality itself.

In an interview about the Vetements’ new collection for Dazed magazine, Ari Versluis said: “In fashion there has always been a focus on individualism – which I think is quite an overused concept, especially in the industry – and it has separated fashion from clothes. We have been documenting clothes and lifestyles for years and now suddenly the clothes have become the inspiration for the fashion. It’s fascinating to observe how people construct their ideas of themselves in this fast changing and very complex social environment we live in nowadays, as well as the influence of the internet and Instagram on fashion.”
While putting together a mood board for this project, I was in pursuit of a sense of lightness, a sensation of a silky touch, a soft breeze of warm air on the skin, and an ethereal atmosphere. I searched for inspiration of the form of my garment within etheric visuals that communicate more than pictorial beauty but give me a perception of using other senses but the one of sight.

Since the idea for the garment in creation was for it to be worn by multiple people, I have looked into various mediums of artistic expression while searching for ideas and creative stimulus. I have found sources of inspiration in artistic, film and fashion photography, nature and urban landscapes and sceneries, different forms of design objects, graphics within music videos, modern and communist architecture and, mostly, I have looked in people themselves, their diversity and universal beauty.
Silhouettes that allow changes within their form in that way make it possible for different people to wear the same garment. I have strived to create a garment that would allow the wearers to be able to create the adjustments of the garment while wearing it, on the move. A form that escapes classic sizing charts is thus easy to wear by multiple people, transform and suit one’s needs.

Wrapping technique has been introduced to the clothing world many centuries ago, and it is one of the oldest and most basic solutions of dressing and forming clothes. It has been used in many different cultures and for a lot of different garments. The act of wrapping the garment around the body and belting it, makes it possible to fit it exactly to one’s shape, it gives more structure to the form and also follows the idea of keeping the body warm and safe from the outside effects.

The garment created for this project has been inspired by two iconic clothing pieces, being the traditional Japanese kimono and Diane von Fürstenberg’s iconic wrap dress from the 1970s. These garments are similar in the way they are wrapped around the wearer’s body and then belted with a soft belt, but they are different in their aesthetics. Both of these garments were and still are used for diverse occasions, formal and informal, day and night.

Kimono is a Japanese traditional garment. Kimono is a T-shaped, straight-lined robe worn so that the hem falls to the ankle, with attached collar and long, wide sleeves. Kimono is wrapped around the body, always with the left side over the right. It is secured by a sash called an obi that is tied at the back. Kimono is worn both by men and women.

Male version is characteristic for having clean and simple lines, while the female can be consisted out of twelve or more parts, made out of printed fabrics, with prints often referring to the current season. There are many types of obi sash, mostly for women. The obi for men’s kimono is pretty narrow, 10 centimeters at most, but woman’s formal obi can be even 30 centimeters wide and more than 4 meters long. Today, a woman’s wide and embellished obi doesn’t actually close the kimono, it’s done by sashes and ribbons worn underneath the obi.
Wrap dress stands for a kind of dress with a front closure formed by putting one side across the other, and knotting the attached ties that wrap around the back at the waist or fastening buttons. This forms a V-shaped neckline and hugs the wearer's curves.

The first wrap dresses had been designed by Elsa Schiaparelli in the 1930s, and Claire McCardell in the 1940s. This design became a basis for a variety of different wrap dresses. Diane von Fürstenberg made an interpretation of the wrap dress in the 1970s, which was consistently knee-length, in a clinging jersey, with long sleeves. It was so popular and distinctive that the whole style has become associated with her.

Combination of elements from both kimono and the 70s wrap dress generates a new shape. Taking the width and volume from kimono which allows different body shapes to fit in to the garment, but also combining it with a light, flowy fabric as used for the 70s wrap dress, that can be either curve hugging or let hang loose.

In a traditional kimono the collar was somewhat revealing the bottom of a woman's neck, since it was considered to be a highly sensual part of the female body. Moving the accent from the neck to the shoulder which has been becoming the new point of attention in the last years, as it stands for delicate sensuality, femininity and vulnerability. Making the sleeve three quarters long, and in that way making it easy for the wearer to play and show under layers or to reveal the bare skin.

The versatility of the garments of inspiration is emphasized in the new garment, and furthermore taken to a new level of flexibility through the possibility of wearing it not only as a dress, but also of wearing it unwrapped and open, as an over layer.
One pattern serves as a base for making five kimono wrap dresses, all having the same shape, cut and all made of the same type of fabric. The differences among them are just their colors and prints. This makes them visually diverse, even though they all share the same pattern and flow.

Garments are made out of silk satin fabric, which brings softness and lightness to the design. They are highly comfortable for wearing in different weather conditions, as an only layer or with other garments.

They are sown double faced in order to avoid visible stitching, thus simplifying the visual outcome of the products. All of the garments come with a belt made out of same fabric as the dress itself.

Colors in which they are made are chosen in a way so that they contrast each other, but also considering their ability to complement one another. Starting from black and white, which are in the strongest contrast of all but also both considered to be extremely elegant, professional and minimalistic shades, and are often found in a combination within an outfit. Following that idea, the third garment is made in a black and white fabric with a geometric print. Forth dress is contrasting all of them, being in a vibrant shade of bright pink. The fifth one is again printed, now using all three shades of white, black and pink, combined in to a floral print honoring the Japanese inspiration of the garments’ form.

Basic measurements:

Front length 90 cm
Back length 120 cm
Sleeve 50 cm
Hole in the sleeve 20 cm
Analyzing the results of the questionnaire, I have used different ways of examination, starting with quantitative analysis of the questionnaire answers, moving on to cross-analysis of different questions, and in the end forming clusters and studying them further.

It seems that fashion plays an important role in everyday life of the interviewees, as 75% of them answered positive to the question if they put thought and effort into their look. This may come as no surprise, since they are all creative people, studying design or design related programs, and creative people often tend to be more concerned with the visual than others.

