

Sewing in the Net – Collective-Aesthetical Experiences of Vestimentary Self-Fabrication

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Published: May 20, 2020

Abstract

For a few years now some DIY bloggers have reflected the aesthetical development of the own and of the other in their vestimentary activities, in their creative production processes and in their collective-structured events. They design, construct and sew most of their garments. Sew-blogging reveals a self-generating form of collective *vestmentary self-fabrication*. This is directly linked to the aesthetic-practical agency, the sewing of clothes for themselves, the aestheticizing and showing of oneself in these clothes as well as the detailed description and visualization of the manufacturing process of the garments. In these forms of aesthetic communitization, an exclusionary fashion dictum can no longer prevail against the polyphonic emphasis and positive reinforcement of diversity, solidarity, and creativity through inclusive body awareness in collective self-sewn clothing. By an iconotextual analysis of the “MeMadeMittwoch,” a weekly moderated linking session in which the bloggers present each other their clothes sewn by themselves, the article reveals wherein the empowering moment of the *fashion-agency* lies, what is meant by *vestmentary self-fabrication* and how the collective-aesthetic appears between and within different medialization formations of the vestimentary.

Keywords: Self-made Fashion; DIY Blogging; Diversity; Solidarity; Creativity.

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Introduction

The core tenet of this article is to show how sew-blogging reveals a self-generating form of particularly collective-aesthetical *vestimentary self-fabrication*.¹ Therefore, in a first step, the concept of this self-creating subjectivation by making own clothes *and* blogging about it is explained in more detail.² Subsequently a few more fundamental ideas and terms are introduced, to point out the terminological and theoretical origin of the article and to explore the dimensions of the collective-aesthetical in more detail. Then the blogosphere of the German “Nähnerds” (sewing nerds) and their link parties will be introduced. What actually happens in this sphere, will be shown with the short impression of an exemplary *iconotextual analysis*³ of the “MeMadeMittwoch” (me-made-Wednesday), a regular network meeting. To conclude its about showing how the sew-blogging can be understood as self-constituting and empowering action in the sense of *fashion-agency*.⁴ The aim is to end with summing up concrete vestimentary visions of empowering, politicizing and creating contained therein.

Concept of Vestimentary Self-Fabrication

To begin with, this brief conceptual explanation of the *vestimentary self-fabrication* shall make it easier to get started. Although the term ‘vestimentary’ is well known as a basic fashion-scientific term in the theory of fashion it might be helpful to briefly explicate my understanding of it.⁵ By ‘vestimentary’ here is meant: ‘clothing related’ or ‘pertaining to clothing specifically.’ In this sense it is adjectivally used as *vestimentaire* by Roland Barthes in his French work *Système de la Mode*.⁶ Accordingly, and beyond I also use it as *the vestimentary* to denote the unexplored space between body and clothes, the immediate connection of corporeality and clothing, and to point out the mutual constitutive relationship. By the term ‘self-fabrication,’ which is also developed in the context of the Medial Anthropology research-group around Lorenz Engell and Christiane Voss⁷ — I refer as well to the idea *On the Gradual Fabrication of Thoughts whilst Speaking* by Heinrich von Kleist⁸ as to the use of the term in the advisory-literature of the early nineteenth century, which speaks for example of the “self-fabrication of female finery.”⁹

Applied to the term ‘vestimentary,’ this means that a person’s self-fabrication¹⁰ manifests itself in the worn clothing and, in particular, in the specific handling of these clothes. And the actual composite

1. Dagmar Venohr, “Ich bin Andere und Ich ist eine andere! — Vestimentäre Selbstverfertigung im Netz,” in *Körperbilder — Körperpraktiken: Visualisierung und Vergeschlechtlichung von Körpern in Medienkulturen*, ed. Elke Grittmann et al. (Köln: Halem, 2018), 261–84.
2. Therefore, it is not only actually about inquiring the making of homemade clothes, but also about the attempt “to locate a renegotiated female subjectivity” throughout the transformation processes within sew-blogging (see Cheryl Buckley, “On the Margins: Theorizing the History and Significance of Making and Designing Clothes at Home,” in *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, ed. Barbara Burman, Oxford-New York: Berg, 1999, 67).
3. Dagmar Venohr, *medium macht mode: Zur Ikonotextualität der Modezeitschrift* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2010).
4. Dagmar Venohr, “ModeMedien — Transmedialität und Modehandeln,” in *Die Medialität der Mode: Kleidung als kulturelle Praxis — Perspektiven für eine Modewissenschaft*, ed. Rainer Wenrich (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), 109–26.
5. See Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge-Malden-Oxford: Polity, 2000). Referring to the definition of Joanne Entwistle — “‘dress’ as an activity of clothing the body with an aesthetic element (as in ‘adornment’) and ‘fashion’ as a specific system of dress” — the main focus here will be on dress, which although can never be seen without reference to the fashion system, but it is “by no means the only factor” (Entwistle, 48).
6. Roland Barthes, *Système de la Mode* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967).
7. Lorenz Engell and Christiane Voss, *Mediale Anthropologie* (Paderborn: Fink, 2015).
8. Heinrich von Kleist, “Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden,” in *Sämtliche Erzählungen und andere Prosa* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1984), 340–6; written around 1805–06, posthumously first published in 1878.
9. Johannes J. Wagner, *System der Privatökonomie: Das Ganze des Familienhaushaltes für das gebildete Publikum* (Aaran: Sauerländer, 1836), 173.
10. I decided to translate the German word *Verfertigung* into ‘fabrication’ because I also want to refer on ‘fabrication’ as ‘invention’ and ‘fictionalization,’ so please always perceive these connotations too.

meaning is therefore only obtained within a medial interplay with and by the gaze of the others. Even if the self does not seem tangible and threatens to disappear in the media process of its performative modes of representation, it returns as ‘self-fabrication’ in the sense of the ‘do-it-yourself’ of own clothes. Vestimentary self-fabrication thus is about the clothing-specific fabrication of the self within the process of self-production *and* medial presentation of one’s own clothing.¹¹ This dual and combinable meaning of the term ‘self-fabrication’ as ‘do it for yourself’ and ‘doing the self’ turns out to be extremely fruitful in the further study of DIY sewing blogs.

