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Embodied brand meaning through design aesthetics: An Underdog Brand Story

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This paper is an experimental contribution aimed at empirically exploring design as a method of managing the materiality of brand experiences. Little attention has been given to the importance of the sensory-perceptual encounters of the material qualities of brands, that to which the embodied aesthetic knowledge of design attends. The perspective of embodied cognition and John Dewey's notion of art as experience serve as the theoretical and methodological underpinning for a design project of developing a personal brand. I use an artistic research approach to consider how my intersubjective experience of a personal brand, through the material management of my clothing, acquires meaning through both concrete qualities and abstract concepts that operate between me and others. The purpose is offer an (en)active, embodied orientation to design management and to challenge the predominant research assumption that brands meaning can be represented through primarily symbolic relationships. "Underdog" refers to this embodied perspective of design knowledge that is not considered in brand management research but gets filtered through cognitive research frameworks for understanding the symbolic dimension of brands or managerial decision making.

Keywords: *Brand experience, design management, embodied cognition, pragmatist philosophy, aesthetics*

Introduction

Recent research on brands has departed from a functional view of brands as collectively held meanings that can be controlled and managed to a more a more multidimensional view of brands (e.g., Berthon, Holbrook, Hulbert, & Pitt, 2012) and how it is experienced and interpreted from consumers (e.g., Allen, Fournier, & Miller, 2008). In this socio-cultural view, brand knowledge is considered more holistically, studied as situated in experiences with brands as symbolic artefacts or of an emergent quality (Diamond et al., 2009). There has been an emphasis on the importance of the emotional and experiential aspects of consumer culture in brands (e.g., Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Schmitt, 2009; Thomson, MacInnis, & Whan Park, 2005). "Brand attachment" and "brand experience" has been linked to product aesthetics (e.g., Stompff, 2003) along with the role of consumers to construct and express (or co-create) symbolic meaning of brands (e.g., Hatch & Schultz, 2010).

While the discourse around communicating brands in multiple manifestations (visual graphics, products, marketing campaigns, packaging) of consumer experience has expanded, design has also grown as interdisciplinary field of practice (Julier, 2006). In general, design practices are becoming more integrated with development processes in management and marketing, and specifically within brand management, for instance, there has been an explosion of interest in design and co-creation methods (e.g., Ind, Iglesias, & Schultz, 2013; Ramaswamy, 2009). Hence the literature on design management that focuses on the intersection of design and management is making the argument that design approaches are needed to play a strategic role in configuring brand experience (Hestad, 2013; Montaña, Guzmán, & Moll, 2007). One area of research highlights design as strategic signifying process that helps send a coherent brand message or meaning in all of the mediations or forms of representation (Ravasi & Lojacono, 2005). As well, another stream of design management research has focused on product design and the symbolic implications of expressing brand meaning through a coherent design language(s) including product aesthetics, features, styling, or visual appearance (Karjalainen & Snelders, 2010; Kreuzbauer & Malter, 2005; Page & Herr, 2002). The range of literature linking brand management and design indicate

the mixed understandings of design and design's role in communicating brand meanings or affecting emotional responses to brands (Allen et al., 2008).

These different perceptions of design underscore the difficulty of conceptualizing and articulating design knowledge, particularly using the theories and methods of management research (Rylander, 2009). Although design practice itself has increasingly become an object of study within management, the research with a focus on understanding how design gives meaning (Ravasi & Stigliani, 2012), the qualitative methods of management research currently used to convey design knowledge and meaning, relies on the positivistic assumption that fully cognitive representations of knowledge are possible. It suggests that design knowledge is reducible to abstract disembodied symbols including language, and thus, can give an essentialist account of design activities. This ultimately poses limitations to the unpresentable, mutable relationships of design, those that are part of shaping multisensory, discursive, emotional encounters with the world but also what makes it important to designers (Johansson-Sköldberg, Woodilla, & Çetinkaya, 2013).

Design knowledge coming from a different epistemological tradition than management has an assumption that design knowledge implies wholly different theories and methods than qualitative research (Cross, 2006). From a tradition of artistic practice, design knowledge, here referred to as embodied knowledge, is inherent to practice and derived from the senses and direct experiences. One such theory, embodiment theory of knowledge, implicates the bodily basis of human thought and behaviour (cognition) to be ascertained through practice or the body's continued activities in the real world rather than in terms of representational content alone (Gibbs, 2006). In this view, descriptions of how design knowledge works are not a substitute for what is felt because descriptions negate the emotional, subjective experience of embodied knowledge. Thus, experience of meaning is considered to be based in our sensorimotor perception, feelings, and kinaesthetic interaction with the world because bodies in action are tied to our capacities to abstract concepts like concepts of self (Gibbs, 2006; Johnson, 2007). Such a dynamical approach to knowledge is highly situational and applied, indicated to intervene in the research situation, as identified in theories of

wicked design problems (Buchanan, 1992), and thereby contributing to the process in which meaning about a phenomenon is shaped.

The implications of this embodied view of design are profound and it is easy to surmise that there is much more to understanding the practical consequences of design knowledge in the development of multisensory and emotional aspects of brand experiences. Solely considering design from a brand management view, or what has traditionally been a marketing perspective drawing from the field of consumer psychology (Allen et al., 2008), frames design knowledge in descriptive and evaluative forms. As a result, by the embodied, aesthetic dimensions of design knowing get reduced to instrumental means often focused on either the symbolic function of products or strategic decision making. As today more constructivist, sociocultural views of branding suggest that there are ambiguities and tensions in brand meaning and its ongoing construction (e.g., Kärreman & Rylander, 2008), it might also be appreciated that design is an equally multifaceted, representational practice of constructing and performing meaningful identity relationships.

In response to the perceived limitations of the underpinning philosophical assumptions of management to describe design, which I admittedly generalize because of the ontological dualism between objects and concepts in positivism and interpretivism alike, I turn to classical Pragmatist philosophy that challenges a representational theory of cognition. Likewise, the pragmatic approach methodologically matches the artistic and experimental nature of design because it surpass the perceived separation of thought and action by bringing about new situations and new concepts (Rylander, 2010). Specifically, John Dewey's (1934/2005) theory of aesthetic experience is relevant to approaching brands as experience and the experiential perspective of design management or "managing as designing" (Boland & Collopy, 2004). This reflects a process-based ontology in which meaning is not able to be captured in the scientific sense, but categories and material existence are learned through their ongoing relationships.

