On the "-Core" Mechanisms of Street Fashion

Anna Kamneva[*]

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Abstract

This paper introduces a model of vestimentary coordination and synchronization, derived from interdisciplinary research within the tension field of fashion and media studies, dealing with the phenomenon of self-organization in social and cultural systems and exploring the spatiotemporal dynamics of persistence and innovation in the field of democratized postmodern vestimentary fashions. Using the example of the *'-core' hype cycle* (2000's hipster, turned normcore, turned glamcore, turned GORPcore), i will outline its two complementary mechanisms providing structural patterns for vestimentary coordination, based on space-biased vestimentary interactions, and synchronization, based on time-biased vestimentary practices: *spatialization* with a tendency to uniformity-oriented network building and *temporalization* with a tendency to singularity-oriented swarming. I will argue that the model can serve as an analytical tool for describing trend development in a digital culture, characterized by pluralization, differentiation, acceleration and algorithmicity.

Keywords: Street Style; Fashion and Media; Fashion and Postmodernity; Social Synchronization; Network..

[*] University of Paderborn (Germany); ✉ anna_kamneva@me.com

Neo-Hipsters in Sync

In the context of media-infused digital culture of simultaneous availability of information, real-time trend communication and acceleration of production processes, post-modern street fashions develop a highly complex, fine-grained organizational structure that is often characterized as random, chaotic, and fluid.[1] Arguably since the second half of the 20th century, street styles have been contributing to the pluralization of fashion and transforming its structure from a continuous succession of changing vestimentary styles into a network of coexisting sartorial clusters, changing the direction of its social dynamics from vertical to horizontal.[2] In his study of street styles from the 1940es to 1990s, anthropologist Ted Polhemus states that during the course of approximately four decades, street fashions have been accumulating a substantial archive of sartorial vocabulary, that is now simultaneously available for sampling, compositing and bricolaging. He calls this archive *the supermarket of style*:

> Here, instead of focusing upon a particular styletribe of yesteryear, all of history's street-styles, from Zootiges to Beatniks, Hippies to Punks, all end up as possible options as if they were cans of soup on supermarket shelves. In Style World, 'nostalgia mode' is set at full tilt, separate eras are flung together in one stretched, 'synchronic' moment in time, all reality is hype and 'authenticity' seems out of the question. At its most effective and startling, this language reduces whole subcultures to simple 'adjectives' – Hippie beads, Skinhead/Punk DMs, Mod target motifs, Rocker leather, Perv rubber, Glam sequins – and juxtaposes these in a single outfit.[3]

Thus, a decentralized, heterarchical structure of group-oriented subcultural styles has been transformed into a distributed system of randomly connected, mass-individualized, relatively homogeneous personal street styles that seem to elude classification. Brent Luvaas remarks on this phenomenon of *whatever*-singularity as follows: "It is what it is, such as it is ..., nothing more, nothing less. Anything specific you say about it tends to read as false, added on and out of pace."[4] Yet within this distributed structure, behind the backs of the individuals mixing and matching their personal styles, broad-scaled patterns can evolve, which I will address in the following section.

In 2014 mathematician Jonathan Touboul published the article *The Hipster Effect. When Anticonformists All Look the Same*,[5] dealing with the phenomenon of involuntary synching up of nonconformists and tracing it back to delay in communication. Synchronization, defined in the field of natural sciences and technology as an adjustment of rhythms of oscillating entities due to their weak interaction,[6] deals with spontaneous emergence of order out of chaos.[7] It can be observed in technological, biological, media and social systems, p.ex. in firing of neurons, cooperative behavior of animals such as fireflies flashing in unison or even humans with their synchronized clapping in the theatre or, as this model suggests, in the field of fashion. Aiming at understanding sync in the fields of statistical physics, neuroscience and economics,[8] Touboul choses the hipster effect as a general premise, which, although a product of postmodern street style culture, appears as old as fashion itself: namely the reproach of

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1. See Brent Luvaas, *Street Style. An Ethnography of Fashion Blogging* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

2. See Ingrid Loschek, *When Clothes Become Fashion. Design and Innovation Systems* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 137.

3. Ted Polhemus, *Street Style. From Sidewalk to Catwalk* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 131–34.

4. Luvaas, *Street Style*, 169.

5. Jonathan Touboul, "The Hipster Effect. When Anticonformists All Look the Same," *arXiv*:1410.8001v1 [cond-mat.dis-nn] (October 2014), revised version: *arXiv*:1410.8001v2 [cond-mat.dis-nn] (February 2019), preprint: https://arxiv.org/pdf/1410.8001.pdf.