The whole 100% of the participants thinks that their style projects their own personality, implicating that the way they dress has a deeper connection with their conscious self-identification. Moreover, none of them feels that they are just projecting an image expected of them by external factors like society rules or current trends, but they feel they are expressing their real self through the way they look.

Just 20% doesn't feel unique because of their style, and the rest of 80% think that they differ from others by the way they look. Again, since all of them feel they express their personality through the way they look, 80% thinking that they are standing out with their looks may thus further mean they experience their personality to be unique and different from others around them.

Half of the participants answered all three questions positively, meaning that they consciously put effort in the way they dress, with an idea of projecting their personality while doing so, and finally feel unique.

Looking a bit more into the participants answering all three questions with a positive answer, more than half of them considered money to be one of the factors that restrain them in their style choices, or
even the only restriction. 70% of them think that their own mood has impact on their taste, and having themselves and the way they feel as the initiator of their style seems to be a reasonable origin of feeling distinctive.

But on the other hand, almost half of this group finds inspiration for their look in street style. But even though they consider the way how others look to be direct and the main or one of the main influences on their look, they still think to be unique in their style, which may come as a bit of a contradiction. Two participants thought that the main sources of stylistic influence on their look are their mood and street style, combining the inner inspirations with the outer ones.

A quarter of all interviewees said they don’t put effort into their look, but anyway feel their look expresses their personality and think their look is standing out when compared to others. It is interesting how even without putting an effort they feel themselves to be unique in their style. But it could also be that they didn’t want to seem as someone who spends all day in front of the mirror and obsesses about their look. Additionally, more than half out of this group described their style as always changing, which may implicate that they follow trends and in the end do plan their looks. Maybe the reason of claiming not to put an effort in their look can also be connected with the remnants of the prior view on fashion as something superficial and non-necessary.

CONSTRAINTS ON THE PARTICIPANTS’ STYLES

Money appears to be one of the main limits when it comes to choosing a desired style as more than half of all participants think it confines their style. This fact can be connected to the context of the target group consisting completely of students, which could implicate that probably a good number of them haven’t reached full financial independence and stability. But what is also interesting is that a significant part doesn’t think they’re restrained by their budget, meaning that either they could be coming from a wealthy surrounding or maybe that their style is an easily affordable one. Or it could even be that even if their budget is limited, they don’t feel it limiting their creativity and influencing the way they look.

Some of the other highly selected options were poor choice in shops and current life conditions. Current life conditions could be related to participants feeling their everyday life surroundings and content are not adequate for their desired style, or that their preferred style isn’t fit with
their responsibilities, maybe again associated to the fact that the participants are still students and have to dress in a certain way to fit in that role.

When stating what impacts their taste, half of the participants chose mood as one of the influences or the only one. It could be that they are aware of the strong connection between dress and identity, as concluded by Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1995). Around one third of the participants are influenced directly by the look of others, whether it is being affected by street style or by style of celebrities and style icons. It doesn't come as a surprise, as in the last years the impact of all kind of celebrities to the fashion system expands, also described by Kate Abnett in an article for Business of Fashion website. This kind of impact could also be connected to a view on fashion as a way of social interaction. But if so, maybe it is a bit offbeat that just one person of all participants found inspiration directly in the way her friends style themselves.

**SOURCES OF INSPIRATION**

A quarter of all participants find inspiration either in their culture or while travelling, thus in other cultures, meaning that culture, whether it is one’s own or a new and unfamiliar one, still plays an important role in influencing style even in today’s society. All of participants who chose traveling as a source of inspiration were coming from European countries. Opposed to them, around two thirds of those who chose culture as their stimulus were participants coming from other parts of the world, such as South America and Asia. Considering these facts, one can even argue that some of the old centralized fashion world’s heritage still exists in contemporary globalized world, where Europeans nevertheless draw inspiration from other cultures and apply it to their own way of dressing, while the people living in more remote parts of the world tend to be somewhat more connected to their traditional way of clothing.

Just one participant thought that fashion shows have an impact on her style, and only 15% of all said to be influenced by fashion magazines. Considering that the topic of the questionnaire itself was fashion, and all participants were students of design, it is curious that such a small amount of participants found inspiration directly in the fashion industry. This can be directly connected to the new order in the fashion system that somewhat moves on from traditional ways of informing about new trends, swapping fashion shows and magazines with social media and street style stars and
bloggers as the new sources of information, and with consumers finding inspiration in the internet interpretations of what designers are offering.

EXPERIENCING ONE’S OWN PERSONAL STYLE

As a part of the questionnaire, the interviewees were to decide on a maximum of two words out of twenty that were offered while describing their own personal style. Around a third of all participants thought of their style as a feminine one, with half of them choosing the other word to describe it to be elegant. With feminine being the most picked out of all offered words, and androgynous haven’t been picked out at all, it is possible that new gender fluidity trends and ideals that have been frequently promoted in the couple of last years have yet not taken their toll. Since the study group formed out of young women which are part of the primary age target of this trend yet connect their style to their gender explicitly, the reason for this could be maybe connected to the cultures of the participants. Or maybe it is a consequence of the fact that all of the participants were living in Italy at the moment of doing the questionnaire and by doing so they found themselves exposed to the more conservative fashion that is dominant in this region.

25% described their style as a simple one, and almost half of those that chose simple thought their style was also comfortable. But even if they considered their style to be simple, 80% of them answered positively to the question if they put thought and effort in their look, meaning that even an easy-looking style needs effort to be maintained. Also, 80% of them considered their style to be unique, that could be seen as contradictory with it being simple.

One fifth of all participants thought that their style is always changing. Participants not feeling that they have a constant specific style could originate in the fickleness of the industry which has been constantly increasing over the last decades, and the fact that trends don’t substitute one another in a clear way as they did some decades ago but now they coexist in the same moment.
Photo Shoot

PRACTICAL PROCEDURES

During three photo shooting sessions, I have taken photos of all of the participants, exclusively for this project. The photos were made in the Photo lab at Bovisa campus. Even if particular sets where the photos were taken differ one from another, the same background and lighting were organized in order to achieve as similar visual outcome as possible. All of the photos have white background and natural light.