Hatch (2012), in a recent theoretical paper called "The Pragmatics of Branding", makes a similar connection that I am making here between brand experience and Dewey's (1943/2005)

aesthetic philosophy. She outlines the role of aesthetics from Dewey's writing to highlight the relationship of "beauty" alongside usefulness in understanding brand meaning. In doing so, she categorizes aesthetic qualities as a further set of criterion for defining a brand's symbolism. This way of intellectualizing Dewey's theory into a conceptual construct for management obscures the more difficult point of how individuals, such as designers, qualitatively asses brand attributes through subjective experience. There is in the interpretive view an inherent essentialism in the abstraction of a brand's meaning from the experience of a brand as though the representation and reality of a brand were distinct. Consequently, I propose to *operationalize* what Hatch says are "the more radical implications of Dewey's philosophy" (p.886), and aim to apply pragmatism through design practice.

The contribution of this experimental case, then, is methodological. In trying to experience a brand, it specifically problematizes the notion of *brand experience* in the interpretive view of knowledge that brand knowledge can be reified and made coherent or illuminated through an abstraction of symbolic meaning. The pragmatic point I lay out here, similar to material-oriented approaches in ethnography (Henare, Holbraad, & Wastell, 2007), is that meanings are not 'carried' by objects but are identical to them or constituted through them. I focus on how brand experience is situated in our interactions and grasped from sensory qualities and feelings of relationships and is not distinct from the materiality of things themselves. Because the concern is with materiality of experience(s), this case of personal branding exposes a difference between the description or symbolic appearance of brand and the material experience of a brand.

This paper is structured as follows: I introduce the design project of personal branding with the context and rationale for the methodology and design. Then I move on to consider and reflect on my experience of the personal branding project and specifically centre this discussion around themes that emerged as they related to Dewey's ideas of art and experience and embodied cognition that focus on continuity of inner and outer selves to illustrate how design management connects to brand meaning through material qualities of experience. I conclude with some reflections on the analytic separation made in management research between

meaning and things and the implications for brand management if they are taken as one in the same through embodied design knowledge.

The Case Study of an Underdog Approach to Branding

The premise of this project, is that because of the problematic nature of knowledge in how to actually implement a brand experience, an embodied design perspective is appropriate to investigate a designer's experience of a brand through material encounters in order to 'think through things' themselves (e.g., Henare et al., 2007). I use an artistic research approach to focus on my experience of design managing a personal brand. I have done so by conducting an empirical project which consisted of investigating the personal branding phenomenon by enacting a material intervention, which has been to wear the same clothing to project my personal brand over the course of two months. I have also been observing instances of my personal brand negotiation, interviewing colleagues, friends, and family about their experience and knowledge of me both before and after the material intervention. I have collected their thoughts through both informal conversations and an online survey. I am still in the process of collecting data both from others and me. Before the asking people about my material intervention, I have tried to note how they respond to my clothing without revealing it as my brand as such, and then, after telling some people about the project, I have gathered their reactions and suggestions for how to continue with the project.

When confronted with a methodological choice, I decided that an artistic research approach sits well with my background in architecture from which I am familiar with design as an experiential, holistic way of working and learning. This has epistemological significance since it includes a situated, aesthetic approach derived from senses, specifically an awareness of a feelings and embodied experiences in relation to others and the material world. Opposed to the focus on cognitive representations in other research traditions, this embodied approach parallels the classical Pragmatist view of the 'self' as socially constituted and fully embraces empiricism. The pragmatist view opposes the realist attitude of a

purely subjective or individualistic experience and by extension the common suggestion that an artist simply imposes his/her self-expression freely onto others. Rather, from a pragmatist stance, artistic practice is intersubjective and revolving around expressive and implicitly social forms of denoting significance to a material reality. Dewey (1934/2005), for example, stresses the point that art is an internal and external process since the artist embodies the attitude of the perceiver when producing a piece of art. Subjectivity is linked to the awareness and ability to generate representations external to the subject that can be observed, analysed and contemplated the same as other forms of representations of knowledge such as data collection. The difference being that design is a holistic approach to knowledge that grounds representational meaning through ordinary experiences and interactions and does not classify aspects of knowledge in order to study the world (Johnson, 2007).

The unfolding design management of a personal brand

I began the experiment by asking how can I research brand experience if it is at once highly personal and socially symbolic? The conceptual analysis of brand experience in the literature (e.g., Brakus et al., 2009) is contradictory to the subjective and situational understanding of lived experience that authors of experience economy point out (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). I thought that one way exemplify the paradox of trying to define brand experience could be through personal branding. Personal branding reflects the struggle of the marketing approach of commodification of a generic notion and measurable construct of experiences by branding and the implementation issues and subjective meaning of practices as deeply identity driven as a personal brand. Thinking about branding human experiences also made me wonder, in today's ever broadening umbrella of branding, what are the values, experiences, or sacred parts of our identity that are free from market values? And, is this important or relevant anymore?

There is currently a large industry devoted to personal branding (e.g., Andrusia & Haskins, 1999; Peters, 1997; Roffer, 2002) in a modern work environment defined by individual agency, creativity, flexibility, fast paced development, and uncertainty. It is notable,

however, that this explosive phenomenon of personal branding does figure much if at all in academic literature (Shepherd, 2005). Researchers have been placing greater emphasis on identity creation and individual agency in today's networking context (e.g., Benkler, 2006; Howe, 2008; Leadbeater, 2008; Shirky, 2008; Tapscott & Williams, 2008). There is a more individualized approach to work and for entrepreneurs and a growing class of freelance workers in the knowledge economy, and there is a blurred line between someone's work and someone's identity (Florida, 2004; Shepherd, 2005). In this way, personal branding is maybe not far removed from current cultural practices of alleged "co-creation" of value (Ind et al., 2013). This objective social "me" in current contexts of social production is becoming a new part of marketing and value creation. Knowledge workers contributing their "unique promise of value" are familiar with the refrain to "sell yourself!". It is repeated that persons are now their own CEO's and must differentiate themselves in order to communicate a value statement. Individuals and primarily so-called creative class workers supposedly have more agency in value creation in the current creative, innovative work milieu, but is this rhetoric focused on the appearance or the substance of work?