The Collective-Aesthetical as the Atmospheric

The *collective-aesthetical* is based, on the one hand, on Andreas Reckwitz’s notion that the aesthetical “takes place in a social space of subjects and objects in which perceptual-affective relations are constantly intertwined.”¹² However, the collective-aesthetical is not linked to material objects *or* human subjects, it is something that remains in suspension between the two. It is not easy to imagine an in-between without thinking a gap between object and subject. Above all, it is important that both can only be realized through thinking and perception, and that this gap must therefore also be grasped as a space of sensory impressions and unexpressed thoughts, a special kind of appearance which matters. It is therefore much more something like “the atmospheric” as Gernot Böhme argued:¹³ half thing and half perception — half objective reality and half subjective realization. This atmospheric can be self-made by “aesthetic work,”¹⁴ thus has a self-empowering effect, and its aesthetical reception¹⁵ can once again have a relieving effect on socially normative claims. According to Böhme, therefore, the aesthetical means something sensory that is not yet subject to the judgment of the intellect, but something that can only be felt sensually, and which can also be experienced together in the atmospheric.

It is more a common aesthetic in the original sense of perception than an aesthetical common sense,¹⁶ an aesthetical more referring to embodied sensuality than to performed beauty. This understanding of a common sensual embodiment of the aesthetic can also be found in the work of Bernhard Waldenfels.¹⁷ Two aspects should be emphasized here, first the role of Others’ gazes on the constitution of the body schema¹⁸ in the sense of Maurice Merleau-Ponty¹⁹, and the idea of a world of perception as an intermediate world, which is formed together through “*Kohabitation*” and “*Kooperation*.”²⁰

11. Cf. Amy Twigger Holroyd, *Folk Fashion: Understanding Homemade Clothes* (London-New York: Tauris, 2017). In contrast to Amy Twigger Holroyd’s great work, which speaks to me in all its motivations and results from the heart, and which presents an almost inexhaustible treasure for me to think in many other directions, my investigation isn’t actually engaged in exploring the sewing of the own clothes, but with their transfer into the media. The acts of transference and the processes of the transformation as well as their explanations depict the processes that is here called vestimentary self-fabrication.
12. Andreas Reckwitz, *Die Erfindung der Kreativität: Zum Prozess gesellschaftlicher Ästhetisierung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012), 24. All subsequent translations of original German citations have been made by Venohr and will not be labeled separately from now on.
13. Gernot Böhme, *Asthetik: Vorlesungen über Ästhetik als allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre* (München: Fink, 2001), 59–71; *Anmutungen. Über das Atmosphärische* (Ostfildern: edition tertium, 1998).
14. Böhme, 22.
15. Aesthetics in the sense of Böhme means the set of rules or the doctrine of sensory perception, which in Greek is termed *aisthesis*. If now ‘the aesthetical’ is discussed here, it refers to something based on sensory perception. But it is not yet a set of rules, and it is not subject to the rules of the aesthetics of the arts. Rather, it comes close to what Iannilli understands by the everyday aesthetics of fashion. See Gioia Laura Iannilli, “How can Everyday Aesthetics meet fashion?,” *Studi di estetica. Italian Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 7 (January 2017): 229–46.
16. Cf. Heidi Salaveria, *Spielräume des Selbst: Pragmatismus und kreatives Handeln* (Berlin: Akademie, 2007); Salaveria develops here the notion of a “Critical Common Sense,” which seems to be interesting for my further research on vestimentary self-fabrication.
17. Bernhard Waldenfels, *Das leibliche Selbst: Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des Leibes* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2000).
18. See Venohr, “Ich bin Andere”, 271–3.
19. Waldenfels refers here mainly to the late work of Merleau-Ponty, in particular to *Le Visible et l’invisible, suivi de notes de travail*, ed. Claude Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).
20. Waldenfels, *Das leibliche Selbst*, 299 (emphasis in original).

Because the body schema is not separated from the vestimentary both in self-perception and in the perception of the Others, and it is always culturally bound to the perception of clothing, all descriptions of such phenomena always concern body, clothing and bodily self-perception together. It is “at the outset thought here of by the Other, not just how *my* body presents itself *to me*, but as *the Others* see me and I *experience* myself that and how the Others see me.”²¹ This in-between, the space which is also expressed in the concept of cohabitation, of common inhabiting, is called here the intermediate sphere, which “would best be characterized as a sphere of differentiation.”²² In the following, this forms the basis for understanding diversity. On the basis of the assumption of a fundamental dialogical constitution of the meaning and the senses, which Waldenfels also exemplifies by means of the idea of fabrication in the already mentioned essay by Heinrich von Kleist,²³ and which ultimately does not permit any subjectivizing or objectivizing selectivity, he finally comes — despite or even because the previously emphasized differentiation — to a so called “emphasis of a syncretistic We.”²⁴

In the understanding of collective-aesthetic perception represented here, thus identification processes play no role, there is no need to identify with someone else. Furthermore, the pursuit of a common identity would lead to a completely wrong track here and disregard again the idea of a mingled, hybrid syncretization.²⁵ Collective as such is not directly linked to identity formation.²⁶ Identity would always point to comparability, which should be avoided here in favor of basic diversity.²⁷ In the Foreword of her reissued work about collective identities Carolin Emcke speaks of the widespread “confusion of diversity and inequality,” which makes “similarity a precondition for equality.”²⁸ In her basic work from the year 2000 thus she pleads for a “thin concept of identity.”²⁹ Recognition processes and the basic cognition of the Other must not require identification.³⁰ And because recognition processes work in such a way that “we communicate in them not only about deviations from the norm, but also about the norm itself,”³¹ and it must be clear that this norm is based on a fundamental otherness of each human or thing.

