**Methodological appendix**

**Structure, strategy and self in cultural peripheries: Theorizing the periphery in the Polish and Dutch fashion fields**

Giselinde Kuipers, Sylvia Holla, Elise van der Laan

This article integrates data from three studies that were conducted separately as part of a larger research project, entitled Towards a Comparative Sociology of Beauty: The Transnational Modeling Industry and the Social Shaping of Beauty Standards in Six European Countries, funded by the European Research Council (ERC). (See also www.sociologyofbeauty.nl.) This methodological appendix explains, separately for each project, the methods, data, sample and research instruments. The project was not originally designed to study peripheral cultural production, but to study various aspects of value creation in fashion fields (fashion photography, modelling, creative production, mediation). The design for each project, however, was organized around a contrast of central and peripheral sites: each study involved the comparison of one or two central, and one or two peripheral countries in the European fashion field. While “peripheralness” was not the central research aim, it was central to the theoretical framework of each study, and was included in the research questions guiding each project.

Study 1

The first study analyzed aesthetic standards in fashion photography in Italy (center), the UK (center) and the Netherlands (periphery). The data presented in this article are based on fifteen observations of photo shoots for Dutch fashion magazines (*ELLE*, *L’Officiel*, *Grazia*, *Glamour*; *Margriet*, *Libelle*, *Viva*, *Vriendin*, *Men’s* *Health*) and commercial photo shoots for fashion catalogues (*Wehkamp*). In addition, 25 Dutch fashion professionals were interviewed, equally divided between photographers, stylists and fashion editors (one art director) working in high and low fashion. The interviews were conducted in Dutch. Nine interviewees were male, and sixteen were female. Most of them were aged between 40 and 55 and had worked in the fashion field for at least ten years. Access to fashion professionals and photo shoots was secured, first, via the network of the third author of this article, who used to work for a Dutch fashion magazine. Second, we contacted photographers and stylists whom we found via Google searches (in Dutch) for “fashion photographer” or “stylist [magazine]”. The response rate for these email contacts was approximately 35%. Some interviews led to opportunities to observe a photo shoot.

The goal of the interviews and observations was to understand the aesthetic logics guiding the production of fashion photography. The list of topics focused on the way such aesthetic logics were “translated” into a fashion image, including the material (practical, logistic, personnel and monetary) aspects as well as the symbolic (aesthetic, prestige) aspects of this process. In addition, the interview focused on informants’ work experience, professional trajectory, and their general observations on the Dutch fashion field and its internal and external boundaries and divisions. Interviews were conducted in cafes, photographers’ studios or editorial offices of magazines. Observations were carried out in studios (10), outdoor (1) and indoor locations (3), and once in Paris (with a fully Dutch crew). Out of fifteen photo shoots, three featured a male model. Interviews were taped and transcribed. Extensive notes were taken during and directly after observations. At every shoot, photographs or film recordings were made and short ethnographic interviews were conducted, asking actors to reflect on the choices they made during shoots. In three cases, interviews took place after the shoot and the shoot was discussed.

All interviews and field notes were analyzed using a theoretically informed coding scheme. While the scheme was set up to address aesthetic systems and beauty standards in fashion photography (Van der Laan and Kuipers 2016a; 2016b), the theme of “peripheralness” and the particularities of creating fashion photography in the small Dutch fashion field emerged as a particularly central and salient theme, especially in the interviews.

Study 2

The second study analyzed fashion modelling in Paris (center), Amsterdam (periphery) and Warsaw (periphery), focusing on the relation between structural conditions and subjective experience in this form of “aesthetic labor”. The data in this article are based on semi-structured interviews with 33 models, and 18 photographers, bookers, fashion designers, magazine editors, stylists, make-up artists and a fashion modeling coach. Most informants were recruited during fashion events, with some recruiting further informants from their own social networks. This chain-referral sampling provided insights into the social network connecting these actors and allowed access to people who might otherwise have been unreachable. In terms of selection, as far as possible attention was paid to factors likely to influence informants’ practices and experiences, such as gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, city and position in the field (commercial or high-end). However, as variation in fashion models is limited by conventions of gender, class, age and ethnicity, the informants consisted mainly of young, tall, slim, mainly white fashion models, most of whom were female (22 or 66% of the sample).

The interviews were conducted in Dutch (in the Netherlands) and English (in Poland), lasted between one and two hours, were recorded with the informants’ permission and mostly took place in restaurants and cafes in the city center. Some informants were interviewed several times. The interviews were carried out using a list of topics developed to gauge work experience (in various places) and professional trajectory; understanding of the field and field-specific understandings of value (i.e. what is “good” modeling, what is a “good” photograph or a “good” magazine); position in the field and relation with other actors; professional strategies, goals and ambitions; bodily and beauty practices involved in modeling; and subjective experience of modeling work. Relevant themes, topics and issues were identified by transcribing and inductively coding all the interviews.