The personal brand literature suggests, like the corporate branding literature from marketing, that a person can control how others perceive him/her by actively defining what image he/she projects: "It means cutting and polishing your brand so everyone who comes into contact with it forms the same basic set of words in their mind when they hear your name. It's packaging the things that make you great at what you do, and sending that message out into the world to sparkle" (Peters, 1997 p.7). Trivial as it sounds, this resembles the product branding literature that focuses on symbolic association in product appearance, "it is the designer's job to decode the common values and opinions that exist in the culture and reproduce them into forms that embody the appropriate symbolic meaning" (Opperud, 2004 p.151). This essentialist desire to turn ideas into images has the same marketing rhetoric that dictates that a brand must be clear, focused and consistent. But, can something as complex as an experience, and in this case an experience of someone, her multiple personalities, inconsistencies, nuances, contradictory thoughts be taken up through the

rationalization of a clear brand image? Can a person be reduced to sound bites and cliché's? Seeing this disparity between research approaches of branding focused on symbolism in relation to perspectives on individual agency in social production, I wanted to empirically test an interpretive research view of branding. By trying to enact (i.e., manage through design) brand relationships (or experiences) rather than trying to cognitively interpret and "construct" them, perhaps there something more to an experiential interpretation of someone's brand.

Clothing as site of material experience

For my personal brand, I thought about where I actually have agency in terms of manifesting some kind of brand experience. My immediate interest was to make or do something that operates as part of my everyday experience and situation. I thought that this could be a way to make the process accessible to others in a common language of design values. By focusing on design in the everyday, I narrow the distance between the assumed agency of design and the consumer in shaping brand meaning to look at what design does to make an experience important.

I started by looking at the personal brand literature and spent time asking myself "where" my qualities of experience or brand presence are, that is, how I locate myself in the material and immaterial. My few online "bios" and profile activities on the web seemed impersonal intellectualized and felt step removed from how I engage with others and how I actually feel about myself as a person. I also sought a design medium that explicitly deals with temporality, because I wanted to try to keep alive the way this case was experienced, how it was made or perceived, as a means to reveal designing as a *matter of experience* not only a matter of materializing a design product. I concluded that should focus on my physical presence somehow, this being a very pragmatic solution to the problem of demonstrating brand experience in the every day. In one sense, I am being quite literal using experience as design to convey design as experience, the premise being that even if I were to design an object, the design is still located in the experience with the object. In another sense, this design example is elusive. I was curious about how the experience of designing a brand can be seen as something connected to who I am as a person and how I

understand the relationship between what I consider a my brand and what others see as my brand.

As I wondered how I could generate certain intensity in my physical presence in some way, my first impulse was that that as brand "design", the form needs to be distinctive as a brand, like with a logo or some material artefact. After some thought I regarded clothing as a way of expressing a personal brand, the term "clothing" used to refer to the items of cloth worn on the body. Initially clothing as a medium seemed superficial, but then I started to reflect on the challenge of exploring clothing as a brand enactment or an expression of inhabiting my brand. I imagined that assembling clothing could be, in fact, an intimate way to illustrate design as an aesthetic activity, also as one that is difficult to pin down and multidirectional as "managing as designing" suggests. It brings up the difficulty in agreeing upon a design outcome in advance of the process of designing, where the daily act of assembling clothing is recognizable as an ongoing practice of design management and by extension can be framed as an ongoing externalization of personhood. "Personhood" is a term from the embodied cognition literature that refers to first-person bodily experience that constitutes the basis for self-conception and abstract thinking (Gibbs, 2006). This is not a monolithic concept of self, but a link between self and body that is *in process* and constantly forming an identity through interaction with others and the environment (ibid). I am constantly negotiating relationships with my clothing and with others as much as through social gesture and response, so this became a site of personal brand experience to direct my attention.

Social context for clothing as a personal brand design

There is very little discussion in branding literature addressing artist's practices of personal representation in our cultural systems (Schroeder, 2005), but many artists ranging from pop stars like Madonna, Lady Gaga, Bob Dylan, and Bjork to visual artists like Andy Warhol and Banksy have created strong brands by taking an art-based approach to managing their identity. For my purposes, I became interested in the numerous artists and creative personalities that are known for repeatedly wearing the same clothing (J. Smith, 2012). They have used clothing as a type of 'self-

portrait' or participation in culture through art. These range from the artist Joseph Beuys who wore a felt suit uniform, Carrie Donovan fashion editor for Vogue who consistently wore large eyeglasses and pearl necklaces, writer Tom Wolfe who wears only white suits, singer/songwriter Johnny Cash that wore all black, and even Steve Jobs DEO of Apple was notorious for only wearing black turtleneck, blue jeans and New Balance sneakers.

Figure 1   Tom Wolfe in white. Source: http://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/entertainment/articles/2012-12/03/tom-wolfe-interview-back-to-blood/viewgallery/

In addition, many well-known modern architects have developed signature brands beyond their buildings through their personal style of dress and accessories. Examples can be traced back to Modernist architects from the turn of the century like American Frank Lloyd Wright who famously wore a cape and a cane, French architect Le Corbusier who had a signature bow tie and round black frame eyeglasses that subsequent architects like the American Philip Johnson also adorned. The continued prevalence of architects with personal brand attire into current day begs the question as to whether they think a particular way of dressing represents, as one blogger amusingly puts it, "a typological solution to the problem of clothing" (Holland, 2010).

Figure 2   Zaha Hadid's signature style, Riverside Museum, Scotland. Source: http://0.tqn.com/d/gouk/ 1/0/3/t/-/-/115730131.jpg

Figure 3   Mike Davis in red. Source: http://constanzeschweiger .blogspot.se /2012/09/2012-mike-davies.html

Examples from this tribe include Philip Stirling who reportedly had a uniform of blue shirts, purple socks and Hush Puppies, current architects like Bernard Tschumi who always wears a black suit and red scarf, Frenchman Jean Nouvel who wears all black or all white depending on the season, Englishman Richard Rogers who wears bright coloured shirts and his partner Mike Davis who dresses in entirely red, Peter Eisenman who has amplified the cliché of the architect's bow tie, Daniel Libeskind dons black cowboy boots, and the Iranian architect Zaha Hadid who is celebrated for wearing bold, sculptural clothing akin to the design of her buildings.

