VIKTOR&ROLF X
STAGING THE STAGE

BACKGROUND
Viktor&Rolf is a complex brand, which is in constant development. Today there is some tension around the brand, and V&R is trying to strengthen its position within the market, but most of the new ideas saturate the brand. As a result the brand is losing touch with its core identity. Even though V&R is trying to introduce some new concepts, the brand is still perceived as old-fashioned. Therefore, the challenge is to revive V&R.

This book is designed from two sides. You can start from getting to know V&R’s brand timeline, brand identity and relevant trends within society and the market. Or, you can start from the opposite end - going through the strategy, the concept and the communication campaign.

You are welcome to find your own process of discovering the new V&R approach to fashion.
BACKGROUND

THE BRAND

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Over the 25 years of V&R being in the industry, there were many changes within the brand and its positioning. The brand has had ups and downs. In order to understand the brand, firstly, we will analyze V&R’s timeline & will point out current struggles of the brand. This will create a background image of the brand & will help to explain why V&R is in need of a revival.
V&R’s brand is a joint creativity of Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren. The brand was founded in 1992, after Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren’s graduation from the Academy of Art and Design in Arnhem (The Netherlands).

THEY STARTED WITH A VERY CONCEPTUAL VIEW ON FASHION, WITH NO INTENTION OF BEING COMMERCIAL.

Fashion was a way to reflect on the Zeitgeist and to communicate. They saw fashion as art and were presenting their collections in galleries and museums.

‘If we can be at the top of fashion (meaning Haute Couture) then the rest will follow. Let’s start at the top and we can always go down, but it is way more difficult to go up.’¹ (Horsting and Snoeren, 2016)

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1992
Viktor & Rolf graduation

1995
L'Apparence du Vide

1993
success at Hyeres

1996
V&R on Strike campaign

1998
first Haute Couture collection
2000 first RTW collection

2002 contract with Loreal

2003 V&R eyewear

2003 first menswear RTW collection

2005 first fragrance Flowerbomb

2006 V&R x H&M
HOWEVER, IN 1996 THEY STARTED TO FEEL THAT THEY DON’T GET ENOUGH CREDIT FOR WHAT THEY DO. THIS FEELING MOTIVATED THEM TO STOP HAUTE COUTURE AND TO BECOME MORE COMMERCIAL.

V&R started RTW collections in 2000 and reached the most commercial point by launching worldwide successful perfume ‘Flowerbomb’ in 2005 and having a collaboration with H&M in 2006.
HOWEVER, VIKTOR AND ROLF CREATIVE PERSONALITIES COULDN’T HANDLE THE PRESSURE OF COMMERCIAL RULES AND SCHEDULES.

The brand was constantly criticized of being too conceptual for RTW. V&R was in need for financial support. As a consequence, V&R sold the majority shares of the brand to the Italian group OTB (Only The Brave) and returned to Haute Couture in 2013 with the ‘Zen Garden’ collection.

V&R POSITIONED ITSELF AS ‘FASHION ARTISTS’.
In 2015 V&R positioned itself as ‘Fashion Artists’, which seemed an attempt to go back to the conceptual and artistic core of the brand. This idea lasted for several seasons. V&R presented outspoken collections like AW15 ‘Wearable art’ and SS16 ‘Performance of Sculptures’.

However, during the last couple of years V&R is trying to find ways to be more profitable again. The brand launched bridal wear ‘Mariage’ collection and evening wear ‘Soir’ in collaboration with American retailer J. Alexander.

In 2018, V&R had a collaboration with Zalando called ‘Up-cycle’ where they used old Zalando stock in order to produce new collection. This collaboration together with a couple of the last V&R Haute Couture collections (AW16 Vagabonds, SS17 Boulevards of Broken Dreams and AW17 Action Dolls) was an attempt to position the brand as sustainable. This idea of sustainability can also be seen as V&R’s reflection of the Zeitgeist, but since it didn’t feel authentic - it didn’t receive much interest from the society. Furthermore, V&R is receiving negative press reviews:

‘Measured against their concepts from the near past, this one isn’t as wildly original; reassembly is already a thing, versus the sculptural cubist polo shirts or the wearable framed paintings.’¹ (Verner, 2017)

‘Compared to what they’ve done previously, the concept doesn’t seem that remarkable—or even unprecedented.’² (Verner, 2018)

V&R is also trying to reach younger audience by introducing ‘Tulle’ collection. However, this product line is rather trend-following than trend-setting, moreover weak communication strategy, targeting too young of an audience with too high prices doesn’t bring desired results.

