



# HOW DO FASHION DESIGNERS DESIGN?

A research on the design process in fashion,  
reflected on architecture

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## Abstract

Architectural theory has illuminated the inherently connected relationship between fashion and architecture. Both disciplines shelter the body, react to spatial volume, rely on a process, and take a work of creativity from its two-dimensional concept into a three-dimensional reality. But the end result does not come out of the blue. It is the design process that leads to a building or fashion collection. And even though designing is just one verb, it actually is a chaotic sequence of activities; a complex, personal, creative and open-ended skill as described by Van Dooren et al. (2014). Is the framework of generic design elements that is developed for explicating the design process helpful to compare the design approaches in fashion with the architectural design process? The results of interviewing three fashion designers show similarities, differences and unique design tools and opportunities used in fashion. These can then be reflected on the architectural design process, and approaches of applying fashion tools in architecture can be considered.

## Keywords

Fashion design, design process, architecture

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fashion, reflected on architecture*

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The disciplines of architecture and fashion have a lot in common. Both disciplines shelter the body, react to spatial volume, and know discussions about form versus function. But taking a work of creativity from its two-dimensional concept into a three-dimensional reality is the biggest connection between all design disciplines. This process of designing is a complex, personal, creative and open-ended skill and presents itself in all creative disciplines (E. van Dooren et al. 2014).

Though both design disciplines, architecture and fashion, are worlds of their own. Where architecture orders space and is to be experienced both from the inside and outside, fashion merely embraces the body and is more a utensil or object. And even though both disciplines are designed for their user, one can choose to buy certain clothing, or not(!), but architecture will be placed in the middle of a community and should ideally comfort all users. With these differences in mind the question arises: What does the design process in fashion look like?

To make the design process explicit E. van Dooren et al. (2014) came up with a framework to describe the underlying generic process in architecture. They distinguished five generic elements in the design process: (1) experimenting or exploring and deciding, (2) guiding theme or qualities, (3) domains, (4) frame of reference or library, (5) laboratory or (visual) language. These elements are generic in the sense that they are main aspects and always present in the complex, personal, creative and open-ended design process. Even though this framework is based on the architectural design process, it is so general that it is used as the basis of this research in fashion design. Therefore, this research compares the design process in fashion with the design process as described in the framework. Next to that, unique tools used in fashion design will be made explicit.

The main aim of this paper is to describe the design process in fashion and reflect it then on the design process in architecture. Is the framework suitable for fashion design? And what differences can be found between the design processes in architecture and fashion? These differences can then be used as a personal motive to guide the architectural design assignment of this graduation project.

To be able to map the process of fashion design and verify the generic elements of the framework, three fashion designers were interviewed about their personal design approaches.

First the framework will be placed in the context of the creative disciplines of architecture and fashion. Then the framework will be explained and the main research question and sub questions will be defined. In addition, information will be given about the research method. In the following section the results of the interviews are presented i.e. the personal design approaches in relation to the framework of the generic elements. In the final section, conclusions are drawn and the application of fashion techniques in architecture is discussed.

## 1.1 Context

Fashion and architecture magazines review respectively clothing and buildings. These magazines then only show the finished product or the end result, and admire their creators for it. But the end result does not come out of the blue. It is the design process that leads to a building or fashion collection. And it is the design process that determines whether the design of the product will be innovative.

Many architects have encountered themselves designing other things than architecture. From closely related furniture, to match their buildings, all the way to pencils, watches and shoes. Zaha Hadid did it because she loved to design her entire life, and to explore new possibilities in terms of design and

manufacturing techniques. (designboom 2015) And for example, Frank Gehry loved doing furniture as a ‘quick fix’: “Architecture is so slow. Sometimes I just want immediate satisfaction.” (Isenberg 2009)



**Figure 1** – Shoe and clutch, Zaha Hadid Architects in collaboration with Charlotte Olympia (2017)



**Figure 2** – Wiggle Side Chair, Frank Gehry in collaboration with Vitra (1972)



**Figure 3** – Eamz shoe, United Nude (2004)



**Figure 4** - Cassina Red and Blue 635, Rietveld (1917)

These exchanges start with a fascination towards other design disciplines, but often result in innovative designs. This particular works interesting when architectural principles are applied in other design disciplines. This resulted for example in architect Rem d Koolhaas deciding to switch disciplines. He now makes innovative shoe and accessory designs (Figure 3). And Gerrit Rietveld decided to put his architectural principles all the way through his designs into his furniture, resulting in an iconic chair (Figure 4).