6. See Arkady Pikovsky, Michael Rosenblum and Jürgen Kurths, *Synchronization. A Universal Concept in Nonlinear Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

7. See Steven Strogatz, *Sync. How Order Emerges from Chaos in the Universe, Nature, and Daily Life* (New York: Hachette Books, 2004).

8. "Whoever understands how to read these semaphores [signals of fashion, AK] would know in advance not only about new currents in the arts but also about new legal codes, wars, and revolutions" (Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004, 65).

unconscious uniformization of the fashionable.[9] However, this relatively recent debate is usually traced back to a *Huffington Post* article by Julia Plevin, published in 2008, dealing with a conglomerate of nonconformist, retro-oriented and anti-consumerist subcultural tendencies often subsumed under the term of the 21st-century hipster. It contrasts two aspects of hipster-uniformity to their assumption of differentiation. Firstly, it is the ability to be identified as a group based on habitual characteristics, and secondly, to become part of mainstream culture:

> The whole point of hipster is that they avoid labels and being labeled. However, they all dress the same and act the same and conform in their non-conformity. Doesn't the fact that there is a hipster look go against all hipster beliefs? Hipsters are supposed to hate anything mainstream or trendy. But the look has gone mainstream…[10]

Interwoven into the process of hipster-becoming-mainstream, subsequent countertrends and subtrends emerged, which I summarize under the term of the *'-core' hype cycle*. A cynical and audacious attempt to deconstruct the normalization of nonconformity was the trend normcore, programmatically formulated by the New York based trend forecasting collective K-Hole in 2013, meaning that normcore, as opposed to hipster, was not a bottom-up trend based on local interactions. Normcore proclaimed the avant-gardism of hardcore-normality: Instead of aiming for personal and group-related differentiation, it assimilated and mimicked mainstream taste and raised the provocative question, whether imitation of the banal and the average is able to operate as a productive method of distinction. During the course of the following year, normcore trickled across the web in the form of paratextual fad confetti with minimal semantic variances.[11] Glamcore (excessive chic) evolved as an explicit countertrend, to be succeeded by GORPcore (an acronym for good old raisins and peanuts,[12] standing for comfortable, outdoorsy clothing) in 2017. Brief ironic comments such as farmcore (2014) appeared; older terms such as queercore became fashionable once again; other pop-cultural '-*core*' trends emerged, or were revived, outside the sphere of the vestimentary: horrorcore, rapcore, doomcore/darkcore, lolicore, nightcore etc.

Touboul's simplified representation of this effect, based on models from statistical physics, showed that due to specific spatiotemporal interaction dynamics within the system, entities seeking differentiation fail to register the choices of others in due time to avoid becoming part of the majority. In his model the system consists only of conformists, who want to dress like the majority, and nonconformist entities opposing general fashion (which can be individuals, but also non-human actants such as media, institutions, codes etc.), shown in this simplified diagram, illustrating the main principle of the model, as squares and circles (Fig. 1).[13]

The decisions of these entities regarding their current stylistic status are made binary, registering the states of their neighbors and choosing to follow either 'the' trend or 'the' anti-trend — in the case of the '*-core' hype cycle* they could be summed up to upstyling and downstyling. If for instance upstyling is currently *in*, nonconformists (who must be in the majority, otherwise the system would immediately stabilize) switch to downstyling and establish it as the prevailing trend. From this moment on, the loop keeps oscillating: let us say, during the second period (T2), nonconformists dress down to normcore, then commit to upstyling again with glamcore (T3), eventually switching to downstyling once more, establishing GORPcore (T4) etc. Although in this model the switching is linear, because there is no plurality of trends, individuals change styles at their own pace.

Touboul's large-scale simulation, illustrating an evolution of the mutual impact of network entities more elaborately than the simplified figure above, shows that such periodic dynamics are by no means

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9. See Georg Simmel, "Fashion," *International Quarterly*, vol. 10 (1904): 141.

10. Julia Plevin, "Who's a hipster?," *Huffington Post* (August 9, 2008, web-update May 25, 2011).

11. See Mirna Zeman, "Lächerliche Normalitätsmaschine. Normaling und Normcore," in *Literatur als Interdiskurs. Normalismus und Realismus, Interkulturalität und Intermedialität von der Moderne bis zur* Gegenwart, ed. Thomas Ernst and Georg Mein (München: Fink, 2016), 69–85.

12. In other versions: granola, oats, raisins and peanuts.

13. See Jeff Guo, "The Mathematician Who Proved Why Hipsters All Look Alike. What Brain Neurons Tell Us About the 'Hipster Effect' When All Contrarians End Up Looking the Same," *The Washington Post* (November 2014).

