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Aesthetic objects, aesthetic judgments

and the crafting of organizational style in creative industries

Yoann Bazin, EM Normandie, ybazin@em-normandie.fr

Maja Korica, Warwick Business School (UK), maja.korica@wbs.ac.uk

Abstract

In this paper, we conceptually engage with style as central to creative industries. We specifically argue that style is crafted into being via an interplay between aesthetic judgments and "aesthetic objects". We define aesthetic objects as temporary, material settlements fueled by a continual sense of dissatisfaction, eventually resolved through relational engagements. These remain under aesthetic inquiry throughout the process of crafting, until brought to particular close. We elaborate our theorizing with a non-traditional exemplar of the Bride Dress in the preparation of a 2009 Jean-Paul Gaultier's fashion show. Our subsequent contribution is a richer conceptual understanding of style, with material aesthetic engagement at its center. In addition, in foregrounding under-explored features (i.e. aesthetic judgments, crafting of physical materials), and introducing new concepts (i.e. aesthetic objects), we outline promising openings for and significant connections with scholarship on creative or fluid industries, style and organizational identity.

Keywords

Style, Aesthetic judgement, Aesthetic objects, Materiality, Fluidity, Creative industries, Organizational identity

"I'm always working… […] It's always a game I'm playing by seeing everything around me. So like, I'm with you now and I can see your studded bracelet, I see your hair, your boots, I see the books behind you on the shelf – you know, everything is part of a learning process…

Nothing I have ever designed has been made as a deliberate fashion statement – I saw fashion advertising for bras in the 50s, and they were on pin-up girls and were a little pointy and sexy, so the conical bra was about my own self-education and interpretation of what women were wearing and liked."

Interview with Jean-Paul Gaultier (Lawson, 2013)

Over the years, the prominent fashion designer Jean-Paul Gaultier has variously shocked, frustrated, awed, inspired and enraged with his designs and their presentation, from conical bras and Breton tops, to nuns and reimagined old Hollywood glamour. Despite the diversity of inspirations and products over the years, he has remained recognizable – of a distinct style. We see his glitzy marketing campaigns and glamorous runways. We read the interviews and, if we like them, buy the perfumes and the t-shirts. How have these come to be recognized as distinctly Gaultier though? How is that style crafted into being? And what can this tell us about the dynamics of crafting and aesthetics in contemporary organizations?

In this paper, we try to answer such questions by focusing on the creative industries and on their characteristic fluidity, facilitated by the continual release of new products. Aesthetics plays an important role in understanding how this fluidity occurs. By aesthetics, we mean an organizing capacity that "concerns a human sensory faculty and a human faculty of judgment […], whereby what we perceive through our senses may provoke pleasure or repugnance, strike us as palatable or disgusting, surprise and intrigue us" (Strati, 1999, p. 1). We identify style, defined as "a durable, recognizable pattern of aesthetic choices" (Godart, 2018, p. 103), as a central driving force. Specifically, we argue style emerges in a distinct interplay between aesthetic judgments and what we term "aesthetic objects" - temporary, material settlements on which actors like Gaultier work in the midst of crafting.

To illustrate our arguments, we introduce the case of *haute couture* (high fashion), as an evocative exemplar of creative organization. Although fashion has often been disregarded or overlooked (Czarniawska, 2011; Korica & Bazin, 2019), it represents a major global industry (BoF/McKinsey, 2017; Entwistle, 2015), with continual change as a central feature; one increasingly shared by other industries (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2016). The fashion industry is thus a rich setting in which to tease out how organizations and actors address the underlying tension between stability and change. Indeed, fashion itself can be seen as "recurrent change against the backdrop of order" (Aspers & Godart, 2013, p. 174): new designs are continually released and assessed in light of past ones, and must simultaneously exhibit coherence and novelty. This raises the question of how designers create the "illusion that [the organization] has indeed remained the same" (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 140)?

Our answer draws on the literatures on artefacts and style (Cillo & Verona, 2008; Godart, 2018; Nicolini et al., 2012; Rafaeli & Pratt, 2013), and organizational aesthetics and arts entrepreneurs (Elias et al., 2018; Gagliardi, 1999; Guillet de Monthoux, 2004; Strati, 1999, 2008). We suggest that style, as a materially accomplished recognizable aesthetic, is a key expression through which internal and external actors can recognize such organizations as distinctive *and* continually changing. A signature style can thus become an important element feeding into wider processes of identity recognition and attribution, both of and within a given organization (Rindova & Schultz, 1998; Brown, 2006; Schultz & Hernes, 2013). To understand how this style is crafted into being, however, requires taking seriously its central artifacts, that is intentionally made products perceived by the senses (Gagliardi, 1990, p. 3).

Indeed, fashion is very much "*defined* by its artifacts […] It is also an industry that lives and dies by its artifacts – via the images and meanings those artifacts convey" (Cappetta & Gioia, 2006, p. 199; emphasis in the original). Once presented on the catwalk, fashion objects stand as a particular material expression of the designer's or brand's style at that moment in

time. Simultaneously, the objects will redefine the designer's existing pattern of aesthetic choices (speaking to who they were), and expand their recognizable pattern by materializing new variations for future consideration (speaking to who they might become) (Aspers, 2006). Such temporal patterns are iterated in continued aesthetic crafting in relation to objects and other key actors. Specifically, we argue that style emerges via a relational process of successive executions of emerging aesthetic objects, through which a designer's signature is negotiated and temporarily settled in repeated cycles vis-a-vis shared aesthetic judgments.

To elaborate this argument, we first introduce and discuss the concept of style in organizations and detail the related roles played by aesthetic judgements and aesthetic objects. We then summarize our contribution in two visual representations, intended as "loose frameworks [that aim to help scholars] with organizing their material so that rich portraits of [style] episodes may be painted" (Tsoukas, 1994, p. 768). In doing so, we follow a contextualist perspective, which takes patterns or "a gestalt, as the object of study", with "change and novelty" as key features (Tsoukas, 1994, p. 767). Its focus on distinct events, which includes their "contiguous past and present", is supplemented by investigation of two further features: quality, that is "the intuited wholeness of an event", and texture, that is "the details and relations making up the quality" (*ibid*). Empirically, the approach emphasizes "the construction of narratives and stories for the interpretation of unique episodes". We follow this by drawing on an illustrative example documenting the creation of the *haute couture* 'Bride Dress' by the designer Jean-Paul Gauthier (see also Simpson & Carroll, 2008). Specifically, we engage this approach, with its relational ontology (Emirbayer, 1997) and an interpretivist epistemology (Tsoukas, 1994, p. 768), to conceptualize how style is crafted into being. We close by outlining the connections and contributions to existing scholarship.

Engaging the literature: Style, aesthetic judgments, and aesthetic objects as a concept

In this section, we define the concept of style and consider how the existing literature accounts for the related roles of artefacts and aesthetic judgements, as three key elements of our theorizing. Examining this allows us to accomplish two things. Firstly, we identify space for the concept of aesthetic objects, and elaborate this as our key contribution. Secondly, we lay the baseline for a discussion of the elements' *conceptual interactions* – represented in our visualizations (Figure 1, 2), illustrated via the case study, and elaborated in the Discussion.