This makes it seem like there is a difference in the design processes, but that they do complement each other. If designers switch between disciplines, their personal frame of reference forces the designer to think differently (out of the box) about the product and solve a problem in a way that lies within their library.

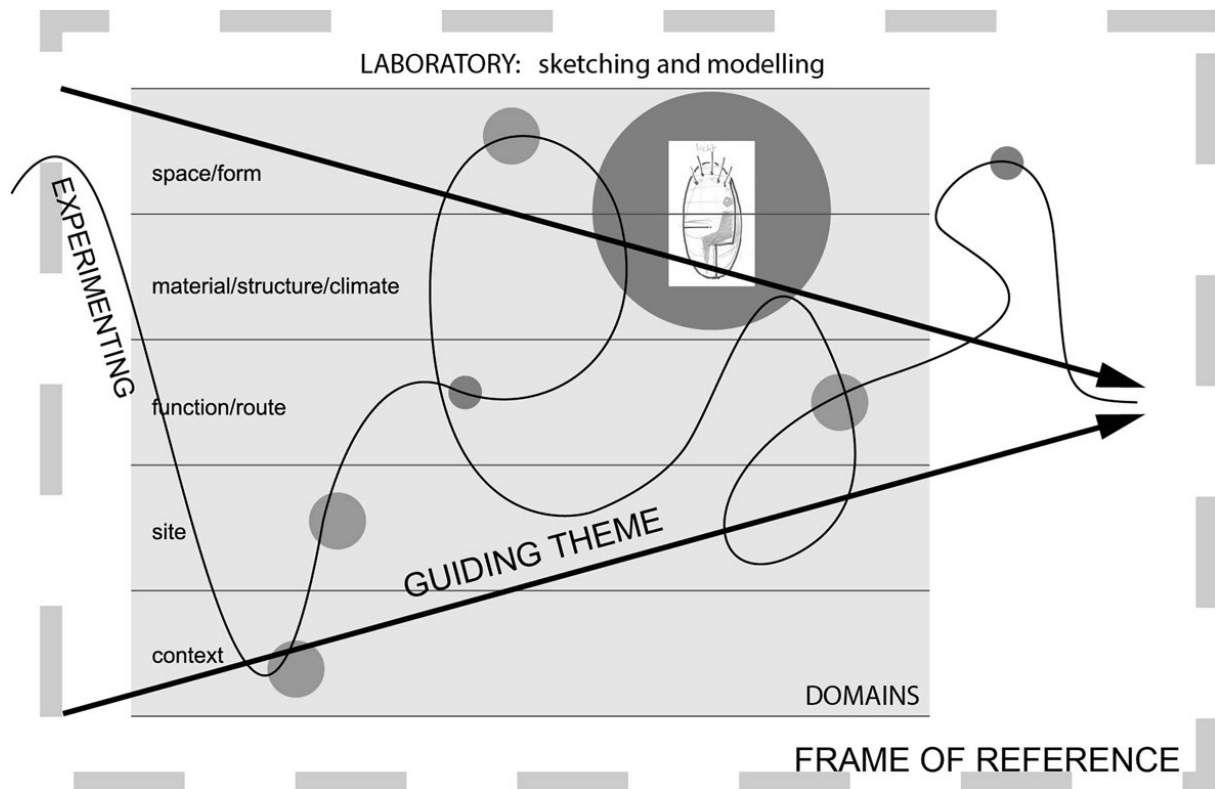
So, on the one hand, each design discipline has its own characteristics. Should the focus be on usability, aesthetics or sustainability? These accents can be fixed within the industry, but can also be placed by the designers. Some disciplines have high commercial demands and others deal with many rules they have to comply with, but a designer can always add his own weight to it and therefore these properties become more subjective. To find which are more dominant, the disciplinal characteristics or personal approaches, both of these features will be taken into account in this research.

## 1.2 Framework

Below is the framework as published by E. van Dooren et al. in 2014. This text explains the five generic themes of the design framework. Underlined are the terms that are used in this thesis.

*The framework consists of five generic elements (see Fig. 1).*

The design process is a process of experimenting, a fractal-like process of coming up with, testing and evaluating hypotheses, or a process of exploring and decision making by activities such as collecting information, analysing, abstracting, associating, comparing, evaluating, and taking distance. Designers present provisional solutions, they study all kinds of aspects in different options and they propose alternatives to compare what “fits best”. After each trial, they reflect on intended and unintended consequences, in order to come up with new proposals.



