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Don't Dress to Impress: The Dutch Fashion Mentality

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Abstract

In this paper I will elaborate on the characteristics of a Dutch fashion identity, and the role of (fashion) media in its construction. National identities are defined by a selection of memories, mythologies, traditions and rituals and a matching set of symbols, which give a sense of national belonging and identification. On a daily basis, this national identity is sustained through fashion. It is reproduced and commodified not only in branding philosophies and iconographies, but also in the textual and visual rhetoric of fashion magazines.¹

Until the 1960s, Dutch fashion designers obeyed fashion as dictated by their Parisian colleagues. The Dutch designers translated these fashions into slightly different clothes, which were thought to be more appropriate for the Dutch woman. The designers were seen as intermediaries, following on the one hand the directions of Paris, and on the other the Dutch 'psychological and geographical climate'.² When Dutch fashion magazines from the first half of the twentieth century describe these alterations, the keywords are 'sober', 'functional' and 'rational'.

Identical characteristics are used by architects and industrial designers to describe the Dutch idea of good design. This is quite remarkable because, until the 1980s, designers and architects did not consider fashion design to be on par with their own trade and were, to say the least, reluctant about any comparisons.

Through a historical overview of these debates, I will show which characteristics of Dutch fashion have been selected by the fashion media and design elite. The debates will give insight into the construction of the national mentality towards fashion. I will substantiate the claim that the Dutch have a negative attitude towards ostentation, while they endorse characteristics such as soberness, functionality and rationality.

Key Words: Dutch fashion, national identity, national imaginary, fashion magazine.

1. Introduction

National identities are defined by a selection of memories, mythologies, traditions and rituals and a matching set of symbols, which give a sense of national belonging and identification. Following Alice Goodrum in

her book *The National Fabric: Fashion, Britishness, Globalization* (2005) this national identity is sustained through fashion, on a daily basis. It is reproduced and commodified not only in branding philosophies and iconographies, but also in the textual and visual rhetoric of fashion magazines.³ This fashion rhetoric is part of a discourse – a set of statements, texts and images which, although very different in nature, together define a particular domain⁴ – in this case the Dutch fashion domain. This Dutch fashion discourse does not only reproduce the Dutch fashion identity, but also plays an active role in the construction of this identity. In other words, fashion magazines do not only reproduce our ideas on Dutch fashion, but at the same time shape our ideas as well.

In this paper I will elaborate on the characteristics of a Dutch fashion identity, and the role of (fashion) media in its construction. I will focus on the narrative of a distinctive Dutch fashion mentality, characterised by a negative attitude towards ostentation, while having a positive attitude towards soberness, functionality and rationality. While I acknowledge that fashion is an international phenomenon, the thesis of my research is that there is a distinct Dutch fashion mentality, which influences the way in which the Dutch respond to the international fashions as set out by the fashion capitals; Paris, Milan, London and New York.

2. A Dutch fashion mentality: shared memories

Before I will zoom in at the second half of the twentieth century, I will sketch the image that the Dutch have of their forefathers and their attitude towards fashion; in other words, the memories that shape the national fashion identity.

In 1941, Christine Frowein published a book titled: *Four Centuries of Clothing in the Netherlands*.⁵ According to the author clothing is always – to certain extend– the reflection of cultural ideals from a period. The psychological mindset of the Dutch woman is the central theme for the author's description of the fashions in the Netherlands in the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The book does not meet any of the academic standards we apply nowadays and is a prime example of the hopelessly dated and hair-raising fashion history, which we as contemporary fashion theorists try to reform. However, it is a clear example of the narrative of a Dutch fashion mentality, because it maintains the clichés without reserve, and it is these clichés that form the backbone of national identity.

According to Frowein, the Dutch woman and her way of dealing with fashion does not change during the four centuries of clothing that she describes. An innate and never changing attitude towards fashion is the central theme in her book. But what are the characteristics of this attitude? When Frowein describes a 16th century woman, who is visiting an annual fair

and is fascinated by an exotic haberdashery stall, we see the first connection between national character and fashion:

There is a woman who hesitates long before she makes a choice. She is dressed in the current fashion, in subdued dark shades, which suit the Dutch woman so well, appropriated to her practical sense and domestic activities.⁶

We see a woman dressed in subdued dark shades, or in other words, sober colours. These colours are linked to the disposition of a Dutch woman; hard working, practical and making deliberate fashion choices. In the characterisation of 17th century women and men and their way of dressing, basically, the same traits are stressed:

The clothing of both men and the women tend towards a burgher simplicity. (...) The whole silhouette is tight with little movement. The line from jacket to pants is straight, without any imagination. A costume for a noble, somewhat austere character, without many requirements on skill and flamboyance. For the tough and often wilful ancestors from the 17th century, sons of a maritime nation, with a rigid posture, and for the dignified regents, this dress was very appropriate.⁷

The Burgher simplicity of these clothes, characterised by straight and pure shapes, are related to the nature of the wearer. These Dutchmen are said to be noble, tough, wilful and austere, without a need for flamboyance.

During the second half of 17th century the first Pandora doll is sent from France to the Netherlands, to inform them on the latest Paris fashion. The Dutch woman's reaction to this novelty was, according to Frowein:

Although, the Dutch woman's innate critical sense to everything new and unusual was retained, she still adapted many of the French fashions, but without losing or denying her own character, which always strove for simplicity and cleanliness. Furthermore, the Dutch climate doesn't lend itself for accepting everything e.g.: the low necklines, or the thin materials.⁸

Yet, again we see a woman making a well-thought-out choice about her clothing, and not slavishly following the latest whims of fashion - just like the woman of the sixteenth century. The Dutch woman of the second half of the seventeenth century also chooses according to her nature, which is

described as a striving for simplicity and cleanliness; the burgher simplicity we have already seen in the description of the first half of the century. In addition to cleanliness and simplicity, the Dutchwoman also chooses the practical over fashion, by not accepting the unpractical necklines and materials.