Style in organizations: Stable patterns and aesthetic choices

The fashion designer Yves Saint-Laurent famously said "fashions fade, style is eternal". This suggests that style stands distinct from continuously fleeting trends that exemplify fashion – it is both made from and shapes these. For Dobson (2010, p. 393), style encompasses the very essence of organization. Indeed, any organizational relations are "unified and intensified by the cultivation of a corporate style." Style is thus not solely an aesthetic appreciation of products; it is what makes organizations recognizable. We therefore follow Godart's (2018, p. 103) definition of style "as a durable, recognizable pattern of aesthetic choices."

Although style always operates "allusively, ambiguously and inchoately" (Davis, 1992, p. xx), it remains, to some extent, that which can be recognized in-between the innovations that take place in each aesthetic iteration. It is thus characterized by a certain stability, as "a way of doing something" (Hegmon, 1992, p. 517). This stability eventually leads to the emergence of a pattern, which connects objects that are different, yet aesthetically alike. This may mean that objects share "perceived visual similarities" (Chan, Mihm & Sosa, 2017, p. 3), including color, shape and texture, but also sound, taste, or elicited feelings. Style is therefore an aesthetic array that emerges through multiple decisions involved in the crafting of organizational artefacts – especially in creative industries.

Time is a key feature of this process. Aesthetic patterns emerge over time, in reference to a certain past. They also act to settle a certain future vision by materializing it in the present (Strati, 1999). Selection is similarly important. In their study of fashion houses and design processes, Cillo and Verona (2008, p. 651) elaborate style as "the aesthetic and symbolic *choice* a company makes regarding […] products and services, their main features and how they are combined" (our emphasis). Style thus emerges following rounds of discretionary negotiation around objects, including what makes them unique, and how objects come together in a pattern at a distinct time (e.g. a fashion show). While the authors stress the importance of aesthetics and choice, their approach somewhat downplays the importance of stability. This must exist for style to be recognizable.

Relatedly, style as a durable, recognizable aesthetic pattern is only rendered tangible when it materializes, most notably, in products. Consequently, objects are critical to style, both as a medium of communication, and as a frame of reference. This is of particular importance in the luxury industries, where "the aesthetic and symbolic elements of a product are the key to sustaining competitive advantage" (Cillo & Verona, 2008, p. 2). These objects can thus be seen as "defining artifacts", in so far as they are "closely associated with the identity of a company . . . [and] convey specific meaning about *its raison d'être*" (Cappetta & Gioia, 2006, p. 210). For example, in her study of toy car designers, Elsbach (2009, p. 1054) showed how creative work leads to "producing a product design that carries one's signature style." This makes its creator visible through specific idiosyncrasies of the object itself.

However, crafted objects are not the only elements critical to how style is crafted into being. Style also depends on an evaluative gaze centered on emergent and finalized products; a comparison between what was done and what was expected or imagined. As Godart (2018, p. 105) stressed, the process of evaluation in the creative industries is based firmly on "judgments about the style of products and services, and, by extension, of their producers."

Whether internal (actors involved in the crafting) or external (journalists, clients, competitors), aesthetic judgments will thus also play an important part in the crafting and recognizability of an identifiable style.

Aesthetic judgments: Negotiation, taste-making and arbitration

Aesthetic judgements are central to organizational aesthetics (Gagliardi, 1990; Gherardi, 2000; Ewenstein & Whyte, 2007). As Strati (1999, p. 112) argued:

"the constantly ongoing process of negotiation in everyday organizational life often involves assertions that are […] utterly personal, [ones] which convey something otherwise unsayable. This 'something' is represented by their aesthetic judgments, which have little to do with explicit description of organizational phenomena. [Indeed], aesthetic judgment does not exert its influence on organizational life by virtue of its objective truth, but by virtue of the negotiative dynamics conducted so that it takes one form rather than another."

Aesthetic judgments are thus not statements about what actions or objects actually are. They instead reflect how actors perceive actions or objects in situations. Consequently, they facilitate situated negotiations regarding how to use, transform or create organizational processes and artefacts. Such negotiations are perpetually on-going. They are also central to how organizational members express themselves to each other, and how mutual recognizability is established. They facilitate the emergence of a shared aesthetic appreciation, and "a shared lexicon for communicating about sensible feelings" – a common "taste" (Gherardi, 2009, p. 541).

Specifically, converging aesthetic judgments fundamentally manifest the existence of an aesthetic community. In such a community, actors express similar or compatible

appreciations: of beauty, of value, and of what seems 'right', but also of ugliness, of worthlessness, and of what seems 'wrong'. Such appreciations are continually emerging through the community's expressions, negotiations, convergences and divergences – a process Gherardi (2009, p. 535) identifies as "taste-making". This goes beyond a single organization. It can define professional communities, making organizational styles porous to one another. Taste and style thus involve multiple expressions of collective aesthetic judgments at distinct times. This is against a backdrop of wider frameworks of reference, which Simmel (1991) identifies in his broader conception of style as characteristic of certain historical domains.

As Godard (2018, p. 104) emphasizes, however, though such frameworks exist, "in the art of making clothes, it is not the trends of the moment that should command a designer's creativity, but rather their innate sense of aesthetic judgment." Within an organization, these aesthetic judgements can be carried out horizontally amongst peers or conveyed with vertical authority of the head designer. They can be immediately unanimous or persistently ambivalent; tacit or very formal. It is at the juncture of different judgments where style plays a key role, as a basis for collective debate – a *sensus communis* (Kant, 1790). As Boorman (2011, p. 185) argues, "where indeterminacies are present, style may play a central role as tie-breaker [because] 'rational choice' cannot provide a complete account of decision making."

However, aesthetic judgements do not easily align with a signature style. As Chytry (2007, p. 37) emphasizes, they occur "in a state of spontaneous openness or 'indeterminability' prior to being 'constrained'." For instance, in design situations, members frequently do not know what will satisfy them as the process unfolds – this is not a "rational" process of trial-and-error against an available template. "Satisfactory" instead becomes an aesthetic expression of what "fits" with and what is "us", vis-a-vis this specific object, now. The "us" is essential: in most creative industries, no object will be displayed without the designer's satisfaction, though this emerges *in relation* to others, most notably creative

collaborators, but also key industry actors like journalists and buyers. As Becker (1998, p. 50) noted, "objects […] are congealed social agreements." Consequently, accounting for the accomplishment of style in creative industries necessitates attending to the objects on which aesthetic judgements are centered. We elaborate these conceptually as "aesthetic objects".