T=1   T=2   T=3   T=4   etc. →

Square = Conformist, Circle = Nonconformist
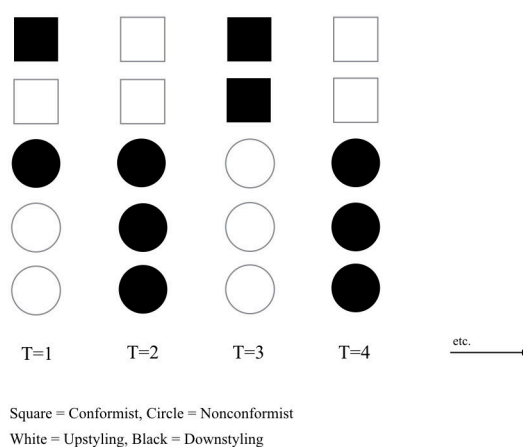White = Upstyling, Black = Downstyling

Figure 1

given, but are an exceptional case, only synthesizable under special spatiotemporal conditions. The connectivity within the system is defined by two parameters: spatial and temporal distances between entities. Every entity is successively targeted to calculate its perception of its surroundings and express it by a numeric value. For the overall picture, only the spatially accessible entities are significant, whereby the strength of their impact on the targeted entity can vary. Temporal distances between entities, that influence the switching between trend and anti-trend, determine the temporal state of the perceived environment with the possibility of picking up past trends. If p.ex. at some point the temporal distance is large, while the spatial distance is small, it means that a state is considered as highly influential even if it is actually outdated. Touboul's simulation shows that for synchronization to take place, the temporarily determined network has to be subject to certain conditions: If the delays (time distances) are too small, the system stabilizes instead of oscillating; if they are too great, they only produce noise — everybody switches randomly at their own pace. It follows that vestimentary sync requires a special geometry of fashion time, allowing past trends to be reckoned as current.

Touboul's deliberately provocative conclusion was: "when hipsters [meaning nonconformists opposing the mainstream, AK] are too slow in detecting the trends, they will keep making the same choices and therefore remain correlated as time goes by, while their trend evolves in time as a periodic function."[14] From the perspective of fashion theory, this result may not appear spectacular: the paradox of individuals striving to be different by doing exactly what others do has been explored by Elena Esposito on the basis of assumptions made by early theorists like Georg Simmel.[15] Furthermore, apart from a fundamental doubt that cultural phenomena can be reduced to fit into scientific formulae, it seems astonishing that the synchronization of nonconformists was broadly discussed in the media as an unwished-for side effect, as a kind of vestimentary epileptic seizure to diagnose all street style formations at individual or collective levels.

Hence, instead of focusing on Touboul's conclusion, I suggest taking into consideration a more significant part of his thesis, namely the spatiotemporal relations within the system that affect its inner communication dynamics. From the perspective of fashion theory, one of the problems of Touboul's model is a lack of explanation regarding the ways the spatial and the temporal networks are related to each other: in his formula, their correlation is expressed by a merely mathematical 'hidden variable.'[16] I thus suggest exploring these spatiotemporal relations, focussing on time-oriented synchronization and

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14.   Touboul, "The Hipster Effect," 1.

15.   See Elena Esposito, *Die Verbindlichkeit des Vorübergehenden. Paradoxien der Mode* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2004).

16.   Touboul, "The Hipster Effect," 3.

— symmetrically — space-oriented coordination as driving forces of trend development and classifying them as automatisms. Automatisms are a cultural technique of complexity reduction, defined as

> ... processes that largely elude conscious control. They exist on the level of individual and collective action as well as in interactions with technology. Since they are rooted in repetition – rather than in creativity, planning, or design – automatisms are close to the mechanical. At the same time, these processes do not function like technical automata. There are neither prior definitions nor programming. Processes of habitualization and conventionalization can serve as examples; conventions and habits grind themselves in; so it is the execution itself, and the scattered activity of many, that create the structure.[17]

Synchronization and coordination can be described as automatisms, by means of which from the noise of discursive vestimentary practices between distinction and adaption, under special spatiotemporal system conditions, periodically recurring correlation in the form of a digital pattern of *in* and *out* emerges. I suggest regarding synchronization and coordination as complementary stabilization mechanisms, determining self-organization in the field of sartorial practices.

The Bias of Vestimentary Stabilization Mechanisms

In his theory of the bias of communication, media theorist Harold Innis conceptualized command and control over space and time as forms of cultural stabilization, analyzing dominant media in different cultures:

> I have attempted to show elsewhere that in Western civilization a stable society is dependent on an appreciation of a proper balance between the concepts of space and time. ... We must appraise civilization in relation to its territory and in relation to its duration. The character of the medium of communication tends to create a bias in civilization favourable to an over-emphasis on the time concept or on the space concept and only at rare intervals are the biases offset by the influence of another medium and stability achieved.[18]

For example, stone architecture of Ancient Egypt as an anchor point of communication represents the wish of maintaining temporal stability and centrifugal persistence of conservative structures; Meanwhile, the introduction of papyrus as a space-oriented medium aiming at centripetal distribution in space indicates a transition to a more democratic cultural organization.