During the eighteenth century, the French court set the fashion in Europe, and, thus, also in the Netherlands. As a result, the chapters on the 18th century elaborate on the difference between the French woman and the Dutch woman. The French woman's disposition is thought to be more geared towards coquettishness, going out and looks, contrary to the preference of the Dutch woman for a burgher, domestically lifestyle. This main view is tied together in the following quote:

Since the Dutch woman was moderate, and very critical against to much ostentation, she kept her clothing from all excesses. In her serene spirit, family, marriage and religion kept her more balanced than the French woman, who looked for sensations and influences from the outside world, and wanted to express her changed state of mind through her dress, in a radical way. The Dutch woman has therefore, never followed the (...) fashions to such a great extent (...)⁹

The image of the Dutch woman in this quote is again modest, with a preference for domestic lifestyle and a negative attitude towards ostentation: she never follows the fashions religiously, but looks at it critically and makes a rational choice. The description of the 19th century adds to the above, that the Dutch are rather slow in reacting on the 'fads of fashion'.¹⁰

What becomes clear in these quotes throughout is that there exists a narrative on the way in which the Dutch - in this case especially the Dutch woman - deal with fashion: dressing practically, being moderate and having a preference for muted colours, straight lines and simplicity. This all is linked to a critical attitude towards everything new and unusual, which prevents her from slavishly following the fashions, but make choices appropriated to her own nature. In short, the Dutch have a negative attitude towards ostentation, while they endorse a positive attitude towards soberness, functionality and rationality.

3. The Netherlands vs. Paris: reliability durability and frugality vs. excessive and wasteful luxury.

As can be seen there exists a narrative on the Dutch and their way of dealing with fashion in the past, but what about their outlook on fashion in the 'modern' world? When we look at the Dutch fashion media from the

second half of the twentieth century, we see that they use more or less the same narrative to interpret the contemporary international fashions and elaborate on them for their audience.

During the war years in the Netherlands (1940 – 1945), as elsewhere, the fashion world stood basically still. Therefore, we will make a leap in time from the publication of Frowein in the early days of the war, to the first fashion show held by French designers in the Netherlands after the Second World War. In a review in the national newspaper *de Volkskrant*, of the 6th of May, 1947, we read:

The choice of the models was somewhat attuned to the taste of the Dutch public. Overall, they made a modest impression; there was not much extravagance to be found here, which characterized many of the Paris shows. (...) This fashion show did not fall short of expectations. Not only were there many fine things to be seen, but also a good lot of wearable pieces. The latter, is were many shows often fail.¹¹

In this quote we see that Dutch taste and attitude play a decisive role, not only in composing the fashion show, but also in the assessment of the show's quality. The Dutch taste is described as modest and the show is great because it lives up to the expectations of the Dutch; not extravagant but functional and wearable clothes. So, not only the "historical" Dutchwoman, but also the fashion mentality of the woman of twentieth century, fits into the narrative of a Dutch fashion mentality.

In the above we have read that, although the Dutch adapted much from the French fashions, their critical sense towards everything new and unusual was retained, which kept them from losing or denying their own character. This process of adaptation to the Paris fashion dictate, within the boundaries of a Dutch mentality is one of the key themes in the fashion magazines of the fifties and sixties. The Paris fashions are thought to be too eccentric, too daring and too expensive for Dutch standards. And Dutch women are urged to take into account their own personality and the Dutch 'psychological and geographical climate'.¹² Reliability, durability and frugality are advocated as virtues that have to be taken into account in their choice for wardrobe. A large part of Paris fashion is seen as excessive luxury and wasteful.¹³ *Margriet* puts it as: 'As always, between those hundreds and hundreds of new designs there were models that are not wearable for a mere mortal, or of an exceptionally wasteful, or ugly luxury.' (1960)¹⁴

The Dutch fashion designers are seen as professional intermediaries in this process of adaptation to what *Elegance* refers to as 'the famous Dutch concepts'. The magazine does not elaborate on these concepts, which lets us

assume that this is not necessary, and that they are thought to be self-explanatory. The readers of the magazine are expected to be familiar with the narrative of a Dutch fashion mentality:

It is the Dutch couturiers and fashion houses, who help you with this. They form a sort of bridge between you and „La Grande Mode”. On the one hand, they keep their eyes on the requirements and findings of the foreign fashion emperors and, on the other, they take into account the famous Dutch concepts. From these two elements they distil, especially for us, Dutch women, a brew that is fashionable, flattering and wearable.¹⁵ (1952)

During the fifties and early sixties the Dutch fashion magazines are much like manuals, with strict guidelines on how to wear your clothes, in keeping with the strong fashion dictate of Paris. Even if following the fashion is not possible or desired, within the Dutch mindset, Paris is still greatly admired. They still think that the clothing by French designers is superior to the clothing designed by the Dutch themselves. The Dutch are convinced that ‘Paris is simply the birthplace of every new fashion’.¹⁶ This somewhat contradictive attitude towards fashion becomes clear in the following quote: ‘In our country, this coat would be impractical, but this does not mean that we should not have admiration for the way sleeves and collar are incorporated and constructed.’¹⁷ In the same review we read: ‘This in our eyes impractical coat, is a typical illustration of the preference of Parisian designers to forget the sleeve this season.’¹⁸ The article praises the clothing, but finds the pieces unsuitable for the Dutch woman because they would be impractical for use in the Dutch climate. Practicality is one of the central themes in the discussions on fashion:

Too bad for Yves Saint-Laurent, who launched the fashion of ‘the bulb with a bare stem’ and it is a pity for our bulb growers, because we will simply not wear them, these short skirts, which flare at the knee! But we would like to clear a space for fashionable but wearable novelties, like these lovely ensembles in modern colours.¹⁹ (1960)

Although no comment is made on the Dutch woman explicitly, she is the addressed reader of the magazine and therefore the woman that is referred to with the ‘we’. The combination with the reference to the ‘national hero’ of the bulb grower and the stress on wearable clothes lets us assume that this critical attitude towards adapting fashion is seen as typically Dutch.