The real cognition rests in the fact that the atmospheric opens up a space that transverses the norms of understanding. Normatively, this kind of collective appears only through the aesthetical, only in the

21. Waldenfels, 121 (emphasis in original).

22. Waldenfels, 286.

23. See Waldenfels, 302.

24. Waldenfels, 304 (capitalization in original).

25. Especially because “it has become something of a cliché to say that fashion articulates identity,” as Joanne Entwistle points out, I will avoid this difficult term altogether. Even because I gave some courses on the topic and by the way I immersed deeper and deeper into this historic swamp of Western modernity. See Joanne Entwistle, “Section II: Fashion, Identity, and Difference — Introduction,” in *The Handbook of Fashion Studies*, ed. Sandy Black *et al.* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 97–101.

26. Cf. Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Maria Mackinney-Valentin, *Fashioning Identity: Status Ambivalence in Contemporary Fashion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018). While Maria Mackinney-Valentin refers to Fred Davis in the form that she analyzes the contemporary fashion landscape on the basis of the proclaimed ambivalence of the fashionable with respect to the “sartorial dialectic of status” (Davis, 63) and thus once again exposes the identity of the vestimentary self, I search within his also called ambiguity for the “fitting representation of self” (Davis, 63) in the context of a fundamental diversity, which in my opinion is not to be understood by the term “identity.”

27. As Heike Delitz clearly points out in her overview and introductory volume on *Collective Identities*, these are always imaginary and constructed, and here therefore quite as basic diversity due to a categorical rejection of every allegedly identical movement (Heike Delitz, *Kollektive Identitäten*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2018, 11). Many dialectical pitfalls in the attempt to situate identity discourses on the left-political side are shown by Lea Susemichel and Jens Kastner, *Identitätspolitik: Konzepte & Kritiken in Geschichte & Gegenwart der Linken* (Münster: Unrast 2018).

28. Carolin Emcke, *Kollektive Identitäten: Sozialphilosophische Grundlagen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2018), 8.

29. Emcke, 275.

30. See Sophie Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear* (Oxford-New York: Berg, 2007). Although Sophie Woodward also examines dress and identity, and she does not take an explicit critical position on the notion of ‘identity’ as such, she speaks of “how getting dressed can be theorized as an act of identity construction” (Woodward, 7), which makes it clear that it is a practical, performative and permanent process and not an assumed entity or core of the individual.

31. Emcke, *Kollektive Identitäten*, 18.

regular enabling and recognition of sensual experiences. So, the *collective* of the aesthetical is to generate joint, shareable and concerted experiences. It is embedded in particular and social sensory perception processes, which are aimed at collectivization for recognition. Also, the aesthetic of clothes must therefore be recognized collectively as a value in itself, without being habitually normative evaluated.

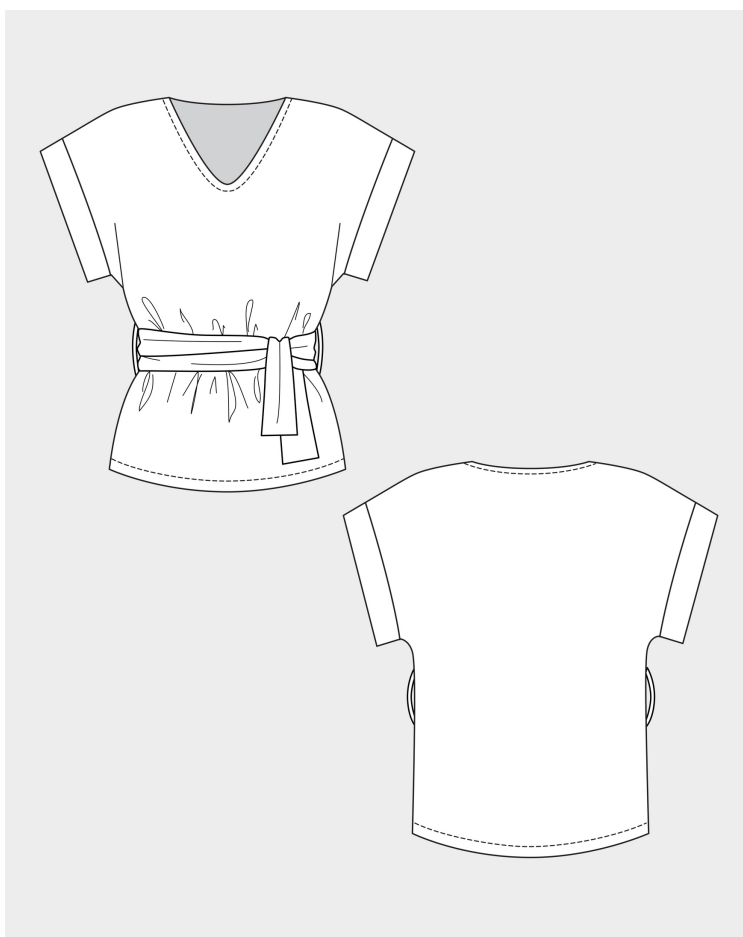


Figure 1: Schematic draft of the Sointu-Tee-pattern by *named*. Sufficient for “Nährerds” to imagine the fabrication process to a concrete fitting self-made garment. ©Petra Lönnqvist for *named*, 2016, <https://www.namedclothing.com/shop/sointu-tee/>

The Experience as Awareness of Perceptions

Experiences stand for being aware of all the kind of sensual perceptions that depend on the visual, the haptic and the tactile, or in other words depend on gaze, touch and contact. In addition to perceiving, observing and describing phenomena, however, one can also observe human action with things, examine the influence of things on people, and in turn examine these observations as actions.

