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Alienation in the time of division of labour – A Marxist analysis on two contemporary Swedish fashion brands

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Abstract

This thesis deals with questions of Marx’s concept of alienation in regards to the semi-aware state of it in contemporary society. In the fashion industry, one of the most globalised businesses, the supply chains are getting larger, tasks are being outsourced and labour is divided on several dozens of workers involved, relationships are socially and geographically dispersed. Hence, companies establish departments for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and by this “cleaning” the supply chain according to international laws and conventions. Division of labour fragments the supply chains and third parties are in charge to audit and inspect factory sites, reporting the findings to the company’s CSR manager and by this increasing transparency and authenticity. Meanwhile being unaware of the fact that alienation happens in a definitive state in the fashion industry, companies counteract not only by communication their endeavour which CSR is executing but also by publishing CSR agendas and policies online. This phenomenon is demonstrated on two Swedish fashion brands, Filippa K and Cheap Monday. After all, I argue, Marx might be challenged in various points of his theory, however, he appears not being completely wrong when it comes to alienation. Further, I claim, that the old-fashioned (and forgotten?) theory of alienation ought to be revived for the understanding of issues on the production side, branding narratives and storytelling marketing strategies as well as end-consumers increasing awareness and education in such realms.

Keywords

Alienation/estrangement, Corporate Social Responsibility, Fashion, supply chain, division of labour, branding narratives
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1. Introduction

The time of Karl Marx (1818 - 1883) was the time of industrialisation, when workers had to be inducted into working with machines and were increasingly disengaged from the making with their own hands. While earlier family, kinship and friendship networks defined the employment as well as the social proximity, the development of factory production, the introduction of the steam engine and the increasing amount of machines brought about a shift in the pace of work and leading to the replacement of the workers (cf. Carrier 1992). The factory employees henceforth could be handled like a commodity: “Like the field of economy more generally, production became an area of life independent of people’s social identities and obligations, with a distinct rationale, economic gain” (ibid.: 551). The production site was characterised by commodity relations instead of family relations and functioning under capitalist control (cf. ibid.: 544). At that time the discussion on alienation started.

I will tie the statement by the philosopher Amy E. Wendling (2009: 4) about the absence of alienation and its unaware state in nowadays society up to this thesis, opposing that alienation in the fashion studies is happening in a semi-aware character. This condition is analysed by means of two Swedish fashion brands. It is a fact that most of the masses consuming clothing today never will encounter with the cotton farmer or the seamstress behind the manufactured garment. While for academic research in earlier times, the worker and producer were central to the discussion of alienation, now the fashion consumer is put into the centre of investigation. This shift pushed consumers in a position assuming responsibility for their behaviour, expected to stand for their action and accredited with education. Ethical consumption of clothing is increasingly debated and eco-fashion becomes an interesting main pillar, depicting the care of the West for the rest. Still, the focus in this producer-consumer debate is not yet set upon the firms’ consequential input. With the increasing interest and investigation in topics of fashion and ethical trade, the quest for corporate responsibility grows as well and with it the emphasis on detecting all corners of the supply chain. Consequently, fashion companies are more and more ending up in the consumers’ gaze and not rare in their crossfire.
1.1. Aims and Research Question

The aim of this thesis is to scrutinize the impact of two Swedish fashion companies, interposed between the worker and the end-consumer as an intermediary, buying commodities, transforming them into private property through branding and then selling it with savvy marketing strategies. I predicate that companies nowadays are fully aware of the split between producers, branding agencies like themselves and the consumers, though not calling it alienation. To bypass this unavoidable and morally questioned gap, they attempt to sustain and communicate credibility, trustworthiness, transparency and authenticity in form of CSR and ethical trade credos. On the one hand, the policies are established to improve the conditions among the supply chain and on the other the companies exploit these credos to clean their vests. Hence, my central research question is:

★ Which relations can be disclosed between formulated and published Corporate Social Responsibility including principles of ethical trade of the Swedish fashion brands Filippa K and Cheap Monday and Marx’s tradition of alienation in times of division of labour?

