

# Problem

Peter Noever invited several “leading exponents of a new cultural spirit” to join in a debate about the topic *The End of Architecture?* at the “Vienna Architecture Conference” on June 15, 1992. The party argued, amongst other topics, about clients and competitions and the following was made evident: one of the designers was very successful and acclaimed in the architectural, academic society, but could not get clients interested to build his work. In fact, few of the architects present had any success. To quote Wolf Prix, “We are losing one competition after another against normal, so-called ‘obedient’ projects... The [unfavourable client’s] argument is: ‘[Your building is] 15 percent more expensive! You want [me] to build it?’ So you can say, okay, knowing that, I’ll never slant a beam again, because I know I will lose the project. This is the problem of our profession.” (Freiman 1992:106)

It seems impossible to find the right backing when commercial clients are only concerned with the return on their investment. And yet one might find the right backing in the world of fashion retail where brands channel enormous budgets into refitting shops, the most conspicuous display of wealth and power, having historical precedents only in the huge expenditure of royal families, political figures and religious institutions. (Castle 2000:59) It is with images, which are ubiquitous and relatively cheap, that fashion and architecture use one another, not simply as backdrops or celebrity head count, but as guarantees of cultural acceptability. The traditional role of patronage, the commissioning of significant buildings, is now the preserve of the luxury retailers. (Pawley 2000:7)

Unfortunately, having a clothing brand as a client does not mean that a fashion designer, a person well versed in design logic, is your client. Ten years ago, the question of brand ownership was easily answered: it was the designer whose name was on the back of your jeans, but the rush of fashion companies onto the stock market has changed their ownership dramatically. (Goldstein 2001:77) The everyday design decisions concerning the brand’s image, are not made by the fashion designer but by the creative director, a profession that emerged out of the need to co-ordinate the image and licence of each product.

The demands of the creative director could leave the architect with no room for innovation. Some brands are just too big to allow individual expression, they are just too settled in globalisation to allow diversity in image. Iain Borden calls them the chains that must seem predictable and safe while simultaneously mixing a whiff of cosmopolitan internationalism with the scent of youth. (Borden 2000:15)

To be sure that the brand stays intact, fashion houses decide on minimalist principles to unite all aspects of the brand into one identity. The image of some of these big fashion houses' outlets, like Issey Miyake, Jil Standers, Dolce & Gabbana and DNKY, have fallen into the minimalism trap, an architecture for those who do not feel the need to ask questions, be they about materials, prices of cleaning instructions: hence the blank walls, blank windows, blank price-tags. (Borden 2000:16)

These retailers are playing an elitist and dangerous game. The shop visit should hold out the hope of a fulfilling personal experience and service satisfaction. In such a scenario, it is extremely important that the delivery and perception meets the expectation. (Markham 2000:26) This is where designers have to gamble. The Minimalist 'art gallery' layout, a long parade from entrance to display racks, makes some shoppers feel as if they are in a goldfish bowl. Those shoppers are unlikely to return. The design must meet the principal objective: enhance the retail offer, assist the sale and make the customer feel good. Architecture and spatial design have become major elements in retail presentation. Their place in the overall scene and promotion of the retailer, the merchandise and the message is a delicate balance of complementary aesthetics, seduction and comfort. (Markham 2000:26)

Here and there one finds little gems, clients with the right frame of mind that allow retail designers to establish the identity of the outlet. One of these is Marni, the previously mail-order-based business, who is accommodating the changing needs of fashion in a totally unprecedented way. They employed Future Systems to design three new shops. Future Systems' design will give Marni further opportunities to express the mood of any collection, by giving them freedom to alter at will the colour of the resin

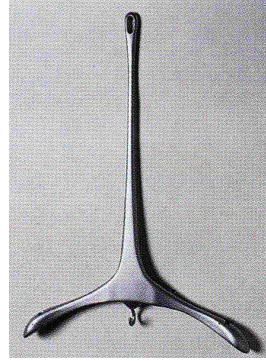
0 3 4 Future Systems for Marni



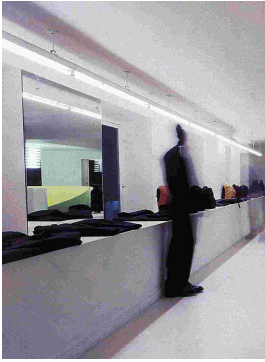
0 3 5 Future Systems for Marni



0 3 6 Future Systems for Marni



0 3 7 Droog for Mandarinina Duck



0 3 8 Droog for Mandarinina Duck



0 3 9 Droog for Mandarinina Duck



0 4 0 Droog for Mandarinina Duck



0 4 1 Droog for Mandarinina Duck



0 4 2 Droog for Mandarinina Duck



paint on the walls and floor. Hanging in the middle of the space, single garments can be walked around, encouraging customers to touch and experience them as individual sensuous objects. (Castle 2000:47)