Another recurrent argument that is used to plead for the adaptation to the new fashions in a Dutch way, - next to wearability and the Dutch climate, is the body shape of the Dutch woman. This is often described as a comparison between the elegant Paris mannequins, and the Dutch woman, e.g.:

With these models self-criticism is not an unnecessary luxury; as elegant as a model may look like on a slender mannequin, for the Dutch woman in general, it has a big disadvantage. The fact of the matter is, that our bosoms are too small (or too large) and our hips are often too wide to wear such a design perfectly.²⁰ (1960)

4. **Traditional magazines guide their confused readers**

The youth revolution of the sixties did not only create a distinct fashion for the young, but provoked a change in the fashion system as a whole. The dictate of the Parisian couturiers loses its strength. And, from now on it is the streets where fashion originates. As *Avenue* magazine describes it;

You are the one that creates fashion in the seventies.' (...) They still exist, the couturiers in Paris, London, Rome and Amsterdam. But their role has changed. They don't dictate anymore, they give shape to our needs. On every field mankind searches for new modes of expression, for more individual freedom, (...). Of course, this is expressed in clothing, commandments, rules and regulations are just not done anymore.²¹ (1970)

While the fashion magazines of the fifties and early sixties were much like manuals, with strict guidelines to be followed, the magazines slowly started to change the tone of their rhetoric. The critical attitude of the Dutch woman towards the international fashion can still be found on the pages of the established fashion magazines like *Elegance* and *Margriet*. They just use a more moderate tone. One of the linguistic techniques used is the recurrent question: 'Do you see you yourself wearing this?'²², which is posed as a rhetorical question, because, of course, these fashions are not appropriate for the Dutch woman, which they represent. Another recurrent technique to show their disapproval, without using a too authoritarian or harsh tone is describing them as 'daft pranks'. These wild fashions are said to be only accepted with open arms by the young generation – and thus suitable for them, as part of a youthful lapse.²³

Fashion magazines like *Margriet* and *Elegance* assure their readers that it is not compulsory for them to dress in such an excessive way as is presented on the catwalks in Paris. They paint an image of women who are utterly confused by the many different and conflicting views of the couturiers and the catwalk gimmicks. The magazines guide them in their adaptation of the fashions in a more moderate version:

It does not have to be *as* extreme, it does not have to be *as* loose-fitting and it does not have to be *as* wide! Be forewarned. The extreme and extravagant as shown by Paris, is to a large extent based on the need to receive as much free publicity as possible.²⁴ (1975)

The strict, disapproving tone of the early sixties and the ridicule prevailing during the second half of the decade, are slowly being replaced by acceptance of the idea short-lived fashion fads. The critical attitude, however, is maintained because a fashion whim is only to be chosen in a sensible way:

Quickly evaporating fashion whims, irrelevant variations and excesses on the gradual development of fashion, already get enough attention. Too much attention even. For those that want to follow it - and it could be nice for a change, as long as it is without the annoying 'this is fashion and therefore it must be worn' attitude - it is wise to choose from the cheaper collections. Those who compose their wardrobe in a sensible way, should especially look at the top quality collections.²⁵ (1975)

5. Rebellion against the traditional media: A new Avenue?

While the established fashion magazines are slowly allowing their readers to pick up a fashion fad here and there - within the boundaries of Dutch common sense -, in 1965 a new magazine titled *Avenue* is launched. The introduction of the first number states:

Before you lays the first issue of a new type of magazine for the new type of woman. Avenue is a compliment to your good taste, a confirmation of your modern style, a clear "no" to the boring patterns of living and thinking of the past.²⁶

It is clear that *Avenue* wants to be different than its predecessors. Its format was aimed at a new generation, not based on the women's realm of the household, but on the individual pursuit of happiness. Next to the usual

themes like fashion and interior, it also addresses contemporary social issues and taboos like sexuality, medical or psychological disorders and the changing social and religious conventions. Not only was the content new and different, the magazine was also well designed, with central role for photography, and printed on high quality paper. A luxurious novelty, something completely new for the Dutch mediascape.²⁷

Does *Avenue* leave behind the Dutch notions of soberness, modesty and functionality? The descriptions that accompany the fashion spreads seem to rebel against the stiff and strict society of the fifties and stress the 'good life'. The break with the past is not as clear as it is made out to be. Because, at the same time, we find during the late sixties not only the DIY knitting and sewing patterns, as we were accustomed to, but also a rhetoric on the Dutch climate:

In this land of wind and rain vinyl clothing is of course an ideal garb. But think not only of the usefulness... This is also fashion for your winter sports holiday, for parading luxuriously and fashionably in Kitzbühel or Gstaad.²⁸
(1965)

This rhetoric of the Dutch climate is, however, combined with the image of luxury as something as common practice, or at least, as something to strive for. In this quote luxury and extravagance is not disapproved nor regarded as daft and silly, as it was in the established magazines.

Avenue thinks of its readers as self-assured and critical individuals. Women are not understood as confused by the different fashions and with a need to be guided by the magazines. The *Avenue* reader already has good taste, and just has to be informed on what is new, before making their choice. This is exactly what the magazine does; *Avenue* gives relatively factual reports on what was to be seen on the international catwalks, instead of and explicit guidance on how the readers should or should not adapt. The fashion coverage is based around ephemeral themes, and is more about setting an atmosphere, than about showing and judging clothes. The fashion pages are accompanied by poetical texts, which enhance these atmospheres.

The lack of guidelines and the poetical tone of the fashion rhetoric in *Avenue* magazine leads to fewer references to a Dutch fashion mentality in their fashion reports. This, however, does not mean that the narrative seizes to exist. During the 1980's and 1990's *Avenue* runs a regular feature called 'Modezaken', which in Dutch can refer to fashion stores, or to matters of fashion. This column is an advertorial in which the leading Dutch fashion stores are discussed. Not only the collection and store interior is discussed, there are also often references towards the Dutch fashion scene and customers. It is here that we find the Dutch fashion narrative. It is, however,

used within the narrative of the magazine itself, which sets its readers against 'the average Dutchman'. This archetype is described as: '(...) the average Dutchman, who only starts to follow a fashion fad, when everybody is already wearing it (...).'²⁹ This type of customer is not the customer of the shops described, nor the reader of *Avenue*. This average Dutch person is conservative in their fashion choices and also frugal. We read that: 'the average Dutchman is not willing to spend money on things you do not see. And since shoes remain for the greater part under the table, they are of secondary importance.'³⁰ Or : 'The ladies handbag is generally the piece to balance the Dutch budget. (...) I [the journalist] doubt – sparingly Dutch - between a 'pencilbag' and 'smackingbag' ... or I will just get both ...?'³¹. At the same time, however, the average Dutchman, seems to have already come a long way:

'As far as suits are concerned, Hilton is pretty much the top for us. Brands like Canali, Brioni or Kiton do not sell in the Netherlands', said Prakken. 'The Dutch find these too expensive. Yet, fashionwise much has changed, and in a very fast pace, in the Netherlands. Fifteen years ago I worked in Germany. When I visited the fair in Florence, there was maybe one Dutchman who would buy a hand full of stuff. And an Italian quietly asked: 'Do there actually live people in the Netherlands ...'³² (1990)

The image that *Avenue* sketches of the Dutch is one of the 'average Dutchman', that still follows the virtues of reliability, durability and frugality, as they were, and in lesser extent still are, advocated by the established magazines. This is, however, not a principle that *Avenue* would advocate for, this magazine rages against these virtues, they did this in the sixties, but we still see it in the nineties. They see themselves more as cosmopolitans, with an international outlook on fashion and life itself.