1. In the process of experimenting a designer needs a focus, an inspiring direction, a guiding theme or qualities, something to hold on to in an almost endless field of possibilities and to give character and coherence to the design. Coming up with a guiding theme, may happen at the start or later on in the process of experimenting. Usually it happens in steps, in a “train of thought”.
2. Designers experiment and come up with their guiding theme within and across all levels of scale and meaning or domains. For architecture five domains are defined: (a) space and composition, (b) material, climate and structure, (c) function and movement, (d) site, and (e) socio-cultural, historical, philosophical context. Designers come up with statements and make choices in all these domains, and within these domains they have to deal with a lot of criteria and information: such as government rules, personal preferences, client’s wishes, “universal” laws, and cultural habits.
3. The process of experimenting and working with a guiding theme takes place in and with the help of a broader context, a frame of reference or library. The knowledge about architectural designing is stored in the built environment and in theory. Designers build up a library, for unconscious and conscious use during the design process. In all domains, the knowledge is in the form of rules of

*thumb and in principles and patterns used, tested in the situation at hand, rejected, transformed, and so on.*

4. *A laboratory is needed for experimenting. The “designerly language” of sketching and modelling functions as an extended working memory. By making visual and explicit, the process of “designerly” thinking, of making choices, formulating, reformulating, evaluating, exploring possibilities and discovering new insights, unfolds.*

## 1.3 Research questions

This paper focuses on the question: Is the framework suitable for fashion design, and what differences can be found between the design process in architecture and fashion? To answer the key question three sub questions are to be answered: (1) Do fashion designers recognize the generic elements in their own design process? (2) How do they describe and interpret the elements; which features and tools do they point out? (3) What tools are specifically used in fashion?

## 2 METHODOLOGY

To get reliable data on the design process in fashion, three Dutch fashion designers were interviewed. All interviewees were working fulltime as self-employed fashion designers at the time of the interview. The group includes both young talented designers and experienced professionals, but all have delivered full fashion collections.

The interviews were semi-structured and taken in Dutch. To decrease the risk of prejudice, the focus was on the designers' stories. The themes from the framework by E. van Dooren et al. (2014) was used as the starting point for discussing the personal design process. The main question was: “Do you recognize these themes, and what do they look like in your personal design process?”

To get a clear insight in all design aspects of fashion design, the designers were asked to describe their process in a chronological order. Meanwhile other questions arose in the context of the designer's story, to stimulate clarification of particular aspects and to reflect the story on the (architectural) framework.

The participants were interviewed in November 2017 for approximately one hour by the author. All interviews were in Dutch and took place in a private setting. The interviews were sound recorded and verbatim transcriptions were made.

The interviews were then analysed in two ways; summarizing and labelling. In relation to the research questions the labelling focused on (1) synonyms and descriptions, the personal notions and ways designers use to describe the activities, referred to with the elements, (2) aspects or features of the fashion design process, in particular the elements and (3) peculiarities in the fashion discipline. Going deeply into the transcriptions by making, reading and labelling them, helped to capture the essence into a summary, directed by the framework and focused on unique elements in fashion.



### 3 RESULTS

The fashion designers were asked to tell about their design process in a chronological order so all designers talked predominantly about the design process. Next to that, the designers were reminded about the five generic themes when they had mentioned one unconsciously, and were able to reflect on them immediately. The designers regularly mentioned their works in order to illustrate the design process.

The data of the interviews will be described from the perspective of the 5 generic elements. For each element the results will be given, following three of the sub-questions: (1) the recognition of the element and the notions used, (2) features and further specifications of the element, (3) the peculiarities in fashion design.

#### 3.1 Experimenting

All designers recognize the theme of experimenting. They acknowledge that it is an ongoing process throughout the entire design process and could go on forever. Designer 1 notes that in the design process you have to experiment until you are satisfied. That experimenting plays an important role in achieving a good design is apparent from the fact that all designers indicate to evaluate a broad range of options before deciding on issues in order to get surprising and innovative results. About this, designer 2 says: “You have to try everything, even if you are not sure it will be nice”.

