

# Dual Fusion

On the interaction between clothes and nonhuman animals

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I'm sitting on the beach, sunbathing on a big rock, now and then dozing off. On a similar-sized rock, farther up into the ocean, I can see a seal sunbathing, dozing off. I wonder if the seal notices the similarities in our behaviour. Right then I hear a loud buzzing, the sound of air moving. I'm afraid it's a large insect. 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, for a few seconds, as if in slow motion. I'm wearing a pair of Nike *Dual Fusion ST2* sneakers, mainly black but with bright blue laces and thick fluorescent pink soles. Later I learn that hummingbirds are drawn to bright colours - they can see ultraviolet color. Ever since our encounter I have been thinking about how my shoes communicated something to the hummingbird and it has led me to think about bees being drawn to colourful T-shirts and how wearing a hat can scare a dog. And I keep wondering; what if we dress up, not with the aim to communicate with other human beings, but with nonhuman 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 clothes into symbolic value which must be institutionally constructed and culturally diffused.<sup>1</sup> Although we know that nonhuman animals also clothe themselves, maybe not with textile but with mud, plants, shells or the remains of other animals,<sup>2</sup> fashion would surely be described as a human construct.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, it is undeniable that nonhuman animals have always played their part in these human fashions: We wear clothes made of them or we wear clothes to mislead them, to hunt them. In less (direct) 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 human identity.

In *De Soldaat was een Dolfijn, over Politieke Dieren* (*The Soldier was a Dolphin, on Political Animals*) Eva Meijer writes that in general, we see humans as more important than animals and this is reflected in laws, science and cultural expressions.<sup>4</sup> Although fashion, as such a cultural expression, is often praised for its strong communicative and 'social' qualities, its reach is in fact restrictive: the 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 nonhuman animal as a passive 'material,' but, referring to Bruno Latour; as an active actant in our webs of social relations. This perspective can invite for, and would require, a reconsideration of our dress practices. Like my encounter with the hummingbird, communication in fashion predominantly takes place on the basis of looks, visual aspects, sight. However, if we take in consideration a broad variety of nonhuman animals, we will be reminded of

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

<sup>2</sup> Assassin bugs for example adorn themselves with the carcasses of their victims.

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

<sup>4</sup> Meijer, E. (2017) *De Soldaat Was Een Dolfijn, Over Politieke Dieren*. Amsterdam: Cossee. p.39

other forms of communication; some nonhuman animals have a very strong sense of sound, taste or smell and some communicate through echolocation or vibration. Surely, I'm not a biologist or zoologist, but since my encounter with the hummingbird I keep thinking about how approaching clothes and fashion from a non-anthropocentric perspective could motivate less exploitative and non-violent interspecies relations.

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