Similarly, I would like to propose that space and time over-emphases in the organization of vestimentary practices are mediated, interfered and balanced out by fashion in order to achieve periodic fluctuation within the bias. To describe this relation, I introduce two complementary configuration processes that are dialectically related and, regulated by the mechanism of fashion, lead to oscillatory stability: *spatialization*, providing the basis for synchronic uniformity and centrifugal trend development, and *temporalization*, leading to diachronic, centripetal style genesis. The idea of stabilization by oscillation is consistent with Elena Esposito's proposition that fashion is a paradoxical phenomenon based on the stability of transition and the conformity with deviance that operates, organizing different forms of instabilities and uncertainties to support and neutralize each other with an aim to cope with contingency.[19]

Thus, two general mechanisms constitute the bias of vestimentary operations: *spatialization* (a general term for phenomena regulated by fashion) as *uniformization* (a special term for vestimentary fashion) vs. *temporalization* (general) as *costumization* (vestimentary). Uniform and traditional costume are usually understood as the opposite of fashion. In everyday language, they are generally referred to as restrictive, normative sartorial phenomena derived from top-down processes aiming at spatial (uniform) and

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17. Hannelore Bublitz *et al.*, "Research Training Group Automatisms. Cultural Techniques of Complexity Reduction," *Research Training Group Automatisms* https://www.uni-paderborn.de/en/research-training-group-automatisms/. See Hannelore Bublitz *et al.*, *Automatismen* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2010).

18. Harold Adams Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 64.

19. See Esposito, *Die Verbindlichkeit des Vorübergehenden*.

temporal (traditional costume) contiguity and resulting in conformity resp. constancy. However, I will argue that these structures can be considered as organizational patterns underlying bottom-up processes of vestimentary automatisms of synchronization and coordination.

Vestimentary Coordination: Uniformization, Spatialization, Network building

In their book on fashion and uniformity, Gabriele Mentges and Birgit Richard state that the two complexes have to be viewed as both oppositional and interdependent.[20] On the one hand, fashion stands for distinction and individuality, whereas uniformity is based on conformity and suppression of singularity. On the other hand, fashion and uniformity have many structural features in common: they both rely on mechanisms of standardization, seriality, reproduction, normalization etc. As a process, fashion and uniformity form a framework for spiral-shaped circulation between interdependent operations: "Fashion-oriented behavior inevitably results in conformal uniformity. And vice versa, uniform dressing leads to new fashionable variety."[21] Such processes, that Mentges and Richard call *diffuse uniformization*, can be encountered in the field of youth cultures, art and media, whose organizational systems are non-hierarchical and do not explicitly rely on orders and commands.

Being part of this process, street styles are often formed in opposition to the mainstream of presumably uniform fashion. By those individuals or groups, uniformity is usually considered reprehensible, superficial, unoriginal and conformist. It is used as an identifiable counter-pattern as well as the backdrop against which their own singularity and authenticity are formed.[22] Thus, although group identity is configured by means of differentiation, it still has uniformity at its core as its main organizational principle because of the spatiotemporal structure of its members' interactions. In her photo series *Identity* photographer Catherine Balet captured dress codes in European schools, illustrating this paradox. Her photographic study shows that at schools, where uniform clothing is mandatory, yet accessories can be varied, pupils customize their mass produced school bags by adding personal pendants, inscriptions, labels etc.. in an identical, uniform fashion.[23] In the context of fashion, individualization is based on uniformity – as it is ironically depicted in the comedy series *Derry Girls* (2018): Four teenagers, who attend a Catholic school, arrange to wear identical denim jackets over their uniform blazers in pursuit of individuality; yet as in the morning only one of the girls turns up wearing a jean jacket, she quickly retracts and hides it in her schoolbag, exclaiming: "I'm not being an individual on my own!"[24]

Uniformity provides a spatial matrix for the distribution of fashion. Uniforms, be they military or civilian, serve to mark and claim territory and signalize spatial unity and synchrony. Uniformity operates in the mode of inclusion and exclusion and ensures localization and addressability of entities in geographical, social and symbolic space.[25] The spatial imprint of uniformity as an aesthetic formation is most strikingly shown, when uniform entities are arranged and positioned in apparent proximity and create an impression of simultaneousness, p.ex. at parades and processions. As a top-down process, *spatialization* comes to a halt and ends in synchronous uniformity: If *diffuse uniformization* becomes too easily detectable and conveys an impression of a collective, space consuming extension, it loses its fashionable relevance. As Esposito points out, fashion only fulfills its function, if it is not too precisely observed.[26]

20. See Gabriele Mentges, "Die Angst vor der Uniformität," in *Schönheit der Uniformität. Körper, Kleidung, Medien,* ed. Gabriele Mentges and Birgit Richard (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2005), 17–42.