Aesthetic objects: Temporary settlement, dissatisfaction and relational engagement

We define aesthetic objects as temporary, material settlements, which remain under continued aesthetic inquiry throughout crafting. Although the expression 'aesthetic object' itself is not new, it has mostly been used to describe artefacts whose aesthetic aspects (shape, color, taste, etc.) predominate, rather than as a developed concept. For example, Ingarden (1961) talks about aesthetic objects as something discovered through an intense aesthetic experience, like a beautiful garden. In the same vein, Strati (2017, p. 573) uses the expression to describe a chairman's painting displayed to evoke certain feelings and reflection by visitors, while Siciliano (2016, p. 691) identifies them as things that are "sensually pleasing (…) to employees." Such references fit Fine's (1992, p. 1269) definition "as an object (or act) that is intended to produce a sensory response in an audience". Similarly, while Kobyshcha (2018) highlights the role of external actors (perception of audiences) in contributing to art objects' becoming, they never explicitly define aesthetic objects as such, instead treating them as simply synonymous with a "piece of art". Dobson (2010, p. 396), in turn, uses the expression in his investigation of style and its role in "experiencing the firm as a unified aesthetic object." He refers to the concept only once however, and does not develop it further.

Our argument is that aesthetic objects in the domain of creative industries can be meaningfully elaborated as conceptual 'cousins' of epistemic objects in the domain of studies of science, with distinct similarities, but also unique characteristics that require further refinement. Specifically, we develop the concept of aesthetic objects around three key

aspects. Aesthetic objects are characterized by *two key features* (their temporary and unsatisfactory nature), which trigger *one key consequence* (relational engagement of actors). It is through this relational engagement that aesthetic objects are eventually brought to satisfaction, and so to conclusion. We elaborate each aspect below, in turn.

Temporary settlement. Firstly, in the field of biology, the historian Rheinberger (1997) focused on the central role of objects, rather than ideas and discourses, in understanding the process of knowledge development. He specifically identified an "epistemic thing" as an object still under investigation, embodying "what one does not yet know" (*ibid*, p. 28). Indeed, for the results of scientific experiments not to be limited to a simple application of theories, such epistemic things have to remain under-defined while under investigation.

As discussed earlier, in the creative industries, the process of crafting is underpinned by dynamics of organizational style and aesthetic judgements. This is in distinct contrast to rational theories and rigorous evidence driving scientific work. Despite this distinction, both fields have at their core a crafting. They require the engaged objects to be open to modifications and contributions, at least temporarily. Indeed, actors can engage with such objects precisely because they are stable enough for experimentation, "but at the same time allow them to play out their ambiguity" (Rheinberger, 2018, p. 345). Were they to be entirely stable, any engagement would likely be meaningless. Aesthetic and epistemic objects thus share the key characteristic of being *temporary* settlements, i.e. materialized steps in an ongoing process. Where they differ is how they are brought to resolution. Within the domain of science, an object is epistemic as long as it remains open to questioning. This is what differentiates them from stable, "technical" objects no longer under inquiry (Rheinberger, 1997). For aesthetic objects, in turn, the process will continue until the object is deemed aesthetically satisfactory enough to be presented, i.e. the questioning over whether it is

satisfactory or not is no longer present. This places lack of satisfaction at the core of aesthetic objects, in driving their dynamic iterations over time, and their eventual close.

Dissatisfaction. The second core element of aesthetic objects in the creative industries is therefore dissatisfaction. Specifically, Knorr Cetina (1997, pp. 14-15) emphasized epistemic objects' critical "lack of completeness", seeing them as "unfolding structures of absences." In the creative industries, this "open-endedness" (Nicolini, Mengis & Swan, 2012, p. 619) is manifested through the continuous lack of satisfaction or the presence of dissatisfaction – both are relevant. This recognizes that aesthetics does not merely imply passive appreciation of an object. As Strati (2000, p. 16) stressed, aesthetics is instead about "the stimulation of the abilities related to feeling." Specifically, during the crafting, the actors share a sustained general sense of dissatisfaction about the objects. This is akin to flute makers passing the emerging flute to each other, unless it "does not feel right", in which case they return it to the previous step for additional work (Yanow, 2000). This general feeling is underpinned by a set of aesthetic judgements vis-à-vis the object: in its details, as a whole, and in relation to other objects. As long as relational satisfaction is not reached, the aesthetic object remains under continued aesthetic inquiry, i.e. open to further modifications. Dissatisfaction is therefore the norm for aesthetic objects, rather than solely a criterion for rejection. Indeed, an aesthetic object can be closed to further aesthetic questioning and discarded at any point for multiple reasons. These include external constraints (e.g. physical impossibility, deadlines), internal considerations (e.g. amount of resources consumed, general feeling of impossibility in executing it to satisfaction), and absence of ideas regarding how to move forward in that specific case. Alongside such reasons, aesthetic objects can also stop being subject to aesthetic questioning once a general feeling of satisfaction is reached. This achievement of aesthetic agreement manifests as a shared sense of taste (Gherardi, 2009). It is also the moment when the artifact can move toward becoming a 'released product'.

Relational engagement. The final core element of aesthetic objects in the creative industries is relational engagement. Namely, according to Nicolini and colleagues (2012, p. 619), "the emergence of an epistemic object introduces a form of a collective obligation toward it." As a result, epistemic objects are central to collaboration in scientific activities, recognizing also that scientific inquiry is perpetually collective. This echoes in part the dynamics of aesthetic objects in the creative industries. Specifically, the dissatisfaction referred to above is a powerful trigger for actors' emotional responses, fueling their continued engagement. Whether this results in frustration or enthusiasm, unsatisfactory feelings structure how actors relate to the object and one another in their quest to negotiate more satisfactory improvements. For instance, irritation might compel further consideration of the aesthetic object's details, of the object as a whole, or of the object in relation to other objects. Each of these considerations might involve different sets of actors, conversations, and materials, relating to each other in different ways. Thus the degree and focus of dissatisfaction may result in different relational engagements too.

However, epistemic and aesthetic objects notably differ in what motivates underpinning relational engagements, and how these subsequently unfold. In the case of epistemic objects, the existing literature implies a need for collective engagements (Knorr Cetina, 1997, p. 13). Aesthetic objects are also characterized by relational engagements through which aesthetic judgements that are negotiated and attuned. Such engagements can be in relation to other internal or external actors, as part of collective work common to the creative industries (e.g. McKinlay & Smith, 2009). They can also encompass actors in relation to other actors and objects at certain moments in time (Elias, Chiles, Duncan & Vultee, 2018), or own thoughts or feelings, which can be verbalized or kept silent (Sawyer, 2000; Burkitt, 2010). They may also include consideration of external expectations and

references. This recognizes, as Godart (2018, p. 107) argues, that style can be seen as a lived tension between outsiders' expectations and "what is specific about this artist."

In summary, we consider temporary settlements, dissatisfaction and relational engagement to be the core elements of aesthetic objects in creative industries. Without denying the importance of technical aspects (like physical constraints), elaborating the nature and relevance of aesthetic objects allows us to emphasize the aesthetic nature of continuous inquiries driving creative work. Specifically, we argue that while their aesthetic qualities (i.e. expression of fit, satisfaction, unease) are under investigation, arbitration regarding aesthetic objects remains fundamentally unresolved. They will stay purposefully unsatisfactory – allowing the very openness necessary for the crafting – until external circumstances or relational sense of satisfaction instantiate their closure. An aesthetic object is thus by nature open to continued reactions, negotiations and alternatives; its unsatisfactory 'incompleteness' calls for them. In addition, this indeterminacy opens up room for aesthetic judgments in action. The two in combination – aesthetic objects and aesthetic judgments – are thus critical to understanding how style is crafted into being in creative industries, as summarized below.