The following theoretical considerations form the basis for these observations of the field, which is increasingly explored through the analysis of media phenomena, through participatory observation, through conversations with experts, and also through autoethnographic references. This kind of empirical research means also locating the topic, the field and the way of generating knowledge on a cultural- and social-philosophical basis. Moreover, due to its essential transmediality,³² fashion and dress can only

32. See Venohr, “ModeMedien,” 109–26.

be understood on the basis of a multitude of perspectives. In a genuinely transdisciplinary investigation aimed to fashion-scientific knowledge, such a multi-perspectival approach therefore seeks to link essential aspects of also supposedly disparate theoretical approaches. Thus phenomenological, pragmatic and poststructuralist modes of understanding come together here.³³

Diversity as Plurality

Diversity here is intended to mean richness and *plurality*, corresponding to the German term *Vielfalt*. In these *many foldings* lies the self per se, “this fold of Being which makes up the third figure,”³⁴ as Gilles Deleuze mentioned. Accordingly, diversity also appears as a kind of “topological relationship”³⁵ within the collective.

But calling ‘diversity’ does not just have positive connotations, it is not a positive term per se. It should be used here in a positive way, but not without pointing out, that we have to observe carefully what kind of diversity we envisage. Sara Ahmed warns against diversity as a so called “cuddly term” with nothing more than a “feel-good effect,” which means that diversity can also be used to conceal serious inequalities.³⁶ This is about the vestimentary practice of privileged, predominantly white women of the global North, who can sew their own clothes because they have enough time, money and freedom. The fact that most of these different “MeMadeMittwoch”-participants act from a relatively privileged social position remains untouched here, but must not obscure the fact, that many other people are affected by different kinds of existing inequality.

Discrimination based on ubiquitous differences and consequent nonconformity in this case concerns corporeality and its coupled textile materiality. The human body is so diverse in its particular plurality, that today’s ready-made clothing, which is based on serial measurements and the resulting average values, does not represent this bodily diversity and certainly cannot sheathe it suitable, embrace it beautifully or even adorn it fashionably.³⁷ Thus, when diversity is mentioned in this context, it refers to the fundamentally positive appreciation of the particulate differences between human bodies.³⁸ The thus discovered unfitting will become now a match field for creating valued plurality.³⁹

Solidarity as Belonging

Solidarity means in Kerstin Meißner’s reading of the term a kind of *belonging*, thus it is understood as a social process of “relational becoming,”⁴⁰ as a becoming of the self only together with the Other.

33. A fantastic short overview of the last two hundred years on fashion philosophy can be found in the article by Stefan Marino. In particular, the rediscovery of the German phenomenologist Eugen Fink, a disciple, companion and coeval of Husserl and Heidegger, for the philosophically oriented fashion theory offers a large fund of suggestions for my further research work. See Stefano Marino, “Philosophical Accounts of Fashion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century: A Historical Reconstruction,” in *Philosophical Perspectives on Fashion*, ed. Giovanni Matteucci and Stefano Marino (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 11–45.

34. Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 114 (capitalization in original).

35. Deleuze, 119.

36. Sara Ahmed, “‘You End Up Doing the Document Rather Than Doing the Doing’: Diversity, Race Equality und Dokumentationspolitiken,” in *Soziale (Un)Gerechtigkeit. Kritische Perspektiven auf Diversity, Intersektionalität und Antidiskriminierung*, ed. Maria do Mar Castro Varela and Nikita Dhawan (Münster: Lit, 2011), 133.

37. Although my approach is very close to Richard Shusterman and his understanding of somaesthetics, especially in his recourse to the aisthetical, my main focus, if to say so, is not resting on the body, but it is floating between Human and thing. In other words, his emphasis on the somatic is too strong for my furthermore fashion-scientific development of the in-between. Cf. Richard Shusterman, “Somästhetik: Das Medium als ‘Ziel,’” in *Philosophie als Lebenspraxis* (Berlin: Akademie, 2001), 225–55.

38. And, as Holroyd puts it, “in order to express and resolve our identities, we need a diversity of options from which to draw” (see Holroyd, *Folk Fashion*, 67.)

39. Also, the idea of a ‘discovered unfitting’ can be related to the “fit model paradox” of Shusterman, whereas I express a decidedly critical opposition to the evaluative role of fashion. Cf. Richard Shusterman, “Fits of Fashion: The Somaesthetics of Style,” in *Philosophical Perspectives on Fashion*, ed. Giovanni Matteucci and Stefano Marino, 94.