21. Mentges, 41.

22. See Elke Gaugele, "Style-Post-Pro-Duktionen. Paradoxien des Samplings," in *Schönheit der Uniformität*, 125.

23. See Catherine Balet, *Identity. Dress Codes in European Schools. London — Paris — Berlin — Barcelona — Milan* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2006).

24. See *Derry Girls*, Series 1, Episode 1 (2018), 4:10.

25. See Elisabeth Hackspiel-Mikosch and Stefan Haas, *Civilian Uniforms as Symbolic Communication. Sartorial Representation, Imagination, and Consumption in Europe (18th-21st Century)* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006), 8.

26. See Esposito, *Die Verbindlichkeit des Vorübergehenden*, 170.

Subsequently, what matters for *uniformization* as a top-down, diffuse process, is not just its spatial extension — when a particular trend conquers and dominates a territory for a certain period of time —, but also spatial relations between the entities within this area. The question arises of how closely the *diffusely uniformized* network is knit together. How many concurrent, differently uniformized entities – as we are focussing on street fashions existing in parallel — divide them, and how long does it take for an observer to link them to each other?

To illustrate this problem, I will use the example of the photo project *Paris — New York — Shanghai* (2007) by Hans Eijkelboom.[27] His transnational visual study of unintentional uniformity on the streets of three cities shows how a piece of clothing, p.ex. a striped polo shirt, can connect fashioned bodies despite geographical distances and cultural, social, age- and time-related disparities. Eijkelboom became famous for his series of photographs of similarly dressed people taken on the streets of city centers within ca. two hours, presented simultaneously in a grid-like pattern. The catalogue is divided into three detachable parts — one for each city — and contains sequences of different sartorial, architectural and everyday activity-oriented uniformity patterns. If observed in a conventional, linear way, the resemblance between different cities remains *in absentia*, so the similarity is to be found between the grids of synchronicity. If the three parts of the book are separated, placed next to each other and read simultaneously, a large network of uniformity emerges, in which similarity (associative correlation) is more important than contiguity (spatiotemporal proximity). Eijkelboom shows that *uniformization* is a highly inclusive phenomenon: not only is it dispersive, but it also sets the scene for vestimentary comparability. It follows that *uniformization* organizes fashion spaces, transforms them into fashion networks and generates collectives.

As stated earlier, uniformity is a spatial phenomenon aiming for synchrony, so that its objects are spatially encouraged to act as one. *Uniformization* as a bottom-up process has therefore a peculiar relationship to the time axis: during network formation, it eliminates the flow of time aiming for synchrony, but it also takes time as a process. Bottom-up organized networks, as media philosopher Eugene Thacker puts it, are never static, yet they possess no tools to express change and duration:

> From the network science perspective, the network is essentially spatial, and the universal properties it displays are not so much evident in the dynamic functioning of the network, as they are static patterns which exist above the temporality of the network. In fact, when we speak of a "topology," we are in effect speaking of networks as spatialized, mappable, discrete entities. ... If we consider Eulerian and Kantian concepts of networks [that lay the foundation for the understanding of networks in the fields of physics, mathematics, computer science, biology, sociology etc., AK], it appears that dynamic change – the very thing that makes a network a network – is only a by-product. This view of networks can only accommodate dynamic change to the extent that it can spatialize that dynamic change, or to the extent that it can spatialize time.[28]

When it comes to analyzing time-based phenomena within dynamic networks, such as affect or emergence, Thacker suggests focussing on swarms — collective 'living' formations that embody the concept of time-as-duration. In the next section, I will argue that in the field of vestimentary fashion, swarming is constituted by the process of *costumization*, based on singularity-oriented diachronic continuity, complementary to *uniformization*.

Vestimentary Synchronization: Comstumization, Temporalization, Swarming

Analogously to the juxtaposition of fashion and uniformity operating in space, discussed previously, I will now outline how fashion and traditional costume are related in time. Initially, fashion is associated

27. See Hans Eijkelboom. *Paris — New York — Shanghai. A Book About the Past, Present, and (Possibly) Future Capital of the World* (New York: Aperture, 2007).