Crafting style in creative industries: Elaborating interactions between key elements

Building on the above, in the creative industries, companies must continually renew themselves while remaining identifiable and distinctive. We argue that through relational crafting, artifacts become materialized expressions of style. This style represents an instance that can be evaluated for consistency and coherence, i.e. identity as externally attributed (Gioia, Patvardhan & Hamilton, 2013). To enable relational negotiation leading to eventual 'close', such objects need to be considered in a state of ambiguity and indeterminacy – making them what we call *aesthetic objects*. Their incompleteness and openness are engaged

and temporarily resolved via on-going cycles, which aesthetic judgments feed into. These are both individual and collective, triggering negotiations around multiple temporary iterations.

To illustrate our abductively-crafted arguments, we chose to focus on a notable setting of fashion *ateliers* (open spaces where seamstresses work on garments for fashion shows). In the spirit of non-traditional research championed by this journal, we consulted documentaries to access rarely seen domains, and as sources of valuable insight for scholarly research (see Bell, 2015; Goodman, 2004; Kenny, 2009). While published interviews with designers, media accounts or brand histories could speak to narrative crafting of style, they are less able, on their own, to capture the nuances of its material crafting as our primary concern. Instead, documentaries showing design in action provided us with empirical examples that we could interrogate, exploring whether and how our conceptual arguments echoed lived experiences.

Thus, as characteristic of the abductive approach, our conceptualization proceeded as a continued "interplay" (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012) between documentaries as main empirical and inspirational 'snapshots', and varied literatures, from style, aesthetics and taste, to identity, creative industries and materiality. As Weick (2005, p. 433) noted, abductive reasoning concerns itself with "[giving] rise to speculations, conjectures, and assessments of plausibility rather than a search among known rules to see which one might best fit the facts". This aligned with our contextualist approach (Tsoukas, 1994), which eschews fixed rules and mechanisms, and instead explores and remains open to the plethora of localized possibilities. We did this via constant conversations and re-evaluations (Locke et al., 2008), as well as by using imaginative tools like repeated draft visualizations, as means of crystallising our ideas.

With this in mind, we carefully selected and consulted twenty-one documentaries focused on the preparation of fashion shows (see *Table 1* in Appendix). The films were done in partnership with established producers (e.g. Arté Productions), directed by prominent filmmakers and journalists (e.g. Frederic Tcheng of *Dior and I*), and incorporated 'fly on the

wall' elements (e.g. Loïc Prigent's *The Day Before* series). Of these, we chose the fashion journalist Prigent's documentary of the preparation for Jean-Paul Gaultier's 2009 autumn/winter *haute couture* show as the most evocative exemplar. Specifically, the focus on its key aesthetic object – the Bride Dress – allowed us to richly depict, echoing other documentaries and sources consulted, its emergence and continual re-emergence over a concentrated week-long period (i.e. *internal loop* in Figure 1), as central to our theorizing. The Bride Dress is also traditionally the *grand finale* that seeks to encompass the designer's expression of style at that time, as it becomes available for external evaluation (i.e. *external loop* in Figure 2). As Prigent (2010: 8'30) explains, "great attention is paid to the Bride Dress. It closes the show, synthesizes the collection. And it must be a peak of emotion for the high maintenance clientele of haute couture" (see Skov, Skjold, Moeran, Larsen, & Csaba, 2009). Recognizing however that documentaries offer an inevitably partial depiction (Hassard, 1998), we also read interviews and other published accounts. This was to enrich the insights Prigent captured, but also to incorporate Gaultier's own reflections, not captured in the documentary, which addressed our arguments. Moreover, this paper was done as part of our wider research project on the fashion industry conducted over the course of several years. This included an 18-month ethnography of the technical side of fashion shows and interviews on related topics (e.g. creativity and style, but also coordination and the aesthetic economy). This enabled us to contextualize the documentaries and engage them with critical distance.

To represent these abductively-crafted conceptual interactions, and in line with our contextualist approach (Tsoukas, 1994), we visually articulate two loops. The first, *internal loop* (see Figure 1 below), produces objects that carry aesthetic choices. This is done via aesthetic objects (characterized by relational engagement, dissatisfaction and temporary settlement) encountering aesthetic judgments. Such encounters eventually result in either discarded iterations or released products, that is in the closure of aesthetic objects. Figure 1

thus depicts the "texture" of events in which style is crafted into being, namely "the details and relations making up the quality" (*ibid*, p. 767). The second, *external loop* (see Figure 2 below) connects products (emerging from the internal loop) with their external evaluation, by clients, competitors, or media, and with internal narrative efforts to inform those evaluations. It is through this external evaluation that a pattern of aesthetic choices, as per Godart's (2018) definition of style, can come to be recognized. This loop will contribute to others' identification of a brand's distinctiveness, but also inform future cycles through which the company's style is re-crafted (future iterations of the internal loop). Figure 2 therefore depicts the "quality" of events in which style is crafted into being, that is "the intuited wholeness" of distinct patterns (Tsoukas, 1994, p. 767). We thus represent the figures separately to bring to the fore, in turn, the richness and the wholeness of how style is crafted into being. As Tsoukas (1994, p. 767) argued, "quality and texture are like the two sides of the same coin: when we intuit the whole (e.g. Figure 2) we suppress its details (i.e. its texture), and when we analyze a pattern (e.g. Figure 1) we try to underplay its wholeness (i.e. its quality)."
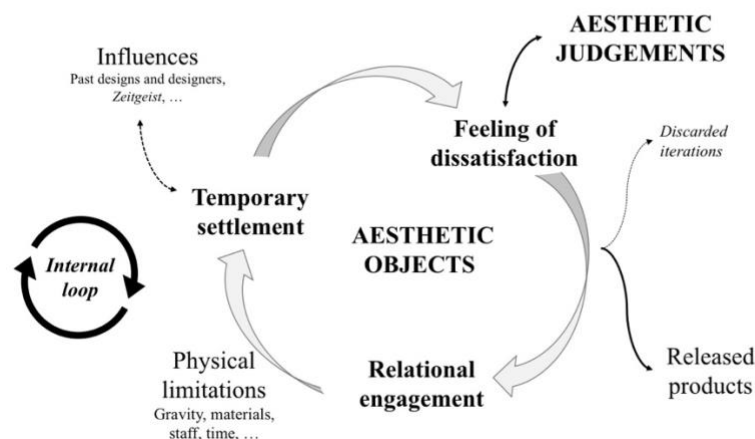