Perhaps in some cases this self-imagery is about enhancing an individualist, creative sensibility, but it appears in most cases for the designer or artist to explore the aesthetics of oneself is a natural extension for the artist to explore multiple materials of self-expression. It is simply a different matter of putting ideas into another form/context. Artists are constantly evolving their art form often along with a highly personal and sometimes eclectic style, and they employ this language of style, performance, artist persona, etc. to catalyse thinking about what the boundaries and construction of art are and how creativity relates to self-identity. They highlight this relationship between appearance and lived experience. This focus of relates the brand management's interest in the ability for objects to carry symbolic meaning, but there is still an open question about what that meaning of self-identity construction is for the designer, how it works in dialog with their art and with others perception of them.

Materiality

Contemplating my material interaction with clothing brought out the immediate, aesthetic relationship that clothing provides for defining who I am in terms of my body, and my identity of my body, in the world. I felt that my clothes have more meaning to me and has more of a manner of expressiveness for a concept of myself than of other representations of "self", such as online profiles. I enjoy the texture and feeling of clothes, and this direct sensory concreteness of clothing feeds into my identity since I wear them on my body as a way that I both appear to myself and present myself to the world. In the Western ontological tradition it is learned to

contrast surface to substance, to hold that deep thinking is more consequential than emotional feeling, and to divide the inner self from the superficiality of how one looks (Klingmann, 2007; Woodward, 2005). Thus, research discourse has difficulty deeply interpreting materiality and appearances without relying on semantic processes to provide understanding (ibid). Yet, the supposed superficiality of sensation that humans experience and might not fully understand is what binds communicative meaning of any perceptual experience to a response (Johnson, 2007). This correlation between experience and meaning was notably offered by communications philosopher Marshall McLuhan over thirty years ago in a comment that, "Everybody experiences far more than he understands. Yet it is experience, rather than understanding, that influences behaviour"(Klingmann, 2007 p.35).

In a conference paper about inhabiting design, Laurene Vaughan (2006) highlights clothing as an artefact that has meaning in that it exists in a lived relationship between user and object. She writes, "Our relationship with clothing is intimate. It is based on touch, we touch it and it touches us. It is a private conversation where each forms the other, an ongoing process of co-creation" (Vaughan, 2006 p.45). Clothing is of the few things that I display that carries degree of self-affirmation since I do not typically have a strong desire for exhibition or ownership of material goods. Nor would I consider myself fashionable or fashion literate, but I do think my clothes constitute a "personal aesthetic" that emerges from my attention to certain relationships I construct when selecting my clothes. In another article titled "Looking Good: Feeling right-Aesthetics of the Self", Sophie Woodward (2005) discusses a case of the material assemblage of clothes by women "as being the site where the self is constituted through both its internal and external relationships" (p.22). I similarly notice that clothing becomes a materialization of my personal aesthetic which is what Woodward says, "emerges as perceptions of what 'goes together' based upon colour, texture, style, cut pattern… what 'goes together' is taken in terms of what 'feels right'. As material culture, clothing is not seen as simply reflecting given aspects of the self but, though its particular material propensities, is co-constitutive of facets such as identity, sexuality and social role" (p.21).

Figure 4   Zentai body suits worn by Japanese club members. Source: http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/04/17/national/full-body-suits-give-identity-freedom-to-japans-zentai-festish-fans/#.U0-AzU2KBMt

The Uniform

Having decided upon clothing being the design expression for the study, I came to the idea that I would wear a uniform, meaning the same thing every day. Rather than focusing on the symbolism of a uniform I thought uniform could become a site of the experience of turning inward to the actual self, my brand. A uniform sets up a bit of a contradiction because a uniform stands in opposition to creativity. It is characterized as being institutional, monotonous, muted, all the things that one would think of as the contrary to capitalism, choice, and even the enhancement lived experience. It speaks of "the system". Paradoxically, no longer focusing on the construction of my outfits frees me from the consumption of clothing and the role of a consumer of brands in the market. Maybe the mono-brand becomes my brand. By not changing my clothes, I now give the look of not caring about my appearance, but perhaps the outcome is that others become more aware of my appearance and the fact that I do not change my clothes. After starting the

uniform exploration, I discovered an equally contradictory phenomenon of enacting personhood in Japan where people wear entire body Spandex suits called 'zentai' (see Figure 4) to interact with others because they seek personal liberation "through complete sublimation of physical self" (Ozawa, 2014). Perhaps for them, as with me, the assumed diminishment of an external framing device such as clothing helps regard the self as more present or clear or maybe it simply a different form of self-expression.

Continuity of Inner/ Outer Experiences

As this personal brand exploration became an exploration of self, it reminded me of having to create a self-portrait in my past design studio assignments. Such self-portraits were understood to be more than merely an image of myself, but an exploration of what form gives the expression of myself meaning (to me and others). From those introspective projects, I gathered that my brand would not take shape in a highly stylized, object-oriented way, but rather, to draw an analogy to gestalt perception, my interest in design is, and has been, about understanding design as a condition of the context. Reflecting on my past design experiences helps me illustrate how my interests in design have evolved into this current concentration of materializing concepts through performance. My approach to design work has always been restrained, focused on drawing attention to the mundane, the everyday, the hidden, the background. I have had an ongoing interest in the question of "where" the design is in a work and if I can remove the designer in some way. In my architectural work, I used to use the terms the "unbuilt" and "indeterminate" to describe this illusive idea being sought after in my projects, and I was often criticized on my drawings for having too light of a pencil stroke which was perceived as not showing enough conviction in the lines (or maybe what I perceived as divisions) I laid out on paper. Although these imprecise and tentative qualities of my design procedure and identity continue to take on different forms, they become more articulable the more self- reflection I give my creative processes. This being the case, I would still not be able to express the extent of my seeking and experimentation over the course of my life that has led up to this present case study. Each design case reflects my way of thinking

in an incremental learning process, and accordingly says something about who I am because they arise from my coupling of my experience and designing in the world. Here is Dewey (1934/2005) on this idea:

> *The scope of a work of art is measured by the number and variety of elements coming from past experiences that are organically absorbed into the perception had here and now. The give it its body and its suggestiveness. They often come from sources too obscure to be identified in any conscious memorial way, and thus they create the aura and penumbra in with a work of art swims (p.127-128).*

Thus, this design work can be understood as having many internal tensions which are noted as processes of "development and fulfilment", to use Dewey's terms, rather than suggesting a rational logic of coherency or recognition. Where branding normally has a purpose of conveying brand values, I did not have a predetermination of a brand image in this case. My brand design is an act of continual experiential fulfilment and identity negotiation. Design always exists between inside and outside, it is an experience, "which is intervening as well as final—always presents something new" (Dewey, 1934/2005 p.144). The work to develop my brand concept is about how the inner and outer are in conversation with one another. These are two sides of a situated transformation of my understanding of my personal brand: "Pragmatism recognizes that thought can be transformative of our experience precisely because thought is embodied and interfused with feeling" (Johnson, 2007 p.92). Designing is not merely a mental interpretation of an external reality, but an operational *how* of carrying expressions of brand intent in a situation.

As I contemplated what my brand does, I explored how to get new perspectives from friends to think about ways I could develop the process. I do not know if it possible to avoid re-affirming my concept of self, but I thought I would try by seeing what others said about me. When starting out, I initially followed the directions from one personal branding book, *The Brand called You* by Tom Peters (1997) where I am to confront myself and ask honest questions about my personality and then have I asked the following questions of myself and then to friends and colleagues: What aspects of my

personality do I project, what moral values do I associate with myself, what skills or talents do I have, and how do I describe myself and my personal style. I first answered the questions with adjectives including: playfulness, sensitivity, criticality, openness, having values for creative freedom and thought, the ability to see connections and reflect deeply on issues, and that I see myself as neurotic, humorous, complex, down-to-earth, and shy. Next I asked friends and colleagues to answer the same questions and let them do it via an online survey so their answers could remain anonymous. They answered with the following descriptive words: discipline, accomplishment, ethereal, visionary, shyness, utilitarian, youthful, innocence, funny, emotional, upbeat, and never-ending learner. I also received statements like, "sense of humor about herself and the ability to see the absurd in life," and "a sense of surprise and wonder and curiosity about the world" and "creative and reflective side puts her into places or situations where she doesn´t feel comfortable, safe or in balance."
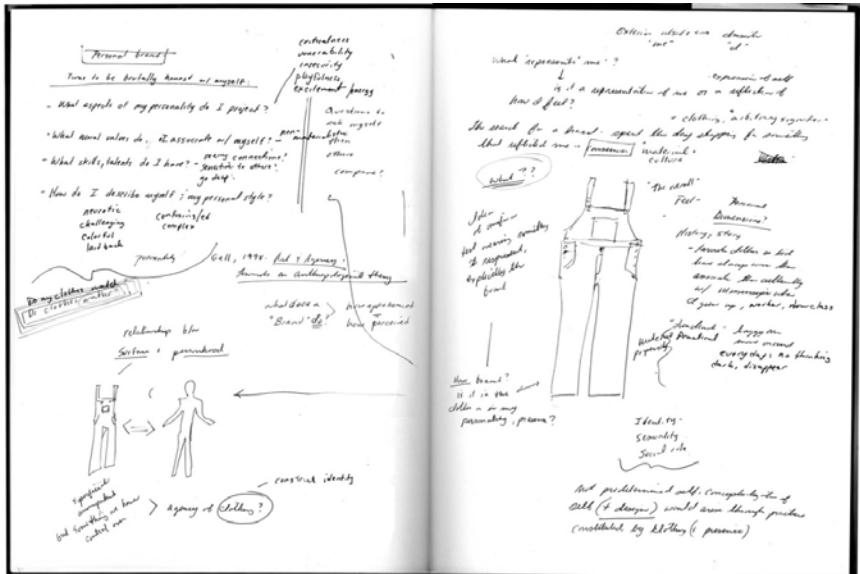

Figure 5   Notes on the case study.

I see their interpretations, which are reflective of my own answers, as part of an unfolding process to keep interpreting my brand. I do not think this is to be interpreted as a coherent, external image of me, but a unity that is in my perceived continuity of self, an identity connected to my body through time and space. It is a natural ongoing navigation between my different selves, between the objective "I" and subjective "me", part of human experience, and in the same way that others perceive themselves or their interaction with me. Thus, the uniform (my brand) is not discontinuous or exceptional in other's experience of me, but part of shaping my experience with them, between me and them.

In classic aesthetic philosophy, the frame of aesthetic judgment or act of contemplation of the *object* of art and the ultimate aesthetic goal is one of "beauty" (Townsend, 1997). This theory makes divisions between content and form, but moreover, between perception and production, which in essence, distinguishes perceiving from knowing. Thus, the struggle with comprehending design knowledge from such traditional philosophies of knowledge, Dewey (1934/2005) says, is that they serve to separate matter and form and thus impose a compartmentalized view of how artistic practices generate holistic expressions or felt meanings of experience: "Esthetic experience has not been trusted to generate its own concepts for interpretation of art. These have been superimposed through being carried over, ready-made, from systems of thought framed without reference to art" (p.136).

It is this ontological subject-object divide that shapes the discourse within design management and makes it difficult for design activities to be understood from a pragmatist process-based ontology, or as having a dynamic conversation with a situation (Schön, 1983). Instead, the designer's attempts to represent qualities of experience is usually interpreted by another as producing a designed object. As Dewey (1934/2005) phrases it, "Art is a quality of doing and of what is done. Only outwardly, then, can it be designated by a noun substantive" (p.222). This, linear one-directional model of production of meaning -a thing- is reflected in the way that the meanings of the organization (brand's creators) and the meanings of the consumer (brand's interpreters) have been approached by brand management as discrete. The brand identity, which is in differentiated product features and a concept, is seen to

originate from the company and the brand image comes from consumer perceptions and set of belief consumers have about the brand.

