Shared Pride
Collaboration as a positive change to the fashion system

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Paper | 3112 words | Amsterdam, 5th of June | Suzanne van Rooij
Pride

The feeling of pride has always been a red thread through my work. I believe in creating strong, clear, outspoken and flamboyant creations. A good example of this is ‘‘Show off’’ the collection that I made for the honours program at the end of year two in 2015. (image 1) this collection was inspired by a flaunt parade and expressed the story of a selfish and arrogant individual that is consumed by her need to show off the prices and awards that she has won in her life. In the collection, this was translated into an overload of gold and black medals and exaggerated flag and medal shapes (image 2 & 3). This created a very static and heavy silhouette.

Reflecting on this collection it also expresses my concerns on the current status quo of the fashion industry. Over the past 4 years of education at a fashion school I have the feeling that there is a focus on the role of creative director at designer houses. However, there are much more layers in these companies that visualise the ideas. In the fashion industry aspects of quality and craftsmanship are overruled by the glitter and glamour side of fashion. Perhaps this sounds a bit generalised, but in fact there is some truth in it. Eleanor O’Neill1 says in her article about collaboration in fashion that ‘‘The fashion industry is known for its closed circles and competitive atmosphere’’ (O’Neill, 2016). This is a problem we alread see at fashion schools, because there are around 7 fashion schools only in the Netherlands. Dreaming of a top position after graduation most of us talents disappear in the mass of anonymity, because the competition is high and there are only a couple of dream job opportunities as creative director. I believe that this should change, because at this moment, during graduation I am confronted by these conflicts that concern me and I am wondering if I want to be part of this competitive circle?

1 Eleanor O’Neill is the founder of Study 34. A sustainable knitwear brand where O’Neill hand makes all the garments of leftover bulk yarns from the industry. One of the aims of Study 34 is to convey to the customer how a garment is made in the hope that once they can see the time and skill that goes into making clothing it will encourage them to value it more
To my opinion we can redirect this starting at the way we are being educated in fashion. Forecaster and researcher of new trends Lidewij Edelkoort said: ’It’s the end of fashion as we know it’.

During her biannual trend presentation in 2015, Edelkoort presented her Anti - Fashion Manifesto, commenting on the fashion industry. She emphasizes especially on how fashion students are educated as ‘’all-round’’ individualist with the prospect of becoming a creative director. To me this image creates an imbalance between the actual job opportunities and that where we as fashion students are being educated for. The role of creative director is only privileged to a select pool of talents. However, many students are educated for this function.

In my graduation project, I want to give a new impulse to the strong hierarchial and individualistic fashion industry. That is why I choose to challenge myself to join forces, skills and talent with two fellow graduates to create a synergy. Because I believe that we are blessed with these skills and should work together to produce a total effect of pride that is greater than the sum of our individual elements and contributions. Our curiosity for alternative interpretations of the role as fashion designer has brought us together. We want to investigate how this collaboration can lead to a positive change in the fashion industry. In this way, we ourselves become the subject of our graduation project.

Current status quo

’’Collaboration. Arguably not the most popular word in a fashion designer’s vocabulary.’’ Says O’Neill (O’Neill, 2016). She is stating that there is this image sketched by the fashion industry of high individual stars that create mesmerizing collections. However, it is true that it’s not a popular word, but without people that are specialised into a certain craft or a technical part we will not be able to make a collection that has a high level of craftmanship and quality. If we look at a brand as for example Christian Dior we see that there is one head designer who is known by the public as the creator of the collection. When we look at the collections that are created it is clear that the head designer is not making this collection by himself. To me the haute couture collections of Raf Simons for Christian Dior from 2012 till 2015 had this magical couture feeling. This feeling for me is made possible by the
craftsmanship and quality of the atelier (image 4, 5 & 6). When there are teamwork wonderful creations are being achieved. However why is it that a brand as Christian Dior has one head designer who is taking all the credits? Why is there this exclusivity and hierarchy in the fashion system of one head designer while there is a whole team that really visualizes the ideas?

