

Dual Fusion

For MetropolisM. Issue Oct/Nov. 2019
By Femke de Vries

I'm sitting on the beach, sunbathing on a big rock, now and then dozing off. From this rock I can see a seal sunbathing, dozing off, on a rock of similar size farther up in the ocean. I wonder if he notices the similarities in our behaviour. Right then I hear a loud buzzing, the sound of air moving. And as the sound changes direction, it appears to be right beside me. As soon as my eyes find the source I see a hummingbird floating next to my shoes, as if in slow motion. I'm wearing a pair of Nike *Dual Fusion ST2* sneakers, mainly black but with reflector swooshes, bright blue laces and thick fluorescent pink soles. Hummingbirds, as I learned, are attracted to bright colours, they can even see ultraviolet light, and this one possibly considered my shoe to be a flower.

Whatever went through its mind, ever since our encounter I have been thinking about how my shoes communicated something to the hummingbird. It has led me to think about colourful T-shirts attracting bees and how wearing a hat can scare a dog. And I keep wondering; what if we decide upon what to wear not with the aim to communicate with other human beings but with other animals

It seems self-evident and therefore unquestioned; human-centred fashion, anthropocentric fashion. Fashion is made by humans, for humans. To be clear, there is a difference between clothing and fashion. In *Fashion-ology* (2004) fashion critic Yuniya Kawamura writes that clothing is that with which people clothe themselves, while fashion is the transformation of clothing into symbolic value which must be institutionally constructed and culturally diffused.”¹ We know that animals also clothe themselves, maybe not with textile but with mud, plants, shells or remains of other animals², but fashion, is surely a human construct.³ However, animals have always played their part in fashion, but overall in the role of the one being exploited; We wear clothes made of them or we wear clothes to mislead them, to hunt them. In less violent ways we create representations of them or we use them as accessories. We dress our domesticated companion animals in the latest ‘human fashions’, either to make them more ‘human’ or to use them to construct our identity.

In *De soldaat was een dolfin* Eva Meijer writes that in general, we see humans as more important than animals and this is reflected in laws, science and cultural expressions.⁴ Although fashion, as a cultural expression, is often praised for its strong communicative qualities, its reach is in fact very restricted; only revolving around interaction between humans amongst each other. My interaction with the hummingbird thus made me think about a form of fashion in which we wouldn't see the animal as a passive ‘material’, but, referring to Bruno Latour; as an active actant in a web of social relations. My shoes facilitated this interaction and therefore contributed to the symbiotic living and being together with diverse beings, like Donna Haraway and Lynn Margulis describe it.

Like this encounter with the hummingbird, communication in fashion takes place on the basis of looks, visual aspects, sight. However, if animals become equal partners we will be reminded of other forms of communication; some animals have a very strong sense of sound, taste or smell, some communicate through echolocation or vibration.

Surely, I'm not a biologist or zoologist, but the encounter with the hummingbird made me think about how approaching clothes and fashion from a non-anthropocentric perspective could make us more strongly connect to a variety of other beings, motivating a shift from human-centred thinking towards less exploitative and non-violent relations between us and other beings.

(This text was originally published in Dutch)

1
Kawamura, Y (2005) *Fashion-ology*.
New York: Berg.

2
Assassin bugs for example adorn
themselves with the carcasses of
their victims.

3
We could of course explore the idea
of symbolic value, institutional con-
structions and cultural diffusion in
the animal world: for example; how
animals turn the things they wear/
carry into symbols for their cultures.

4
Meijer, E. (2017) *De Soldaat Was
Een Dolfin, Over Politieke Dieren*.
Amsterdam: Cossee. p.39