40. Kerstin Meißner, *Relational Becoming: Mit Anderen werden* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018).

Understood by Heinz Bude also as an “enigmatic social bond,”⁴¹ it forms the idea for the basic understanding that we share the world with others, and that makes him note as follows: “They are there, and I cannot imagine, how I could be without these many Others.”⁴² The democratic of solidarity lies in its fundamental recognition of diversity while simultaneously granting equal rights. Equality thus aims at the valued Otherness of every human being. “Dialectically, solidarity unites opposites, contradictions, and differences dialectically,” notes Hauke Brunkhorst, further emphasizing that it is the constitutive and political part of every democracy.⁴³ Referring to Richard Rorty, the desire for solidarity is a human attitude that can proliferous counteract the pursuit of an objective, judgmental and immutable truth. Solidarity is accordingly based on a daily practical community building and not on a possible discovery of similarities. In particular, the Other is then the connecting interesting and encourages the change, development and production of the self. It does not depend on ‘discovering’ but on ‘doing,’ thus in order to reveal forms of solidarity, it makes more sense to “use such images that do not show the discovering, but the making.”⁴⁴

This making, in turn, refers to self-fabrication in doing and acting with things. This making, in turn, refers to self-production in doing and acting with things. As we will see, the “Nähnerds” show the process of creating both clothing and solidarity through their community building as a movement of condensation: a diffuse crowd that organizes link parties and regularly congregates in different constellations in real life.

Creativity as Arsenal/Agency

At the same time, it is important to clarify the above-mentioned rather broad approach of aesthetics as the aesthetical on the basis of a common and everyday-practical concept of creativity — unfortunately an overused term these days. Therefore, it is particularly important to clearly outline ‘creativity’ as a concrete useful term for this research interest.

The approach of my research is referring to the Andreas Reckwitz’s conceptual creative space. In short, creativity can then be seen “as an arsenal of subjectivation techniques.”⁴⁵ For Reckwitz creativity seems *to be done* in discourse and practices, in a sense of *doing creativity*, for me it seems to be also a kind of culture-anthropological capacity. That is why the term ‘arsenal’ appears to be useful here in the sense of ‘workshop’ or ‘factory, as a place where everything is ready to be made to arm yourself.

While Reckwitz is pointing out the “aesthetic regime of the new”⁴⁶ and the “social catalog of requirement”⁴⁷ as the overarching objectives of his concept *creativity dispositif*, in the sense of an “aesthetical sociality,”⁴⁸ I would like to deal here with the *collective-creative resourcefulness* and that in terms of its potential to *evoke* vestimentary self-fabrication as a kind of *agency*. Of particular note in this context is the aspect of “*self-transformation*,”⁴⁹ which involves non-directive action. This making and what comes out of it, is different than what is expected, because it uses things and oneself differently, and it

41. Heinz Bude, *Solidarität: Die Zukunft einer großen Idee* (München: Hanser, 2019), 34–44.

42. Bude, 163.

43. Hauke Brunkhorst, *Solidarität: Von der Bürgerfreundschaft zur globalen Rechtsgenossenschaft* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2002), 15.

44. Richard Rorty, “Solidarität oder Objektivität?,” in *Solidarität oder Objektivität? Drei philosophische Essays* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1988), 23.

45. Andreas Reckwitz, “Die Erfindung des Kreativitätssubjekts. Zur kulturellen Konstruktion von Kreativität,” in *Unschärfe Grenzen: Perspektiven der Kulturosoziologie* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008), 238.

46. Andreas Reckwitz, *Die Erfindung der Kreativität: Zum Prozess gesellschaftlicher Ästhetisierung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012), 323.

47. Reckwitz, 346.

48. Reckwitz, 322–26 (title of a subchapter).

49. Reckwitz, 325 (emphasis in original).

no longer subjects them to normative rules. According to Reckwitz, this room for manoeuvring can also be called a “niche,”⁵⁰ and it first enables empowering agency and the experience of self-efficacy.

Unfortunately, this “aesthetical mobilization”⁵¹ means also that every human being “as body, mind and practice [is] his own aesthetic object,”⁵² and thus can be designed differently over and over again. Accordingly, the aesthetic-creative regime of the new in its currently prevailing third stage is no longer geared towards progress in the sense of novelty and optimization or continuous self-development: “Here it is not about being *better*, but *different*.”⁵³ And so the idea of a fundamental appreciation of diversity runs the risk of losing itself as a mere affect among many others and as “impulses of the aesthetically new”⁵⁴ in the “structure of the new as a stimulus.”⁵⁵ The Other would then be commodified and commercialized as a mere difference, and in the ever-faster cycle of the ever-new of fashion, it quickly becomes a trend.

But I think in the so-called Other are also potentials that do not let it completely degenerate into a conformist eternal-new. Therefore, it is crucial to look very closely at *how* the aesthetic strategies evoke resourcefulness and may eventually become carefully established as creative tactics in many different and increasingly numerous social, cultural, economic niches.⁵⁶ This, too, would be a way to transform towards a more conscious and, at best, more sustainable way of life. Because differently does not mean in principle new, but potentially also moderate or more fittingly.

Blogosphere of the “Nähnerds” and the “MeMadeMittwoch”

The blogosphere focused on in this exploration is that of do-it-yourself-, and especially sewing-blogs in Western societies since its emergence in the USA at the beginning of the 21st century. These blogs are special interest blogs, full of comments and very strongly hyperlinked, both amongst themselves and also increasingly with commercial providers. In terms of content, they are all about the exchange of sewing experience, detailed sewing instructions in words and images and therefore also a collective knowledge generation and learning from each other.⁵⁷

Unlike other blog formats such as fashion blogs,⁵⁸ personal style blogs,⁵⁹ street style blogs,⁶⁰ or plus size

50. Reckwitz, 326.

51. Reckwitz, 326–30 (title of a subchapter).

52. Reckwitz, 327.

53. Reckwitz, 327 (emphasis in original).

54. Reckwitz, 326.

55. Reckwitz, 327.

56. In contrast to the almost perfidious exploitation mechanisms of the creative industries, numerous case studies and contributions from around the world in the following volume develop economic alternative ideas to the predominant capitalist imperative of creativity: David Bollier and Silke Helfrich, *The Wealth of the Commons: A World beyond Market & State* (Amherst: Levellers, 2012).