6. Emancipation: the Netherlands as a fashion country

What is striking is from the second half of the eighties onwards, Dutch fashion designs are steadily more and more depicted in the fashion shoots. This mirrors a change in the way the Dutch regard fashion from their country. From the sixties onwards we see a gradual emancipation of Dutch fashion, something that really picks up at the end of the eighties and takes a big leap forward during the nineties. A new idea comes into existence that first of all Dutch fashion can compete at an international level, but also that there is something inherently different and unique to Dutch fashion. In this idea of a national fashion style the same traits of modesty, soberness and

functionality, that characterise the narrative of a Dutch fashion mentality, play a determining role.

We have already seen that Dutch fashion designers are seen as intermediaries, which help the Dutch to adapt to the Parisian fashions while maintaining their own identity. Although they design their own collections, their inspiration comes from Paris and the public regards the clothing by French designers as superior to the clothing designed by the Dutch themselves. The Dutch are convinced that 'Paris is simply the birthplace of every new fashion'.³³ And the same goes for a lot of other fashion products. In *Margriet* no. 23 of 1960 (May), the following is stated:

We Dutch have unfortunately still the strange inclination to think of everything coming from abroad as better, nicer or more elegant. For a gown made in Amsterdam, but with a label in French we are readily willing to pay much more. Shoes with the magic word Italia, „fit" better, even though they were made in Brabant. Woolen fabrics from Tilburg, if they are marketed as English, sell more quickly, and countless other examples could be named.³⁴

What we see here is that there are certain countries, which have established an aura of superiority, the French for their fashion designs, the Italian for their shoes, and the English for their knitwear. At the same time, this article disapproves of this preference for foreign products. Its main theme is a project to advertise the qualities of the Dutch cotton industry, through a collection by a renowned Dutch couturier Dick Holthaus. The fabrics are said to be of an 'international fashion level' and – when processed in a modest way – to give your wardrobe 'unique chic-ness'. Not only is the 'Dutch' value of modesty advised, but an emancipation of the Dutch fashion- and textile industry is also advocated.

In the sixties and seventies it is the traditional couturiers following the Paris trends at large whose work is said to be on an international level. Holthaus is praised for his export to the U.S., where he designs collections for Lord and Taylor and Bonwitt Teller, 'signalling international recognition'.³⁵ Although the couturiers themselves - and sometimes the fashion magazines- try to convince the public that their clothing is not inferior any longer to that of Paris, in reality, the public still prefers couture from abroad. Even ten years later *Elegance* informs us:

Dutch couturiers, visiting Paris to jumpstart their inspiration is a normal state of affairs. It is highly remarkable, however, for Parisian designers to come to the

Netherlands in order to see design with which a Dutch colleague succeeds to attract international attention.³⁶

During the second half of the eighties more or less the same traditional couturier's collections are being reviewed. Especially *Elegance* magazine promotes them, which in addition to reviews also organises special couture shows for its readers. The magazine informs its readers that the Dutch couturiers are conquering the hearts of Dutch women and that they represent the source of inspiration of a regenerated fashion country.³⁷

At the same time, however, there is also a new, young generation of Dutch fashion designers, a lot of which trained at Dutch art schools. And it is this new generation, who stand at the cradle of the new Dutch fashion recognition. *Elegance* refers to this new generation as 'talents from our own soil with international air'.³⁸ *Avenue* writes in an article on this new generation in 1984:

The next generation of designers makes the Netherlands more and more into a fashion country. Their creativity, coupled with realism, eliminates the traditional, burgher mentality that used to nip every fashion development in the bud. The very absence of a strong fashion tradition makes the climate extremely favourable to innovation. The higher level of individualism of ever more people, who prefer to distinguish themselves from the mass, is an extra incentive for these fashion makers.³⁹

Avenue's regular feature 'Modezaken' reflects this attention to Dutch fashion, as we read about more and more stores that specialise in Dutch Fashion, and especially the avant-garde style of Dutch fashion of the new generation. The 'average Dutch customer', however, seems to be still a bit reluctant:

However, the collection is daring: creative, unorthodox designs of a quality that we, with Dutch understatement, refer to as 'non-Dutch'. "The average Dutchman will not be interested unless you casually mention that illustrious Imps does so well in Japan, or Georgette Koning of Pearls Before Swans is going to design bags for Mugler," says Tonny. (...) The Dutch designs often stand midway between French and English fashion: a classic forms the base, to which a generous twist is added.⁴⁰

From the early nineties onwards the fashion magazines start to use and discuss the Dutch national identity, a reflection a national discussion on what it means to be Dutch in a globalised world.

With hindsight it seems remarkable that in the early nineties, Dutch fashion is not explicitly seen as a medium that expresses this Dutch identity. In 1990 *Elegance* dedicated its July/August issue to the Netherlands. The travel section discusses travelling in the Netherlands, the literary section invited fourteen well-known authors to write on the Netherlands and there is an essay on the characteristics and peculiarities of the Dutch. Or, what makes the Dutch different from the rest of the world population? The fashion section consists of two fashion shoots, one being called 'the pride of Holland' in which the clothing is depicted against a background of typical Dutch landscapes, among which are the bulb fields, bridges, the beach and a girl on a bike in front of a windmill. The second shoot is called 'Going Dutch', which in Dutch is a word play on the English saying, which the magazine in this case translates into 'the Dutch way of doing things'. Here we see a young couple sitting in a vintage convertible decorated with a floral garland, on their way to visit a Dutch sea resort. Here we see them at the beach, in a 'bruin café', which is a typical Dutch bar, and we see the girl sitting on two gigantic wooden shoes, which is a standard tourist attraction. At first sight you would think it does not get any more Dutch. When we look at the captions, however, we see that the clothing that is selected is only partially by Dutch designers.⁴¹ The 'Dutchness' of these articles are, in other words, based on the icons of the Dutch national identity; tulips, wooden shoes, windmills, bikes etc., and not on the fashion itself. Also, the essays in this edition do not refer to fashion, nor to Dutch industrial design.

