



FASHION SEMINAR SERIES EMBRACING FASHION & TECHNOLOGY 10 February 2016 Review of the day

This is a wrap up report on the seminar “Embracing Fashion and Technology”, which is part of a series of seminars on the Future of Fashion, a collaboration of ClickNL Next Fashion, Atelier Néerlandais, and the Netherlands Embassy in France. The focus was on the synergy of fashion and technology. The next seminar will be focusing on Stores and the changing Retail Landscape, and is planned for November 2016, so please check the websites of ClickNL and Atelier Néerlandais to stay tuned.

We started our day with a short trend forecast by Bradley Quinn, moderator of the day and author, strategist and fashion industry consultant, having published his first book on wearable tech in 2002. He states that “The adoption of wearable tech seems slow to catch on, with portable devices emerging as a popular alternative“.

So when do wearable devices become wearable tech, what is the difference and how are they being produced already?

Pauline van Dongen, Valérie Lamontagne, Elisabeth de Senneville, Anouk Wipprecht



Designers use wearable systems, software and advanced fibers to explore new performances and possibilities and to create new interfaces between technology and the human body. They are finding a market in performance sportswear, and beginning to influence art, interactive design, healthcare, automotive industry and lifestyle brands.



Yet, wearables seem slow to establish a market in mainstream fashion.

One major aspect seems to lie in the general nature of both fields, Fashion on the one hand and Technology on the other, as fashion-tech designer, Anouk Wipprecht points out: “The cycles of technology and fashion are completely different. I upgrade the technology in my dresses regularly, so the garment itself will stay. The fashion industry however needs new garments every season.”

Elisabeth de Senneville, who already worked with wearable tech in the nineties and can be seen as the true pioneer in French wearables, points out that her designs work on a different level than that of aesthetics only. “I am looking for solutions in my garments: visibility, comfort, and health issues, are important, but in the end I am a fashion designer combining these functionalities.” De Senneville developed amongst others scarves for use in Chinese cities with a pollution restraining function.

We wonder where wearables will find new markets in the future, and what steps are needed in order to persuade brands and consumers to adopt them? Valérie Lamontagne sketches the (future) characteristic of our wardrobes: “Maybe we don’t want to walk around as billboards of our internal life but somehow we are already doing so every day. The question is on how can wearable tech add to that?”

But for the makers the challenge of merging fashion and technology clearly does not only lie in theoretical approaches and the characteristics of the areas. As materials, electronics and consumer needs are discussed, issues such as power sources, washability and software compatibility reveal that there are challenges to overcome. Challenges, such as that of storing and collecting energy in more innovative ways than a classical battery. Pauline van Dongen, who has amongst others developed a solar jacket that can charge your phone, shared her ideal image of this kind of energy system with us: “There has to be a network about all kinds of gathering and storing energy because the circumstances change. It must ideally be a synergy between all: piezoelectricity, solar, photovoltaic etc. These and other issues concerning conceptual details of wearable tech still seem to deliver room for thought and experimentation, how long until wearable tech is not alien to our wardrobes any longer, but part of the regular fashion we wear every day?”



Thinkers consider Merging Fashion & Technology

Florence Bost, Luca Marchetti, Lianne Toussaint, Alice Gras

As technology changes the performances and potentials of clothing, so too does it alter the way we view our bodies, our relationships to others and our engagement with the constructed environments surrounding us. Luca Marchetti, professor at HEAD Geneva and working for the Institut Français de la Mode questions merging trends of fashion and technologies: “Now that we have objects that become subjects, where does this bring us? These new interdisciplinary approaches could shake the existing fashion system to the core, as they may influence the consumer to choose their wardrobe in response to the digital lifestyles emerging today. Does the fashion industry need to start dressing utopian bodies, or rethink representations of the body altogether?” Bradley Quinn goes further as he shares his vision of robots of the future, that are in his perception not going to have a human shape, but are rather going to be extensions of our bodies, that we can wear and that will add to our personal performance - So wearables after all?

Further questions raised in the discussions of this philosophical think tank were: Could fashion’s engagement with other disciplines open the door to transhumanism, or signal the arrival of the post-human condition? Does fashion theory sufficiently address these issues today, or does it need to evolve along with the new questions they present? PhD researcher Lianne Toussaint brings it to the point: “The question is how technology is relating to our lives. Is it another

species or is it entering our lives?” She also shared her experience about the ways technology already alters our daily lives today: “When I was halfway in an informal dinner with friends in New York, two of them suddenly stood up, because their device told them to do so. It felt like another person at the table, directing them what to do.”