Participant observation was an additional method to make the process of aesthetic production, and the strategic decisions and interactions between models and beauty producers involved, comprehensible. Most observations were made in the presence of interview informants, often during fashion shows. This included backstage observations of models’ professional practices and interactions with, for example, stylists, make-up artists and hairdressers. The researcher also engaged in various body practices with models, especially those discussed during the interviews, like eating, drinking and exercising, which showed how models “do beauty” outside official working hours. All observations were recorded as field reports and analyzed along the same lines as the interviews. These complementary sources resulted in comprehensive, “thick descriptive” ethnographic narratives and situational accounts of the practices and experiences of a wide variety of informants. For more information on this study see Holla (2016, 2018, 2020).

Study 3

The third study analyzed the production of value, in particular by fashion intermediaries and creatives in the fashion fields of in Milan (Italy), Warsaw (Poland) and Istanbul (Turkey). The latter was not included in this project as the data were found not to be of sufficient quality. This study focused specifically on the creation and perception of symbolic and material value in the fashion field, and most of the study was carried out after the other projects were concluded. Like the others, this study combines participant observation with interviews.

 This third study aimed to access the perspectives of actors that were underrepresented in the other two studies: creatives other than photographers (e.g. designers, stylists, make-up artists), and intermediaries like bookers, fashion bloggers and journalists. Informants in Warsaw were mostly approached via fashion events such as Łódź Young Fashion, or via chain referral, through informants that were already contacted for Study 2 or via a research assistant with good connections in the Polish fashion world. The main purpose of the sampling was to speak to various forms of intermediaries and creatives. The researcher aimed for a good spread across social backgrounds and segments of the fashion field (commercial or high-end). The latter proved problematic since there is little in the way of a “high-end” in fashion design or in fashion editing in these peripheral fields. The final sample of 18 informants in Poland consisted of 12 women and 6 men, which seems a reasonable reflection of the field; all informants were of Polish background, and had been working in the field for at least five years. The interviews were conducted in English. They were recorded with the informants’ consent and transcribed verbatim, generally lasted between one and two hours, and were mostly conducted in design or fashion studios, cafes, and sometimes in people’s homes.

 The interviews were guided by the use of a list of topics developed to gauge understanding of “value” in the local and transnational fashion field. Images and fashion magazines were brought along to facilitate the discussion and to discuss participants’ tastes and “repertoires of evaluation”. Topics discussed included informants’ professional activities and strategies for creating or pursuing these forms of value; and their perceptions of the local field and other fashion fields; their work experience (in various places) and professional trajectory; their ambitions and aspirations; their assessment of their own and others’ chances of success. There was considerable overlap between the interview questions in Studies 2 and 3. Relevant themes, topics and issues were identified by transcribing and coding all the interviews, using a theoretically informed coding scheme.

This study also included ethnographic observation. The aim of this method was to understand the workings of each fashion field, as well as differences between various national fields. It also aimed at understanding how value is created and understood across these fields. The participant observation included visits to booking agencies, design and styling studios, guided tours of fashion stores in the company of informants, and visits to fashion events, including the visit to Poland Fashion Week described in the beginning of the article (which actually preceded most of the interviews). During these visits, observation was combined with short field interviews, the taking of photographs, the collection of research materials (e.g. so-called “compcards” with models’ information, flyers, catalogues), and even several instances when the researcher was styled, fitted, and made-up by informants. Notes were taken throughout all of these events, and transcriptions of these observations were included in the data as field reports and analyzed along the same lines as the interviews.

**Table A1**

*Netherlands and Poland in the transnational fashion field*

*Indicators of integration into transnational fashion, compared with fashion capitals*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | France | Italy | UK | Netherlands | Poland | Founded/based in |
| Offices of global agencies |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Avant | - | - | - | - | + | Moscow |
| Elite | + | + | + | + | + | Paris |
| Number of agencies\*  | 66 | 74 | 106 | 47 | 66 |  |
| Magazines (year founded) |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Vogue* | 1919 | 1964 | 1916 | 2012 | 2018 | New York |
| *Elle* | 1945 | 2000 | 1985 | 1989 | 1994 | Paris |
| *Cosmopolitan* | 1973 | 2000 | 1972 | 1982 | 1997 | New York |
| *Grazia* | 2009 | 1938 | 2005 | 2007 | 2012 | Milan |
| Fashion designers (selection) |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Armani\*\* | 79 | 98 | 52 | 18 | 4 | Milan |
| Versace\*\* | 4 | 12 | 9 | 0 | 2 | Milan |
| Yves Saint Laurent\*\*\* | 15 | 8 | 8 | 1 | 1 | Paris |
| Dior\*\*\* | 16 | 9 | 12 | 2 | 1 | Paris |
| Vivienne Westwood\*\* | 1 | 1 | 10 | 0 | 0 | London |
| Alexander McQueen\*\*\* | 3 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | London |
| Marc Jacobs\*\*\* | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | New York |
| Issey Miyake\*\* | 17 | 66 | 23 | 2 | 1 | Tokyo |
| Local version *Next Top Model* | 2005 | 2007 | 2005 | 2006 | 2010 | US |
| Fashion Week, established | 1973 | 1958 | 1984 | 2004 | 2005 |  |

Sources: company websites, sometimes with a phone call for additional information. Data collected 2018

\* Fashion agencies based on 2018 International Fashion Model Directory ([www.fashionmodeldirectory.com](http://www.fashionmodeldirectory.com))

\*\* All shops/outlets

\*\*\* Flagship stores only