28. Eugene Thacker, "Networks, Swarms, Multitudes," *CTheory* (2004).

with change and innovation, whereas traditional costume (as well as ethnic or folk dress, which I use synonymously) with constancy and "fixed cosmology."[29] Ethnic dress is defined as "all those items, ensembles and modifications of the body that capture the past of the members of a group, the items of tradition that are worn and displayed to signify cultural heritage"[30] and is considered therefore, especially within the context of the fashion-as-modernity debate, as non-fashion[31] or, even more radically, anti-fashion.[32] In terms of change vs. continuity, although without the overtone of normativity, the same distinction is drawn between fashion and personal or group-oriented style. Ted Polhemus suggests analyzing street styles as *style tribes* constituting and maintaining their singularity by means of repetition in time: "like the Amazon Indian to the Slowakin peasant, they [members of *style tribes*, AK] took pride in the unchanging continuity of chosen style — such continuity, as amongst tribal and peasant peoples, expressing the stability and longevity of their culture as a whole."[33]

Yet despite the opposition, fashion and traditional costume can be analyzed as interdependent phenomena. According to Friedrich Theodor Vischer for instance, fashion can be *costumized*, that is become part of the process of *costumization*: "So fashion plays and plays, sometimes throwing an accidentally right, often a distinctly wrong part of its sophisticatedly capricious inventions over the city wall onto the fields, where it is seized on by the country people and gradually becomes an ancient inheritance, i.e. a costume."[34] A broadened, more contemporary characterization of costume, not based on the opposition of fashion = city and costume = land, is based on continuity it takes to charge recurrent vestimentary rituals with emotional quality in order to expresses unity of a social/cultural group. Although traditional costume and fashion coexist as parallel vestimentary practices, costume is subject to fashion trends, and fashion relies on *costumization/temporalization* — a temporal retardation that is key to validating it beyond a status of a mere fad.[35] Furthermore, continuity becomes an important structural feature of fashion in its notorious recurrent retro-orientation. As Jean Baudrillard puts it, "it always presupposes a dead time of forms, a kind of abstraction whereby they become, as if safe from time, effective signs which, as if by a twist of time, will return to haunt the present of their inactuality with all the charm of 'returning' as opposed to 'becoming' structures."[36]

As a process underlying mechanisms of fashion, *costumization/temporalization* serves to fabricate the notion of singularity. Sociologist Andreas Reckwitz describes singularity as a significant feature of postmodernity, aiming at formation of the unique and remarkable not only at the level of the individual, but also of culture and society.[37] Reckwitz argues that while modernity was striving to generalize the world and extrapolate a notion of universality, singularity was an anti-fashion (p.ex. as a key feature of the romantic outcast), but postmodernity has transformed it into one of its salient features — singularity is now mainstream. Singularity defies generalization and, due to its inner complexity, eludes comparability and substitution. In the field of fashion, when a vestimentary phenomenon is considered singular, it is generally not idiosyncratic or inimitable — because imitation lies at the core of fashion — but it is, on the contrary, very easily imitable due of its continuity and consistency. Artists, designers, dandies, as well as fashion brands, subcultures etc. develop their individual styles by means of recursive use of distinct vestimentary vocabulary. The style's singularity does not depend on its uniqueness in general: it can

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29.   See Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits. The Evolution of Modern Dress* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 11.

30.   Joanne B. Eicher and Barbara Sumberg, "World Fashion, Ethnic, and National Dress," in *Dress and Ethnicity. Change Across Space and Time*, ed. Joanne B. Eicher and Barbara Sumberg (Oxford: Berg, 1995), 295-306.

31.   See Hollander, *Sex and Suits*, 16.

32.   See Ted Polhemus, *Fashion & Anti-fashion. Exploring Adornment and Dress from an Anthropological Perspective* (London: Self-Publishing, 2011).

33.   Ted Polhemus, *Style Surfing. What to Wear in the 3rd Millennium* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 20.

34.   Friedrich Theodor Vischer, quoted in Roman Mainhold, *Fashion Myths. A Cultural Critique* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013), 26.

35.   See René König, *Die Mode in der menschlichen Gesellschaft* (Zürich: Modebuch Verl.-Ges., 1958), 114.

36.   Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London: Sage, 2017), 109.

37.   See Andreas Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten. Zum Strukturwandel der Moderne* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2017).

be grotesque and eccentric as well as strikingly 'normcore' — one need only think of Beau Brummel's 'conspicuous inconspicuousness' or Steve Jobs' highly stylized, constant fashion blindness.