We all know stories about how devices are changing our everyday life, but how far would we like this to develop and can we even influence this at all?



Producers challenge Production Technology

Marina Toeters, Martijn van Strien, Oscar Tomico, Karin Vlug, Pauline Guesné

Technology holds the potential to revolutionise fashion on many levels, including the ways that garments are manufactured, merchandised and sold. It doesn’t only empower the consumer, but also the producer as it has the potential to bring together both ends of the specter and questions the role of the intermediary, the retailer and merchandiser.

In this field open source designer Martijn van Strien is mapping the feasible and already actively testing the market with pop up manufacturing platforms in Dutch city centers. In these pop up stores, the production is entirely skipped as the consumer and manufacturers close the loop in direct interaction. And this is not where it is to stop, as Martijn envisions: “If you offer a garment that will last 100 years, you should offer it as a service, to lease it for instance. It is an emerging market and the most profitable one for brands that offer a very high quality product.”



Another change is to be observed in an increased implementation of 3D printing, one of the fields the Business of Fashion recently named the big factors to majorly alter fashion as we have known it. Skipping the 2D intermediary step of patterning cutting and sewing is one of the fields of research that designer Karin Vlug is focusing on. In her work she makes a direct translation of the 3D-design to the product and skips any sweatshop problematic directly.



So what does this mean for existing procedures? Can existing manufacturing methods be adapted for the production of wearable technology today and in future? Or is a completely new manufacturing paradigm required altogether? If so, how do practitioners in different fields come together to create it? Considering these questions furthermore evoked a discussion about the concept of sustainability, the meaning of innovation, the role of advanced materials and the added value of well-being. For WEARABLES Award winner Halit Soysal it is clear that “People don’t want to be adapting to how the manufacturing works, they want the product to adapt to them.” And Kristin Neidlinger of Sensoree adds the notion of emotional durability and the personal relation one has to his garments. When changing the emotional relation between a wearer and his garment, the consumption style and cycle will change progressively and so will production. Fashion tech designer Marina Toeters spins this though further as she evokes the vision to activate retail in merging it with production altogether: „ ... if you had shops where you send your info, while waiting get a coffee and at the end receive the garment you would like - ready made.“

This leaves us with the vision of an evolving production, that almost transforms and enters a second stage as it is merging with retail. Where will this go, projects such as Pop up Stores from Martijn van Strien and research from Karin Vlug show us what is possible already, and help us to push our imagination to the edge.

Businesses and Creativity Meet in Multimedia

Pierre-François Le louët, Jacob Kok, Ricardo O’Nascimento

Digital media and interactive technologies create exciting new potentials for how fashion is designed, presented and experienced by the consumer. This think tank considered the potential of

using multimedia platforms to create immersive experiences and interactive forums that heighten the sensory associations clothing has. Where does the virtual world merge in to the real and can be real what is not tangible? Mood, emotion and sensuality play important roles in wearables and are increasingly being built into their performances.

Ricardo O’Nascimento designed a device to add to your shoes: “I wanted to make a product for people which changes the way they sound every day, just like changing your scent on a daily base with perfumes.” It serves as an extra layer of expression and taps into the same notion of reevaluating and deepening the wearer-garment relationship evoked earlier the day already.



Multimedia is furthermore taking a significant part in merchandising and retail, as it is transforming fashion brick and mortar boutiques into spaces that provide content rather than just sell clothes.

Pierre François Le Louët, CEO of NellyRody trend forecasting, noted that these days some Chanel stores have more Ipad then actual garments. “Stores are a location for inspiration, and technology contributing to the brand experience is more and more important.” Technologies may also make it possible to improve fit and comfort, boost brand loyalty, make online purchasing easier and transform our experience of fashion retail.

All in all we see how technology is already taking a stand in consumer-fashion interaction. As the discussions of the day showed us wearable tech is one, and a big part of merging the two fields, but much more is already happening in other areas, as technology is altering the way we produce, communicate about trends and styles and relate to fashion as a system. How long before wearables find a durable place in this system? Already now we see a strive from major players to redefine the schedule fashion has been dictating for decades. The first luxury houses such as Gucci already eliminated sales from their schedules, now Paul Smith even goes further and reduces it’s collections from 28 per year down to merely 2.

Is the fashion system in its search to redefine its relevancy and to keep up with the new spin technology added to spreading trends already in itself approaching the „Cycle of Technology“?