The creative director is surrounded by a majority of hardworking senior, junior and trainee designers who all work together to finish everything before the deadlines. There is therefore no team with equivalent positions, but an obvious hierarchy (image 7). Within the fashion house, the other designers are recognized, but the ultimate star is the creative director. It tries to exploit the individual talent of the other fashion workers as much as possible as stated by Jackie Mallon teacher of fashion design programs in New York (2017). This is underpinned if you look at show reviews of newspaper headlines, it’s always about the creative director. (headline 8 & 9)

Since the symbolic ‘walkouts’ of leading designers as Raf Simons at Dior and Alber Elbaz at Lanvin in October 2015 indicates that the pressure is very high (Illingworth, 2016). Simons thanked for this feature because the number of collections passed the creative process (Alper, 2016) Simons says in an interview:

’’It always had to go faster, always more. The whole system is fucked up. In the end, I did eight collections a year, and six runway shows. Impossible, but we did it. And it worked.’’ (Simons 2016)

However, the most hypocrite thing about Simons is that he now is the head designer of Calvin Klein and is leading the creative direction for the company’s entire stable of brands, including ck Calvin Klein, Calvin Klein Jeans and Calvin Klein, as well as the men’s and women’s ready-to-wear collections. To me this doesn’t sound like someone who wants to have more time for the creative process. Also, Alber Elbaz voiced his frustrations with the demand of speed on the creative industry: ‘‘I need more time, a little bit more time’’ (Ferrier, 2015). This makes sense because I believe that the magic of fashion lies in the value of the craftsmanship and quality of the haute couture collections. In this current system, it loses the magical feeling.
because it is overruled by the speed and pressure of the next collection that is already in the making.

At this point of graduating I am in a dilemma, because I don’t know if I want to work in an industry that is driven by speed and has no space for craftsmanship and quality. However, these ‘‘walkouts’’ can be a step towards a change in the current system, it will be difficult. The discussed issues conclude to me that collaborating and creating opportunities for each other is highly unusual in the current fashion industry. However, this is necessary to create a new fashion system where we in fashion always go forward, for the system we should go back to what fashion is all about: creativity, craftsmanship & quality.

Ridicule

For the graduation project, I wanted to push myself to the next level. My work always consists out of historical elements that clash with sports inspired source. This clashing element is now translated into a collaboration together with Sharon Jochemsen and Meike Nieuwenhuis. We choose to work with each other, because we see the collaboration as a positive response to show our critiques to the fashion industry. A new and alternative way of approaching our profession as fashion designer. In this era, we can create new chances and job opportunities for ourselves from the bottom, using social media (image 10), and thereby overcome the classic hierarchical structure of the fashion industry. In this project, we are the creative directors, we are the ‘‘stars’’ of the collection. This collaboration has led to the name ‘‘Ridicule’’ what actually means: making fun off. In this case making fun off the conformations in fashion.

We all have our own vision on the fashion industry and have a different design approach. Sharon Jochemsen (image 11) has a more serious approach on fashion. She works in a sustainable way. She uses old garments to transform them into something new. Creating her own fabric by ironing and stitching garments into a flat piece that can be used as a new piece of material. She wants to make a statement to show that we don’t need to make complete new designs from fabric, instead we should make us of garments that are already there. Meike Nieuwenhuis (image 12) works in a conceptual way. The sea is her starting point and she built her story upon...
subjects that connect with her subject. She is always looking for a tension between reality and unreality.

**Personal inspiration**

"More is more and less is bore" (Apfel, 2007). A famous quote by geriatric starlet and fashion icon Iris Apfel. This quote fits perfectly to the way I develop my concepts, materials and garments, because I am always attracted by things that have a certain overload and clash in colour, silhouette or material. Developing fabrics for me are just as important as the 3D design itself. In 2015 I followed the Minor Textiles and developed an handwriting in combining graphic elements with folklore, romantic and kitsch materials (image 13 & 14).

For my graduation project, I started with looking into my archive of images that I collected and I came to the conclusion that I am into collecting Dutch folk costume images. The images of the costumes of Marken (image 15 & 16) are known for its richness in layers, colours and decoration. I wanted to use this inspiration because to me it has this feeling of pride translated into Dutch historical heritage. Something that we should appreciate and keep alive.

The sports element comes from the Dutch long-distance ice skating, something my family always watch together on tv. The aerodynamic ice skating suits attracted me by its ugliness. The graphic design and the colours translate the country of origin and the sponsors. For the Dutch Sven Kramer, this means an orange suit combined with green and blue (image 17). The graphic design of the whole suit is not very attractive and I would like to use this as an inspiration in material and prints to give my own interpretation that will clash with the Dutch folk costume.