All of the participants were free to pose during the shooting in whichever way they felt to be the right one, and were offered to stand, sit on a chair or floor of the set, walk, jump, turn, squat, etc., and of course to change positions during the shooting. They were also free to decide if they were to express seriousness, happiness, etc. and in that way affect the final outcome. Some of the participants brought their props since they felt that they would communicate their look in a better way and were able to use them in any way they wished while having their pictures taken.

Pictures have composition that shows more or less centered full figure of participants. Two pictures per person were chosen for each of them out of all pictures that were taken. While deciding on which pictures to select, I was considering the quality of the photos, their composition and finally the looks of the participants themselves, as I was trying to find the ones that are expressing their personalities in the clearest way.

Chosen images from the shootings were after somewhat altered using Photoshop CC in order to achieve the same or almost same amount of light and similar color of the background in each of them.

For the examination of photos I have chosen the content analysis method, respecting principles specified and described by Gillian Rose (2001).
COLOR AND PATTERN CHOICES

When choosing one out of five offered garments, 40% of all participants chose the black one, followed by the flower patterned garment which was chosen by 35% and geometric patterned one, chosen by 20% of participants. Only one participant decided to wear the pink one, and none of them chose white.

Through history, black color was primarily connected to death and mourning in Europe, but has gained many new meanings mostly during the 20th century. Coco Chanel was a big admirer of this color and has invented the iconic ‘little black dress’ and also the ‘little black jacket’. During the 70s and 80s it started to be connected to the young subcultures of the time, as punk and goth. Designers as Rei Kawakubo, Yohji Yamamoto and Raf Simmons further changed the meaning of black.

Today, black is considered as formal and elegant in many cultures, it is one of the colors that are held to be adequate for various ceremonial occasions, both professional and leisure. Black is often considered even to be a safe and easy choice, since it is reckoned to be a color that is easy to combine and also a shade that visually narrows down the silhouette of the wearer’s body making the wearer appear leaner. It is thought of always being in fashion, and is often seen as one of the shades to be present on catwalks.

Taking in consideration these facts, almost half of all participants choosing to wear the black garment comes as a somehow logical consequence. Having the black garment to be the most chosen one it may come as a bit of a surprise that white garment wasn’t chosen at all, since these two shades are often connected in being the most basic ones, being worn for work and formal events as well as during less official occasions.

Having floral print to be stated as one of the main trends for spring of 2017 by Vogue magazine and other sources, the print being widely present on catwalks, pages of magazines, blogs, social media and in all kinds of retail stores, maybe could be connected to the big number of participants choosing the flower patterned garment, as 35% decided to wear that one.

Considering the countries the participants are coming from, I wanted to see if there were some similarities in choice between the ones coming from the
same country, or if that condition didn’t have anything to do with their choice. Even if black garment was the most chosen one between all garments, and the biggest part of all participants is coming from Italy, none of Italians chose to wear the black one. On the other hand, 60% of Italians chose to wear the flower patterned garment. This could be connected with flower pattern being one of the trends of the season, and also Italian people being known for following latest trends and fashion. Both participants coming from India chose to wear the black garment.

VARIOUS WAYS OF WEARING AND DIFFERENT BEHAVIORS

60% of all interviewees decided to create a look where the garment is worn opened, while the rest of 40% chose to close it with a belt. 50% of all didn’t use any belt to close the garment, 30% used the original belt of the garment, and 20% used another belt.

Two participants even decided to use the original belt, not as a belt but as an accessory to their look. One of them wore the original belt as a scarf, while the other made a head band out of it. But except the creativity in using the garment’s belt, the two had only similarity in being Italian, as they chose different patterns of the garment (one geometric and the other flower pattern), and wore in a different way (first one wore it closed with another belt and second one left it opened without a belt to tie it).

More than half participants (65%) wore the garment as a top layer, combined with other clothes beneath, whereas the rest (35%) chose to wear it as an only layer, next to the skin. Just one participant chose to wear the garment open even if she didn’t wear any other upper garment, while all of the other participants wearing it as an only layer decided to wear it closed. The participant wearing it open and without anything beneath but a shorts decided not to use any belt either, but she held the garment with hands during the shooting.

Even if no explicit instructions on this matter were given to the participants, 20% of them decided to put their hands through the shoulder openings of the garment, making it to be more like a vest, without sleeves. The rest of 80% used the sleeves in the classical way.

Two participants brought a prop to the set, thinking that it will better explain their look, and add a further meaning to it. One of them chose to bring a book to the shooting and pose while reading it, as she wanted to communicate a homely atmosphere. The other one brought a fan which she held either opened or closed during the photo shoot.
When it came to deciding on how to pose for the photos, almost two thirds of all participants (65%) kept a serious attitude and maybe behaved more formal, while the others didn’t keep a serious face and were laughing or smiling while posing in a more relaxed way.

Cross-referencing the participants’ behavior with their style choices, I have tried to see if there is any link between the garment they’ve chosen and their behavior while wearing it. It may come as a surprise that half of participants who chose the black garment were relaxed and joyful during the photo shoot, even if black is mostly held to have serious, formal and elegant meaning. All of the participants wearing the geometric patterned garment were serious while in front of the camera. More than half of those wearing the flower patterned garment were keeping a severe attitude, while the rest of them who wore the flower pattern decided to pose in a more informal way.

Almost two thirds of all interviewees paired the garment with flat shoes, some of the others wore heels or wedges to complement their look, and 2 participants didn’t wear any shoes at all. More than half of participants wearing flat shoes were serious while having photos taken and while the rest of them who wore flats were casual and laughing while posing. Heels could be associated with a more serious or a stronger attitude, as all of the wearers of heels kept a serious attitude while taking photos.