##### 1- recognition of the element and the notions used

The most used notions besides experimenting are to be categorized in two groups; On one hand there are the words in order to describe the actual testing, on the other hand are the notions used to describe the reflecting (see Table 1). But in the end, designer 1 describes the experimenting as finding solutions for problems.

<i>Testing</i>	<i>Reflecting</i>
<i>The experiment</i>	<i>Judging</i>
<i>Exploring</i>	<i>Making decisions</i>
<i>Researching</i>	<i>Improving</i>
<i>Seeing what happens</i>	<i>Asking questions</i>

**Table 1**

##### 2- features and further specifications of the element

Even though all designers recognize the ongoing character of experimenting they do have their own approach to it. Designer 1 and 3 go into the experiments very open-ended: “we will see what happens and what it will bring us”. But designer 2 goes in more determined: “I need to fill the table with all products of the experiments before I can start assembling them”. Table 2 shows the distinct phases the designers mention in the questions they ask themselves. This seems to be a repeating process all through designing.

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Questions asked</i>
<i>1. Stating problem</i>	<i>What is wrong / the problem?</i>
<i>2. Testing (all) options</i>	<i>What can I do to solve it?</i>
<i>3. Making decisions</i>	<i>What is the best solution?</i>
<i>4. Reflecting</i>	<i>Are all problems solved?</i>

**Table 2**

The designers also recognize the troubles that are part of experimenting. The first designer said: “In the beginning I shaped silhouettes of which I thought would be perfect coats, but when I started to execute it, it turned out to be impossible. You then have to think in solutions”. Or as another designer (3) called it “thinking in possibilities”. These two designers also explicitly called out the endless nature of experimenting; “I could think of one hundred thousand things to do, but in the end, I have to set a boundary for myself”.

### **3- peculiarities in fashion**

The designers seem to make a distinction between technical experiments and creative experiments. The technical experimenting usually comes from a problem, or goal that has to be achieved. Meanwhile the creative experimenting seems to be a more open-ended process, in search of opportunities.

## **3.2 Guiding theme**

When talking about the guiding theme, the fashion designers immediately recognize the theme and need only few synonyms to make that clear. The terms ‘concept’ and ‘inspiration’ are used by all designers and seem self-evident enough to cover the subject. Remarkable is that the guiding theme is clearly a very personal subject and according to the long stories that are told about it, it seems to be an important part to the fashion designers.

### **1- recognition of the element and the notions used**

In describing this theme, the designers apply more nuance to their explanations. The concept is a starting point according to designer 1, and designer 2 explains it as a reason to do things, or not. The last designer (3) calls it his ‘handwriting’ and states that his personal motives always seep through.

### **2- features and further specifications of the element**

Designer 2 explains her guiding theme as a personal idea: “The guiding theme is my fantasy, my bubble, and people can look at it, be inspired by it and maybe even be part of it, but I am showing them my imagination”. This attitude seems to be a common approach under the interviewed designers, but is not general in fashion design. Designer 3 states: “Some designers, like Viktor & Rolf, think of a concept and work it out minutely. I barely ever explicitly think about a theme”.

The designers do mention though, that an explicit guiding theme puts more focus into a fashion collection. Where designer 2 embraces the ‘copy-paste’ technique to create atmosphere and unity, designer 3 rebels to it. He believes that his unity is achieved in the implicit characteristics of his clothing.

### **3- peculiarities in fashion**

Fashion designers are extremely explicit about their guiding theme. They ask themselves questions like “how do I want to be perceived?” (2) and “how do I make myself unique?” (3). Designer 1 also ‘puts her own mark on it’, and the other two designers (2) (3) use the notion ‘brand identity’. Table 3 shows the thorough elaboration of the designers’ guiding themes or as it may be called, brand identity, and illustrates the weight the guiding theme has within fashion design.

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**Guiding themes / brand identity of the interviewed designers**

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(1): “After my internship in Antwerp I had made a lot of photographs of, for example, birds in the sky or from the moving sky itself with its clouds. I really liked these pictures. I noticed the movement in all these photographs and how they captured the motion of flying birds, or my movement in the bus. When I saw an overview of all these photographs, I saw the similarity in these pictures, even though they were taken at different moments. So, I realized that movement might be my current fascination. To research how movement plays a role in daily life. Next to that, big issues like ‘how does the world move, nowadays?’ kept me busy. For example, I was interested in the refugees fleeing their countries in hope for a better life. The fact that this is happening, touches me emotionally. So, I started to investigate why the world is moving this way. It seems like it only gets worse, even though we have all kinds of new technologies within reach. Everybody is busy with innovative designs and solutions. Then how is it possible that there still is humanitarian decay?