Avenue also uses the Dutch national imaginary for several of its fashion shoots. In October 1990 there is a feature called 'Fietsbelles', which is a word play on the French 'bike beauties' as well as the Dutch 'bicycle bells'. Here we see women cycling around the canals of Amsterdam dressed in designer clothes, by international and national brands. One of the spreads captions is titled 'Dutch ride', and shows a girl in an evening gown at the back of a bike which is driven by a boy in a men's suit.⁴²

In 1991, *Avenue*, features a fashion shoot inspired by the traditional wear of the province of Zeeland. The introduction reads:

Have you ever seen a contemporary variation on a Dutch klepbroek [flaptrousers] or kraplap [neck-shawl]? Designers prefer to draw their inspiration from Indian sari's, Chinese Mao jackets and Turkish zouave trousers. Or is the traditional Dutch costume just not suitable as a fashion muse? *Avenue's* fashion director Frans Ankoné thinks it is. With fashion from the new international winter

collections he composed outfits based on the traditional clothing from Zeeland and crowned it with hats that were also inspired by this costume. Maarten Schets immortalized the result in a series of seascapes.⁴³

The images are inspired by traditional Dutch seascapes where the fishermen's wives are waiting at the beach or on the docks for their men to return home, characterised by a worried expression on their faces, the wind that blows through their hair and fluttering skirts and shawls. The international fashions by among others, Romeo Gigli, Yves Saint Laurent and Chlo  , are adapted to this Dutch visual tradition, in a way that they are reminiscent of the Dutch clothing of the seventeenth century – everything is in black -; it makes them almost authentically Dutch.

The same year Avenue also dedicated the styling of one of its fashion shoots to the Dutch artist Rembrandt; 'In the light of Rembrandt'. The introduction reads:

Outside, in front of the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum, see you jogging suits, faded jeans and worn out sneakers. But inside, the walls of this building, where the spectacular Rembrandt exhibition will open soon, you behold fine lace, glowing velvet and glittering brocade. And these are precisely the materials of which the new fashion is made. An epic report, after the fashion of Rembrandt's clair-obscur.⁴⁴

The clothing is staged in the Rijksmuseum; in front of the Night Watch, in the library and in the Nieuwe Kerk (New Church), in Amsterdam. The captions do not only inform us about the clothes, but also tell us about the life of Rembrandt.

These fashion shoots based around Dutch icons fit well in the overall trend, using icons as a theme for depicting the new fashions. For example, reports with themes as Bonnie and Clyde and Frida Kahlo. Where in the past international themes and surroundings like Russia and India were favoured, from the nineties onwards Dutch heritage becomes a fashionable theme.

7. A Dutch fashion narrative for the 21st century

As we have seen the narrative of a Dutch fashion mentality, stressing the readers to choose for reliability, durability and frugality in their clothing, was – in this format - abandoned, as the fashion magazines stopped instructing their readers how to dress. Instead, it became replaced by a narrative on 'the typical Dutchman and at the same time the Dutch national

iconography starts to be a source of inspiration for styling the national and international fashion. Does that mean that soberness, functionality and rationality do not play a role in the fashion rhetoric of Dutch fashion magazines anymore? Quite to the contrary, as illustrated realism was the main characteristic used by *Avenue* to describe the new generations of Dutch fashion designers in their article of 1984.

Since the second half of the nineties, fashion magazines as well as more serious publications have tried to determine the unique characteristic of Dutch fashion. The main reason for this phenomenon was the breakthrough Dutch fashion on the international fashion stage.

In 1994 the Dutch brand Orson & Bodil, debuted on the Paris ready-to-wear catwalks. At the same time a group of seven Dutch fashion designers⁴⁵, working under the name 'Le Cri Néerlandais'⁴⁶, presented themselves in the Institute Néerlandais. The international press attended the shows and the feedback was extremely positive. I-D magazine portrayed 'Le Cri Néerlandais' as the successors of the Antwerp six, and the ones to determine the future of fashion.⁴⁷

What was so new about this fashion? Instead of quoting and deconstructing retro fashion styles, those designers started with the material itself; the fabrics, the construction, the stitching. In other words, they replace the post modern way of dealing with fashion, with a modernistic ideal. Through this they go further than the anecdotic and the thematic.⁴⁸ The shapes were described as extremely sober, minimal and modest. The New York Times review states:

The Dutch answer to Belgian deconstruction is something called "New Modernism", a term that suits the clean lines of Orson & Bodil well. Best in the show was Saskia van Drimmelen, who showed white jackets and trousers folded in sharp creases. Collars were turned down stiffly, and there were no buttons. It was all just straight lines and the purest shapes.⁴⁹

In retrospect, we see that the Dutch Modernists were aligned to a general movement towards a more conceptual and introspective fashion, as part of a reaction to the over-the-top designs of the eighties.

Nevertheless, it is also seen as something peculiar to the Dutch national identity. Ever since the nineties the Dutch fashion identity has been the topic of many debates in the fashion magazines and other media. The central idea in this phenomenon is that Dutch fashion is unique, a distinctive fashion that is characteristic for the Dutch nation. The central themes in the debates around this idea are: if there is something like a distinctive Dutch fashion, how did it originate, and what are its characteristics?

9. Conclusion

In this paper I have elaborated on a distinctive Dutch fashion mentality, as reproduced and constructed throughout the Dutch fashion media. This mentality is characterised by a negative attitude towards ostentation, while endorsing the characteristics of soberness, functionality and rationality. We have also seen that the themes of Dutch heritage, a Dutch imaginary and a Dutch national identity have become more and more important in the rhetoric of the Dutch fashion magazines.

