Meet me in another world.
Sometimes love story ends well
"Free electron: an electron that is not attached to an atom or molecule and is free to respond to outside forces". (Collins, 2010).

When it comes to the study of fashion, I have always been a free electron. My approach towards fashion is singular as I consider craftsmanship as an art and do not pay attention to the so-called fashion rules (colour cards, fabric samples,...) . My work comprises of feelings, emotion and passion with no regard nor influence towards what is happening nowadays in the fashion industry. Instead of concerning myself in defining what best fits me within the industry, as a student I enjoy being a free creator and making things, without restrictions.

But with this graduation project and the end of my studies arriving soon, it was time for me to get out of this special place and look deeper into this fashion industry which I will confront very soon in a professional way. After having researched and analysed the shows of the past years, only one word came across my mind: boring. A majority of the catwalk and sets are dull and unattractive. The haute couture looks presented during the shows are "too wearable", the gap between the ready to wear and the haute couture has shrunk (Fig. 1, 2). Shows have become a business and are all about who is sitting on the front row and which super model will be walking. It seems that the interest for the clothes themselves is less than it used to be.
What happened to the colourful and extravagant yesteryear fashion from the 80's and 90's? The industry that made me desperately want to be a part of. Today's world of fashion remains kind of a mystery for me. I have difficulties understanding why people enjoy working for houses and brands which lost big parts of their souls and creativity. It is now clear that this is not a place for me. But there is an inherent and urgent sense of need to find my place.

It is only fitting that in my graduation project I create and express my utopian world of fashion, in a manner without restrictions and outside of today's fashion boundaries.

This decision was deeply inspired by the work of Rik Wouters showcased from Septembre 2016 to February 2017 in the exhibition “RIK WOUTERS & THE PRIVATE UTOPIA” at the Antwerp MoMu. He was an artist of the “Fauvism” movement and is famous for painting his everyday life and transforming it into colourful scenes with authentic subjects. He was bringing what he saw into his colour saturated utopia (fig. 3, 4).
My utopian fashion world is a place where people wear crazy, bright, bold fashion. A kind of fashion which is on the edge of being art that is able to transports viewers and wearers to another place amongst the galaxy, or one that is parallel.

“Today, fashion is irrelevant!”

“Today, fashion is irrelevant” is a sentence that comes to my mind at least once a day. After analysing this industry in a deeper way, three main issues occurred to me as an answer to this boredom.

First of all, nowadays, fashion became doing more, producing more and selling more. In this overloaded and insufferable pace, creativity has been lost. In an interview for the website “Fashion Network”, Alber Elba (previous art director of Lanvin) says “I only hear people complaining in this industry: too much shows, too much collection, is it the fashion week in Russia now? Oh no wait! It is also the fashion week in India. Too much confusion. Which season of which year are they showing now? Unless it is Croisière? Or Resort? It is always more and it is endless. And nobody is happy. Not enough love, too much fear”. According to him, the fact that there is now so many collections is an answer to the fast fashion. The reason for the multiplication of the collections of those famous houses such as Chanel, Chloé, Dior,… is to force their way onto the
covers of magazines. Making them more visible, therefore increasing the attendance in their shops in order to answer to the fast fashion brands.

Another issue which appeared recently is the fact that fashion managers took over some major components of the designers function. It seems that the management team is the one deciding of what should be produced and what shouldn’t, what designers need to create, which trend should be followed,… The designer is being driven into a one way street with only a few available side paths. I believe that the management as well as the marketing should be present at a later stage of a collection’s production. It should promote the creativity, the dreams and intuitions of the designers. Albert Einstein said: “the intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift”. Indeed, if only the gifted designer was left with some time at the beginning of the creative process in order for him to meditate, create and explore his intuition, and later with the help of the managers and marketing teams, the outcome of a collection could turn out better than with the current system. Intuitions can be risky and mistakes can cost a lot but the biggest innovations in the history were born when people trusted their intuition and followed it.

Finally, It seems that due to the economical context of the past decade, people spent less money in exuberant luxurious good and were more attracted by basics, timeless and long lasting garments. Customers would more easily buy the speedy bag from Louis Vuitton rather than a bag from their latest collection. This need of safety brought fashion houses to become less daring & bold in their designs.

These fast changing trends are only pushing customers to buy more and at a faster pace to a point where people buy for the sole purpose of buying. The joy of purchasing is now coming from the fact of buying rather than finally owning a long desired item, leaving no time for any relationship between the owner and his clothes to grow. The time when saving in order to buy the the piece of your dream has passed and has been replaced by a world where main street fashion brands are selling cheap copies of designer’s clothes without identities and available to anyone.

“My utopian fashion world”

I always have been a thinker, always lost in my own thoughts, imagining stories and adventures.