This means, CSR is not considered being just a tool to improve a company’s status, but also a way to publish the “good deeds”. The following sub-questions shall further be discussed in this paper:

★ What does a Marxist approach to CSR in the fashion studies imply?
★ How can we detect alienation in the huge supply chains like the ones fashion garments pursuit in a lifetime?
★ To what extent are these strategies and tools aiming at bridging the unavoidable gap of division of labour in the contemporary fashion industry?

1.2. Approaching alienation in an empirical way

Regarding investigating the concept of alienation, most people would first think of a network-analysis of relationships. However, investigating the disharmony of alienated work-relations is difficult, since making relationships visible also demands revealing connections between geographical dispersion and dislocation and is insofar a project of global dimension (cf. Rivoli 2007; Ander 2012; Snyder 2009). Due to my emphasis on the company’s impact on producer as well as consumer, the analysis seems to be feasible in a more practicable way.
1.2.1. Method
I will make a point by investigating what is publicly accessible and online and therefore aiming at walking a path, which everybody else could walk. I consider CSR policies as narratives telling the end-consumer something about the intentions and philosophy of the company (cf. De Neve et.al. 2008: 21). My work would be something completely different if my goal were to detect covered relationships, analysing lines of communication and matters of business connections. I will put my emphasis on what is made public deliberately, what is formulated due to the purpose of being available online, what can be read with only a few clicks on the company’s webpage, but also calling in Social Reports. According to this, I am after finding what everybody else could find, though, bearing in mind Marx’s theory of alienation and the idea of branding narratives and storytelling techniques.

1.2.2. Material

Material I: Selection criteria for brands
As a first reference point I orientated my research at the list of the Association for Swedish Fashion brands (ASFB). The focus was put on three interests: Firstly, if the brand’s CSR programme is obviously published on their webpage. Secondly, if they follow a special code of conduct, ethical or ecological trade concepts like fair trade or cradle-to-cradle.1 Thirdly, I studied if the company names a particular brand philosophy, which could be taken into consideration regarding being connected to ethical trade. According to this, I came upon two different Swedish fashion brands: Filippa K and Cheap Monday. Even though the brands are pragmatically chosen and bear no deeper intrinsic meaning, no random sampling could be conducted due to the criteria described above.

The bigger and more successful a company becomes, the more it can be divided into different sections. Having a CSR manager, thus, indicates a particular size of a company as well as investing money in this area.

Material II: The text material

Online Corporate Social Responsibility policies
The idea of using CSR policies made public online is targeted on researching material, which is accessible for everyone interested. The webpage of the two chosen brands became by this to the main field of investigation.

1 Cradle-to-cradle (c2c or cradle 2 cradle) is a concept of “Remaking the way we make things” by the chemist Michael Braungart and the architect William McDonough (2002).
To investigate the text material of the online CSR policies the method of the comparative content analysis was used. A first phase including four times reading of the online CSR policies was carried out explorative. First, the policies were read to get a general overview and after this were defined by titles for each paragraph. Moreover the amount of pages was counted. A second reading should help to locate redundancies in order to find what the brand wants to emphasise and concepts, dates and organisations were marked. First Filippa K’s CSR policy was analysed, directly after this Cheap Monday’s. A third reading was conducted to find parallels between the two CSR policies, focusing on the actual comparison. Lastly, a fourth reading was needed to find detailed information on specific topics such as technical tools used by the firms to execute their CSR politics or details on countries of production and the like. Simultaneously, titles and subtitles were compared.