Because styles, developed through *temporalization*, invite reproduction, and thereby feed into the system of fashion where originality is achieved through imitation,[38] they are counteracted by *uniformization* — according to an urban legend, Charlie Chaplin once reached the third place in a Charlie Chaplin look-alike contest.[39] Polhemus argues that singular street styles are "threatened not only by the spectre of change, but also by the phenomenon of 'fashionalization', whereby traditional costumes or street styles are converted into to latest 'looks',"[40] devalorized and deprived of their singular status. The postmodern culture of singularities, as Reckwitz states, generates rhythmic dynamics, fluctuating between valorization and singularization on the one hand and devaluation and desingularization on the other hand: one day a trend reads as exceptional, another day it is considered conformist and mediocre.[41] Within this process, exclusivity-oriented *temporalization* has the same function constituting the singular as inclusivity-oriented *spatialization* performs for the normal:[42] it provides spatiotemporal patterns for structure formation.

I would like to suggest that the structure evolved from time-biased processes of *temporalization/costumization* is a *vestimentary swarm*. Swarms are biological formations, organisms with distributed agency on the verge of individual, collective and context (environment). A swarm is therefore not ruled by the entities it consists of, but by the relations, processes *between* the elements that constitute its singularity.[43] According to Thacker, a swarm is

> ...a whole that is more than the sum of its parts, but it is also a heterogeneous whole. This is not to identify a unified, homogeneous group that serves the heterogeneous needs and desires of individuals. Rather, the principles of self-organization require that the group only arises from the localized, singular, heterogeneous actions of individual units. ... [A] swarm does not exist at a local or global level, but at a third level, where multiplicity and relation intersect. ...A swarm always exists in time and, as such, is always acting, interacting, interrelating, and self-transforming.[44]

Vestimentary swarming can be understood as a process of synchronization, whereby entities automatically adjust their rhythms of changing clothes and styles to be able to act as a stable singular system.[45] This centripetal force, that holds a swarm together and guarantees its stability, may be interpreted as determination of being sustained as a whole — an inscribed ideology. Based on this characteristic, Thacker draws a crucial distinction between space-biased networks and time-biased swarms:

> Networks ... are those forms of distributed organization that facilitate connectivity (qualified by pattern). Similarly, swarms are those forms of distributed organization that facilitate collectivity (qualified by purpose). This in turn outlines the criteria for both networks and swarms: networks can form a collectivity, through connectivity, while swarms can initiate a connectivity, but only through collectivity.[46]

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38. See Esposito, *Die Verbindlichkeit des Vorübergehenden*, 13.

39. See https://skeptics.stackexchange.com/questions/9423/did-charlie-chaplin-lose-a-charlie-chaplin-look-alike-contest.

40. Polhemus, *Fashion & Anti-fashion*, 45.

41. See Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten*, 14, 17.

42. See Jürgen Link, *Versuch über den Normalismus. Wie Normalität produziert wird* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013).

43. Thacker, "Networks, Swarms, Multitudes."

44. Thacker.

45. "Swarming occurs when the dispersed units of a network of small (and perhaps some large) forces converge on a target from multiple directions. The overall aim is sustainable pulsing – swarm networks must be able to coalesce rapidly and stealthily on a target, then dissever and redisperse, immediately ready to re-combine for a new pulse" (John Arquilla and David Ronfeld, *Networks and Netwars. The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, Santa Monica: Rand, 2001, 12).

46. Thacker, "Networks, Swarms, Multitudes."

Carried over into the field of fashion, this means that when a certain number of people wears similar clothes (*uniformization*), they can form a collective (*vestimentary network*) through *coordination* on the basis of their spatial pattern, if this pattern subsequently feeds back into society.[47] This phenomenon is illustrated by *Exactitudes*, a photo series by Ari Versluis und Ellie Uyttenbroek, who not only spot anonymous, random similarities at the level of mainstream fashion like Eijkelboom does, but, often ironically, characterize group-oriented uniformities as whimsical habitual features of a species, such as *Mystique (Amsterdam 2014), Auntie Never Ever (Rotterdam 2010), Flexamanagers (Rotterdam/Paris 2008)* etc.[48] With swarms however, the mechanism works contrariwise: a *vestimentary swarm* is formed primarily through recurrent activities (*costumization*), from which a mutual heart-beat of a group (*synchronization*) is derived, leading eventually to trend formation as a byproduct. For instance, as Polhemus remarks, punk "was never a single stylistic entity,"[49] but, as a collective formed by purpose, it eventually distilled stereotypes ('mohawks and safety pins') from a conglomerate of scattered rituals that could be mimicked and fed into a bubble-up-and-down fashionalization mechanism.