IN CONCLUSION, V&R’S BRAND IS PERCEIVED AS OLD-FASHIONED, IS GENERALLY STUCK IN THE GLORY OF THE PAST. SOME NEW PRODUCT LINES MADE THE BRAND TOO SATURATED AND, THEREFORE, V&R LOST TOUCH WITH ITS CORE IDENTITY.

This chapter is defining V&R's core identity & will give some examples of how V&R is translating its vision & mission to its collections.
THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE

L’Apparence du Vide exhibition
1995
For example, in the 90’s, fashion became an era of the Super Models and V&R felt that girls became more important than the garments. They felt that was wrong and they wanted to communicate it. They made an installation of golden garments hanging in the gallery space. No models, no mannequins - just a soundtrack of kids pronouncing the names of all the supermodels.
TO REFLECT AND CHALLENGE
THE ZEITGEIST & FASHION INDUSTRY
For instance, the ‘Atomic Bomb’ collection was a reflection on the millenial turn - it was going to be a fun time (a celebration) or the explosion of a dark time. V&R felt the wait for 2000 was a ticking bomb.
Values

PROVOCATIVE TRANSLATION

encourage people to think critically and be aware of what is happening around them, so we can turn negativity into positivity.
being literal makes V&R conceptual. Literal translation of ideas in an exaggerated manner by using cliches and mainstream icons.
drawing people's attention to controversial concepts by using a high level of craftsmanship.
IRONIC BUT ELEGANT,
PROVOCATIVE BUT INTELLECTUAL

it is contradictory, but V&R finds a perfect balance between these conflicting traits.
V&R STATEMENTS

V&R’s statements on fashion will help you to understand V&R’s view on fashion and their creative process. These statements are also starting points for the new V&R strategy and concept.
“We have always used fashion to communicate - it is our primary means of artistic expression.”

“FASHION IS RUNNING OUT OF TIME. WE ARE GOING TOO FAST. ORIGINALITY AND PATIENCE IS THE ONLY WAY TO GO FORWARD.”

“We’ve been running around for so long, we thought, let’s enjoy where we are. Our current state of mind is mindfulness.”

“FASHION’S EVER-INCREASING SPEED REMINDS US HOW IMPORTANT IS TO BATTLE FOR OUR CREATIVITY.”


“COUTURE IS LIKE A LABORATORY TO
BE CREATIVE AND TO EXPERIMENT
WITHOUT RESTRAINTS. IT’S TOTAL
FREEDOM. TO US, EXPLORING THIS
FREEDOM IS AS IMPORTANT AS THE
FINAL OUTCOME.” 6

“We don’t start the season with a photo or a mood board. We don’t work like that. We always start with language. For us, it’s much more important than any visuals.

For example with the art collection, we had just stopped ready to wear to return to couture and we thought ‘What is couture for us, what does it mean to us?’ and that’s when wearable art came to our mind, because that’s what we’ve always thought about couture: first and foremost, it’s a laboratory for experimentation. So the term ‘wearable art’ was on the table, then we thought about visualizing it. And then it was, ‘perhaps you can wear a painting,’ and this stuck in our mind and we started trying it out. That’s an example of how we start with an idea.” 7


Since V&R’s core lies in the reflection of the Zeitgeist, it’s important to be aware of the current trends within the fashion industry and society. This chapter will give an overview of some relevant trends such as illumination of fashion hierarchy, brands becoming legislative, time becoming today’s luxury and society starting to talk more openly about failure.
Notions of High and Low Fashion Becoming Blurred

Haute Couture is threatened by fast fashion. Fashion became very fluid. It became difficult to draw the line between high and low fashion segments due to the increasing number of collaborations and digital media.