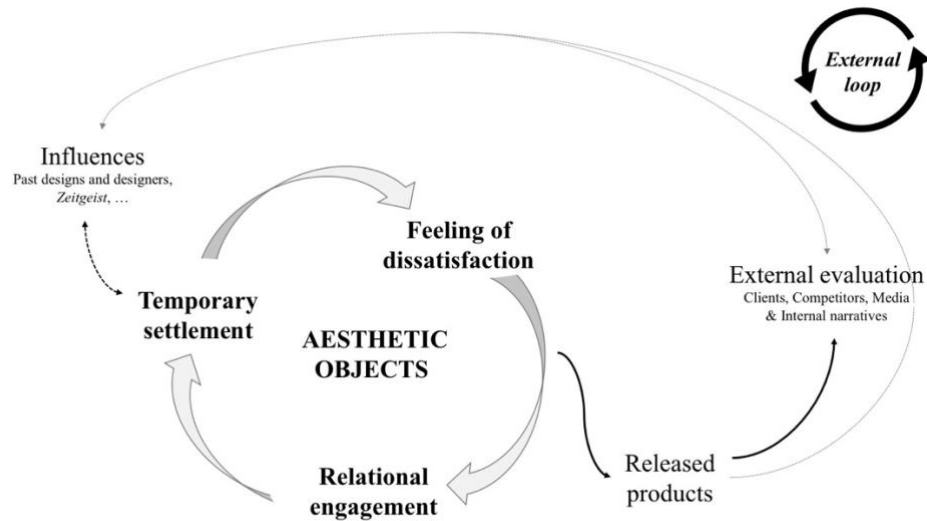*Figure 1. Crafting style into being: Internal loop*

Figure 2. Crafting style into being: External loop

Before elaborating the conceptual interconnections in the Discussion, we turn to an exemplar from high fashion, as a rich means of illustrating our ideas.

Illustrative exemplar: Jean Paul Gaultier's 2009 autumn/winter Bride Dress

For this season, the theme chosen by Jean-Paul Gaultier was cinema, specifically major actresses. The collection was to feature a "Garbo dress", a "Bacall dress", a "Marilyn dress". What Prigent does not share, but Gaultier does elsewhere, is that cinema, like his other "aesthetic fixations [like] corsetry, religious iconography, S&M" (Kelsey, 2018, p. xx), is a continued source of inspiration. In Gaultier's words, "I have obsessions, different things that are deep inside of me, that I go on to work on and develop in another way" (Anderson, 2013). Cinema is also tied to Gaultier's personal history. In his telling to *Dazed*, "I like to go to the cinema and I also like watching TV. I am of a generation born with TV. My grandmother used to let me watch it […] I like watching old black-and-white movies, French or American, with stars like Bette Davis" (Lawson, 2013). As Cillo and Verona (2008, p. 7) stressed, "designers tend to search in the neighborhood of their expertise and, more specifically, of their identity i.e., they search locally" (see also Simmel, 1991).

With this inspiration in mind, Gaultier wants the Bride Dress to be *cinéphile*: to project the actresses' faces on the veil. In other words, cinema as a distinct *influence* will inform all *temporary settlements* of the Dress as an *aesthetic object*, until it emerges as a finished or *released product* on the runway (see Figure 1). Twenty hours before the show, the Bride Dress is far from being finished though. Indeed, dozens of dresses are still being created. At around 10.30 am the day before the show, the Bride Dress comes back from the ateliers for a fitting. At this stage, it has a large veil with film roll on its side, which starts from the front (waist) of the model, goes up to form a rectangular movie screen around her head, then falls freely down the back. A ruffle made out of golden material rests around her waist.

--- Insert Picture 1 and Picture 2 about here ---

Early iteration of the Bride Dress

Not satisfied with the veil, Jean-Paul Gaultier manipulates it, testing alternatives. As a designer, Gaultier does not sketch or stitch; he mimes and crafts in space, manipulating materials directly on live models. The documentary shows him working closely with seamstresses, relying on their expertise to materialize his ideas. As Mireille, head seamstress, puts it: "We are the hands and he is the head" (Prigent, 2010, 8'20). This demonstrates the creating of *aesthetic objects* as a fundamentally *relational engagement* (see Figure 1).

As with the *aesthetic objects*, the Dress is here open-ended: there is a feeling of *dissatisfaction* driving the testing of multiple iterations, with only the vague *influence* of cinema as a basis upon which this might eventually be resolved (see Figure 1). In Gaultier's own words, "there is always something to do, to improve. It is mainly a search, I think. I remember a trench [coat] I did that took 30 fittings. [Thirty] fittings, but that's what it is. […] It is the search for perfection. Does it exist? Do we need it? That I don't know…" (Prigent, 2010, 11'). They next remove the veil and use it to test a belt of sorts, replacing the ruffle.

--- Insert Picture 3 about here ---

The veil becomes a belt

Although Gaultier is pleased with the result, he still does not like the veil's structure: "I think what doesn't work, sadly, is the 'big screen' effect" (Prigent, 2010, 9'33). They hesitate before removing it, as the veil is a key traditional element of a Bride Dress. Gaultier cuts things short after some hesitation: "The projection will be enough. Let's drop it" (Prigent, 2010, 9'41). Mireille and Gaultier go around the model to dismantle the veil. While they remove stitches, he tries to drape it around – another attempt at a satisfactory *temporary settlement* to overcome *dissatisfaction* (see Figure 1). While draping, the fabric is reshaped into a more classic structure. The ruffle has also been moved from the waist to her breasts.

--- Insert Picture 4 about here ---

From a square to a cone veil

They next test moving the cone-like veil from the model's shoulders to 50 centimeters above her head. Their aesthetic judgment concerning the new iteration appears positive; they nod and hum. This suggests a shift away from *dissatisfaction* propelling the iterative practice driving *aesthetic objects*, which may bring these to a 'close' of a *released product* (see Figure 1). Almost 10 hours later however, the Bride Dress comes back for a new fitting. As the milliner waiting outside comments: "We're not relaxed (stressed giggle), what he precisely wants is far from obvious. And (the veil) has to hold by itself… and that's impossible". (Does it exist 'It's not possible' for Mr Gaultier?) No (laugh)" (Prigent, 2010, 15'55). This suggests that alongside *influences*, *physical limitations* also matter, in this case gravity (see Figure 1).

The new shape also requires a new hairstyle, to support the veil standing high enough.

--- Insert Picture 5 about here ---

New veil, new hair style

At this stage, the Dress has taken a new form. Beyond the updated conical veil that finishes in a sort of cape, the ruffle is around the model's chest, and the belt has disappeared. They struggle with the hairstyle that has to be perfect to avoid movement. Moreover, the veil

remains an open-ended question, because it needs to be thick enough for the projection to be visible (see *physical limitations* in Figure 1). While draping the model, Gaultier thinks out loud: "Or… why don't we do a stripe?" (Prigent, 2010, 15'56). In this suggestion of a stripe, we can detect the *influence* of Gaultier's 'signature style' (Elsbach, 2009; see Figure 1), as inspirations to which he continually returns, and for which he is known. As Gaultier explained, "I have a fixation with stripes! When I was a child I used to wear striped tops, and when I was an adolescent I used to wear them because flea markets were in fashion and the tops were cheap […]. My fascination for using it in my collections began when I was designing a raincoat collection and I sketched a coat with stripes. Little by little I used more variations of it" (Lawson, 2013). This also echoes the porosity of style, in which past *influences* inform present *temporary settlements*. As Godart (2018, p. 118) put it, "although styles are recognizable and durable, new styles can and do emerge. These are often – but not always – hybrids of older styles" (see also Cillo & Verona, 2008).

Although the new iteration is appreciated, the Dress as an *aesthetic object* remains open-ended (*internal loop* of Figure 1): further improvements are suggested. The milliner notes: "There isn't much time left. That's the issue…" (Prigent, 2010, 16'04). Around midnight, the matter of presenting the Dress on the runway surfaces added *physical limitations*: Gaultier's choice of projecting on to the veil blinds the model, who cannot walk.

--- Insert Picture 6 about here ---

The blinded Bride

Since cinema is the central theme (*influence*) this season, the actors' *aesthetic judgment* remains that the projection cannot be avoided: it is essential for expressing Gaultier's style now. Surrounded by stage producers and company executives, representing views informing the *internal* (production) and *external* (eventual *evaluation*) *loops* of Figure 1 and 2, Gaultier brainstorms. Possibilities are examined on the technical side (changing the scenography), the

human side (changing the model), and the object (modifying the Dress). This demonstrates that the Dress is not merely the garment itself: it is a particular material expression negotiated by actors in relation to certain *influences* (cinema) and *physical limitations*, be they spatial (this catwalk), temporal (the looming deadline) or material (veil's porosity). Tentatively, they agree to assistants holding her hands as she walks. The Bride Dress goes back to the atelier.

Around 9.30 am the next day, the hairstyle question as a *physical limitation* returns. The stylist finally finds a way to hold the veil that aesthetically pleases Gaultier, thus presenting a satisfactory *temporary settlement* (see Figure 1). At 10 am Gaultier discovers the modifications on the Bride Dress made overnight. He seems satisfied with the solutions found without him, once more demonstrating the *relational engagement* underpinning objects and, through them, of collective *aesthetic judgments*: "Ok, so we don't do it like that anymore. It's way better this way" (Prigent, 2010, 33'15). His satisfaction may well have been influenced by a unique feature of his *atelier*, namely that design work is done 'in house'. Most of his design staff have worked with him for years, the head seamstress for decades. When it comes to Gaultier's *aesthetic judgment*, repeated joint work over time has made it *collective*.

As the show's start looms, the iterative practice of aesthetic judgments informing *aesthetic objects*, which then calls for further *aesthetic judgment* (see Figure 1), must come to an end. Despite this, until the very last, Gaultier seeks satisfaction: to make them "fit" better.

--- Insert Picture 7 about here ---

Last-second changes

In summary, echoing Figure 1, through a *relational engagement* centered on *aesthetic objects* like the Dress, we witness Gaultier looking for an aesthetic judgment that satisfies. This iterative search is informed by a variety of *influences*, from personal (e.g. stripes) to external (i.e. clothes popularized by selected actresses), and other collaborators' *aesthetic judgments* (i.e. key contributions from Mireille and others). Importantly, though we see how

some *influences* are materialized, the broader process through which Gaultier finds continued inspirations is more ephemeral (Figure 2*)*. As Gaultier said at the start, "I'm always working. It's always a game I'm playing by seeing everything around me…" (Lawson, 2013).

It is also clear that he would not show a dress without being pleased with it: in the documentary, we see him *discarding* dresses after days of work, for not producing a result he appreciates (*feeling of dissatisfaction*), or even for not having a model on which they fit 'correctly' (*physical limitations*). What is 'correct' is never verbally explained, but spontaneously agreed upon (*aesthetic judgments*). Thus, despite the importance of aesthetic judgments, *physical limitations* matter too. The show deadline is ever present, for instance; still Gaultier makes tweaks until the last minute. Crucially, this speaks to a central feature of *aesthetic objects*, namely their "capacity to unfold indefinitely" (Knorr Cetina, 2001, p. 181). However, their closure does not come (ontologically) from them, but from external limitations (e.g. show's start), or sense of satisfaction vis-à-vis *influences* being achieved.

Other *physical limitations* matter too, including financial considerations. As the designer notes, "sometimes with a collection, one can completely screw himself, and maybe sometimes the company at the same time" (Prigent, 2010, 10'30). In addition, French legislation forbids shifts longer than 12 hours. Halfway through the Bride Dress' creation, seamstresses have to turn the work over to the night crew. As Gaultier recalled from another show, "when the [in-house] seamstresses had the dresses back in their hands, *their dresses…* […] They undid everything. […] There were [dresses] that we couldn't progress" (Prigent, 2010, 24'30). Thus *physical limitations* can also re-introduce aesthetic judgments, which contributes to *aesthetic objects*' open-endedness by introducing further sources of ambiguity.

Discussion

Our illustrative example of Gaultier's Bride Dress richly demonstrates how style is crafted into being via continued, relational interactions between aesthetic judgments and aesthetic objects (*internal loop* in Figure 1). In the creative industries in particular, this process subsequently represents an entry point into the broader dynamics of evaluation of style as a "recognizable pattern" (Godart, 2018, p. 103; Figure 2), which have been extensively discussed in relation to dynamics of organizational identity in settings. To fully elaborate our theorization, we must therefore make and detail the connection to such broader dynamics.

Specifically, while the openness of the definition of organizational identity has been frustrating for some, there remains value in engaging it as a "nexus" concept: "something that links things together, as well as a central meeting place. […] Organizational identity also serves as a 'place' where other theories can meet and 'hang out'" (Pratt, Schultz, Ashforth & Ravasi, 2016, p. 4). We engage organizational identity in precisely this way, by examining how style being crafted into being may help us see its dynamics differently. In addition, engaging with contexts where materiality and aesthetics are central offers a valuable contribution to that literature, which has increasingly recognized the need to look beyond traditional corporations alone (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 183-184). We thus contribute in two ways. Firstly, we introduce the concept of aesthetic objects, and suggest that examining them more closely can help further object-focused research on organizational identity. Secondly, we elaborate the link between style and organizational identity dynamics in creative domains.

Bringing objects (back) in: Aesthetic objects, style and organizational identity

Firstly, by introducing the concept of aesthetic objects, we highlight the undervalued role of i) collective aesthetic judgements and ii) materiality in the crafting of a style into being, which

makes the organization recognizable. The concept was informed by the notion of epistemic objects (Knorr Cetina, 1997; Rheinberger, 1997), which had already been extended from the field of science to knowledge workers (e.g. Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009; Miettinen & Virkkunen, 2005; Nicolini et al., 2012). The possibility of relational engagements with specific objects that are aesthetic, rather than epistemic, has not been investigated however, beyond perhaps Ewenstein and Whyte's (2009) examination of visual representations, as well as Elias and colleagues' (2018) study of arts entrepreneurs and their customers.

Here, the case of Gaultier's Bride Dress is a nice illustration. It is central to the season's collection, yet it remains continuously modified until the very last minute. For the collective of actors, the question of whether it is at any point satisfactory remains open. Some attempts are discarded off the seamstress' table, others are pondered endlessly – within the timeline. Throughout, the actors engage in problem-finding rather than problem-solving: they are "constantly searching for [a] problem" (Sawyer, 2000, p. 153), not bringing closure to the object. Attending to aesthetic objects thus allows us to better understand how crafted style comes to present itself for eventual evaluation, and why. As such, our contribution lies at a distinct, material crafting stage of the creative process, best seen as a collective engagement, rather than an individual achievement (Sawyer, 2006; Elias et al., 2018).