When we look back to the point where we started this exploration of a Dutch fashion mentality – the book *Four Centuries of Clothing in the Netherlands* - it becomes clear why such a hair raising piece of fashion theory hit the shelves again in 2009. In the same period as this book was reissued two Dutch fashion magazines dedicated a special issue to Dutch fashion and its characteristics. Moreover, there was a major fashion exhibition on traditional Dutch costume as a source of inspiration for contemporary Dutch fashion design.⁵⁰ The choice of the publishers to reissue a book that has become seriously outdated by the recent developments in the fashion theory field is therefore not as odd as it might appear at first sight. Indeed, it attests to the fact that Dutch fashion is a hot topic - in the Netherlands at least.

Notes

¹ Alice Goodrum, *The National Fabric : Fashion, Britishness, Globalization*, Berg, Oxford, 2005, p. 62.

² Anonymous, 'Rondom de Nederlandse shows...'. *Elegance*, Vol. 9, No. 10, October 1952.

³ Goodrum, 2005, p. 62.

⁴ C. Delhaye, *Door consumptie tot individu: Modebladen in Nederland 1880 – 1914*, Aksant, Amsterdam, 2008, p. 12.

⁵ C. Frowein, *Vier eeuwen kleding in Nederland*, Spectrum, Utrecht, 2009 [1941].

⁶ Frowein, 1941, p. 12 . Original quote:

Er is een vrouw, die lang aarzelt voordat zij kiest. Zij is gekleed naar de toonaangevende mode, in stemmige donkere tinten, die zo passend is voor de Nederlandse vrouw, en berekend op haar praktische zin en huiselijke bezigheden.

⁷ Frowein, 1941, p. 18. Original quote:

De kleding van de mannen zowel als van de vrouwen neigt naar een burgerlijke eenvoud. (...) Het gehele silhouet is streng zonder veel beweging. De lijn van jas naar broek is recht, zonder enige fantasie. Een dracht voor een eerwaardige, wat stijve figuur, die niet teveel eisen stelt aan behendigheid en

zwier. Voor de stoere dikwijls wilskrachtige voorvaderen uit de 17de eeuw, zonen van een zeevaardersvolk, met stramme houding, en voor de waardige regenten, was deze dracht uiterst geschikt.

⁸ Frowein, 1941, p. 25. Original quote:

Hoewel de Nederlandse vrouw haar aangeboren kritisch gevoel tegen alles wat nieuwe en ongewoon was, behield, nam zij toch veel van de Franse mode over, zonder daarbij echter haar eigen karakter, dat steeds naar eenvoud en properheid streefde, geheel te verloochenen. Bovendien leende het Nederlandse klimaat er zich niet toe om alles te aanvaarden b.v.: de lage décolleté's, of te dunne stoffen.

⁹ Frowein, 1941, p. 54. Original quote:

Daar de Nederlandse vrouw gematigder was, en zeer kritisch tegenover te veel overdaad stond, bleef zij ook in haar kleding van excessen ontdaan. In haar rustige geest hielden huisouden, huwelijk en godsdienst haar meer in evenwicht, dan de Française, die sterkere prikkels en invloeden van buitenaf zocht, en radicaal haar veranderde innerlijke gesteldheid en geesteshouding in een passend kleed tot uitdrukking wilde laten komen. De Nederlandse vrouw heeft daarom nooit in zo sterke mate aan de (...) modes meegedaan (...).

¹⁰ Frowein, 1941, p 88

¹¹ Henriette, 'Franse lente in Hollandse sneeuw'. *de Volkskrant*, March 6, 1947. Original quote:

Bij de keuze van de modellen was enigzins rekening gehouden met de smaak van het Hollandse publiek. Over het algemeen maakte zij een eenvoudige indruk; van het buitensporige, dat menige Parijse shows kenmerkte, viel hier niet veel te bespeuren. (...) Deze modeshow heeft de verwachtingen niet teleurgesteld. Zij gaf niet alleen veel moois vooral ook veel draagbaars te zien. Aan dit laatste hapert het op vele shows nog wel eens.

¹² Anonymous, 'Rondom de Nederlandse shows...'. *Elegance*, Vol. 9, No. 10, October 1952.

¹³ J. Teunissen, 'Margriet en Avenue als modemakers.' in P. Terreehorst, *Modus: over mensen, mode en het leven*, De Balie, Amsterdam, 1990, p. 90.

¹⁴ Madeleine, 'Een lijn vol levenslust: Parijs 1960'. *Margriet*, Vol. 44, No. 36 (1960), pp. 4-9. Original quote:

Zoals altijd waren er ook dit keer tussen die honderden en nog eens honderden nieuwe ontwerpen modellen die voor een gewone sterveling niet te dragen zijn, of van een uitzonderlijke, verkwistende of lelijke luxe.

¹⁵ Anonymous, 'Rondom de Nederlandse shows...'. *Elegance*, Vol. 9, No. 10, October 1952. Original quote:

Het zijn de Nederlandse couturiers en modehuizen die u daarbij helpen. Ze vormen een soort brug tussen u en „La Grande Mode”. Enerzijds houden zij het oog gericht op de voorschriften en de vondsten van buitenlandse grootheden en anderzijds houden zij rekening met de fameuze Hollandse begrippen. Uit die twee elementen destilleren zij, speciaal voor ons, Nederlandse vrouwen, een brouwsel dat modieus, flatteus en draagbaar is.

¹⁶ Anonymous, 'Modieuze tips: goede smaak en persoonlijke stijl in Nederlandse confectie'. *Elegance*, Vol. 11, No. 4, April 1954.

¹⁷ Madeleine, 'Let eens op hals en mouw: Parijs lente-zomer 1960'. *Margriet* Vol. 44, No. 17 (1960), pp. 10-11. Original quote:

In ons land zou deze mantel onpraktisch zijn, maar het neemt niet weg dat we bewondering moeten hebben voor de wijze waarop hier mouwen en kraag zijn verwerkt en aangebracht.

¹⁸ Madeleine, 'Let eens op hals en mouw: Parijs lente-zomer 1960'. *Margriet*, Vol. 44, No. 36 (1960), pp. 10-11. Original quote:

Deze in onze ogen wat onpraktische mantel, is toch een typerende illustratie van de voorkeur der Parijse ontwerpers om dit seizoen de mouw te vergeten'

¹⁹ Madeleine, 'Volg de mode met Margriet'. *Margriet*, Vol. 44, No. 36 (1960), pp. 90-91. Original quote:

Jammer voor Yves Saint-Laurent die de mode van de „bloembol met 't kale steeltje" lanceerde en jammer voor onze bollenkwekers, want we trekken ze niet aan, de korte uitwaaiierende rokjes op kniehoogte! Maar we ruimen graag een plaats in voor de modieuze draagbare nieuwtjes, zoals deze mooie ensembles in moderne kleuren.'