For Dewey the material (object) of design that causes contemplative effect, but the object is an effect of internal and external interactions. By example, from my design background, I find that focusing on the experience of designing is not so different from focusing on the object of design, because in practice they are intertwined. When designing buildings, for example, I am actually more focused on the experience of being inside the space than the design of the building itself. Thus, a building is not the *work* of architecture, but rather as Dewey (1934/2005) writes, "the work takes place when a human being cooperates with the product so that the outcome is an experience that is enjoyed because of its liberating and ordered properties" (p.222). The point is that in artistic practice how one engages in the world, that is, how they perceive the relations between body and world, is how one also understands social and symbolic meaning. Things and meaning are not separate, but are in context to how we experience them. Dewey (1934/2005) argues that "art, in its form, unites the very same relation of doing and undergoing" (p.50), the same integrated view of perception and action being presented by embodied cognition theory. One claim from this theory is that perception and action are two aspects of the same neural and physiological processes and that the brain does not simply register representations of the world but is actually adaptive and responsive in representational behaviours (Gibbs, 2006). This being the case, design is a synthetic knowledge activity of direct encounters, doing and perceiving with the world, and as a representational behaviour, design does not disembody meaning, but the acts of production (artistic) and perception (aesthetic) are taken together.

The Uniform Part II

Before deciding on what clothes should constitute the uniform, I resolved to spend a short amount of time shopping for an outfit. My reason for shopping for something new rather than using clothes I already had was for this task of making a choice of clothing. I thought it would be interesting to see what I chose. Furthermore, a new item of clothing also gave me a point in time from my pre-

branded self to say, "This is where I'm beginning my brand". Since I am testing the relationship between appearance and experience, I did not want the decision to be overwrought, based on any particular appearance of who I think I am, but I wanted it to be something I just liked, without much up front explanation. I gave myself the stipulation not to overthink the choice, and I succeeded in selecting something after only visiting a few stores in town, being quickly drawn to a pair of black denim overalls on sale at a women's chain store where I live. I immediately liked the hardy fabric and the baggy cut so I tried them on over what I was wearing. There must have been a literal translation of flexibility in this case, because I thought that if they fit over my clothes, their looseness would give me more options for variability if I chose to appropriate them (I later found out that working men sporting overalls in the 19th century actually wore them over another pair of pants). And though I usually prefer to dress in bright colours, I found their colour practical because I thought they could "disappear" by being nondescript and easy to combine with other clothes.

Notes on the Overalls

I did not explicitly evaluate the overalls from their symbolic qualities, though I had a more or less conscious awareness some of their socially communicative aspects. After wearing the overalls, for example, it was pointed out to me they convey the idea of a "builder" which has a figurative match to my architecture background, but I had not thought about that direct translation of my self-biography. I began to wonder how much weight gender and class symbolism overalls have since they have become ubiquitous fashion attire within modern American culture like green military jackets. I learned that overalls, more precisely "bib overalls" which features a pair of pants and a bib area that covers the stomach and chest and held up by buckle closures at both shoulders, were historically worn by working men in the U.S. in the 1750s. They became then standard dress for painters, farmers and railroad workers when manufacturers started making them out of denim at the turn of the 20th century. Around that time they started being worn by children and women and later becoming common attire of women in factories during World War II. By the 1960's, overalls became a fashion item in American culture and today they are both

work and casual wear. They have been noted to be part of broader
a clothing evolution to more relaxed garments and specifically
referential to a current cultural trend of "keeping things simple"
with a resurgence in homesteading, D-I-Y, or farm-to-table
movements in the U.S. (Rotenberk, 2013).

Figure 6   The Overalls.

The overalls actually caught my attention for being an item of
clothing that I have always enjoyed wearing since I was a kid. I have
had several pairs over the years which have been a favourite of
mine, and I can recall a picture of my aunt wearing overalls in her
youth hanging on a wall in our house. Besides just being fun to
wear, I strongly associate overalls with where I grew up in the
southern United States where they are commonly worn by farmers
and working class. These memories with overalls have some
underlying associations that I connect to my self-identity, and the
aspect that most coincided with this that they are gender neutral, if
not masculine, and roughly speak to a "work ethic" or simplicity of
lifestyle. I am not highly sexualized through feminine clothing but

have always preferred clothes that serve a degree of utility (having many pockets, being loose, durable, etc.) and effortlessness. The overalls fit into this space between my biography and the world, so that I am able to "feel like my 'self'" in them (Woodward, 2005 p.38).

Having chosen the overalls from a genuine place of self-identification elicits a sympathetic and authentic reaction from friends and colleague versus if I had intentionally chosen a provocative or disruptive outfit. By example, on more than one occasion friends complemented me on the overalls before knowing that they were part of my brand exploration. When I asked them if they thought they suited me, some said yes and that they are "special" and "different" but "they don't jump out you" and others said that they had not really noticed. I think there should be more of extensive exploration of the perceptions and emotions elicited by the uniform including its associations or the reaction to repeated wear. Not knowing about my project, most people have not commented to me directly. Only one person has mentioned, "Oh, you're wearing your overalls again." But for those that I have told, they have stated kindly, "I thought you just ran out of clothes," or "Now I realize what is going on. I noticed before, but I realized it when we met again. When I told my family they just laughed and said, "Haven't you done something like this before?" The next round of questions is about my rules for the uniform (see below) and information like, "Can you wear the striped shirt or does that go against the non-colour thing?" There seems to be an interest on their part to check that I am following 'the rules' and to help establish or negotiate them, as some have given me suggestions for shoes or other accessories to further the identity. As time goes on the uniform can continue to be a format around which I can gather input into my brand image and enactment. It serves as a stage for wearer-viewer overlap, where I can where I can introduce and discuss the implication of the uniform for a personal brand experience with others.