Instead of imposing rigid architectural spaces, the Marni shops will make architects think about ways of building stores for designers able to move with their collections, and place emphasis on the beauty of the clothes themselves. It is in a sense the reverse of the Minimalist trend that employs the luxury of permanent materials, marble, stone, and wood, for what add up to no more than disposable interior spaces. (Castle 2000:47)

Another interesting and different design is the retail space for Mandarinina Duck, a brand that made its name with its range of stylish luggage and expanded into wider fashion by launching their first series of stores in Paris. Mandarinina Duck wants to be instantly recognisable, not because every shop is exactly the same, but because every store is distinguished by its design. (Picchi 2001:54)

Both Marni and Mandarinina Duck are small fashion houses who are not competing with names like Benetton and The Gap, whose architecture is never contained in any single store but is dispersed globally, through hundreds of other such stores in cities over the world. (Borden 2000:15) Neither Marni nor Mandarinina Duck have given in to the overwhelming popularity of white walls and pared-down spaces that have led the look of stores to converge. Given that many of the products in high-fashion shops are often very similar, following a season's trend, shops risk losing their point of difference, and thus their identity, among their competitors. (Castle 2000:54)

A globalised brand would not be the best choice regarding this thesis. The author wants to explore how architecture can reinforce identity of the individual, within the fashion industry and in an urban context, while introducing something different.

Turning from global to local, the South African fashion industry suits the intention of the thesis. Despite stiff competition from imports and lukewarm support at home, the local fashion industry has blossomed in recent years. International journalists have started making the long haul to the South



African Fashion Week, with some 150 million viewers world-wide witnessing last year's [2001] event on CNN. (Burton 2002:39)

The SAFW is very much involved with the urban regeneration of Johannesburg's CBD. The SAFW carried an innovative message about inner-city renewal in 2002: Turbine Hall in Newtown became the centre of fashion. Presented in conjunction with the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA), the show's entrance fee for the public allowed one to take a journey into Johannesburg's inner-city by bus, giving a glimpse of some of JDA's inner-city renewal projects. Stops on the tour included Johannesburg's emerging fashion district, the Constitution Hill development in Braamfontein, and the renewed heart of artistic activity, the Newtown Cultural Precinct. (Majola 2002:1)

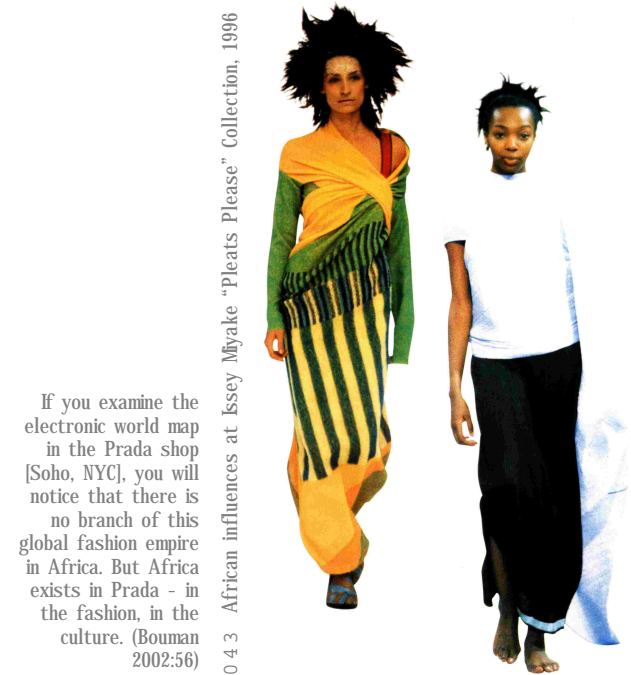
Johannesburg has in recent years received increased international recognition for its fashion industry with magazines like Spruce\* taking notice of what is available here in the same way as they take notice of what is happening in New York, Berlin or Sydney.

The fashion industry is still young, but imbedded in an African identity. This has sparked revival. In the last three years factories [garment and accessory] have opened as smaller, more efficient operations, and most important, they have found a more secure niche market: ethnic African designs, which are becoming popular and can not be produced by Asian sweatshops because they are very individualistic (Davie 2003:1).

Unfortunately, local designers are limited in terms of fabric availability. Local mills are loath to weave small quantities of cloth, forcing all designers to either all use the same fabrics, or import small batches of unique fabrics. Our designers have less access to textile innovations than international designers do (Burton 2002:46).

This creates a constant backlog if South African designers want to compete internationally. (And here the author would like to stress that international recognition is not the same thing as being known as a globalised brand.)