²⁰ Madeleine, 'Zoek de zon en de zee op: wat voor badpak gaat u kopen?'. *Margriet*, Vol. 44, No. 21 (1960), pp. 10-11

Ook bij deze modellen is zelfkritiek geen overbodige luxe, want hoe fraai zo'n model ook lijkt op een ranke mannequin, voor de Nederlandse vrouw in het algemeen, heeft het een groot nadeel, Wij hebben namelijk te weinig (of te veel) buste en vaak ook te brede heupen om een dergelijk model perfect te kunnen dragen.

²¹ Anonymous, 'U maakt mode.'. *Avenue*, Vol. 6, No. 9, September 1970, pp. 71-78. Original quote:

U bent degene die de mode maakt in de jaren '70. (...) Zij zijn er nog steeds, de ontwerpers in Parijs, Londen, Rome en Amsterdam. Maar hun betekenis is veranderd. Zij dicteren niet meer, maar geven vorm aan onze behoeften. Op elk gebied zoekt de mens naar nieuwe uitdrukkingvormen, naar grotere individuele vrijheid, (...) Vanzelfsprekend uit zich dat in kleding; geboden, wetten en voorschriften zijn uit den boze.

²² Anonymous, 'Een brandende vraag: ziet u zichzelf al zo lopen?'. *Elegance*, Vol. 27, No. 6 (1970), p. 28.

²³ Madeleine, 'Het is een dolle dwaze mode!'. *Margriet*, Vol. 49, No. 26 (1965), pp. 29-31.

Original quote: 'dolle capriolen'.

²⁴ Anonymous, 'Paris: été mille neuf cent soixante quinze.'. *Elegance*, Vol. 32, No. 5, May 1975, pp. 52-53. Original quote:

Het hóeft niet zo extreem, het hóeft niet zo ruim en het hóeft niet zo wijd!, laat het u dat gezegd zijn. U moet maar bedenken dat het extreme en extravagante van wat Parijs toont, grotendeels berust op de behoefte om zo veel mogelijk-gratis-publiciteit te krijgen ofwel free publicity.

²⁵ Anonymous, 'Elegance' keuze uit de behaaglijke wintermode'. *Elegance*, Vol. 32, No. 9, September 1975, p. 46. Original quote:

Snelvervliegende mode-grillen, niet-ter-zake-doende variaties òp en uitwassen vàn de geleidelijke ontwikkeling der kledingmode, krijgen reeds voldoende aandacht. Teveel zelfs. Wie er aan mee wil doen – en dat kan voor de verandering best wel eens aardig zijn, zolang het gebeurt zonder de dra vervelende nadrukkelijkheid van 'dit is mode en dit moet dus gedragen worden' – doet er verstandig aan te kiezen uit goedkopere collecties. Wie verstandig verder-bouwt aan de eigen garderobe, zoeke het vooral in de kwaliteitstop.

²⁶ Anonymous, Introduction, Avenue Vol. 1, No. 1, November 1965, p. 2.

Wat u nu in handen hebt, is het eerste nummer van een nieuw type blad voor het nieuwe type vrouw. Avenue is een compliment aan uw geode smaak, een bevestiging van uw moderne stijl, een duidelijk "neen" op het saaie leef- en denkpatroon van vroeger.

²⁷ M. Brands, *Avenue van A tot Zero*, Veenman, Rotterdam, 2006

²⁸ Anonymous, 'Lak is mode'. *Avenue*, Vol. 1, No. 2, December 1965, pp. 28-29. Original quote:

In dit land van wind en regen is lakkleding natuurlijk een ideale dracht. Maar denk niet alleen aan het nut...Dit is ook de mode voor de wintersport, voor het luxueus en modieus flaneren in Kitzbühel of Gstaad.

²⁹ Juliette Berkhout, 'Wij zoeken het hogerop'. *Avenue*, Vol. 25, No. 11, November 1990, p. 54. Original quote:

(...) dat is de doorsnee Nederlanse man, die zich pas aan een modegril onderwerpt als iedereen eraan meedoet (...)

³⁰ Juliette Berkhout, 'Savante'. *Avenue*, Vol. 25, No. 4, April 1990, p. 84. Original quote:

De gemiddelde Nederlander heeft geen geld over voor dingen die je niet ziet. En aangezien schoenen toch veelal onder tafel blijven, komen die op de laatste plaats.

³¹ Juliette Berkhout, 'Hester van Eeghen'. *Avenue*, Vol. 25, No. 3, March 1990, p. 46. Original quote:

Damestas: meestal het sluitstuk van een Hollandse begroting. (...) En ik twijfel nog, zuinig Hollands, tussen de potloodtas en het meptasje...of zal ik ze gewoon allebei...?

³² Juliette Berkhout, 'Di Dato'. *Avenue*, Vol. 25, No. 10, October 1990, p. 181. Original quote:

„Hilton is zo'n beetje de top voor ons op pakkengebied. Merken als Canali, Brioni of Keaton krijg je in Nederland niet verkocht,” zegt Prakken. „Die vinden de Hollanders echt te duur. Toch is er in Nederland op modegebied veel en snel veranderd. Vijftien jaar geleden werkte ik in Duitsland. Als ik in Florence de beurs bezocht, liep er misschien een Nederlander rond die een handje vol spullen inkocht. Werd mij door zo'n Italiaan zachtjes gevraagd: „Wonen er eigenlijk wel mensen in Nederland...”

³³ Anonymous, 'Modieuse tips: goede smaak en persoonlijke stijl in Nederlandse confectie'. *Elegance*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (April, 1954).

³⁴ Madeleine, 'Mode met een Nederlandse naam'. *Margriet*, Vol. 44, No. 23 (1960). Original quote:

Wij Nederlanders hebben helaas nog steeds de vreemde neiging alles wat uit het buitenland komt beter, mooier of fijner te vinden. Voor een Amsterdamse japon met een in het Frans gesteld etiketje betalen wij grif vele guldens meer. Schoenen, met het toverwoord Italia, „zitten” beter, ook al werden ze in Brabant gemaakt. Wollen stoffen uit Tilburg, als Engelse aangeprijsd, verkopen vlotter en zo zouden er nog talloze voorbeelden te noemen zijn.