In a second step of analysis, this information and gathered data was directly compared and classified in a list. The first time, the information was split up in the two subcategories general and detail, whereas the second phase of comparison generated more subtle classes according to keywords such as: introduction, Code of Conduct, start (of Corporate Social Responsibility), suppliers, partnership, relationship, Fair Wear Foundation, inspections / checking compliance, report, environment, empty promises?, storytelling, organic cotton, alternative fibres, chemicals, humanity, office (head quarter of the brand), water, negative (general), positive (general). This comparison stated then the frame and main body for the additional information provided by the Social Reports and the e-mail interview.

🌟 Social Reports
The Social Reports were used to get more structured and formal information about the online CSR, since the reports are not always online accessible. (Only the one of Cheap Monday was, Filippa K’s was sent by their CSR manager.)

The Social Reports were read only twice, since I already explored the field of interest. In the first round the focus was put on how relationships are described, how they are being maintained and if any connections to the branding philosophy or storytelling are being made. In a second round, the emphasis was put on the titles and the different subparts of the Social Report to directly compare the degree of standardised format. Finally the findings were connected to the information deriving from the published CSR policies and integrated in the main body.
Material III: The interview

To investigate the ambitions and strategies behind the public-made information, I planned to conduct additional interviews with the CSR manager to increase my ability to understand the CSR programmes in an accurate way. Conducted was only one interview with the CSR manager of Filippa K, Elin Larsson, and this as an e-mail interview. The CSR manager of Cheap Monday declined in thanks, motivating her refusal with other priorities.

The interview contains three sections of questions. The first three questions point towards the development and history of CSR, the necessity and ideal model of CSR policy. The second section asks more about the daily work, the social and communicative distances from department to department as well as the cooperation between these, but also cooperation with umbrella organisations and the visits on-site. The last section deals with the personal view of the manager, asking for the ideal type of CSR, how important the phenomenon is considered and space to let the manager add their comments. Finally, the interview shall function in the matter that company is given the possibility to highlight their central points and formulations of the online CSR agenda.

1.3. Previous Research

The examination of division of labour (by definition bound to the conditions of alienation, cf. Mészáros 1974: 142) and its increasing length of supply chains, corporate responsibility, branding philosophy and narratives or storytelling techniques are researched well enough. Yet, the connection to fashion studies is rarely investigated. Thus previous concepts shall be described and discussed beneath.

1.3.1. Marx and the Fashion Studies

General approaches to Marx’s theory of alienation are frequent. In this paper the theory will lean on the philosopher Amy E. Wendling’s investigation on the term alienation connected to technology (cf. Karl Marx on Technology and Alienation 2008), whereas the political philosopher István Mészáros mainly deals with the different aspects of alienation and how it is structured (cf. Marx’s Theory of Alienation; 1986). The use of the term alienation is defined by the anthropologist James G. Carrier’s version in Alienation in Production: A Maussian History (1992), where he processes the development of division of labour and alienation in production. Marxist theory has been integrated in fashion studies only a few times, such as the short entry on Marx in Valerie Steele’s Encyclopedia of Clothing and
Fashion (cf. Volume 2, Leslie 2005: 386ff). Another one, focusing more on the communicative aspect of what a person wears, in this particular case Marx’s favourite cape, is Peter Stallybrass’ narration on “Marx’s Coat” in Border Fetishism: Material Objects in unstable Places (1998). Stallybrass enlightens Marx’s obvious concern about fashion nevertheless in a rather exploited way: Marx had to pawn his overcoat in order to receive some money to survive. Without his coat though he wasn’t allowed to enter the British Museum where he found quietness and privacy to be able to study (cf. 1998: 187f.). On the other hand Stallybrass explains, that buying new clothes or paying the pawned ones redemption equalled happiness (cf. 1998: 195).

Interesting literature has also been written on the concept of commodity fetishism. Elizabeth Wilson, central since the beginning of the Fashion Studies, wrote a paper on Magical Fashion (2008), outlining fetish in different veins, but also in Marx’s way connected to materiality and objects.\(^2\) Even so, William Pietz, a scholar and political activist, discusses the origin and development of fetish and the appendant added value in his article on The Problem of the Fetish (2003).