As soon as I came to an understanding that today’s society was not working in a way which corresponds to my ideas and principles, it gave me the idea to create an utopian world as the
centre of my graduation concept. In this mirrored image of our world, people would have a different relationship with fashion. The inhabitants of this universe do not believe in comfortable fashion but use it as a mean of expression and as a social necessity. Individuality in style is king, simple garments such as skinny grey jeans and other basics do not exist. White basic t-shirts have been transformed into t-shirts ornamented of red flowers (Fig. 5). All of our usual fashion bearings have been shattered, the institutional uniforms are nonexistent. Singularity in style leaves no room for boredom and fear of being overdressed or wearing different clothes than others.
This situation means that no trends could be set, everything available to anyone could eventually become a piece of fashion as long as it matches someone’s envy and need to express. People wear fashion not clothes, fashion is meant to carry a message. Imagine streets filled with colours, everyday is a festival, a carnival where no judgement exists and every shape becomes a personal message (fig. 6, 7).

Fig. 5: How could a white t-shirt looks like in my utopian world.
(Comme des garçons, 2014)

Fig. 6 & 7, How would people from my utopian world look like in everyday life. (Left: Carrie Branovan, 1997) (Right: Advanced style, 2017)
The clothes themselves are all what we would call “Haute couture” in our world. Each piece is very unique, with extreme attention to details in order to match its owner’s body but more importantly, his mood and personality. As these garments mirror their owner’s soul and daily mood, most of the looks are very voluminous and imposing. As everybody and their twisted mind are able create their perfect outfit, all usual clothes definitions are inexistent, a skirt could be attached to a sweater for example so it would become a dress/skirt or trousers could look like trousers but would actually be a skirt. There are no names to define each piece of clothing.

Women have a deep crush for dresses as they are poetic, magic and represent the quintessence of femininity. Trousers are not be a first choice and are usually only be worn if rearranged by being covered by a dress or skirt or by being extremely special by their shapes and colours (fig. 8, 9).

As mentioned previously, colours and more specifically, bright colours obviously play a very important role in this utopia. Imagine a world where colours are an universal language. As in any language, the combination of words, in this case colour combinations are endless. The colour codes defined by our fashion standards are no longer applicable. Combinations of 3 to 4 colours put together are not seen as something extravagant but something normal. Black is only be part of a combination and “ton sur ton” shall not be a guideline as is it in our fashion society.

In this new world, every single person is a poet, in love with the the colours they are using as words to create their poetry shaped in the form of clothing and fashion. Their relationship to colours would be so deep that living in our grey world suffocates and makes them dry of words.
This deep need for colours comes from the constant blooming season present in this universe. People living in cities where less nature and flowers are present still feel the need to fill their days with natural colours, therefore dressing the way they do is for them the best way get back in touch with their bright nature and feel as a part of it.

Living in an organic world, their landscapes are quite different than ours, why would clouds be grey or white? Why would fields not only be flower fields? Even if their cities are made of concrete, their architecture is much more organic than ours, geometric shapes are distorted and inspired by nature. Glass and steel concrete wouldn't be especially green and grey but tainted and influenced by the flowing shapes of the wild. All these exterior influences inspire the people to create mind-blowing prints and patterns for their clothes (fig. 10).

![Fig. 10: How would be the landscapes in my utopian world (Van Gogh, 1889)](image)

To complete the outfits, we need to provide people of the utopia with amazing fabrics but as fashion is not an industry but a language. A simple cotton fabric has to be customised by its owner
using hand embroideries, prints and paints in order for them to express their feelings through their clothes.

Finally, what distinguishes our world and this utopia is that people actually care deeply for the garments they wear and own. First of all because they value quality, self-expression and individualism over quantity and for this reason, they have time to build a relationship with them. As these garments are so special and tailor-made by their owner to their own body and mind, that they actually become part of them and too precious to ever be thrown away.

“Yesteryear fashion”

Such a world is obviously not a possibility for our world as it would need a complete redesign of our institutions. From a designer’s expression and “stylistique” point of view, traveling back in time to the 80’s and the 90’s would probably bring us close to this world.

The Fashion of these two decades which gave me the drive to study fashion is definitely not a model for our world when it comes to values and principles. But it felt more real, designers had guts and customers were ready to wear anything. The internet, mobile phones, DOS, Windows95 and rapid globalisation made it a period of freedom and expression. Fashion was not driven by globalisation but all about single designers doing what they wanted by following their own intuitions rather than major fashion groups employing designers and giving them strict restrictions.

Fashion from the 80’s was all about appearances, very outstanding and colourful. It was ostentatious and smells like liberty. Accessories were very present and important for the overall look and everything seemed expensive. The fashion of this decade introduced a lot of new designers as well such as Jean Paul Gaultier, Thierry Mugler and Claude Montana (Fig. 11, 12).

Fig 11: (Mugler, 1987)

Fig 12: (Montana, 1984)
Fashion became extremely popular and was everywhere on the media, campaigns for brand such as Ralph Lauren or Calvin Klein were selling dreams to the world. Fashion was a symbol of outspokenness and sexy (fig. 12).

![Kate Moss for Calvin Klein campaign](Fig. 12: Kate moss for Calvin klein campaign (Mark, 1992)

Creators developed a new idealistic image of the women’s beauty. Designs were structured but also voluminous and very theatrical making fashion exuberant and therefore nice to see. Also, people cared about their clothes and paid attention to how expensive it looked. (Fashion ! Golden Eighties, 2012).