³⁵ Anonymous, 'Couture in Nederland'. *Avenue*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Christmas Special 1965, p. 25. Original quote:

„Lord and Taylor” en „Bonwitt Teller” zijn klinkende namen die internationale erkenning beduiden voor een Nederlandse couturier.

³⁶ Piet Kort, 'Internationale waardering voor Nederlandse bont-collectie'. *Elegance*, Vol. 32, No. 12, December 1975, p. 10. Original quote:

Dat Nederlandse couturiers naar Parijs gaan om er hun inspiratie op gang te brengen of aan te vullen is een normale gang van zaken; dat Parijse ontwerpers naar Nederland komen om er te zien met welke ontwerpen een Nederlandse collega erin slaagt de internationale aandacht te trekken is niets minder dan hoogst opmerkelijk.

³⁷ Jos Stroker, 'Nederland (weer) modeland'. *Elegance*, Vol. 42, No. 9, September 1985, pp. 94-95.

With a regenerated fashion country, the magazine refers to the successful ready-to-wear industry of the fifties and sixties, during the seventies, as a result of the introduction of minimum wages and the

competition of low-wage countries, a lot of workshops had to close down. It does not refer toward the Netherlands as a trendsetter or visionary of fashion.

³⁸ Anonymous, 'Jong met allure: creaties van Nederlandse mode-ontwerpers'. *Elegance*, Vol. 42, No. 7, July 1985, p. 61.

³⁹ Anonymous, 'Nederland in de mode'. *Avenue*, Vol. 19, No. 5, May 1984, pp. 32-33. Original quote:

De jonge garde ontwerpers maakt Nederland steeds meer een modeland. Hun creativiteit, gepaard aan werkelijkheidszin, rekent af met de traditionele, wat burgerlijke mentaliteit die elke modeontwikkeling hier vroeger in de kiem smoorde. Juist het ontbreken van een hechte modetraditie maakt het klimaat nu uiterst gunstig voor vernieuwingen. Het individualisme van steeds meer mensen die zich liever onderscheiden van de massa dan erin op te gaan, vormt een extra stimulans voor deze modemakers.

⁴⁰ Juliette Berkhout, 'Ban de bloemetjesjurk'. *Avenue*, Vol. 25, No. 11, November 1990, p. 197. Original quote:

Gedurfd, dat is de collectie wel: creatieve, onorthodoxe ontwerpen van een kwaliteit die wij met Nederlandse understatement zo graag 'onhollands' noemen. "De gemiddelde Nederlander wordt pas wakker als je achteloos laat vallen dat Illustrious Imps het zo goed doet in Japan, of dat Georgette Konings van Pearls Before Swans tasjes voor Mugler gaat ontwerpen," zegt Tonny. (...) De Nederlandse ontwerpen houden vaak het midden tussen Franse en Engelse mode: een klassieke vorm is de basis, waaraan vervolgens een royale knipoog wordt toegevoegd.

⁴¹ 'Denkend aan Holland', *Elegance*, Vol. 47, No. 7/8, July/August 1990.

⁴² Anonymous, 'Fietsbelles', *Avenue*, Vol. 25, No.10, October 1990, pp. 108-119.

⁴³ Anonymous, 'Zeeuwmeerminnen'. *Avenue*, Vol. 26, No. 9, September 1991, pp. 44-55. Original quote:

Ooit een eigentijdse variatie op een Hollandse klepbroek of kraplap gezien? De ontwerpers putten hun inspiratie liever uit Indiase sari's, Chinese Mao-jasjes en Turkse zoeaven-broeken. Of is de Hollandse dracht niet geschikt als modemuze? Voor *Avenue's* fashion director Frans Ankoné wèl. Met mode uit de nieuwe, internationale wintercollecties componeerde hij outfits die geënt zijn op de traditionele Zeeuwse kledij en bekroonde deze met eveneens op deze dracht geïnspireerde mutsen. Maarten Schets vereeuwigde het resultaat in een serie zeegezichten.

⁴⁴ Anonymous, 'In het licht van Rembrandt'. *Avenue*, Vol. 26, No. 10, October 1991, pp. 78-89. Original quote:

Buiten, voor de deur van het Amsterdamse Rijksmuseum, zie je joggingpakken, vale spijkerbroeken en afgetrapte gympen. Maar binnen, aan de muren van dit gebouw waar eerdaags de spectaculaire Rembrandt-

tentoonstelling van start gaat, aanschouw je teer kant, gloedvol fluweel en flonkerend brokaat. En dat zijn nu precies de materialen waarvan de nieuwe mode gemaakt is. Een luisterrijke reportage in een Rembrandtesk clair-obscur.

⁴⁵ The six designers were; Pascal Gatzen, Marcel Verheyen, Lucas Ossendrijver, Saskia van Drimmelen, and the design duo Viktor & Rolf.

⁴⁶ 'Le Cri Néerlandais' is a wordplay that refers to the nineteenth century expression 'dernier cri'; the latest fashion.

⁴⁷ J. Teunissen, 'Mode in Parijs: 'made in Holland'. *NRC Handelsblad*, March 3, 1994

⁴⁸ J. Teunissen, 'Dutch Modernism: terug naar de bron van kleding'. *Items*, Vol 13, No. 3 (1994), pp. 38-46.

⁴⁹ A. Spindler, 'Patterns'. *The New York Times*, March 8, 1994.

⁵⁰ These were the May/July editions of *Avantgarde*, a general-interest magazine, which states that Dutch fashion is *en vogue* and that we are on the edge of a 'golden age' of Dutch fashion; *NewStyle*, a trade journal, which elaborated on a 'Dutch School' in fashion. The exhibition *Gone with the wind* forms the grand finale to the Jubilee manifestation celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Zuiderzee Museum in Enkhuizen, with the work of forty fashion designers, accessories designers and photographers.

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Maaïke Feitsma is a PhD student at the Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands. The hypothesis of her project 'Dutch Fashion from the sixties till now' is that a Dutch fashion style has been constructed from the 1960s onward under the influence of the minimalist and conceptual form of Dutch modernism in art and design. The project will research the development of Dutch fashion in the last fifty years up till today, a period in which Dutch fashion design started to build an international reputation.

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