1.3.2. The global tracks of a fashion garment
Under the last decade, a lot has been written on the journey of garments. In this category of books the economy professor Rivoli’s garment diary on The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy (2006) has to be allocated. Rivoli travels kilometres to detect the manufacture of a T-shirt and therefore visits three continents due to investigating the background of the used cotton, the weaving, the sewing and the printing of the subject of investigation. By means of the fashion industry and in particular the T-shirt, she examines from an economic perspective markets, power and politics of world trade.

Another text in this category is also the ex-WWF-activist Kirsten Brodde’s book on clean clothing, introducing a world of green fashion-consumption and appealing for more awareness about the impact of wearing green clothes (German: Saubere Sachen; 2009). Likewise, Eco Chic by Matilda Lee (2007), an editor at The Ecologist, acts as a shopping guide through the myriad of labels pretending to be green, ecological and/or fair. These books shall educate the end-consumers and equip them with knowledge about the production of garments as well as the companies’ impact on the production process, commercialisation and marketing.

\(^2\) Elizabeth Wilson published Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity in 1985 and has ever since then been an important figure to the development of the fashion studies as a discipline.
More zooming in on the actual resource cotton is the text by the Journalist Gunilla Ander (Swedish: Bomull; 2011). She travels along the business relations of cotton trade, detecting its politics, the handling of water resources and the low effort on eradicating child labour. While Ander is mostly writing on issues allocated on the production site, Rachel Louise Snyder’s history about Fugitive Denim (2009) explores the fetish around denim. Denim is probably the most worn cloth on the world, fascinating designers as well as end-consumers or academic researchers. Snyder in her book examines the global dispersion of denim and centralises how a conviction can lead to a successful eco-brand.

1.3.3. CSR and ethical trade in previous literature
Corporate Social Responsibility has been experiencing publicity in some areas, not yet in the fashion studies. To the work at hand, though, some CSR literature was crucial.

First, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development’s report on Corporate Social Responsibility, also providing an appropriate definition of the concept and connected aims, is fundamental for this work (2000). Furthermore, Geert De Neve, Peter Luetchford and Jeffrey Pratt published an anthology on Hidden Hands in the Market: Ethnographies of Fair Trade, Ethical Consumption, and Coporate Social Responsibility (2008), discussing the comparison of ethical trade and CSR. In their work are several articles included, which are used in this thesis, such as Dinah Rajak’s article on CSR in South Africa (‘Uplift and Empower’: The Market, Morality and Coporate Responsibility on South Africa’s Platinum Belt; 2008) pointing out, that CSR is a tool for empowerment indeed but by also is creating a relationship of dependence and control. Geert de Neve’s text on Global garment chains, local labour activism (2008) discusses the long-term impact of CSR opponent to local, political struggles. The study by Catherine S. Dolan called Arbitraring risk through moral values: The Case of Kenyan fairtrade (2008) introduces the ineffectiveness of fairtrade and the empty promises of communal benefits. Rebecca Prentice in her article Looping the value chain: Designer copies in a brand-name garment factory (2008) comes across the differentiation of workers producing accordant to given standards opposed to the re-using of material-leftovers to “design” their private products which are not being sold on the market.

Alexander Bassen, Sarah Jastram and Katrin Meyer’s definition of CSR (2005) is used as general basic knowledge. David A. Crocker and Toby Linden deal in their introduction of their work Ethics of Consumption: The Good Life, Justice and Global Stewardship (1998) with questions of end-consumers’ awareness of their consumption’s effect on other people in
other countries as well as introducing this to realms such as brands, time, space and environment.