The barefoot participants were smiling and laughing, while posing in a more casual way that could be linked to the idea feeling of freedom with no shoes on, or maybe to the more relaxed occasions of not wearing them.

PARALLELS IN CHOICE

Even if provided by a choice of five, vast majority of participants decided to wear either the black or the flower patterned garment. This would imply that they were drawn to these two options, maybe they were influenced by the practicality, safe and simple choice implications of the black color, and the trendiness and attractiveness of the ubiquitously present flower patterns.

Almost half of all of the participants (45%) wore the garment as a top layer, and decided to wear it open, combining it with other clothing pieces and with flat shoes. Almost all of the described group, wore either the
black or flower patterned garment, thus meaning one third of all the pa-
rticipants wore black or flower patterned garment as an open top lay-
er and combined the look with flat shoes. Just one of them wore the
look with the garment’s original belt, while all the others didn’t use any.

Around a third of all participants making quite similar styling choices individu-
ally from one another suggests that the participants tend to interpret the gar-
ment in the same way up to a point, and that they perceive it in a similar way.

Furthermore, even if a smaller number of participants chose to wear the geo-
metric patterned garment than black or flower patterned ones, between them-
selves they have presented a lot of visual resemblances. Three quarters of
the ones who wore the geometric patterned garment to the shooting, wore
the garment as an only layer, closed the garment and worn it as a dress
and with a belt, and were even standing whilst posing in a serious manner.

This, and other similarities in looks and behavior of different partici-
pants stood out to me while I was analyzing the photos from the photo
shoots. Every now and then they would have similar approaches and be-
haviors while choosing which garment to wear, how to combine it and
with which attitude should they later accompany the look. This may mean
that some rules were applied by the participants themselves, even if
not imposed on them through the project description and guidelines.
ONE GARMENT, MANY OPINIONS

The audio recordings of the interview, later translated into written notes, have served as a basis for writing a more in-depth chapter about different opinions and experiences of the participants. For this chapter I will not use the names of the participants, but instead I will use numbers following the order in which they were organized during the day of doing the interview.

Starting with the interviewee n.1, which chose to wear the black garment, pairing it with a book and a dark red bra for a luxurious home outfit that she would love to wear in a luxurious hotel room. In her real life she wouldn’t wear the garment outside her home, and even inside she didn’t think that the garment would fit in her everyday life. She explained it is because she lives in a small apartment in India with her family and is not used to wear elegant clothes at home. Besides interviewee n.1, interviewee n.8 thought that the garment doesn’t resemble her style, and has tried to make it more similar to her usual look by adding personal details as jewelry.

On the other hand, all of other interviewees did find the garment fitting into their taste. Most of them would see themselves wearing the look they had for the photo shoot for a night out, making examples of going out with friends, to an aperitivo or dinner, for a cocktail party etc. Some of the participants thought that the garment fits their everyday lifestyle and they would wear it both during day and night occasions. A part of them pointed out the difference that is achieved by wearing the garment open or closed, finding it more elegant when closed and worn as a dress.

The garment being simple and versatile probably made it easier for most of the participants to implement it in their personal styles, but it may also had something to do with the fact that kimonos are considered to be one of this year’s hip garments, so the garment having visual resem- blances with a kimono may have influenced their taste up to a point.
Some of the participants explained their choice of color by it fitting in to their regular style and wardrobe, them mostly being the ones that chose geometric patterned or black garment. All of those choosing the geometric pattern said that that one fits their style perfectly. Interviewee n.5 thought the black garment fits in what she would wear usually, especially since black is a color she typically wears. Interviewee n.13 commented her decision by saying she chose the black one because she’s the most comfortable wearing black. Interviewee n.16 chose the black one because she likes simple and very basic clothes, thinks black would fit the best with her style, wears casual and a bit basic, and doesn’t like vivid colors and patterns. Interviewee n.4 commented her choice to wear the flower patterned garment in the fact that she would usually pick the black one but has decided to go out of her habits.

The only participant that chose the pink garment explained she chose the pink one because she liked the color itself, she first thought about the white one but decided to try something new. She wasn’t the only one to mention considering to wear the white garment, but in the end no one decided to pick the white one for the shooting.

**IMPORTANCE OF ONE’S APPEARANCE IN EVERYDAY VS. SPECIAL OCCASIONS**

Almost all of the participants find that the way they look in their everyday life is important. It could be linked to the fact the interviews are designers, as some of them even identified that to be the reason by themselves, but also could be that the communication of self simply plays a big role in our lives, as explained by Goffman (1971) in “Self-branding and brand-branding” chapter. Most of the participants thought that how they feel about their looks is more important on an inner level. But since a lot of them explained how the way they feel about their look reflect how they interact with others, thus if they are not comfortable and confident with the way they are dressed they are likely to feel uncomfortable around others.

Interviewee n.4 thinks that her look is important for her everyday life, first of all for liking herself and being self-confident, which than reflects on her social life. Interviewee n.15 gets confidence she thinks she needs to interact with others through the way she is dressed. Interviewee n.16 says that when she isn’t comfortable and sure that she is dressed well, then she behaves differently and has less fun while around other people.
A part of the interviewees found that the way one looks is important when being surrounded by other people. Interviewee n.3 considers that first impressions are important and her look depends on the people she is going to meet, even though she thinks others don’t care too much about her look. In the interviewee’s n.1 opinion, the way she looks can make a difference to the way people from her surroundings treat her. She feels that it depends also on the surrounding itself, as when being in Italy she felt she was given more attention and treated in a better way while wearing western clothes compared to the times when she wore Indian clothes, while in India people would highly appreciate her wearing nice Indian clothes and sometimes would even that she is celebrating something, like her birthday.