So that was my big issue. And in the end, that was my inspiration for the collection. So, finally, I had a big social problem as my starting point. The photographs and visuals were no longer necessary, they just stimulated me to look at movements.”

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(2): “During my graduation I came up with the New Street Expo. This was quite an experimental collection, including mouth caps, paint brushes, bomber jackets and rebellion. That is where I started. From then on, each collection is name New Street Expo. Each time, I put the feeling of this gang into a new place and time. Last time it was the seventies, Bronx, New York. And every time I want them to identify them as a group. So, they were hip hoppers, rappers, beatboxers or graffiti artist from that time.

I start with researching that time. For example, watching the movies and noting this ugly pair of pants. How cool would it be to do the same thing now, but then in a different shape, with these kind of pockets, etc. The one question I keep asking myself is: ‘what would a New Street Expo member wear?’ And that is very important! It keeps the fantasy alive.

My guiding theme does not have to be real or existing. I do not like the heavy topics, because you must always justify yourself. To me, fashion should be something beautiful; something fun, a fantasy, something you would want to wear every day. Something that makes you happy. The story behind it should be nice. I may transfer a story, but not as a goal in itself.”

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(3): “What you see nowadays is particularly difficult to me. The image of modern women, the Kim Kardashian feeling, where they try to look like their pictures... All these pictures have filters, and if you try to look the same in real life, you need to brush away your face. I, however, want to see real women. I always put pockets in my garments. Even in evening wear, so that the women can feel comfortable on the red carpet. It is much prettier and sexier. What is happening right now, is really bad. The entire image of women, everything that is going on with the sexual harassment. But, if you are a ‘strong woman’, you will be much stronger in that too. Then you are the one making decisions. You have got the power. While if you settle to be the person that brushes her face away, you will have a totally different appearance.

So, I find it important that these women, are powerful women. And that is why I keep repeating my slogan: ‘new ethics in luxury fashion’. So, that is not only sustainability or the clothing, but also the image of women. It shows everywhere.

Besides that, I do believe that I am always using classic silhouettes. At least, a classic approach. I am rather classical, but always with a sort of imperfection or looseness to achieve the tension I pursue.

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**Table 3**

### 3.3 Domains

Even though the domains are related to the design discipline, the fashion designers did recognize the architectural domains they were introduced to. In general designers call out all aspects and domains as described in the framework and the ones they have to attend to by their discipline of fashion design. In generic terms they talk about aesthetics, technique, functionality, physical and socio-cultural context. Also, the aspects within these domains are thoroughly discussed and shown in Table 4.

<i>Domains</i>	<i>Notions used in the interviews</i>
<i>Appearance</i>	<i>Form, colour, material, movement, proportions, silhouettes, composition</i>
<i>Technique</i>	<i>Constructions, fit, size, sustainability, climate</i>
<i>Functionality</i>	<i>Wearability, type garment</i>
<i>Physical context</i>	<i>Body, human, skin</i>
<i>Socio-cultural context</i>	<i>Target audience, segment, commerce, zeitgeist</i>

**Table 4**

#### **1- recognition of the element and the notions used**

After introducing the designers with the concept of domains they reflect on them as being “a framework” (1) or “rules” (2)(3) to design within. Designer 3 even remarks that these domains are often not so clear, but overlap. This designer also mentions that the domains are sometimes imposed by the industry. This statement is backed up by designers 1 and 2 who stress that they do not want to be limited by the domains.

#### **2- features and further specifications of the element**

The clearest and most emphasised domain is the appearance. All designers reserve a lead role for silhouettes, material and composition. The physical context, in the sense of the human body, seems to be so self-evident that it is only shortly mentioned. Functionality, technique and socio-cultural context are the most subjective domains. According to the designers’ guiding theme the emphasis shifts between these domains. “If it has to be commercial, you pick this fabric, because it feels good against the skin” is the explanation of designer 2 about how the domains react to each other. Designer 3 describes his emphasis on the matter sustainability as follows: “There should be some timelessness in the pieces. Because they are made as individual garments, they do have to be able to continue to exist. That is our sustainable story, slow fashion.” The domains are always there, sometimes imposed by the discipline, but the designers always have to deal with them, even if that means ‘choosing to ignore what is prevailing’ (1)(2)(3).