I won’t exclude to take other stakeholder’s “mythical” demands into account which function as a sort of power and driving force to implement the assumed public values into the business ethics to gain legitimacy and trustworthiness. To that effect, it seems plausible that the implantation of justifying programmes like CSR and ethical trade can be illustrated as tools to gain legitimacy and trust by making them public. Meyer and Rowan (1977) designed a concept on rational myths, which can be completed by DiMaggio and Powell’s theory on institutional and structural isomorphism (1991). Meyer and Rowan introduce in their work *institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony* the force of believed myths, myths of what consumer expect to believe by institutions, constituting a point of reference, where one can orientate at and focus on while conceptualising demands and expectations of the customers. DiMaggio and Powell, however, demonstrate in *The Iron Cage revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Field* that institutions have the tendency to orientate one at each other and by this imitate structures and methods of other institutions due to coercion, uncertainty or professions. Since these theories answer on a question of why CSR programs and ethical trade are implemented and how this could be conducted, they are not further provided as theoretical concepts for this work.

### 1.3.4. Branding narratives and storytelling techniques

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) envisages the increasing importance of consumers’ stance towards consumption – and not the producers’ anymore. This is described in Colin Campbell’s *The Sociology of Consumption* (1995) and Eric J. Arnould and Craig J. Thompson’s *Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research* (2005).

Especially in the fashion system this stance shift bears the meaning of the consumer as an active participant and stakeholder of the industry. Within this approach, consumers are central and their presence in the market is valorised. Companies are willing to invest money, time and other resources to gain the consumers’ reliance. Thus, branding narratives and storytelling techniques are a logical consequence to attract the consumers’ gaze and advertise a product.

Significant for CCT and branding is also the business scholar Douglas Holt. In his article *Toward a Sociology of Branding* (2006b) he presents the importance of brands and consumption in capitalist systems. In *Jack Daniel’s America: Iconic Brands as Ideological Parasites and Proselytizers* (2006a) Holt describes branding narratives. He outlines the

Brands, identity and consumption constitute a central discussed topic in CCT. Russel W. Belk describes how possessions extend our selves (*Possessions and the Extended Self;* 1988) whereas he published in cooperation with Güliz Ger and Søren Askegaard an article on the phenomenon of continuous dissatisfaction: *The Fire of Desire: A Multi-sited Inquiry into Consumer Passion* (2003). Consumer passion is fundamental to fashion consumption and thus a must to be included here. Further, Avi Shankar, Richard Elliot and James A. Fitchett contributed an important perspective on *Identity, Consumption and Narratives of Socialization* (2009), whereas Aaron C. Ahuvia’s paper explains how loved objects affect consumer’s identity narratives (2005). To consider CCT in fashion studies is important, since fashion and consumption capture different social surroundings and help to understand branding in an all-embracing manner.

Klaus Fog, Christian Budtz, Philip Munch and Stephen Blanchette introduce in their handbook to *Storytelling. Branding in Practice* (2010), the techniques how storytelling operates and is used most effectively.

1.4. Theoretical Background

To investigate issues in fashion studies with tools of Marx’s theory is yet an uncommon way of handling issues in quest and thus an untrodden path.

1.4.1. Marx’s theory of alienation

I think that the concept of *alienation*, formulated by Karl Marx in the midst of the 19th century, is still crucial to the understanding of ongoing discourses in the global economy, especially in the fashion system, one of the most global and dispersed businesses. I want to focus on the obvious facts of a semi-aware mode of alienation; semi-aware in terms of a phenomenon as daily and as natural as the division of labour yet not as obvious as in times of the industrial revolution when Marx lived.
Karl Marx’s theory of alienation was influenced by the philosophers Aristotle, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke (cf. Wendling 2009:1ff.). Overarching, the concepts of objectification, alienation and estrangement (I will use alienation as synonym for estrangement for simpleness’ sake, even though Marx describes a difference between those two) bear a big input from other ideas not to be mentioned in the scope of this work. I will draft the outlines of this theory by introducing the main concepts, but first define my use of the term alienation, which is affiliated to Carrier’s use of it:

The core of ‘alienation’ as I use it here is a sense of separation. A thing is alienated from a person when it is seen as separate from that person; a person is alienated when seen as separate from surrounding people or things. Thus, alienation refers to how people perceive and understand themselves and their environs. (1992:540)

Carrier continues by specifying the connection of alienation and control: “People who have little control over a thing or activity are likely to be more alienated from it than are people with more control; people obliged to cooperate with strangers are likely to be more alienated from their activities than are people who interact with family and friends” (ibid.). According to helplessness and lack of control as central factors and the daily interaction with strangers by means of goods who trespass geographical, social as well as national borders, this definition seems adequate for the investigation at hand.