Interviewee n.10 thinks that in some situations people probably judge you more by your look, thus it is more important which kind of impression you make, but even so, she doesn’t necessarily dress for those situations in the ‘usual’ way. She dresses based on her mood and practicalities required (for example, in the club she is dancing, and dresses in more comfortable way). She would wear just jeans and a white t-shirt when clubbing and then go to a coffee shop wearing something considered to be over the top or eccentric for the occasion.

A big part of all interviewees considered some situations to require a more carefully planned look, and when attending those events it would be more important how the interviewees appear. When asked for an example, most of them said that they put the most thought into their look when going to a job interview. Whether it is because the participants are in the age of going to their first job interviews, and maybe still don’t have a wide range of clothes they would think to be appropriate for going to one, or maybe because HRs of companies can be strict when it comes to the dress code, job interview definitely stands as an occasion where more effort is put into one’s look. Two interviewees even stated that in their opinion wrong clothes during an interview can easily get in a way of getting the job.

Some of the participants even gave examples of having the right or the wrong clothes during job interviews and important work events. Interviewee n.11 experienced situations when she went to an interview and didn’t feel comfortable with the way she looked, because she tried to fit in the right style for the interview but didn’t express her personal style while doing so. On the other hand, interviewee n.12 recalls situations during job interviews, when she was dressed in an elegant manner, while some other interviewees...
came in t-shirts. As a consequence she felt more positive energy coming from the interviewers since she was looking more professional than others.

NOTICING HOW OTHERS LOOK

When it comes to paying attention and observing others, their clothes and the way they style them, all of the participants said they do notice the appearance of others around them. Some of them stated that they just notice and do not pay much attention to it, while some others said they only pay attention if they like the particular look. While some said that they do not judge people if they do not like their look, interviewee n.3 was blunt honest when saying she likes to comment about it with her friends, maybe with hers being a lonely example or the others not being completely open about the subject.

Even though they didn’t say they judge particular people by their looks, two other participants expressed their general dissatisfaction with people dressing similarly to each other. Interviewee n.1 thinks that in Italy or at least Politecnico everyone wears almost same kind of clothes because everyone shops in the same stores. She is not satisfied with, in her words, lack of identity among people: “You want to be chic? Everyone is being chic in the same way. You want to be hippie? Everyone is being hippie in the same way. I mean c’mon, develop an individual taste. Like something and find a reason why you like it, and appreciate someone else doing that.”

Having a similar point of view, interviewee n.12 puts a lot of attention when looking the people around her, and thinks that due to the popularity of casual street style in the last years it is not possible to understand the background of a person wearing a certain look. She says: “Lately, everybody is dressing the same...there is this street style and everyone looks the same, so you can’t really understand who is rich or poor, or cultured or anything, everything is like uniformed.” She dislikes it, and thinks people don’t have an identity anymore, but they just follow the latest trend because the media is portraying the latest trend to be cool and everyone wants to fit in that description.

When it came to particular brands, opinions were divided. Interviewee n.5 said to notice the way others dress a lot, and not just to the way they are dressed but also brands they wear since she finds brands to be important. On the contrary, interviewee n.1 doesn’t care about brands but notic-
es what people wear, cuts and style. Perhaps this could be linked with the fact that she is coming from India, where brands such as Zara and similar maybe do not have the same importance as they do in the Western culture.

A part of the participants described the reason of looking to how others dress is to try to understand more about them, what is their profession, where do they come from, what are they dressed for. Interviewee n.15 compares the looks of the people she is observing with their country of origin and questions why they are dressed in that particular way. Interviewee n.16 said that if a person is dressed at a certain way she tries to imagine where they are going, if they have a special event, or maybe a date.

Some of the participants said to find inspiration for their own look. Interviewee n.13 describes how she observes people looking for inspiration, while on a metro. Interviewee n.20 tries to take inspiration from the way others are dressed and is influenced a lot by how others around her look and street style in general.

Several interviewees coming from other countries that are not Italy, made comparison between the looks of people in their own countries and in Italy. Interviewee n.1, coming from India, found people in Italy looking alike to one another and buying very much alike clothes in similar shops. Interviewee n.2, originally from Slovakia, notices some differences between style in Slovakia and Milan, finding people in Italy to be a bit more conservative, especially in the way young women dress and how much bare skin do they show.

Interviewee n.8, being from Chile, perceives a big difference between Italy and Chile. Opposing to interviewee n.2, Interviewee n.8’s opinion is that in Chile everyone generally looks alike, while in Milan she doesn’t feel the same thing happening. In Chile people are generally conservative and it reflects in the way they look, in general they don’t express their personal style but they dress similar “Zara basic trend”, and if someone stands out he/she is treated in a different way. When being in Chile, she thinks her style sometimes fits in, in casual situations as university, whereas when attending special events she feels to be different from others. If she follows trends that she sees in magazines, or that she discovers when traveling, she stands out and other people get impressed by her look, even if she is just wearing a different length of a dress from the one popular in Chile at the moment.
RADICAL STYLE SHIFTS

Some of the participants went through drastic changes of style, dramatically changing their look during their life. I have noticed that the most of those changes happened during the end of high school years, or when starting to go to university. This could maybe be linked to the teenage period, being the part of one’s life when he/she forms a personal style, but also that in this period people tend to be easily influenced by their surrounding and friends.

Interviewee n.1 speaks about her style, and spending all her childhood in India dressed in Western clothes. She would put up a fight when her parents wanted her to wear Indian clothes, like kurta (modern Indian garment with Indian prints). Her style went under a radical change when she moved to another city and started going to college. She changed according her new environment that was more pro traditional, and started wearing Indian clothes which she wore in her own, ‘artsy’ style. Her parents and friends from home were highly surprised by this when seeing her over the following summer. What is interesting is that even if she criticizes others for being too uniform and looking similar to each other, even she finds herself under influence of her surroundings.