(image 13 & 14: Textile samples: red graphic check combined with white lace, dried flowers painted with gold acryl, Brugman 2015)

(image 15 & 16: Dutch Traditional folk costumes of Marken, Holland Known for its richness is colour, layers and decoration, left image: Brugman, 2017, right, Klederdrachtmuseum, 2017)
The other source of inspiration is the flag. The flag is a symbol of pride and victory. I already used the shape and the symbolic meaning of flags in the Honours Program collection. However, they still fascinate me. The interesting thing to me are the graphic design, the clear communication of colours and the way that they move (image 18). With these inspirational sources, I started developing clashing materials and designs for our graduation collection.

‘Fucking Klere’

The unpredictability of our collaboration leads as a red thread through our concept. Because we are working together, we are forced to get rid of our tunnel vision and let go of our ego. This could only be done by putting the whole concept into perspective and reduce it to: it’s about fucking clothes (“Fucking Klere”).

The three individual concepts (image 19) consciously create a collection that is inconsistent and controversial. Where normally it is about consistency within the collection, for us it is about diversity to the maximum. There is no coherent story within the entire collection. The styling principle is that every designer creates garments and is styled together in a unpredictable and playful outfit. Making use of loose garments emphasizes the diversity of the concept. The structure of the collection is comparable to making a movie, only this time it is a movie without a script. There is no scenario written, the scenes are developed purely on intuition and feeling. However, the collection is set up with three individual styles as a framework that are translated into prints and fabrics.

Over the past few months we have had a great process together. For me this collaboration stands for sharing creativity, skills, talent and knowledge. The fear of losing ourselves and our identity in this collective project sometimes caused that we got stuck in our own research. Gradually we learned how we had to overcome these barriers and allow each other in our work. The focus lies on confidence in order to come closer to each other.

At the beginning of our project we wanted to have a clear division in our specializations. Sharon would focus on colour and design, Meike on prints and I would focus on materials. Starting with creating fabric
samples, prints and design it became clear that our work and specialisations began to blur into each other. For example, I developed fabric samples that were inspired by the traditional Dutch folk costume of Staphorst called ’’Staphorster stipwerk’’ (image 20, 21 & 22). A jacquard with a reverse dot print on top made of a layer of white vinyl had something folklore and modern because of the white vinyl. Soon it was translated into a silkscreen print by Meike to make it more wearable and less plastic (image 23), because we are working together we also inspire each other with all the fabrics, prints and designs that we develop and everyone has another interpretation or variation on what you make.

This is also the beauty of our collaboration, because it has led to a unique and unexpected collection that results from joining our forces. We want to reinforce each other rather than compete with each other and share the feeling of pride after finishing this wonderful collection and experience.

Process
For the collection, we have created separate outfits or garments that have been put together to create different outfits that all tell their own story. The choices for colour, material, prints and details are chosen per outfit. For example, we have created an outfit that consists of a blouse that is designed by Sharon and that is styled together with a jumpsuit from me (image 24). For this outfit, my inspiration came from the many layers the Dutch folk costume consists of. I translated this into a very over the top dramatic silhouette. For the fabrics and prints we choose a black and white striped theme. These stripes are translated from all of our develop prints and materials. Translated in to horizontal, vertical, diagonal, thin, wide, blurred and organic lines. Also, there is a diverse way of techniques that we used to create those stripes. Stripes that are stitched on fabric, printed, painted with spray paint, woven into fabric, or just tape that is glued on top. In this outfit, we make use of a diverse scale of print, technique but also in fabrics that we use to create the stripes. The fabrics range from poplin, linen, a fishnet tulle, leather and a parachute fabric. We make decisions per outfit and look into our process book to find interesting inspiration.

Through this graduation project I want to make a positive note to the criticisms I have on the hierarchical and strong individualistic fashion world. To me, my biggest source of inspiration is the feeling of pride that I want to share in this collaboration. By designing a collection together with three totally different fashion designers we set ourselves apart from the prevailing fashion culture. We believe that we can learn from each other and that our own character does not lead to the loss of identity, but that we can complement each other. From this collaboration, a surprising and unexpected collection has grown, with the use of diversity to the maximum without losing its unity.
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