**Definition of concepts: objectification vs. alienation**

The distinction of objectification and alienation by Marx is made in his early work *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*:

> This fact expresses merely that the object which labor produces – labor’s product – confronts it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer. The product of labor is labor which [sic!] has been embodied in an object, which has become material: it is the objectification of labor. Labor’s realization is its objectification. Under these economic conditions this realization of labor appears as loss of realization for the workers; objectification as loss of the object and bondage to it; appropriation as estrangement, as alienation. (Marx 1844:§8)

Along this quote we shall now analyse what Marx exactly meant with objectification and alienation and how they differ. Objectification means the state, where men do not produce for their need’s sake but rather produce in freedom from such need (cf. Wendling 2009:15). The produced objects bear the imprint of the workers, thus human imprint (ibid.). Nonetheless, such objectification is not individual but social (ibid.). Through manufacturing objects, humans make and, by this, commodify the reality, which mankind is part of (ibid.). Accordant, this transformation comes to pass not individually but socially (ibid.). Wendling writes out: “I recognize myself not only in my own creations but also in those of my fellows, whose objectifications I also recognize as exhibiting the same human spirit as my own”
(ibid.). This is called “species-being”, where we are also integrated as human beings and through the social world of human objectifications (ibid.).³

By the execution of labour, alienation is revealed through objects. Since workers are increasingly producing for economy’s sake, the produced amount cannot longer be owned of a worker. The more jeans a Chinese seamstress completes, the less she can own (cf. Marx 1844: §9). Marx calls this the state alienation from his ‘species-being’ (ibid.: §36). The life of the species is turned to an individual life, producing for individual purpose (cf. ibid.: §28ff.). Even though workers put time and effort into the creation of the object, it exists independent of and alien to them (ibid.). This state of estrangement, the state of not being able to incorporate what is created manually, leads to the alienation of the product. Since the terms and conditions under which alienated work emerges and its impacts are so closely linked to each other, I continue with the conditions of alienated labour and its consequences.

Impacts of alienated labour

If we follow Marx’s line of argumentation, not only the objects of production are alienated, but also the means and the entire process of production: Alienation is not only revealed in the result, but in the act of production (cf. Marx 1844:§19). There are four states of alienation, which position the alienated worker in the capitalist system: the worker is alienated from nature, from the process of production, from human’s actual purpose of existence (species-being) and finally from other people (cf. Marx 1844:§18ff.).

This explains the development of alienation: After producing a garment industrially, the end-consumer buys it, now alienated to the producer and by commissioning it also being in a state of alienation to the latest tenant, to the brand. This moment of acquisition is the phase of transformation from the factory-produced clothing object to the privately owned and beloved garment. “Private property is thus the product, the result, the necessary consequence, of alienated labor, of the external relation of the worker to nature and to himself“ (Marx 1844:§53). Marx emphasizes here as well, that the physical created product can neither be incorporated by the worker himself nor by other people. The product can be appropriated of non-workers as private property additionally to the existing wardrobe filled with other alienated pieces. Finally, alienation is realised through appropriation (cf. ibid.: §52ff.).