For interviewee n.2, the change was also related to moving to another place. When she was a teenager, around age of 14, she was wearing a reggae style and had dreadlocks. She tried to look like she didn’t put a lot of effort in to her look, even if she was actually putting and she was trying to be cool and fashionable since the style was popular in her country at that period. Then she went from Slovakia to Japan and there her style wasn’t fashionable at all. So she cut her dreadlocks and started having a new, more elegant style to fit in her new surroundings, with new classmates and society. When returning to Slovakia after one year, the reactions to the change were really strong. Her parents were very happy she cut off her hair. She thinks that every time someone is in a new environment and have to fit in they will change accordingly, and further thinks people don’t have one style that they will develop throughout their life no matter what, but that the surrounding has the strongest influence on our look, especially during teenage period.

Style of interviewee n.10 changed many times, both regarding her clothes and hairstyle, she had had radically different phases but is not sure what the influences of the changes were. During primary school her friends were constantly shocked by the way she looked as it was quite eccentric, but since she felt a need to be eccentric as a kid she didn’t mind it. And all her high
school she was, in her words, dressed as a clown. She was experimenting and putting all kind of clothes on herself. Looking back, she supposes that people seeing her during that period must have supposed she was crazy. Even so, she considers these childhood phases of experimenting with her look to be important in finding her own style and expression later.

Interviewee n.20 speaks how, when she was younger, she used to change her friend group a lot, and with that also changed her style. When she was 13 she was having a goth style, 14 but then started dating a basketball player transformed her style into rapper girl look, and as a consequence she changed her friends group. She thinks that other people were judging her goth look and thought that she was weird, but then when she started wearing clothes that were common at that period they started noticing her more: “If your style is pretty extreme, then people might not see you, they just see your style.” Her mom never liked her gothic style, especially since she used to draw a cross on her face with an eyeliner when accompanying her mom to the supermarket, but also her mom was always aware it was a phase.

A significant part of all interviewees thought that the most radical change they’ve made to their look was cutting their hair short. This emphasizes the strong relationship we have with our looks in general, not considering only the clothes we wear. Interviewee n.18 changed her look radically by cutting her hair three years ago, going from a really long and feminine hairstyle to a bob. She got different reactions from others to the change but didn’t pay much attention as she was happy with the change.

While on one hand a lot of participants think changing their style to be a sign of maturing and finding their own look or adapting to new situations and fitting into their surroundings, on the other hand some of the participants say that they have never changed their style in a radical way. Part of them claims that they have changed their style but never did it in a radical way, whereas some say they haven’t changed their style at all for a long period, or even at any time of their life. Interviewee n.5 never changed her look in a radical way. She started paying attention to the way she looks in her teenage years, and her style did change over time as a consequence of her growing up and changing interests, but she doesn’t think the changes were big. Interviewee n.16 claims not to have changed her looks in the last ten years, while interviewee n.6 says she has never changed her look in a radical way and thinks that she has looked quite similar throughout her life.
Further Analysis

**UNIQUE COLOR DECISIONS**

In this chapter I will try to gain more knowledge about the main questions of my project by comparing analysis results of all three parts of the project all at once. After analyzing the three parts separately, I have put all of the analysis results together and tried to draw additional conclusions about uniqueness, influences on one’s style choices and one’s awareness of them when comparing them to each other and to interpret their relations to one another.

One of the opinions that stood out the most within the questionnaire results was the one regarding all 100% of the participants feeling that they express their own personality through their style. This was even more interesting when compared to the fact that 80% of all participants found their look to be unique, since it would mean that they think their personality is unique as well (since their personality is expressed through the way they look).

Taking in consideration these two groups of participants, one that thinks to be unique in their style and the other that doesn’t feel to be standing out, I looked into their opinions on whether the garment fits into their style or not. Just two of all participants said that the garment doesn’t fit into their style, one of them belonging to the group that said to feel their look is exceptional and the other not thinking that she stands out in the way she looks. Most of the ones that found the garment fitting into their wardrobe were the ‘unique’ ones.

I then compared answers to the question of feeling unique with the decision they made when choosing the garment for the photo shoot. 95% of all participants chose either black, flower patterned or geometric patterned garment regardless of them feeling diverse from others or not I assumed that maybe one’s perception of uniqueness doesn’t have to do as much with their looks as one might expect it would.

Moreover, almost all of the participants wearing the black garment that
was the most common of all choices, were the ones belonging to the part
thinking their look is distinctive from others. Considering these examples, I
wonder if in the end the personal view on being unique maybe has more
to do with the participants’ poise and confidence, or maybe with their inner
consciousness of their personality than with their actual style standing out.

PINK GARMENT

The only participant that chose the pink colored garment did belong to the group
stating to be unique, it being just a coincidence or not. Since her choice was
one of a kind in this case, I’ve looked deeper into her interview and questionnaire
results. It was interesting to find that her questionnaire answers didn’t contrast
the answers of others, even though her look for the photo shoot was different.
In the questionnaire, she stated to put effort into her look, thought that her style
expresses her personality and felt unique in her style, thus belonging to the half
of all participants that responded to all three questions with a positive answer.

She finds her style to be a casual one, but also always changing, which
could mean that she is also open to different style influences. This could
be linked also to the main influences of her taste being travelling and street
style, both being external impacts on one’s preferences, while she picked
society conventions to be one of the main limits to her style choices.

Furthermore, in the interview she spoke about noticing how others dress, and in
case of liking the outfit, trying to remember their look. Once more confirming her
openness and susceptibility to the influence her environment has on her taste,
she described a change of her style that happened after she begun going to uni-
versity. She started seeing more different styles she didn’t know from before and it
made her want to try new things. She said that the change was gradual, not drastic.