After the 80’s came the 90’s and its diversity. According to the journalist Petit (2008), and as mentioned earlier, fashion of the this decade, was deeply influenced by socio-political events from that period. As the soviet bloc just bursted, more and more people lost their jobs, AIDS was becoming a real social problem and suburbs were showing more and more discomfort. Because of this, people lost interest for the body as such and tried to put their identity forward. This feeling started with an anti-fashion movement which rejected the materialism of the 80’s. Many minimalistic designers also called “conceptual” such as Martin Margiela and Yohji Yamamoto who were already slowly growing in the previous decade are now taking the front of the stage (fig.13).
Also, the “Grunge” movement appears as well as a main anti-fashion movement, rejecting all kind of materialism and wanting to express themselves more than ever.

Fashion of the 90’s was also the fashion of all the trends. Basics from the previous decades were recycled and became fashionable again. People were just adding some accessories in order to personalise their looks. K-way from the 70’s are back, people wear Levis’s jeans again, same for trench-coats and so on. Bell bottom trousers and overalls which were trendy in the 70’s got very fashionable again. The 90’s is also the decade where clothing such as T-shirts and sweaters carried messages. “Happy” prints and other Hawaiian flowers, animal patterns and warm colours were very on trend.

Sportswear also became something that people would want to wear as daily outfit rather than just for working out. Brands like Adidas, Nike and Juicy couture are at the top of their game and everybody is fighting over their sneakers and joggings.

The 90’s were then a decade with a fashion of all excesses and all types, where Minimalism met with expressionism and the extravagance of the Italian “bling bling”. This mix is obviously very interesting as not only the high fashion is inspiring but also the mainstream fashion by showing us an extreme diversity of styles, use of colours and different patterns and prints.
This decade is not only interesting in a styling and inspirational point of view but also how the haute couture was at a turning point in its history. Indeed, according to Loic Prigent (2015), the “Chambre syndicate de la Haute Couture” is now counting only 16 couturiers while they were about 200 in the 60’s. This massive reduction in the number houses occurred mainly during the 90’s as fast growing big fashion groups started to take over smaller designer’s houses. As an example, Dior took over Galliano and Givenchy took over Alexander Mc Queen. It is also at this moment that these big companies started to spend great amounts of money for their shows and advertisement. It was the turning point for the industry! the first big step toward the high fashion industry we know today.

“For the love of fashion, I will break up with you”

We live at an age where old fashion mentalities are able to be pushed over by new ways of thinking. In some industries, the career paths set by the institutions are not the only way to success anymore.

Famous Youtuber Casey Neistat proved wrong to anyone who did not believe that there were other ways to make movies than going to film school and then work in Hollywood. In a video posted on Youtube he addressed the following message to these people : “To the haters the doubters, […] to everyone who’s ever told anyone with a dream they can’t, this video is for you. Keep you head down, follow the rules, do as you’re told, play it safe, wait your turn, ask permission, learn to compromise. These is terrible advice. If I had to write an autobiography, a book about my life, the title would be “Do what you can’t”. […] When you are a creator, you do not need someone in your ear telling you what you can and cannot do, what you can and cannot say. They call us gamers, influencers, artist. But we know something they do not know: you can do anything. When you are a creator, all you need is your brain and a good idea, a story you want to share, something you need to say and then the rest is history. To my fellow creators, I say: keep creating, keep doing the work and do not forget that you do not need to listen to anyone because in this new world no one knows anything. The haters, the doubters are all drinking champagne in the cockpit of the Titanic and we are the iceberg. So do what you can’t”. By saying this, he goes against institutions asking people to follow a certain path in order to enter the ranks of our society. This would go against the most basic principle of creation. Freedom. Fashion fell in the same trap, indeed, the way the institution of fashion is now established does not give enough freedom to the creators which are restricted straight out from school by the profit driven brands of our actual fashion industry. In order to consider fashion as an art, this would have
to change and as a real art form no rules or models should be followed. Leaving all fashion creators a blank card to play. An open minded industry would most probably lead to open minded customers not looking for something safe to wear but something new, different and reflecting their personalities.

This is why the creation of this utopian world in which fashion is more than just clothes was the first step in the creation of my graduation collection. The second step was to invent a story which would reflect the feelings of the people living in this world. And what better than a love story?

“On a party trip from the utopia to our world, she met a man who was different from everyone she ever met. She directly fell in love with him. This man was from our world, not interested in fashion, he wears grey jeans with sneakers. For the love she has for him, she tried to be like him and adapt to his world but she couldn’t because she is too couture. Now, she misses her fashion world which allows you to express herself freely without judgment so much that she breaks up with him, for the love of fashion”.

In translating this story into garments it is my goal to reflect the values of this utopian world, to elevate fashion to an art by using not only craftsmanship but also paintings, colours and shapes. Not by looking for perfection but singularity and hoping that this could be the first step toward the rest of my career in which I hope to spread the word.
Reference list: