SONIC BODY AND SONIC SPACE

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ABSTRACT
Fashion design as a field and fashion design methods are mostly based on visual values and expressions. This paper investigates alternative non-visual perspectives on fashion design aesthetics. The study on sound ontology in fashion, for example, is limited and presents a new and interesting potential territory to be explored. The main aim of this paper is therefor to explore 'sonic fashion' through speculative design research methods. *The Soundtopia* – a speculative fashion design method is presented as the introductory sonic explorations in regards to *sonic identity*. The paper introduces sonic qualities and sonic identities and suggests the new possibilities for alternative forms of design-thinking to open in research programs in non-visual aspects of person-object relationships in design.

Keywords
Non-visual aesthetics, sonic identity, sonic expression, design-thinking

Sonic Identity
The understanding of the Self comes often from binary systems constructed of personal reflection and opinion of others. Clothing as a form of visual communication is a powerful means of making statements. Everyday we make decisions about the social status and role of people we meet based on what they are wearing: we treat their clothes as 'social hieroglyphics' [1]. Clothing, as one of the most visible forms of consumption, performs a major role in the social construction of identity. Dress is an embodied practice, a situated bodily practice that is embedded within the social world and fundamental to micro social order [2].

However, although sound, touch, and smell are elements of clothing, the visual culture is predominant in the fashion as a material culture and fashion is understood as a system of visuals. If the hierarchy of senses would change? If the visual value would change to the sonic perception? If we could not see, but only percept the world and self by hearing? If our garments would become antennas? How do we construct our *sonic identity*?

Unlike the sense of self-received through ocular reflection, the *sonic self* is always already mobile, ephemeral, and spreading outward whilst incessantly referring back. It is an echoing 'image' felt throughout the body rather than one perceived externally as visual mimesis.

The investigation on the *sonic identity* as another form of Self-construct is made. The topic is explored during three speculative fashion design workshops with students and people who have different seeing abilities. The exploration is presented in this paper.

Sonic Object
The notion of sonic object was the focus of the first theoretical concerns of concrete music [3]. Pierre Schaeffer is the first to have conceptualized the sound object as a purely intentional object as opposed to the physical object, the emitter-object. Michael Chion defines this Schaefferian sound object as any sound phenomenon or event perceived as a whole, a coherent entity, and heard by means of a reduced listening which targets it for itself, independently of its origin meaning [4].

The notion of sonic object implies not only an awareness of the perceived object, but also of the perceptual process, which gives this object to perception. Schaeffer starts by remarking that the object usually appears in language, classical or colloquial, as vis-à-vis of the subject: the object of one's concerns, hatred, or studied; an object is any point in the world to which an activity of consciousness is applied. It may be an ideal object, existing in consciousness only, such as a logical proposition, an abstract category, language, or even music when considered independently of its concrete realization [5].

Fashion objects are very much based on visual expression: real object (clothing), representation (photo / video), and text that describes particular clothing. Language could be visual (written text) and sonic (spoken text). Sound of clothing (wearing, moving, touching) is a sonic identity of a garment / accessory / shoes or any object we wear. The sonic aspect is not often considered. For example the art installation by Kosuth consists of wood folding chair, mounted photograph of a chair, and photographic enlargement of the dictionary definition of "chair" [6]. He is showing three concepts of the same chair: language, real object, and representation. The forth form of possible concept (sound) is missing. There could be added a mode of interaction – sound of folding / sitting on the chair. This missing aspect inspired me to think on sonic identity of the objects and investigate the non-visual aesthetics of design objects.

Sonic Body and Sonic Space
Clothing is generally considered to be soundless. They don't make sounds when they are without a body that is interacting with them (e.g., hanging garment in the closet, folding pants, etc). Clothing starts to make sounds by interacting with a human body, when we wear them, scrunch or undress them, and etc. The interaction is based on touch and movement. This kind of state could be called as a *becoming-state*. A becoming-state of an audible object: to be determined how it becomes an object from inaudible to an object that produces sound. The haptic and kinetic interactions of human body empower the clothing to become a sonic object and create the sonic space around.

Moving clothed body becomes a sonic event. If we attach e.g. a sounding object/accessory to a moving body the sound extends it. The attachable sounding object is amplifying and choreographing the movements differently; the bodily rhythms become an echo of a particular sound.

The artwork *Ukiyo* by artists, composers, and designers Michele Danjoux and Johannes Birringer is a great example how sounds are used in a creative way connecting body and movements [7]. This choreographic installation is fusing dance, sound, design and digital projections together (Figure 1). Attention is drawn throughout the sounding wearables that open up a new dimension of a moving clothed body – *audial space*.

Figure 1: Speaker Woman, Ukiyo by Michele Danjoux and Johannes Birringer, 2009

Somatic Costumes by artist Sally E. Dean is an interesting example of bodily extensions [8]. Her workshop *Somatic Costumes* is also as the educational tool and possible *wearable extensions* for a moving body. Sound that plastic bags make is additional invisible extension of a body that interests me (Figure 2). *Sonic Costumes* became as an inspiration for my own speculative workshops on sound that are presented in this paper as a fashion design method.

SPECULATIVE DESIGN METHOD FOR FASHION

The speculative design explores vital questions of how designers can use fiction and speculations to help us imagine sustainable futures and create new thinking by

Figure 2: Somatic Costumes by Sally E. Dean, workshop, 2014

design. When Dunne and Raby insist that design has a unique and much-needed contribution to make of enhancing our future capacities, they mean mostly product design. Speculative design method as the provocation for changes in the fashion design system and education are not often used. It should be an update to the education program of fashion design with speculative methods and studies. New topics as sonic identity should be brought to fashion education that empowers to design more sustainable futures. The speculative design workshops *Soundtopia* are based on future sonic expressions in regards to sonic identities and sonic bodies. Sound becomes a fundamental and dominant form of representing Self.

Sonic Utopias

In this paper the sound and *Soundtopia (Sonic Utopia)* is presented as a form of design-thinking. This speculative design method works very well as an introduction to a sonic discourse in fashion as it might seem challenging to shift our focus from visual to sonic perception. The method was explored during three speculative fashion design workshops based on sonic possibilities for future: (1) Exotic Matter; (2) *Soundtopia: Possibilities for Future Sonic Body and Behaviour I*; and (3*) Soundtopia: Possibilities for Future Sonic Body and Behaviour II*.

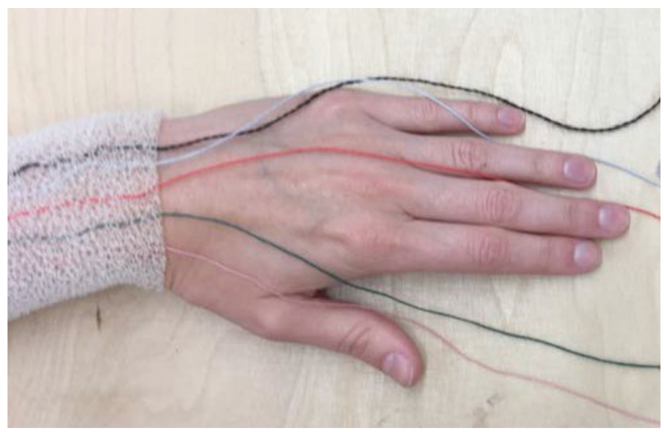

Figure 3: Making a Prototype of Ultrasonic Fabric, workshop "Exotic Matter", Design Research Lab, Berlin

Workshop 1. Exotic Matter
Participants: PhD students (including me)
Lead: Clemens Winkler and Lukas Franciszkiewicz
Place: Design Research Lab, UdK, Berlin
Date: October, 2016
Type of collected data: photos, gifs, written texts

During the workshop *Exotic Matter* at University of Arts in Berlin participants (including me) developed an unknown property for future materials. Participants created speculative gifs (graphic interchange format) about imagined property of textile that is linking with our own research projects. I created the idea of *ultrasonic property*: by wearing ultrasonic fabric blind and visually impaired people could locate themselves in the space. While interviewing people who has visual impairment a few months before the workshop, I gained useful knowledge. People who use blind sticks for finding the obstacles, said that the most important is to get rid of the white stick and any other sounds they emit. That is why I was thinking about "silent" ("muted") expression of sound. Bats are using ultrasound for echolocation, so I combined this knowledge and used for my prototype. The ultrasonic fabric should scan the surrounding and send the feedback as tactile vibrations, which would inform about the obstacles in the surroundings. I presented this speculative idea during other workshops; it is a design-thinking example that I use for introducing the possible sonic properties for future fashion (Figure 3).

Workshop 2. Soundtopia: Possibilities for Future Sonic Body and Behaviour I

Participants: 4 participants (blind people)
Lead: Vidmina Stasiulyte
Place: Vilnius Academy of Arts, Vilnius
Date: 22nd October, 2016
Type of collected data: photos and audio recordings

Before this workshop, I collected various materials that make sounds: fabrics, accessories, fastenings, etc. The topic of the workshop was based on sonic identity, which is very important for blind people. During the workshop at Vilnius Academy of Arts we explored and created sonic possibilities for future identity and sonic communication with regards to the clothing. There were four participants who are blind and one assistant who helped me during the workshop. Participants were creating their own sonic utopias – sonic collages from various materials that I collected (Figure 4).

The importance of identical sound was highlighted. It was suggested the inspiring idea of future identity expression with sounds. The *wordless* communication is not possible for people who are blind in daily life, e.g. they wish they could feel the presence of a person in the room. They can't communicate without speech, for example, they cannot register a blink of an eye or smile. One of the sonic utopian possibilities was to wear an identical sound, that you could recognize a person not by their voice but by personal sound.

Figure 4. Making Sonic Collages, workshop "Soundtopia: Possibilities for Future Sonic Body and Behaviour I", VAA, Vilnius

During this workshop the main topics on the *hypersonic sensation* and *wordless communication* were investigated. I gained inspiration with regards to my research and the methods I am developing. The collected opinions and recorded data helped me to build the categories for my own ontology for sound in fashion design and investigate this topic further.

Workshop 3. Soundtopia: Possibilities for Future Sonic Body and Behaviour II

Participants: 9 B.A. and M.A. students
(costume/fashion design)
Lead: Ph.D. student Vidmina Stasiulyte
Place: Costume Department at UdK, Berlin
Date: 24th-25th November, 2016
Type of collected data: photos, audio and video recordings

I gave a two-days hands-on workshop for costume (4) and fashion design (5) master students from UdK and Weissensee**.** The workshop "Soundtopia: Possibilities for Future Sonic Body and Behaviour II" was focused on the non-visual value: sonic expressions. Students were using speculative design methodologies for creating future visions based on different sonic categories. During the workshop students created their own speculative scenarios and suggested different possibilities for future sonic fashion and human behaviour.

At first I gave presentation on my research, introduced to my Sonic Fashion Archive, and Sound Ontology (1 hour). Then students had the opportunity to ask questions and we had a discussion. After a break we went to the costume wardrobe (at UdK Costume department) where they chose several clothing according to sound as opposed to visual aesthetics. Later students presented what they collected and explained why. We discussed the value of sound. From this wide topic we moved to more personal ones: we talked about individual sounds that we wear in our daily life and how they form our identity. Every student brought clothing/accessories/shoes samples that they wear and explained why they liked the sound. After everybody introduced their sonic identity, we had a fruitful discussion and students started to form into two groups: those who preferred to isolate themselves from sounds and those who like to generate sounds. Students decided to work with two different categories of sound (*amplified* and *isolative*) and made two working groups: *Homo Isolator* and *Homo Amplifier*. Students from the group *Homo Isolator* were recording different silences at UdK (studios, corridors, kitchen, etc.) and experimenting with isolating properties of fabrics/clothing. I liked the concept of isolating self by wearing amplifying sound(s) (Figure 5).

The group was exploring different intensities of isolation: full isolation and semi-isolation, when using a filter or an open form. This kind of *semi-isolation* could be used when you don't want to fully isolate yourself from the surrounding. Their future scenario was based on isolation, because they thought that "the world will become more and more noisy and unhealthy, and we will need to protect ourselves by wearing isolative accessories and clothes".

Students from the other group – *Homo Amplifier* – were creating sonic sketches of future steps and behavior of moving. They did an ethnographical study on the relationship between steps and identity by recording different sonic sketches. Students analyzed how a person (the body movement) is influencing the sound of shoes.

The group was recording walking sounds from four different perspectives: a. all participants walking barefoot and socks, b. participants walking with their own shoes, c. the same person with different shoes and d. different people with the same shoes.

Their future scenario was based on future steps. They made a sonic sketch of a person moving with rollers and stated that "the speed and way of walking will change and we won't have stepping sounds at all. There will be sounds of fast moving, merging in the space".

At the end of the workshop both groups gave presentations on their topics and we had a discussion afterwards. The first group *Homo Isolators* were surprised that there is no silence and that the silence in different rooms was so different. The different intensities of isolation (full and semi) were an interesting finding for this group. The group *Homo Amplifier* developed an interesting sample of the relationships between identical walking and shoe sounds. They discovered that there are more sounds involved (e.g.: frictional sounds of wide trousers, when the person is walking).

During the presentation this group conducted a test: they asked us to guess the sounds of shoes and identical sounds. It was difficult to do this, although the participants from this group knew all the recordings, we could not guess. The speculative design method based on utopia inspired students to open up and experiment, to imagine the future with or without sounds. I was impressed by the student's ability to work so professionally in such a short amount of time: they managed to do many interesting sound recordings, high quality images, and compared and analyzed data they collected during the experiments.

Figure 5. Experiments with isolative sound category, UdK

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The sonic identity is a form of Self-construct that has a big potential for investigating fashion as sonic fashion. The sound is invisible, ephemeral, and spreads to all directions. Moving clothed body with attached sounding object becomes a sonic event and extends the body in the space. The new dimension – audial dimension – is added to the identity of moving body.

The speculative design method *Soundtopia* works very well as an introduction to the sonic perception and sonic value. Although the sonic expression is challenging to work with, especially in the field of fashion, the potential for creativity and new methods finding is there. The shift from visuals to sonic perception open-up students to improve their understanding on non-visual aspects of fashion.

By using a speculative design method participants of the workshops were inspired to experiment and speculate of future possibilities for sonic fashion. They found out interesting aspects of possible future sonic identities, such as a form of semi-isolation and merging digital sound of movements instead of sounds of steps. The non-verbal communication, which blind participants were working on, proposed the functional use of the sonic identities' concept.

Looking at the experiments and artifacts created by artists, designers and myself there is clearly a potential in the sonic identity and it is worth to investigate it further.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vidmina Stasiulyte is doing a practice-based research in the field of fashion design that is based on sonic value and sonic identity. This new field of investigation in the non-visual aesthetics of fashion is unique and has a big potential for establishing a program on Sonic Fashion.

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Figure 1: http://www.danssansjoux.org/ukiyo/cover.html

Figure 2: http://www.idocde.net/idocs/73