Specifically, by foregrounding aesthetic objects in relation to aesthetic judgments in the process of crafting style into being, we allow space for an artefact-centered understanding of organization identity in the making. Notably, most organizational scholars have engaged identity either by examining "what members believe is the core, distinctive, and more or less enduring characteristics of their organizations", or "the categories organizations claim to signal similarity or differences" (Pratt et al., 2016, p. 3). Asking the question "how does a collective define itself?" has produced a plethora of definitions and engagements, not all of which are consistent. The answers have largely centered though on approaching identity as a

result of affirmed or implied belief, or as projection to and conversation with external audiences (Corley et al., 2006; He & Brown, 2013; Pratt et al., 2016). What has rarely been examined is the role of artefacts in such dynamics, particularly as it relates to crafting in the first place. According to Watkiss and Glynn (2016), "the preponderance of this research has emphasized the importance of intangible factors, especially language, rhetoric, and symbolization in organizational identity construction, to the relative neglect of more tangible, physical, or material factors" (see also Harquail & Wilcox King, 2010).

Of course, exceptions exist. Kaplan's (2011) study identified how Powerpoint facilitated shared understanding by making tangible the competing ideas being negotiated (see also Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012). In addition, the literature that sees organizational identity as relational and adaptive has also acknowledged links between aesthetic aspects and identity, including vis-à-vis objects (Gioia & Patvardhan, 2012; Pratt et al., 2006; Schultz & Hernes, 2013). For instance, Hatch and Schultz (2002, p. 1001) argue that "when meanings are expressed in cultural artifacts, the artifacts then carry that meaning from the deep recesses of cultural understanding to the cultural surface. The meaning-laden artifacts of a culture thereby become available to self-defining, identity-forming processes." How such "self-defining, identity-forming processes" operate in relation to identity beyond being narrated remains less clear, however. Though the authors suggest "practices of expression", like corporate dress, "help to construct organizational identity through culturally contextualized self-expression" (*ibid*, p. 1002), the question of how related aesthetic objects come to be relationally crafted in the first place, instead of solely expressed, is not directly addressed.

Watkiss and Glynn (2016), in turn, offer three "mechanisms" by which artefacts come to matter in relation to identity: categorization (objects facilitating how an organization is classified), symbolization (objects embedding meaning, as key to identity claims), and performative repertoires (objects as resources for organizational communicative practices).

Yet, they conceptually engage artifacts as facilitators of identity, not as sites for crafting of style as a related concept. In the authors' words, "material practices and objects do not have inherent meaning, but rather derive meaning from the categories in which they are embedded, through the actors who interpret them, and in the ways in which they are put to practice" (*ibid*, p. 329). This suggests a rather discursive conceptualization, in line with the predominant focus of non-traditional research in this domain (e.g. Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994; Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Humphreys & Brown, 2002; Brown, 2006; Schultz & Hernes, 2013; see He & Brown, 2013). As Cappetta and Gioia (2006, p. 199) noted in one example from the context of fine fashion, "it is primarily through their artifacts that firms in this industry develop, sustain, and change their organizational identities […] and communicate those identities to different constituents through image-based 'sensegiving' processes." In its focus on discursive interpretation, the existing literature therefore too often overlooks the very *physicality* of artefacts (Pratt & Rafaeli, 2006): how they are reshaped and reimagined, as a gateway to understanding what their crafting subsequently makes available to those interested in identifying organizations in some way.

Bringing in style: Clarifying the link to organizational identity in creative industries

Secondly, as we illustrated with Jean-Paul Gaultier's Bride Dress, identity dynamics in the creative industries encompass strong aesthetic aspects. This is a feature, however, that the existing literature elaborates less often. Indeed, though some studies include sensorial elements, like labels (Gioia et al., 2000), offices (Schultz & Hernes, 2013), buildings (Elsbach, 2004; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2011) or products (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006), and some authors (Clegg, Rhodes & Kornberger, 2007) have called for more studies of dress, many remain focused on discourses and images (e.g. Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Whetten, 2006; see Hatch & Schultz, 2004). Furthermore, when it is engaged, the aesthetic dimension is often

seen as an addition, rather than a point of entry for exploring identity differently; with scholars who take an aesthetic approach to organizations as notable exceptions (Strati, 2010, p. 885). Such an approach would allow scholars to explore how organizational identity presents itself in a broader sensorial manner, not based on discourse or image alone (Wasserman & Frenkel, 2011). Doing so, however, requires a return to situated crafting, or "the inner becoming of things" (Bergson, 1911, p. 322, cf. Shotter, 2006), as we did here.

Our distinct contribution to an aesthetic approach to organizational identity thus lies in elaborating the concept of style, and articulating more clearly the conceptual link between style and organizational identity. Specifically, we argue that style, as a "recognizable pattern of aesthetic choices" (Godart, 2018, p. 103), provides a conceptual frame that connects sensorial aspects, crafted locally between creative actors (*internal loop* in Figure 1), with central, enduring and distinctive elements that come to define organizations (Albert & Whetten, 1985; *external loop* in Figure 2). We demonstrate how aesthetic objects and judgments provide a specific entry point into identity dynamics – an important precursor to subsequent mediation of creative actors' narrative discourses or further imagery. We are not alone in recognizing this potential (e.g. Hatch & Schultz, 2002). However, in our account, importance of aesthetic and material crafting is foregrounded, not merely referenced.

Specifically, as we saw in the Jean-Paul Gaultier illustration, aesthetic judgments can inform a wider range of identity dynamics. They express not only a collective taste (Gherardi, 2009), but also power and politics (Wasserman & Frenkel, 2011) and learning and knowledge (Ewenstein & Whyte, 2007), underlying the answers to the question 'who are we?' Style also enables recognition of the organization's past, without reducing it to a series of products, since aesthetic judgement also encompasses traces of 'who we were'. This echoes processual approaches to identity, which recognize that identity "is always constructed in time" (Schultz, 2016, p. 101; see also Simpson, 2009; Pratt, 2012; Schultz, Maguire, Langley & Tsoukas,

2012; Hernes, Simpson & Soderlund, 2013). Indeed, if the forgetting of the past is critical to the future of organizational identities (Anteby & Molnar, 2012), these non-rational, non-cognitive aesthetic judgements establish such connections, while leaving room for difference and innovation. This importantly addresses in part Schultz and colleagues' (2012, p. 5) call for the "need to develop our understanding of the flow of time in identity and ask how past, present, and future are connected." Emphasizing the crafting of style into being can thus enrich existing studies of how past identities are engaged to inform imagined futures, like Schultz and Hernes' (2013) investigation of identity claims by managers in the LEGO Group, by highlighting the non-discursive means by which this can also be accomplished.