Start day, March 3, 2014. When starting out I set myself some rules for the uniform: 1) I will wear it when I meet people and all social and work-related occasions, 2) I will wear the same undershirt and shoes, 3) I will wear it for a few months (or at least until the final version of this paper is completed). Thus far, I have

held to rules to and 1 and 3, but within the first week I realized it was hard for me not to mix shirts and shoes, so I have allowed myself this margin. This revealed something about me, that I require rules but to an extent, or mostly that I need an element of variation or otherwise I feel constrained. I found the repetition impeding, like eating the same thing every day. I do not mix the undershirts much, but the little amount of change between black, grey, green, and on a couple of occasions, white shirts has an interesting psychological effect. The sense of choice that comes with the ability to vary my clothes, has been for me, a matter of changing my day to day experience. It is not particularly an act of expression or symbolism.

There is a tension the overalls as a representation of myself or how much they are an expression of how I feel about myself. I think the latter is more the case, and the former is the symbolic connection, overall as "signifier", that arises in a particular social encounter with someone. Someone will perceive the symbolism or cultural currency of overalls and connect that to me as a person. The overalls become a mediator that allows others' intentions, bound up with their lived experience, to connect back to me. Until they recognize my processes in choosing my materials of expression for this presentation and until they have a sense of me, they may or may not comprehend the 'self' or the inner material that I have exposed to the world (Dewey, 1934/2005). Without engaging with my brand, the experience of me through all my attributes and over time, there is a difficulty of describing the meaning of such encounters with my brand, me in a uniform. I do not become "Ariana" wearing overalls, a symbol or meaning for certain qualities to my friends, I am experienced by my qualities when I interact with my friends, and those experiences become internalized by modality-specific, situational perceptions that friends recall in their memory of me (Damasio, 2005). With friends, the uniform is only one aspect of an experience with me among repeated experiences with me. The uniform is an artistic medium for inner exploration and expression of personhood or 'self' as much as it is serves a collective system of symbols and cultural meanings. My action of "wearing overalls" is the doing and making in design management, not an outcome of a design. It is a mode of interpersonal communication, a conversation for myself and others that is *consummated*, to use

Dewey's term, as "my brand" because I recognized it to be experienced as such. It has significance for me and others through our relationships that already have emotional meaning. My brand, that is me in overalls, is comprised of various relational meanings, not one complete narrative. It is not purely cognitive because it is both contradictory (comprising my multiple selves) and ongoing (still being formed) in its material realization.

Meaning of Experience

The pragmatist focus on experience challenges the recent interest in semantic perspective of design that suggests that design objects convey meaning through semantic interpretation (Krippendorff, 1989). In one such area of product design research, the focus on the design aesthetics as signifiers towards an instrumental end to distinguish semantic interpretations of brand qualities or product categories (Kreuzbauer & Malter, 2005). Product aesthetics are easily conflated with products possessing semantic attributes and it seems reasonable to specify the representations or "styling" of a brand should be primarily based how it should look through a visual language or product form (e.g., Person, Schoormans, Snelders, & Karjalainen, 2008). The intent is to elicit emotional responses from consumers, often under the term "affect" (Crilly, Moultrie, & Clarkson, 2004) through design attributes by offering perceived symbolic representations of brand meanings. Because semantics, through language, classifies meanings onto things, studying design from this perspective assumes a cognitive (thinking) meaning separate than an affective (acting) meaning and a causal, behavioural relationship of producer-receiver. Brand knowledge, then, is assumed to exist in cognitive forms in the minds of product designers and consumers, so that brand recognition and categorization can match a one to one signifier-signified semiotic thought to exist in discursive symbol systems (Kreuzbauer & Malter, 2005). This approach becomes practically functional because it internalizes an underlying, and perhaps collective, meaning which and works to stabilize or make coherent what are ultimately deterministic and reified brand categories or identities.

Dewey's claim is that meanings are not mediated through the symbolic dimensions of art alone, but meanings are also caught up

in direct emotional response to form, presentation, or materialized experience. Relations are perceived and felt, not just thought, meaning that body-based perceptions of the qualities of a design are what gives a design the so thought "higher-level" symbolic meaning. Johnson (2007) summarizes Dewey's argument of aesthetic experience in this way,

Instead of isolating the "aesthetic" as merely one autonomous dimension of experience, or merely one form of judgment, we must realize that aesthetics is about the conditions of experience as such, and art is a culmination of the possibility of meaning in experience (p.212).

In other words, from the pragmatist standpoint, there cannot be a translation of an experience into the discursive symbol systems of language and selecting qualities of semantic meanings is a reductive view how internal ideas (thoughts, concepts) can represent the outside (world). The inner and outer are the same substance in existence—the outer result is expressive, but it is equally for internal fulfilment. In my case, I was not interested in managing my identity through only symbolic representations (meanings) of 'self', but also felt and reacted to different sensory qualities with the items I dressed in. This exemplifies the relationship of doing and undergoing in the way that Dewey (1934/2005) articulates, "The material is not employed as a bridge to some further experience, but as an increase and individualization of present" (p.127).

Consequently, how knowledge is reified in the cognitive constructs of traditional management research, does not support the material, intuitive, multisensory, context-specific interactions with the world that is assumed by Pragmatism and practiced by designers. Design revolves around qualities of experience and the situational encounters with brand "tangibles" (Hestad, 2013) at the individual level. Aesthetic meaning does not rest in general (in a social definition) nor out of context (in the head of perceiver) but is intertwined in experience. Designers, in that respect, experientially consider or qualitatively asses design attributes and relationships through their affective experiences with the world.

Conclusion

This case questions design management's suggestion that design can play a role in managing a coherent brand image (Ravasi & Lojacono, 2005) or visual recognition of a brand (Karjalainen & Snelders, 2010). The predominant approach to design management research on brands aims to understand how a brand is intended in agreed upon semantic terms or expressed values. From a management perspective, it is implied that multisensory brand experiences can be translated into verbal, cognitive representations of meaning: "Brands most certainly carry expressions of intent of the intent of their originators" (Hatch, 2012 p.888). It is important to point out from a design perspective that this notion of formalizing and modelling knowledge in advance through an intended image (or reified view) of knowledge is not necessarily how design materially develops ideas or meanings (through things). In design management where it is currently understood that design and management are both engaged in the production of representations (Orlikowski, 2004), I would add that unlike management, design is not preoccupied with operating in the world through a priori, symbolic terms. In design processes there is a gratification in the artistic behaviour to express, elaborate, or make experiences special in themselves which is not secondary to the symbolic meaning of the experience. Thus, where there is difficulty for design, in management terms, is in sharing the aesthetic perception of felt qualities of design. Management's instrumental concerns and need for rational explanations over the experiences themselves requires a translation from action to thought or vice versa. Thus, the interpretive view of framing brand experiences for management purposes actually keeps the discussion of brands in the conceptual (linguistic) realm and characteristically reduces any kind of complexity or ambiguity of implementation and the context-dependent, relational experience of meaning(s).