#### **3- peculiarities in fashion**

On the other side of the personal preferences for certain domains, there is a shared approach on one domain. The socio-cultural context has a very specific interpretation in fashion design. Designer one describes it as follows: “First you write down who this person is. What is his age? Does he have money? What does he want? What are his hobbies? You are trying to imagine a person who would be your ideal client.” The emphasis on this domain is partly due to commercial considerations, but has also a strong link to the guiding theme. Table 5 shows the overview of the personal target public of the designers.

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**Target public of the interviewed designers**


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(1): “A woman, approximately thirty to forty years old with enough capital to purchase such clothing. This woman has seen things, so she knows what her style is ... she is confident. She succeeded in life, so she knows what she likes, what she loves, and she is aware of her choices. Besides, she might have more affinity with art.”

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(2): “Men and women, young and old.”

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(3): “The eccentric woman with a developed fashion sense. Like in the seventies and eighties, the muses you had back then, a Paloma Picasso. That was the kind of woman who seems very classic in her suit, but then you knew she was not wearing any underwear. There is always something below, an exciting hidden layer.”

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**Table 5**

### 3.4 Frame of reference

There are two ways the designers look at the frame of reference, the first one is ‘experience’ and results in what designer 3 calls ‘intuitive designing’. The second way the frame of reference is looked upon, is from the aspect of ‘inspiration’. In this case the conversation is usually about gathering sources of inspiration around them to expand the frame of reference. These references can be found in anything! The designers can get inspired from second hand furniture, films, music to political issues. Next to that two designers (1,2) explicitly do research about their references where the other designer (3) only looks at his references or sources of inspiration briefly to capture its essence.

#### **1- recognition of the element and the notions used**

The frame of reference is on the one hand seen as a technical library, but on the other hand also a tool to form an opinion about what is right. Designer 3 explicitly names his extended working experience, things he has encountered or things he has tried before as a part of the frame of reference. Designer 1 and 2 also do real research in order to expand their frame of reference. The research divides from diving into the history of reference to learning from practical experiments with fabrics. But in the end all designers are looking for ‘a base to start building upon’. This base leads to easier decision making. Designer 3 illustrates it this way: “Of some fabrics you immediately know that they are going to be pants or a coat, end. But other things are more open, those could become anything”.

#### **2- features and further specifications of the element**

There is also a technical aspect to this theme. The rules of the fashion industry sometimes dictate what to do. For example, designer 1 was designing a winter collection, so there had to be a coat in it. This was stated as it to be self-evident. Another self-evident statement came from designer 2: “If you are going to make pants, you start with the basic pattern, the one everyone uses, then you are going to customize it the way you want”.

#### **3- peculiarities in fashion**

All designers state that they gather their inspiration around them, which results partly in a physical frame of reference. Designer 2 has many pictures, small drawings, self-made colour palettes and a board with all her practical experiments on it in her studio. The wall in the atelier of designer 3 is filled with inspiring pictures and materials. He also tries to expand his frame of reference into the future; “I have quite a feeling for what is to come, so I am usually one step ahead of fashion”.

## 3.5 Laboratory

The laboratory is mostly mentioned by the tools involved. The designers are very like-minded in the tools they use within the laboratory but they do experience the importance of the tools differently.

### **1- recognition of the element and the notions used**

Common used tools are sketching, modelling and draping. There seems to be no major differences in the way the designers sketch or model, one (1) is a bit more precise than the other (3), but they use these tools for the same goal; creating silhouettes and then elaborate on them.

### **2- features and further specifications of the element**

Designer 1 relies on the technique of moulage, or draping. She starts out with the fabric and immediately starts shaping forms on a mannequin. If she then finds interesting forms she starts drawing. Designer 3 however, starts out with pinning a fabric to the mannequin to get inspiration, but starts the real designing in a sketch. This sketch is, in contrast to the sketches of designer 2, not binding. Designer 2 states that her sketches have to be perfect before starting to actually executing the garments. She says: “If I do not fully believe in my drawings, it is never going to work”.

After draping and sketching all designers start with their first execution in fabrics, resulting in a prototype. This prototype is usually made in ‘testing cotton’, a cheap and manageable material. These white models are then usually photographed and printed.