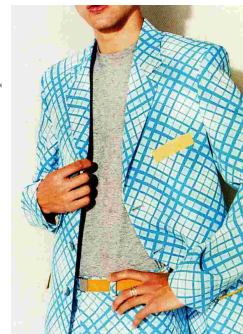
In the international fashion world new textiles are making a tremendous



If you examine the electronic world map in the Prada shop [Soho, NYC], you will notice that there is no branch of this global fashion empire in Africa. But Africa exists in Prada - in the fashion, in the culture. (Bouman 2002:56)

0 4 3 African influences at Issey Miyake "Pleats Please" Collection, 1996

0 4 6 Giteon featured in Spruce\*



0 4 4 Spruce\*



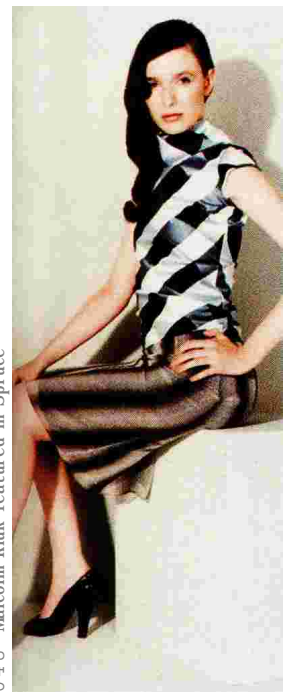
0 4 7 Manrienne Fassler



0 4 5 Stoned Cherry's design force



0 4 8 Malcolm Kluk featured in Spruce\*



0 4 9 Abigail Betz



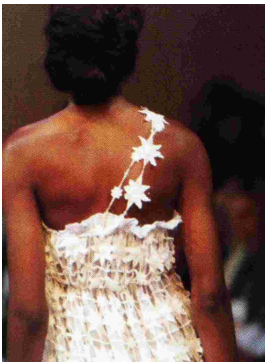
0 5 0 Clive Rundle



0 5 1 Clive Rundle



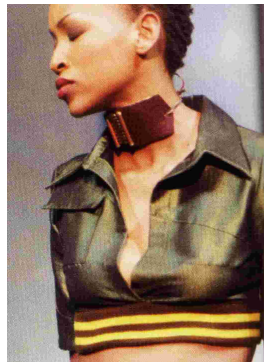
0 5 2 Malcolm Kluk



0 5 3 Malcolm Kluk



0 5 4 Stonned Cherry



impact. The intricate tailoring previously necessary to shape a garment is now giving way to simple, classic silhouettes displaying these sophisticated textiles. Fashion designers worldwide are aware that the future of fashion is in the area of fibre technology, and realise the importance of selecting the right fabrics for their collections. More fashion designers are employing textile designers, or are themselves researching the wide range of textiles available. (Braddock 1999:100)

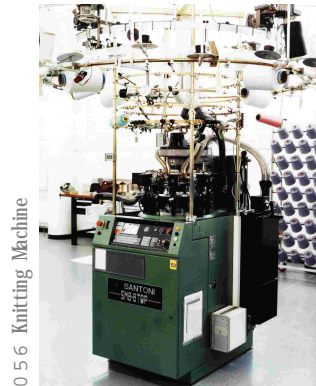
The aim of this design investigation is the provision of an identity for the urban setting, an identity for the client as well as for the customer. Textile technology can be included on a urban design scale where people come to a specific city block to find textiles and what have you, while the focus of this investigation can still be on the design of fashion retail space where the identity provided is more personal.

Laser Cutting Machine  
Used for the collections of Giorgio Armani, Chanel, Versace and the Swiss designer Daniel Herman. The machine cuts the fabric very finely, leaving no frayed edges so stitching is not required. One person controls the machine. (Malmros 2001:200)



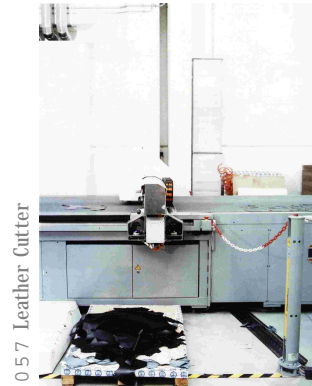
0 5 5 Laser fabric Cutter

Single Cylinder Circular Knitting Machine  
The machine makes the seamless tubes that are the base for the production of dresses, skirts, bras, knickers. It has a fine gauge (32 needles per inch) used to make the sheerest hosiery. One knitter is in charge of eight machines. (Malmros 2001:202)



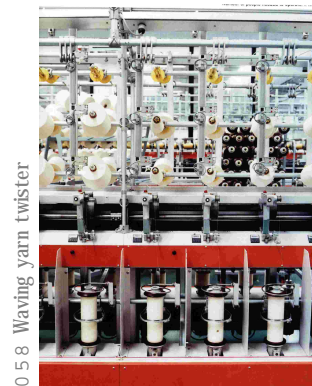
0 5 6 Knitting Machine

Ultrasonic Cutting System for Leather  
Used for Prada sport shoes, the machine reads the dimensions of the leather and marks out the possible defects. It then cuts out the leather with minimum wastage. Works best on plain leather. Two people operate the machine. (Malmros 2001:201)



0 5 7 Leather Cutter

Twisting Machine  
It makes elastic cotton, wool and corduroy by twisting and preparing the yarn and, in some cases, adding Lycra fibre to it. The machine works automatically. (Malmros 2001:199)



0 5 8 Waving yarn twister