PUTTING AN EFFORT TO ONE’S LOOK

Going back to the other participants as well, I have compared the idea of
being unique with their descriptions of their personal style. I’ve learnt that out
that all of the participants describing their style to always be changing and
evolving were also from the group considering their style to stand out from
others. Perhaps this could also be understood in a way that they think to
be able to avoid looking similar to others by constantly changing their style,
which could also be done through being the first to find out about a new
trend and wear it before the majority does. On the other hand, these out-
er changes could not be connected to the change of fashion, but they can
also be coming from a deeper inner change and evolving of the person.

To understand this better, I have examined their opinions further. What stood out
was that almost all of them said they don’t put thought or effort into their look,
although that may be a contradiction to them constantly changing their style,
which would imply at least some thought if not also effort. Additionally, all of them
said in their interviews that the way they look is important in their everyday life.

Some of them explained their opinions and attitudes about this matter more
in detail. One of them explained that she considers the way she looks to be
a part of her personality, not only a mean to attract others. Since she made
it clear that clothing is important in her everyday life. Another one claimed
her everyday look is both important for herself and for interacting with others,
because she believes that “you represent what you wear, and this influences
how you relate (to others)”. Since they think that their looks to present her
personality, but then again wrote in the questionnaire that her style is always
changing, this may mean that they consider their personality to change as well.

Contrasting the ones feeling of uniqueness within their style, I want-
ed to see if the much smaller group that doesn’t feel the same way
has other similarities within its members. Maybe coming as a sur-
prise, all of the participants not feeling exceptional in the way they look
said they put thought and effort into their style. So I wondered, if they do
put effort into their style, why wouldn’t they feel distinctive from others?

It could again be explained through a confidence issue, with the ones not
feeling to be unique maybe having less confidence and self-assurance than
the ones thinking that they are one of the kind. But it could also be that they
just have a more realistic attitude and a more pragmatic view on this matter. If
their taste was for example simple or casual as a lot of participants described
it to be, them putting effort into their style wouldn’t necessarily mean that they
will stand out and be different from everyone else through the way they look.
UNIQUE BEHAVIOR

Comparing the sense of uniqueness with the way participants styled themselves for the photo shoot, I have noticed some particularities that could perhaps be link that sense to the matter of confidence or maybe just to the perception of oneself. During the explanation of the project to the participants and description of what is their role in it, it was never mentioned to them that the garment can also be used like a vest by choosing to put one’s hands through the shoulder holes, and also tucking the sleeves inside the garment. Although they weren’t informed about this, some of the participants, around one fifth of all, came up with the idea themselves. Interesting is that almost all of those who showed this kind of initiative were the ones not seeing their style to be standing out, meaning that even if they feel to have a common style they expressed creativity and inventiveness when deciding upon their look.

As taking off their shoes made two participants that chose to pose for the photo shoot barefoot stand out from the others, I tried to examine their cases more deeply. Both of the participants taking off their shoes were the ones feeling to be exclusive through their style. If the personal sense of uniqueness is indeed linked to one being self-secure, this would could also be explained by more confident people feeling more relaxed and thus being comfortable to take their shoes off, or maybe they were consciously trying to stand out from others.

But not wearing shoes could be also be linked with one’s culture, as some cultures are more it is more acceptable or even it is a part of the tradition. And even though both of them stated that culture is one of the main influences on their taste, I found that the idea of being barefoot could be linked just to the one coming from India and wearing the garment as, in her words “a luxurious home garment”. In India it is quite common to wear no shoes at least when being at home, so it maybe wouldn’t make her stand out there as it does in Italy.

EXTERNAL FACTORS OF INFLUENCE

Having a quarter of all participants explicitly say to draw inspiration from observing how others look, I decided to try finding out does a more specific relationship exist between the feelings of being different from others to the act of getting influence from other people’s way of dressing.
What I have learnt is that from the interviewees that openly told to find inspiration for their own look from observing the appearance of others, all of them were the ones that were belonging to the group that found themselves to be unique from the rest. This is interesting because someone having a sense of being diverse from others but at the same time being aware of consciously copying the way others look could be seen as quite a contradiction. How can we copy from one another, and at the same time all be exceptional?

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Going further into this topic, I wanted to see whether the sense of uniqueness is in some way related to the answers from the questionnaire about the main influences of one’s style. I have realized that all of the participants that stated to be influenced by external social factors, such as their friends, street style, celebrities and style icons were the ones that considered themselves unique. Again, if the main source of one’s style inspiration comes from other people and the way they approach fashion, it is questionable if the same person can achieve a total individuality in the way of dressing.

Another external factor of influence seems to be one’s work environment, as the participants generally considered a situation of going to a job interview to be the most important when it comes to the importance of their look, and the impact their appearance can make to the outcome of a situation. Even though the most of the participants didn’t consider social norms to be a key constraint on their style when filling in the questionnaire, it seems that they are very much aware of the difference between a work and leisure environment, and the importance of following certain rules when getting dressed for a professional occasion. It may be that they don’t form their actual taste around the rules of a professional surroundings, but they do adapt their look to the formality of the situation even if it doesn’t fit in their actual style.
Conclusion

Reminiscing the main questions of my project, in this chapter I will formulate a concise recapitulation of all the parts that were encompassed along the development of this work, from the theoretical research to the final interpretations and assumptions of the practical part. I will do this while striving to link them in one wholesome that communicates my deductions, opinions and conclusions made on this subject.

What means to be unique today? In the time when trends spread faster than ever, due to technology and various changes within the fashion system itself, is it possible to reach individuality? Do contemporary people actually strive towards uniqueness, even if they think they are doing so?

One might say that much has changed in the fashion system during last decades, as it was argued by Crane (2000) and Polhemus (1994) while describing the changes of the initiators of fashion, going from high society being the one to say what is in style, to young people belonging to eccentric subcultures of the end of the 20th century.

As in the today's society the role of the fashion trend creator is not as clear as it used to be in earlier times, while the origins and ways of spreading of a new trend not rarely remain a mystery on one hand, while on the other hand being informed has become easier and faster than ever through internet, social media and other means, one could say that it is hard to avoid being under influence of various images available.