The designers mention working on the full garment, as well as working on separate details like pockets, embroidery and zipper finishing. They also do material and colour studies resulting in moodboards and overviews of the experiments.

### **3- peculiarities in fashion**

After the draping, sketching and testing, there is a ‘white collection’ in test cotton and can the final phase start: ‘fittings’. Fitting models come into the studio and the clothes are put on them. This is a very important step in de design process and an essential tool within the laboratory. Now photography also takes an important role to capture the current state of the garments.

## 4 CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Verification of the framework

#### *Sub (1) & sub (2)*

In regard to the first sub question of this research, the results show that the interviewed fashion designers do recognize the generic elements of the framework within their own design process. They clearly put different emphasis on what elements are more or less present in their personal process, and they may sometimes even differ in naming the themes (see Table 6), but the content and descriptions of the themes seem to always be accurate.

In regard to the second sub question, the way the fashion designers describe and approach the themes applies the necessary nuance to the main question of this research. The fashion designers have described thoroughly what the themes look like in their process, but they also gave indications about how dominant the themes are in their personal design process.

*Table 6 shows an overview of the five generic themes and the notions used in the interviews.*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Notions used in the interviews</b>
<i>Experimenting</i>	<i>Testing, studying, asking questions, exploring, researching, judging, making decisions, improving, seeing what happens</i>
<i>Guiding theme</i>	<i>Concept, theme, brand identity</i>
<i>Domains</i>	<i>Framework, rules</i>
<i>Appearance</i>	<i>Form, colour, material, movement, proportions, <u>silhouettes</u>, composition</i>
<i>Technique</i>	<i>Constructions, size, sustainability, climate</i>
<i>Functionality</i>	<i><u>Wearability, type garment, fit</u></i>
<i>Physical context</i>	<i><u>Body, human, skin</u></i>
<i>Socio-cultural context</i>	<i><u>Target audience, segment, commerce, zeitgeist</u></i>
<i>Frame of Reference</i>	<i>Experience, inspiration</i>
<i>Laboratory</i>	<i>Sketching, modelling, photography, <u>prototypes, draping, fitting</u></i>

**Table 6**

Overall could be said that the framework as set up by E. van Dooren et al. (2014) is a good generic method to reflect on the design process. The themes are well described and fit the fashion design process almost as accurate as the architectural design process. Experimenting, the guiding theme and the frame of reference are well defined terms and fully recognized and described by the fashion designers. The definition of these themes does not seem to differ from the descriptions of the original research. Differences were found in the discipline specific themes; the domains and laboratory. These differences however, were mostly found in the elements involved within the theme and not in the definition. Only the domains, which were specifically described for architecture, were made more generic for this research in order to fit aspects of other design disciplines in it as well.

## 4.2 Unique tools in fashion

### *Sub (3)*

The peculiarities in fashion design seem to lay mostly in the local differences compared to other design disciplines, and can be categorized into two groups: (1) disciplinary characteristics and (2) approaches. The disciplinary characteristics are specific for each design discipline and are clearly described by the interviewed fashion designers. Next to that, the interviews show that each designer has his own approach towards the design process, and therefore each process is unique. All these peculiarities stand out in the sense that they are mentioned frequently and stressed by all designers as an important influence on the design process.

The disciplinary characteristics are fixed within the design discipline and are appropriate for the product. These characteristics show mostly in the domains and laboratory. Underlined in Table 6 are the aspects within the domains and laboratory which distinguish the fashion design process from the other design disciplines. Themes like fit, wearability and the human body as context, are important aspects in fashion design and cannot be ignored since they are required to make a garment. Next to that, the precise and flexible nature of fabrics makes it important to experiment with it by draping and making prototypes in different materials. The designers unanimously stress the importance of using fabric samples and making test models to actually be able to test. Also doing this frequently in the context; fitting.

The approaches of the designers however, are influenced both by themes within the design framework as by disciplinary, and mostly commercial, influences. The interviewed designers show similar focus on certain aspects in their design processes. Some in favour of commerce and some in favour of their guiding themes.

As designer 2 states, fashion designers do not take the public opinion into account, but describe their own target audience and segment. She explains being able to do this because fashion can be bought and worn by customers who like it, and the rest of the world does not have to be bothered by it if they do not like it. This is a good illustration of the fashion industry and its commercial side; to be able to sell clothing you will have to appeal directly to the customer. The need to stand out leads to extensive guiding themes, or as the interviewed fashion designers call it: Brand identity. This brand identity is then usually visible in all fashion collections, but also in their presentations (fashion shows, publications, shoots, etc.).