Before advancing to my cursory conclusory suggestions regarding possible analytical applications of the model of *vestimentary synchronization and coordination* as general mechanisms of trend development in the field of street fashion, I will sum up their processual components in terms of the bias of time and space in a table that illustrates their complementary nature, leading to formation of respective collectives (*vestimentary networks* and *swarms*):

Trend Development	
Vestimentary Coordination **Space**	**Vestimentary Synchronization** **Time**
Reproduction/connection of entities in space: spatial stability, coordination, synchrony. Fashion trends stabilize in space though expansion and are best observed in spacial contiguity (spatial segmentation), when different people wear identical/similar clothes (redundancy).	Reproduction/connection of entities in time: temporal stability, continuity, diachrony. Fashion trends have a certain duration and stabilize in time; to establish or follow a trend (depending on the position within the innovation curve), it has to be worn more then once. Trend revivals cut into the time axis and cause rhythmical segmentation.
Time	**Space**
Eliminates the flow of time aiming for synchrony, but takes time as a process.	Connotation of limited social space, regionality.

Scenarios of Vestimentary Coordination and Synchronization

Based on the assumption that fashion functions as a stabilization mechanism, mediating between space- and time-oriented practices, I now outline some possible scenarios of *vestimentary coordination* and *synchronization* within the three-dimensional tension field (Fig. 2) of different forms of stabilization:

-- When *temporalization* is a dominant tendency within trend constitution (fashion + *costumization*), it eliminates distribution and spatial dispersion, forming a swarm. This effect occurs p.ex. during initial phases of subcultural style formation, opposing mainstream fashion, when trickle-across trend development is dominated by protonormalistic, centrifugal forces holding a group together and maintaining its status of singularity.

47.   Using terminology of fashion semiotics, this feedback can be describes as *performativity of (vestimentary) code*.

48.   See https://exactitudes.com.

49.   Polhemus, *Style Surfing*, 56.

Axis of fashion
(spatiotemporal stability of
transition -> oscillation)

Axis of uniformization /
spatialization
(spatial stability,
uniformity, simultaneity,
synchrony)

Axis of costumization/
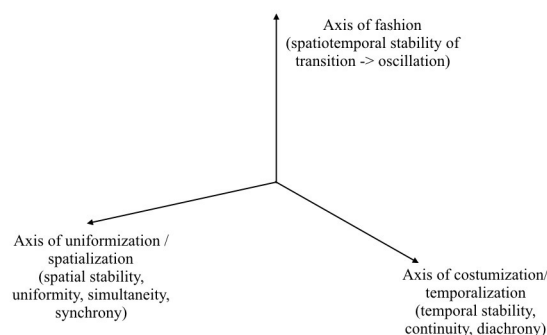temporalization
(temporal stability,
continuity, diachrony)

Figure 2

-- When centrifugal force and *spatialization* unite with fashion (fashion + *uniformization*), network building takes place aiming for synchrony. In the case of hypes, characterized by wide spreads and short memory, as described in the example of the *'-core' hype cycle*, *spatialization* rapidly supersedes *temporalization*, leading to acceleration of fashion time.

-- When uniformity-oriented *spatialization* and recursive *temporalization* evolve symmetrically or are temporarily united (*uniformization + costumization*), they tend to create spatial and temporal persistency operating against the instability of fashion, preventing oscillation. An example of such constellation is the utopia of stylistic universality, aiming, like the modern male suit or the blue jeans, to some degree at spatiotemporal context independence.

-- If, on the contrary, *spatialization* and *temporalization* are manipulated by fashion to cancel each other out, they result in the noise of *whatever*-singularity of indistinguishable styles without any sociosemiotic value. As Brent Luvaas puts it by taking the example of mass individualization, "the styles on the streets are like a spill of water across the pages of [a] dictionary, blurring its words together, making its pages stick."[50]

I thus suggest using the model of *vestimentary synchronization* and *coordination* in order to navigate through the *supermarket of style* when analyzing dynamics of contemporary street fashion. If street styles such as punk, hippie or hipster are no subsuming categories anymore but are split into sets of equivalent stylistic connotations, that are arbitrarily combinable with any attributes associated to other subcultures, than every personal style can be addressed according to different degrees of its involvement within *uniformization* and *temporalization* mechanisms, whereby the process of detecting a trend itself becomes a matter of spatiotemporal distance from the subject in question.

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50.   Luvaas, *Street Style*, 173.

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Anna Kamneva: University of Paderborn (Germany)

✉ anna_kamneva@me.com

PhD candidate and research assistant at the department of Art, Music and Textiles at the University of Paderborn, Germany. Dissertation project: *Vestimentary Coordination and Synchronization* (working title). She studied Fashion, Textiles & Design (BA) and Media Studies (BA, MA) in Paderborn and was an associate with the research training group "Automatisms. Cultural Techniques of Complexity Reduction" (2016-17); since 2014 editor-in-chef of *Weft*, an e-journal on fashion, art and textile studies, published by professor Iris Kolhoff-Kahl https://www.weft-magazine.de.