However, most of the participants of this project, felt themselves to be unique in their style. With Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1996) and then Entwistle (2015) describing dress to be the means by which an identity is shown and maintained, it doesn’t come as a surprise that all of the participants thought to express their personality through the way they look. A portion of them even thought to express their personality in a unique way without putting thought and effort in their style. After a thorough analysis of their questionnaire and interview
answers, and their look and behavior during the photo shoot, I haven’t found the participants feeling of being exceptional to be considerably different in their choices from the ones that didn’t perceive themselves to be standing out.

Even contrasting their view on their style as not being a unique one, all of the participants feeling they blend in with others said they put thought and effort into their style. And further on, some of all participants showed an initiative and creativeness during the photo shoot, as they chose to wear the garment in an unusual way that wasn’t even stated as an option during the description of the project. Almost all of those who got inventive during the shooting were in fact the ones not feeling to stand out. Whether the feeling of not being exceptional comes as a result of a more pragmatic view on one’s style or as a consequence of a lower self-esteem, I failed to see a significant disparity between the groups of participants who felt unique and those who didn’t. This made me ask myself whether the sense of one’s uniqueness remains at the inner level of a person, having more to do with one’s perception of self than with actual visual dissimilarity to others.

All of the participants that stated in the questionnaire to be influenced by external social factors, such as their friends, street style, celebrities and style icons were the ones that considered themselves unique. Furthermore, a quarter of all participants explicitly saying during the interview to draw inspiration from observing how others look, all of them being the ones belonging to the group that found themselves to be distinctive from the other people. Contrariwise, none of the ones not feeling to be unique said to get inspired by how others look, maybe not being aware of that kind of influence or just thinking their taste is resembling to the taste of others and thus resulting in a visual uniformity even without direct copying of style. These contradictions lead me to an opinion that maybe the feeling of wanting to be exceptional, in the end doesn’t mean that the one feeling it actually strives to be.

Going back to the core questions of this project, I tried to understand if there are particular universal sources of influence that are shaping one’s style. Do they come from one’s culture and background, or are they coming from the recent social developments of the globalized fashion system? Up to which point are people susceptible to external factors and are they aware of those influences?

As already stated, one of the main influences to one’s taste chosen by participants in the questionnaire are other people, whether from one’s environment, friends, or the ones they see on a metro or on a street, or style icons and
other celebrities which photos they can view online or look on the pages of a magazine. A significant part of all participants chose culture and traveling to be the main source of inspiration for them, thus one’s own culture and the culture of others, whereas some of the participants expressed in the interview their opinions about the style in their countries and culture compared to the one that is actual in Italy. Influence of one’s culture to his/her style is not novel, but what is new is the easy comparison we are able to make in the modern society, where different cultures are intervened with each other, people have more opportunities to travel, or they can be searching and exploring online. But since most of the participants coming from more remote parts of the world still addressed differently the European, thus Western style and their own, and even mostly preferred the European style to their country’s one, it is possible that some dissimilarities still do exist between Western culture and the other cultures even if much less than they existed before the effects of globalization.

More than a half of all participants stating their mood to be the main source, or one of the main sources of influence on their look, makes it one of the most common answers to be picked out. This further implies a deep conscious connection to one’s self, as described by Entwistle (2015) as well. Entwistle reasons that the modern self is aware of itself, and disposed to consciously planned alterations, as one intentionally attempts to present the best version of the self to others.

Studying deeper the relations between answers given by the participants while filling the questionnaire and the ones given during the interview, I have understood that even though society norms were rarely picked by the participants to be a main restraint to their style choices, the opinions stated in the interview told me otherwise. Coming from the participants’ thoughts and experiences, I have come to understand that estimating one by his/her look is something that is still vastly present in everyday life. Even if some of the participants stated they do not judge other by their looks, others said contrary. A significant part of all participants said to try to understand more about a person through the way the person looks, while some of the participants spoke about the importance they feel the first impression of one’s look makes on other people. I feel that that process and its conclusions present a sort of an evaluation and estimation, even if they made with an objective attitude towards that person.

What stood out as a general belief after a more detailed cross examination of questionnaire and interview answers, was that we are still highly judged by the way we look in the work environment. Participants listed a job interview to be an occasion when it is the most important how one looks. Some of them spoke
about their experiences of attending job interviews and having positive or negative sensations caused by the way they were looking. I have associated their opinions and understandings to the claims of Goffman (1971) and Entwistle (2015), both explaining the way the norms of the society impact the way a person presents himself/herself to others. As a consequence of those rules, a person tends to fit in those norms in order to be accepted by the public and does so by trying to stay within the society bounds of what presents a dressed body, whether it is occurring on a conscious or an unconscious level. Considering all this, it could be that one’s work environment may still present one of the strongest external influences to the way he/she looks, maybe not defining the person’s taste but having a strong influence on his/her look while in that environment.

In the end, when it comes to the matters of one’s uniformity and individuality in a contemporary society, several factors stand out to be relevant, some of them influencing people’s personal styles for a long time, while others are coming from the more recent age. Cultural heritage and traditions still seem to have some impact on a person’s style, but it appears to come in a reduced amount due to different consequences globalization generated in the global fashion system. Social norms act to be imposing rules on people also in today’s age, particularly in the professional environment, dictating certain rules of what is appropriate and what not.

People find inspiration for their style both within themselves and from the others around them, thus having influence internally and externally. They observe and assess other people by the way they look, and are also aware of the importance their own appearance has to the situations of interaction with others. With or without putting effort to the way they look, the general opinion is that one’s look expresses his/hers personality. Finally, even if it looks like a lot of them feel to be unique in their style or strive towards that feeling, it seems that this deduction may be coming from an inner level of self-perception and a personal experience of one’s style, one’s understanding of the way his/her look is paralleled to the looks of others more than it is coming from the person’s actual visual authenticity and distinction from everyone else.
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