Another peculiar approach in fashion design is the distinguished elements that are designed. The designers declare to design garments, outfits and collections; separate designed elements which together reassemble a whole. The designers differ however, which of these elements is the leading theme of the design process. Designer 3 says to focus on singular garments and styles the outfit around it. He even says that his collections just happen to be coherent, thanks to his strong guiding theme and handwriting. Designer 2 on the other hand, strives for a maximum coherency and adapts her looks and garments to the concept of her collections.

Lastly there is a current topic going on in the fashion industry which illustrates how commerce pressures fashion designers to work conform the norm. Designer 3 has worked for the bigger fashion houses a long time and was asked to do about six collections a year. This is the so named 'fast fashion'. All the interviewed fashion designers are for a counter movement (slow fashion), stating that the fashion industry as it is, is not sustainable at all. The fashion designers aim to put quality over quantity, in order to get fair and sustainable garments, but also to design clothing that lasts beyond the season. Designer two says: "When I design a dress, I aim for it to be worn for generations", and designer three designs using classic silhouettes as a basics in order to make the garments timeless.

However, by designing according to 'slow fashion', the designers automatically put themselves outside the big commercial market. Making sustainable clothing is far more expensive, especially compared



to the big fashion chains who offer quickly changing collections for bottom prices. To compete in the fashion industry a design or brand should therefore stand out in its appearance, be affordable and produce enough pieces a year. Altogether, quite a (commercial) challenge! The interviewed designers position themselves within this market by putting emphasis on creativity. Aiming for the more exclusive segments of the market, gives the opportunity to choose form (or creativity) over function. This is in contrast to the commercial fashion brands, which are not included in this research, and is a whole different line of work.

### 4.3 Reflection on architectural design

This research indicates that the design processes in architecture and fashion are very much alike. Therefore, it is not so strange to find architects making exchanges to fashion design. The design process they always use can be maintained, but thanks to some peculiarities in fashion design, architects are now, for example, able to build one to one prototypes. Something they cannot do in their usual design process. The experiences gathered with such exchanges, make it possible to actively broaden the frame of reference. This in order to make it easier to think out of the box later on in their own design discipline again.

To apply the tools of fashion design in architectural design, three approaches are to be considered.

The first is to literally apply the tools used in fashion design. For example: making prototypes, using the domains of fashion and even use the approach of designing outfits, collections and the human body. This might be considered the most extreme approach, since it undermines the principles of architectural design.

The second option is only using the mindset of fashion designers, regarding their approach towards the certain themes of the design process. For example, designing according to commercial pressure. The architectural design process would then also start with defining an elaborate guiding theme, target group and segment. This would lead to a more commercial approach than the conventional architectural design process, and could therefore already be called 'out of the box'.

However, there is one more thing to consider. The industries of the two disciplines are different by default. Architecture is dominated by liability on safety regulations, public opinion and the impact on its surroundings. Because of this, creativity gets a submissive role. Meanwhile, to stand out in the fashion industry, a designer must exploit his creativity in order to conquer a profitable position.

To deal with these different two industries, there is a third possible approach on hand. When looking deeper into the peculiarities of fashion and its unique components, quite some of them could be translated into an architectural equivalent. The pieces of an outfit could be the equivalent of the elements in a building; the façade is a coat, and the entrance a handbag. The draping of fabrics could be seen as the same as modelling in a large size site model. And this might even show, that it is not necessary to actually do things differently, but to renew the way one approaches the product that is to be designed.

So before deciding about how to apply these tools of fashion design on architectural design, one might first need to consider their position in the industry. Are you willing to go commercial? Or are you determined to stay put in the discussion of 'form follows function'?

## 5 LIMITS

This research is a MSc graduation project and has therefore a limited validity. The limited number of interviews makes that the results of this research only give an indication on the subject, and further research might be needed.

## 6 REFERENCES

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### 6.1 Images

- Cover image:** Miller, M. "Architecture as wearable object #1." University of Cincinnati. *Fashion & Architecture*. Cincinnati, 2016.
- Page 4:**
- Figure 1 - zaha-hadid.com (courtesy of Charlotte Olympia)
- Figure 2 - scandinavia-design.fr
- Figure 3 - unitednude.com
- Figure 4 - dintradesign.nl



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