57. For further information on blog research and the attempt to explore sewing blogs see Venohr, “Ich bin Andere,” 266–7.

58. A short and precise overview of the development of fashion blogs and their inherent fashion-scientific analysis potential can be found at this article of Agnès Rocamora, “Hypertextuality and Remediation in the Fashion Media: The Case of Fashion Blogs,” *Journalism Practice*, vol. 6, n. 1 (2012): 92–106.

59. Rosie Findlay argues for a digital identity that can be determined by blogging (cf. Rosie Findlay, *Personal Style Blogs: Appearances that Fascinate*, Bristol-Chicago: Intellect, 2017, 115–45). And Agnès Rocamora also sees in them “a significant space of identity construction” (“Personal Fashion Blogs: Screens and Mirrors in Digital Self-portraits,” *Fashion Theory*, vol. 15, n. 4, 2011: 407–24). Against that I would however like to avoid any notion of identity, and all that what this kind of, if also performative, determining is aiming for.

60. Accordingly, I oppose the terms of Monica Titton in relation to her “fashionable personae,” especially when she speaks of personal style bloggers and “the enactment of their own self-identity,” it is this very fact that I’m avoid, which I want to bring in motion within the field to the Other (“Fashionable Personae: Self-identity and Enactments of Fashion Narratives in Fashion Blogs,” *Fashion Theory*, vol. 19, n. 2, 2011: 202.) Therefore, the approach of Jan C. Watzlawick, who focuses on the “photographing subjects” and their “stage of identity formation, self-representation and tools of participation,” seems

blogs,⁶¹ DIY and especially sewing blogs not only feature the fashionably dressed self, fashion clothing or accessories, but very often is there a great deal of focus on representing manufacturing processes and discussing particular difficulties and their solutions. Thus, material processes are depicted in whose specific performativity the self is fabricated by sewing and by its always different impressionable expression. In the case of sew blogging, therefore, the production activity plays a constitutive role for the content and the way in which it is presented, especially in comparison to kinds of fashion blogs.

The sewing-bloggers typically are between twenty to sixty years old, mostly female, white, well educated, financially independent, middle class and mostly situated in the global North.⁶² The scene is this unmanageably large, which is why I selectively focus on the German *Nähnerds* (sewing nerds), as they call themselves. In Germany there are about thousand, according to their own words.⁶³ *Nähnerds* are simplicity characterized by the fact that they sew most of their own clothes themselves. A very precise, just as humorous as self-deprecating self-test, differentiated into eighteen questions or statements, can be found since 2013 on the blog “Nahtzugabe” by Constanze Derham, for example: “If you see a person, who is wearing an extraordinary well-fitting piece of clothing, you are wondering if it is self-sewn and whether you should ask the person about it.”⁶⁴

A lot of them regularly participate in various sew-alongs and link parties. Sew-alongs are joint actions of bloggers, who are sewing for a longer time on certain topics like, for example: “Summer-Skirt,” “Prada — We can” or “FJKA,” what means “Frühjahrs-Jäckchen-(Spring-Jacket)-Knit-Along” — only to demonstrate, that other textile techniques are also involved.

A particularly popular link party is the “MeMadeMittwoch,” a collectively edited blog, used as a kind of connection platform, with an average of one-hundred-fifty participants and around twenty-five-thousand clicks per event. It started as a weekly event in 2012, and now takes place on a monthly basis. As the central element of networking, self-sewn clothing items are collectively worn, presented on the MMM-website and displayed in great detail. The vestimentary self-fabrication in the *Nähnerd* scene is characterized by intensive reflection of manual work, the study of one’s own body forms, the very personal networking and mutual appreciation. In the following some of the collective-aesthetical strategies of the *Nähnerds* based on their presentation within the “MeMadeMittwoch” will be introduced

Exemplary Iconotextual Analysis of the “MeMadeMittwoch”

Iconotextuality is the main concept of my previous research in medial theory of fashion (Fig. 2). It is based on the observation, that fashion meanings are constituted by recipients in the concurrent perception of image and text in medial settings.⁶⁵ It is differentiated into various aspects of analysis, of which I

much closer to my research (“Straßen. Stile. Sensationen: Die Präsenz des Streetstyles in Weblogs,” in *Medien der Mode*, ed. Gudrun König and Gabriele Mentges, Berlin: Edition Ebersbach, 2010, 135). Sonja Eismann also sees in this kind of blogs, despite all the digital economic and socio-political oppression processes, at least the practice of a fundamental “right to self-representation” (“An den Rändern der Hauptstraße: Street Style Blogs zwischen kommunikativem Kapitalismus und dissidenter Artikulation,” in *Kleiderfragen. Mode und Kulturwissenschaft*, ed. Christa Gürtler and Eva Hausbacher, Bielefeld: transcript, 2015, 189).

61. Melanie Haller, in her body-sociological and fashion-scientific based research of clothed body and its mediatization, here the so-called “plus-size-bodies,” stands for an understanding of subjectivation processes, in which bodies are constituted through actions (“Plus Size Blogs: Infragestellung weiblicher Normkörper von Mode als Kampf um Anerkennung,” in *Körperbilder — Körperpraktiken*, ed. Elke Grittmann *et al.*, Köln: Halem, 2018, 245–60). In this sense, also the *vestimentary self-fabrication* is based on the fundamental emphasis of the constant, in this case, material making and being-made by the self and the Other.

62. On the social and socio-political localization of this blogosphere and a possibly democratizing moment of blogging itself, see Venohr, “ModeMedien — Transmedialität und Modehandeln,” 266–68.

63. Meike Rensch-Bergner, “Wertschätzung ist unsere Währung,” contribution to *Nebenan. Freundliche Internet-Konferenz*, Hamburg: Beta-Haus, June 6, 2015 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pYobAOrK9xw>; September 29, 2019).