Haute Couture is losing exclusivity, because it becomes more wearable and accessible.

**AS A RESULT, THE RELEVANCE AND AUTHENTICITY OF HAUTE COUTURE IS UNDER PRESSURE.**

“The world of fashion used to be very niche <…> the blurring of high street and Haute Couture have opened up to a popular audience in radically new ways.”

(Self, 2018)

Today everything becomes more accessible, including Haute Couture. Everyone is able to watch collections online and even stream them live. “Haute Couture fashion shows are no longer exclusive”. (Wallacce, 2017)

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Transparency - Legislative Brands

“In 2019, frustrated consumers will welcome legislative brands: corporate interests using their significant power to call for, promote, and even impose laws that drive constructive change and make the world a better place.”¹ (Luthy, 2018)

**LEGISLATIVE BRAND TRENDS GO BEYOND TRANSPARENCY AND ACTIVISM. THIS TREND IS ABOUT LOOKING FOR NEW AND MORE HONEST WAYS TO OPERATE THE COMPANY.**

The most progressive brands are looking to do more than just raise awareness. They are looking to influence – and even change – the rules of the game for the better.² (Luthy, 2018)

The Trends
Time is Luxury (slowness)

High ambitions and a fast pace of life make time a precious value. Having time, having the possibility to choose how to spend time or taking time for the things you really like becomes something special.

“TRUE LUXURY IS BEING ABLE TO OWN YOUR TIME”

- to be able to take a walk, sit on your porch, read the paper, not take the call, not be compelled by obligation.”(Vanderkam, 2017)
Acceptance of Failure

Today, society becomes more open when it comes to the topic of failure. Failure is more acceptable than it used to be.

HONESTLY TALKING ABOUT THINGS WHICH DIDN’T GO WELL IS MORE AND MORE APPRECIATED.

Famous people always talk about the difficult paths they had to go through until they reached success. This is nothing new, but we can notice that people are opening up about failing in every day life as well.

“When only years ago, failure was something you worked to avoid, today failure is almost a badge of honor, especially for entrepreneurs.”¹ (Spooner, 2017)

“Failure is in fashion. Fail fast is Silicon Valley’s motto, and failed startup founders readily share their lessons. Famous stars write of their early failures. A whole slew of TED talks celebrate the power of failure to get you to success. CEOs test prospective hires by asking how they failed. We’re told that secretly feeling like a failure, a.k.a. “imposter syndrome,” is a sign of greatness. Masters of the universe are out; vulnerability is in” (Lichfield, 2016)
CONCLUSION

Background research into the brand, social and market trends and V&R's statements on fashion and creative process formed conceptual starting points for a new V&R strategy and concept.
The Conclusion

V&R’s brand timeline analysis showed that creating conceptual and reflective messages expressed via Haute Couture is the core of the brand. However, in recent years the brand became saturated and these messages lost authenticity. The reason behind V&R losing touch with identity is also the fact that today Haute Couture, as a market, is losing its core and relevance. Therefore, V&R should strengthen its identity and positioning as ‘Fashion Artists’.

Joint creativity is one of the biggest assets of the V&R brand, therefore, the new V&R strategy should celebrate this. It would also strengthen V&R’s identity.

From the very beginning, V&R have been criticizing fashion for its fast pace, but they never took action upon this criticism. Today, when Haute Couture is under pressure and trends such as Legislative Brands are getting into the market, it’s a good time for V&R to change the way the company is operating in order to make these critical statements alive.

Furthermore, V&R are constantly emphasizing the importance of creative process and the time which is needed for experimenting & crafting an Haute Couture collection. This, together with the current trends within the society of openly talking about failure as well as time being today’s luxury, creates a starting point for the new strategy. From now on V&R should expose their creative process and emphasize the time which goes into the trade of the craft.

Conceptual starting points for the new V&R strategy and concept in keywords:

REFLECTIVE MESSAGES, FASHION ARTISTS, JOINT CREATIVITY, ACTIONS ON CRITICIZING FASHION, EXPOSURE OF CREATIVE PROCESS, EMPHASIS ON TIME AND CRAFT.