This approach is all the more relevant in the creative industries, including fashion, (Godart, 2018, p. 104), where style is materially crafted into being. In the finalized form of released products, as end result of the *internal loop* in Figure 1, who the organization aesthetically is appears through a 'signature style' (see also Elsbach, 2009). Only when aesthetic objects finally appear on the catwalk, in the form of stable, released products, can they be considered and evaluated by external audiences, or shaped into convincing narratives by the company's insiders (i.e. *external loop* in Figure 2). The latter two movements – evaluation and active shaping of narratives – present the recognized means in the literature by which identity dynamics are instantiated and proceed (e.g. Rindova & Schultz, 1998; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). As such, we argue that style represents one key aspect by which organizational identity will be attached to organizations by external audiences, and in relation to which organizations will work to make themselves externally identifiable. This articulates a distinct conceptual link between style and organizational identity: the former's material and relational crafting (*internal loop* in Figure 1) feeds into the distinct means by which the latter is articulated and attributed (*external loop* in Figure 2).

The distinction is important because existing scholarship has not always been precise about the relationship between style and identity. Firstly, they have occasionally been conflated, or treated as synonymous. For instance, Elsbach (2009, p. 1047) suggested "organizational products may embody both the organizational brand and the organizational identity." In addition, creative objects enable her to discuss "signature-styles", which allow "designers to affirm their creative, professional identities" (*ibid*, p. 1041). However, while that study suggests a connection between identity and artefacts, it does not elaborate on the nature of the link or how it might operate in practice.

Secondly, as we stressed, style does not emerge out of individual identity alone. This point stands in contrast to some of the literature on style, most notably Simmel's (1991) classic articulation. Specifically, Simmel (1991) noted that style can conceptually be related to both a "general law of form" at a distinct time and place, which negates the uniqueness of individual expressions, *and* in rarer cases, "a mode of expression flowing from [a person's] very individual genius, which we now sense as the general character in all their individual works." Style in art can thus be expressed on several levels, as both 'Gothic' (collectively shared at a certain period), and 'Michelangelo's' (individual). This view is especially echoed in studies of arts entrepreneurs (Elias et al., 2018) and creative industries like fashion, where "designers […] should follow their own styles, i.e., something that makes their judgment unique, an unmistakable expression of who they are" (Godart, 2018, p. 104).

Yet this link between personal identity and one's style does not simply appear out of the ether. The concern that emerges, therefore, is how is such style crafted into being, as a precursor to any subsequent consideration as part of identity dynamics (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). In other words, how do designers come to create products in a way that encapsulates their distinct style, thus echoing past choices *and* making current ones

available for future-oriented displays to external audiences? That is the question we have worked to address and conceptualize, as summarized above and in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Conclusion

Within creative and other industries, considerable scholarly concern has focused on understanding "how identity changes and what creates stability in the making of identity constantly on the move" (Schultz, 2016). We have argued that in creative domains, like high fashion *ateliers* and brands, this is done through a specific process of crafting style into being: in on-going encounters between aesthetic judgments and aesthetic objects (*internal loop* in Figure 1). The eventual closure of such crafting then informs processes of organizational identity formation and evaluation (*external loop* in Figure 2). Rather than being achieved through narrative means (e.g. Schultz & Hernes, 2013), this recognizes that organizational identity in creative settings starts with materialized events of aesthetic crafting. This is where aesthetic judgments and aesthetic objects meet, and where style is crafted into being.

Our arguments thus notably contribute to moving organizational identity beyond its predominant expression as a "narrowly cognitive, linguistic . . . construct" (Harquail & Wilcox King, 2010, p. 1621), toward materially-focused, relational crafting, in which iterative negotiations between aesthetic judgments and aesthetic objects play a key part. Admittedly, this shift has limitations. As we stressed, style as a pattern, definitionally speaking, cannot be simply reduced to crafted objects (*internal loop* in Figure 1). It also features external elements and evaluation (*external loop* in Figure 2) – including a comparison against the "general law of form" characterizing wider aesthetic appreciations at that time and place (Simmel, 1991). It is in light of such evaluations perhaps that much of the existing literature on organizational identity in creative domains, but also beyond, remains focused on the convincing work to demonstrate coherence and distinctiveness (Brown et al., 2006; Cappetta & Gioia, 2006; He

& Brown, 2013). By predominantly focusing our theorization on the textured crafting of style into being (*internal loop*), we inevitably foregrounded a part of a more complex whole. Future investigations which focus on both the textured crafting centered on aesthetic objects and subsequent actions to narrate such work to external audiences toward broader identity display efforts (i.e. Figure 1 and 2 equally), would therefore be undoubtedly valuable.

Similarly, while this paper employs documentaries as illustrative exemplars, first hand empirical accounts of concurrent crafting and verbalization of style in action, via ethnographic observation and similar, would enable further elaboration and extension of our arguments. Relatedly, examining such dynamics in other aesthetics-centered, creative and entrepreneurial settings where continual change is customary, such as the arts (e.g. Elias et al., 2018), would enable us to see whether and how style crafted into being via aesthetic judgments and aesthetic objects may matter. This is particularly so regarding aesthetic objects, a novel concept we sketched out here. Empirical investigation of a) how these are engaged in different settings, b) what other features may facilitate their perpetual open-endedness, c) how relations (including power) around them might make a difference, and d) how they might be differently brought to a close, would test the concept's utility, refine its assumptions, and identify further limitations. Indeed, though our paper has focused on creative industries, the concept of aesthetic objects opens the door to considering their presence and relevance in other organizational domains as well, as another area of possible future research.

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Appendix I. Summary of select documentaries abductively engaged as part of this study

Fashion house observed	Title of the documentary	Director	Year	Duration (minutes)
Alexander McQueen	McQueen	Ian Bonhôte & Peter Ettedgui	2018	111'
Alexander Wang	The Day Before: Alexander Wang	Loïc Prigent	2010	26'
Chanel	Signé Chanel	Loïc Prigent	2005	4x26'
	7 Days Out - Chanel	Andrew Rossi	2018	26'
	Lagerfeld Confidential	Rodolphe Marconi	2007	99'
Diane von Fustenberg	The Day Before: Diane von Fustenberg	Loïc Prigent	2010	52'
Dior	Dior & I	Frédéric Tcheng	2015	90'
	Inside Dior	Michael Waldman	2017	
Dries von Noten	Dries	Reiner Holzemer	2017	90'
Fendi	The Day Before: Fendi by Karl Lagerfeld	Loïc Prigent	2009	52'
Isabel Marant	The Day Before: Isabel Marant	Loïc Prigent	2011	52'
Jean-Paul Gaultier	The Day Before: Jean-Paul Gaultier	Loïc Prigent	2009	52'
	Jean-Paul Gaultier at Work	Loïc Prigent	2015	52'
Jeremy Scott	The Day Before: Jeremy Scott	Loïc Prigent	2010	26'
Lanvin	The Day Before: Lanvin	Loïc Prigent	2011	52'
Manolo Blahnik	The Boy who Made Shoes for Lizards	Michael Roberts	2017	89'
Narciso Rodriguez	The Day Before: Narciso Rodriguez	Loïc Prigent	2010	26'
Nina Ricci	The Day Before: Nina Ricci	Loïc Prigent	2010	52'
Proenza Schouler	The Day Before: Proenza Schouler	Loïc Prigent	2009	52'
Sonya Rykiel	The Day Before: Sonya Rikiel	Loïc Prigent	2009	52'
Versace	The Day Before: Versace	Loïc Prigent	2010	52'