64. Constanze Derham, “Test: Bin ich ein #nähnerd?,” on *Nahtzugabe: Nähen und Verwandtes*, June 24, 2013 (<https://nahtzugabe.blogspot.com/2013/06/test-bin-ich-ein-nahnerd.html>; September 29, 2019).

65. See Venohr, *medium macht mode*, 205–16.



Figure 2: Current editor team of the “MeMadeMittwoch” wearing the “Sointu Kimono Tee.” ©Team “MeMadeMittwoch”, 2019, <https://memademittwoch.blogspot.com/2019/03/>.

now select three to discuss the collective-aesthetical of the “MeMadeMittwoch”-website: (1) the *écriture* (in German *Schreibweise*), the style of generating any meaning, to *de_construct* the sense of diversity; (2) the aspects of *coherence and cohesion* to explain the *co_relation* of narration and rule for doing solidarity; and (3) the aspect of *production* to show how creative it could be to *manu_factor* the self.

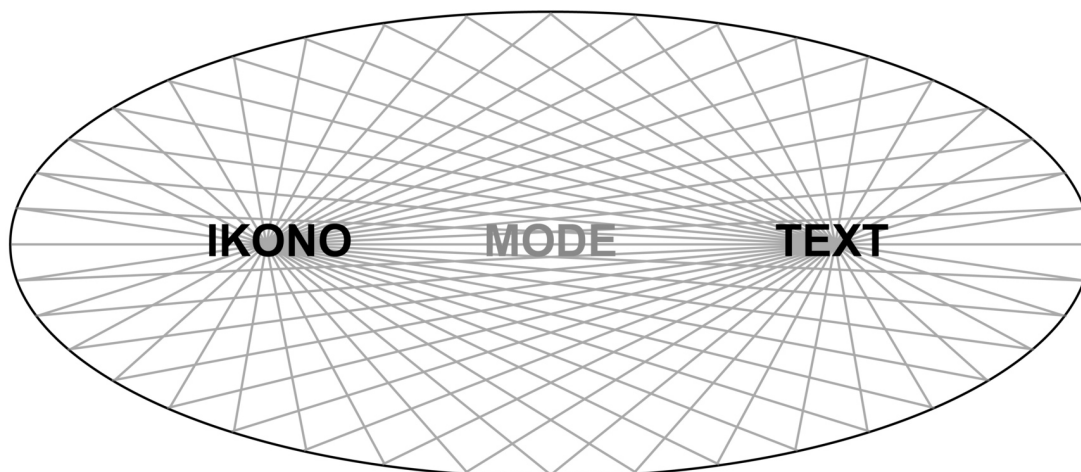


Figure 3: Iconotextuality as elliptical perception model. ©Dagmar Venohr, “IkonoModeText,” 2010.

Diversity is De_constructing

The first aspect *écriture* focuses on the ideological and historical way of constructing the self and the Other. It’s about the kind of presentation of a particular shirt pattern at one “MeMadeMittwoch:” It is the pattern of the legendary so-called “Sointu-Kimono-Tee” designed by the label *named*.⁶⁶ *Sointu* in

66. By an online image search with this term appear thousands of hits worldwide, especially on sewing blogs, but this here is the designer’s own: <https://www.namedclothing.com/shop/sointu-kimono-tee/> (October 02, 2019).

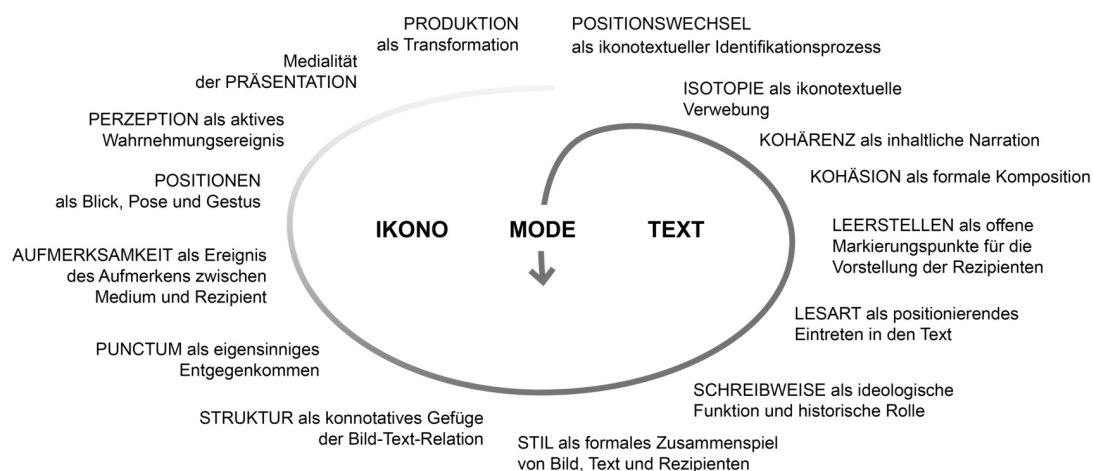


Figure 4: Model of the iconotextuality-concept with detailed analyzing aspects. ©Dagmar Venohr, "Ikonotextualität – Analyseaspekte im Modell," 2010.

Finnish means 'sound' or 'harmony' combined with the Japanese kimono connotations, and the invocation of the story of the American T-shirt, the pattern undermines a certain idea of cultural origin.