In this project of personal branding, it took me a process of self-reflection through my material circumstances to uncover some hidden values that I inhabit and project without necessarily being able to articulate them first. The concreteness of the overalls provided an externalization, a modelling process, by which I have been able to reflect on the concepts of personal branding and "personhood" but also how I find personal meaning in the work

itself. I am able to see a connection between my process and outcome of a brand. On one level, I have become alert to the idea that my brand (or personhood) is both reflected by constituted by my decision to wear dark, asexual pants with a utilitarian aesthetic. The clothes, as a symbolic vehicle, speak to my desire to be practical and for gender mobility, but also my desire to be seen by others in that way. They are at once an application of clothing I find personally evocative but also in the context of others as clothing that surfaces facets of my biography. The materiality provides a way to go into the embodied emotion and feeling of the substance of form.

Moreover on another level, the repetitive wear of the overalls as a uniform serves as a means of enhancing my reality which includes an emotional and psychological component. It gives my behaviour an artistic or special behaviour that is a means of production inseparable from the making special of my material conditions (Dissanayake, 1992). This behavioural enhancement of performing a kind of clothing ritual revealed to me my deeper interest in how aspects of design can arise from the ordinary. Repetition, I am discovering, is one technique that I enjoy as a means to enhance the material and social consequences of my actions where representational meaning does not necessarily come first. In other words, repetition of an activity makes the experience important, and thus aesthetic for me. It has been a way of managing my behaviour that includes a sensual pleasure and intellectual curiosity that I value apart from the symbolic function of the overalls.

Figure 8   Brand Placement.

Figure 9   Brand Launch.

Figure 10 Brand Turnover.

This design project helped illustrate how embodied design knowledge constitutes meaning in situation-specific experiences, but it scarcely reveals some of the many contradictions that executing "the intent" entails in practice. The intention of an experience or idea, which is more than an image, may not be understood until it is materially articulated and can be experienced and thus reflected upon. Knowledge of brands reside in individuals' material experiences, and these in the end are assessed through multiple sensory qualities and felt aspects. These cannot be easily reified into linguistic concepts or reduced to design features as product design literature rehearses (Crilly, Moultrie, & Clarkson, 2009; Hestad, 2013; Kreuzbauer & Malter, 2005; Person et al., 2008). Instead, experience contain multiple and conflicting views. Thus, the management of such design qualities cannot be predetermined or fixed, but must be ongoing with aesthetic, material attitudes. Design utilizes a material perception of form and interaction to also denote, signify, and shape representations through non prescriptive artistic concepts of expressive, emotional content, one that is learned through embodiment.

Finally, this case exposes, in a small way, the conflict of designer caught between the traditionally polarized imperatives of management and art. On one hand, the designer must support

reified, commodifiable meanings of brands, and on the other, pursue an artistic notion of exploring non-economic, non-deterministic, felt qualities of experience. The instrumental values of marketing and the compartmentalized perspectives of management research work to separate the intent and consequences of a brand experience. This separation between values and intent is a source of confusion in trying to understand and cognitively represent brand meaning.

In the context of branding, understanding for a designer's role and approach means that a designer not only provides practical and technical contribution but also a conceptual and compositional one. There is an intrinsic value for the care put into carefully and thoughtfully designing an experience, care in the detail and thought that is not necessarily rational or economically measurable. This is more than an output but a labour of love. Dewey (1934/2005) writes that "craftsmanship to be artistic in the final sense must be 'loving', it must care deeply for the subject matter upon which skill is exercised" (p.49). This provides a critique to the current attention being paid to co-creation processes by branding (e.g., Hatch & Schultz, 2010; Ramaswamy, 2009) which might be missing the point that there can be a kind of artistic authenticity or value for expressing an intent in intersubjective, felt qualities of experiences, not first through a marketing purpose for profit and predetermined values. Therefore, what might be important is a degree of autonomy associated with art to place more value on the creative process itself rather than on any preconditions for co-creation processes. This rather, is what gives design processes self-fulfilling or intrinsic motivations for people to engage with creative processes beyond economic concerns. Dewey (1934/2005) acknowledges this aspect of consummation of meaning in the social process of creative production:

> *Wherever conditions are such as to prevent the act of production form being an experience in which the whole creature is alive and in which he possess his living through enjoyment it will lack something of being esthetic. No matter how useful it is for special and limited ends, it will not be useful in the ultimate degree—that of contributing directly and liberally to an expanding and enriched life (p.27).*

If the intent of a brand can be seen beyond the instrumentality of symbolic meaning to the qualities of engaging in brand experiences, it would be to see that a brand does not just become a symbol of experience, but is in the aesthetic (thinking and felt) qualities of the that experiences the brand provides. Pragmatism and embodied cognition both imply that design does not translate meaning semantically through visual languages, but intertwines values and intent in experience — where there is usually an aesthetic expressiveness of intent in framing such experiences consistent in experience itself. This is the Underdog approach of design. It does not put experience over theory, but holds them together, and it is our experience with things that "*can be conceptual*" (Henare et al., 2007 p.13). This means appreciating the intrinsic value of design knowledge in helping shape experiences, because there is an expressiveness that is not necessarily predetermined by linguistic categories or images of meaning. Furthermore, this logic of embodied knowledge has the intriguing and provocative capacity to actually convey multiple, inconsistent meanings. Individuals perceive things in more than one way in experience and design, as a material practice, draws on the associative perceptions constituted by relationships between people and material world. It would not matter what symbolic meaning brands are perceived to adhere to but suggests rather that they are about engaging people in experiences of ongoing identity fulfilment. There should be seen great potential for brand management through embodied design knowledge because a brand can be dynamically performed, constructed or enacted along numerous continuities and qualities of experience.

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