The whole editorial team of the "MeMadeMittwoch" sewed the seemingly same shirt in different colors, sizes and fabrics (Fig. 1) and comes to the conclusion "that the shirt is very special in its simplicity, and it adapts surprisingly well to the different female figure types."⁶⁷ Diversity in the context of this representation can therefore be understood as the equal richness of different others. And looking on the whole web we find many more modes of this kind plurality. From the simple, identical pattern, through the making, the material, the body and the staging in image and text, always arises an Other. In this diversity of appearance itself lies the potential of the differences to *de_construct* something common, connecting and collective.

Solidarity is Co_relating

The formal rules, the cohesion of the "MeMadeMittwoch" originates from the organization as an editorial team, whose members take turns as hosts every month. They have thus created their own rules of participation. Most important is to wear something 'me-made,' present it on your own blog or Instagram account and link it back to the "MeMadeMittwoch" blog. Equally important is, what the link party is not: It is not a competition. Against that, it is a kind of outer space where we see us and each Other, where the I and the We is constructed by viewing each Other with interested appreciation. In the words of Constanze Derham, one of the earlier host-editors:

Looking in the mirror and down at myself — the usual perspectives that you have of yourself — I do not usually know what to think about it. ... Cool or disaster? In that case a photo for the "MeMadeMittwoch" can help enormously: The photo provides the view from the outside, which the mirror cannot deliver.⁶⁸

Content coherence in the continuous narration of the whole idea can also be seen in the history of the changing editorial team, twenty participants in the last seven years, and all the unsolicited continual attendance. This story of solidary belonging, this *co_relation* is narrative expressed in all performative kinds of the active medial gazes, which create equivalent visibility and participation.

67. "Doreen, die Wollleise, on *MeMadeMittwoch*, April 03, 2019 (<https://memademittwoch.blogspot.com/2019/04/mmm-am-03-april-2019.html>); October 2, 2019).

68. Constanze Derham, on *Nachtzugabe: Nähen und Verwandtes*, September 7, 2016 (<https://nachtzugabe.blogspot.com/2016/>



Figure 5: “Nahtzugabe” (Constanze Derham) as a team member of “MeMadeMittwoch.” ©Constanze Derham for “MeMadeMittwoch”, 2020, <https://memademittwoch.blogspot.com/p/die-crew.html>.

Creativity is Manu_facturing

“Sewing_E,” one of the current host-editors of the “MeMadeMittwoch,” describes her experiences with cuts and shapes as follows: “Because of my large chest I’m always a bit cautious about patterns with a high waist — no one wants to wear the waist seam on the chest — therefore I first extended the top by five centimeters while cutting.”⁶⁹ Immediately after reading this, the viewers gaze wanders to her chest, sees the seam, and: the waist-height fits.

The iconotextual reading of the written is interacting with the visual, the dress, the fabric, the color and with her smile. For this kind of reception, the presented materiality matters. While following her description of the sewing process one stumble over the so-called ‘inner outside,’ as she writes: “I’ll give you a look inside.”⁷⁰ Along with the detail photo of the dress the Other is now getting deeply into it and sees then how it works inward. (Fig. 7)

This is precisely what this research is referring to: creative production is based on an evocation of a collective resourcefulness in our self by *manu_facturing* as material making and medial transformation. Correspondingly, the comments here are full of mutual appreciation, similar experiences, caring compliments and professional exchange.

Vestimentary Visions of Empowering, Politicizing, and Creating

The collective-aesthetical emerges and becomes comprehensible, if *fashion-agency* becomes a significant space to act and to belong to others in another mode. Then it will be also another handling of the medial fashion system to work out your own encouragement together with the Other.⁷¹ Fashion-agency thus is about acting with clothes, fabrics and textiles (the *Agents*), it marks the fact of all the related options of action (the *Faktum*), and it points to medial negotiating other assignments of meaning (the *Negotium*).

09/heute-als-schicke-suffragette-in-girl.html; October 2, 2019).

69. “Sewing_E,” on *MeMadeMittwoch*, March 6, 2019 (<https://memademittwoch.blogspot.com/2019/03>; October 3, 2019).

70. “Sewing_E,” on *MeMadeMittwoch*.

71. When Holroyd speaks of “the fashion commons” and thus combines the idea that it might be a creatable “common land” for everyone, then my concept of fashion trading corresponds to the possible empowering and explorative acting within this field (see Holroyd, *Folk Fashion*, 58–60).



Figure 6: “Sewing_E” adorned with a fitting waist seem. ©Elke von <http://www.elkma.de> for “MeMadeMittwoch”, “Blick nach Innen”, 2019, <https://memademittwoch.blogspot.com/2019/03/>.



Figure 7: The inner outside of the “Sewing_E”-dress. ©Elke von <http://www.elkma.de> for “MeMadeMittwoch”, “Blick nach Innen”, 2019, <https://memademittwoch.blogspot.com/2019/03/>.

It is therefore a mode of retaining or reclaiming fashion not as a structural system of modernity but in the sense of the collective vestimentary empowerment.

The presented blogosphere stands for an inclusive body awareness in collective self-sewn clothing, and there are many other such diverse and resistive practices. Therefore, fashion-agency denotes a me-made-mode of socio-political acting, a kind of vestimentary self-fabrication that matters as well through its material making process, as through its medial performative happening, and as through its collective creation of belonging.

Now it's about politicizing the social processes of aestheticization⁷² and in this sense also the *collective-aesthetical vestimentary self-fabrication*. Therefore, it might be a collective creation of other commonly shared sensuous perceptions of clothed self. Finally, and visionary, vestimentary self-fabrication is to create anOther aesthetical atmosphere of the still largely undiscovered perception and recognition of the clothed self. "Dress is the frontier between the self and the not-self,"⁷³ so please let us shape this space of the still limited self together.

72. See Reckwitz, *Kreativität*, 368.

73. Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London: Virago Press, 1985), 3.

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