³ Marx’s German term is “Gattungswesen” and rather adequate to understand his concept.
Commodity Fetishism – alienated consumption

Along with increasing production comes, according to Marx, the phenomenon of commodity fetishism (cf. Marx 1867; Mészáros 1974: §142ff.). Marx calls the habit of worshipping alienated objects of production commodity fetishism. After explaining that workers are more and more commodified – since they sell their own labour and thus can be bought – Wilson puts emphasis on the fact, that the whole production process is being fetishised, from the machines to the creation of an object to the worker (cf. Wilson 2004: 380). To develop this argument, I quote Wendling, who describes how commodities are transformed to fetishes, namely by worshipping commodities as an “eternal form of human wealth” (2009: 51). Consequently, commodity fetishism is on the one hand closely linked to the production of the garment, the fetish of the machines, but on the other hand introducing modes of consumption and fetishised products such as today’s branding techniques.

While Belk delineates commodity fetishism as being “the false path to happiness”, this perception is essential to the work at hand, since commodity fetishism epitomises consumer’s desire for a material object and by this excluding worker’s involvement and labour (1988: 146). Wearing a brand doesn’t help to remember the factory workers, rather make us appreciating a brand’s design. Hence, commodity fetishism is an immediate consequence of alienation. Further, and foremost, fetishising products seem to be a common habit, a result of the unawareness of workers “behind the thing” and thus a cloud hanging between production and consumption.

The “object’s irreducible materiality” is central, according to Pietz: “[M]aterial objects turned into commodities conceal exploitative social relations, displacing value-consciousness from the true productive movement of social labor to the apparent movement of market prices and forces” (ibid.: 3f.). The actual manpower is forgotten and displaced by the value-consciousness of the particular brand.

On the other hand, commodity fetishism means, that a humanly produced object “acquires a life of its own” (Wilson 2004: 380). Wilson, in her text on Magic Fashion continues to define fetishised commodities, “including of course garments (…) taking on a meaning far beyond their use value. They are thus like figures of speech or metaphors” (ibid.). This “life of its own” could bear what brands want to commit: their philosophy and lifestyle.

As we will see in the next chapter, it is not always the commodity which speaks for some added value and epitomising fetish, sometimes it is also the added value – which could be the brand communicating a philosophy – which speaks for the commodity.
1.4.2. The brand speaks for the commodity

Branding and marketing captures an important role in a corporation’s appearance and performance on the global stage of the fashion business. To understand which role branding and storytelling have for alienation, we first have to understand the context of these concepts.

While Holt designates branding today as a “[…] core activity of capitalism, […] it must be included in any serious attempt to understand contemporary society and politics” and by this defines its realm (2006b: 300). Cayla and Arnould approach its definition from a rather abstract perspective, pointing at its mobile and dynamic character: “(B)randing is a specific, symbolic form, a particular way of talking about and seeing the world” (2008: 87).

Wearing a particular brand bears meaning and hence, the consumer cannot only be considered educated and knowing, but also in the role of a person thoroughly choosing what brand extends the self in the best way (cf. Ahuvia 2005; Belk 1988; Shankar et. al 2009). Consequently, wearing Filippa K and Cheap Monday express a certain attitude, but this does not communicate that the wearers have read the CSR policies. If one were wearing Fairtrade clothing (such as only choosing Fairtrade organic cotton garments) this would convey more commitment. Being dressed in Filippa K or Cheap Monday, however, is not equal with committing to their CSR policies. Further, brands depict cultural indices and thus are part of the historical, geographical and social context (cf. Cayla and Arnould 2008: 87.). Here, Filippa K and Cheap Monday fit in more likely, considering the social background the wearing of one of the two brands implicates or the predisposition of dressing a national brand. By this, brands incorporate a worldview, which is often communicated with a story. Storytelling is an efficient technique to appeal to consumers: It evidences our daily experiences and addresses emotions and values, mediates the brand’s culture and builds a bridge between company and consumer (cf. Fog et. al. 2001). Accordingly, it is to expect, that telling a morally correct and ethical story could affect consumers’ behaviour. But do CSR policies derive from the same interest as branding narratives and storytelling?

2. The Brands

The plan to find one brand with CSR and one with an ecological and/or sustainable brand philosophy had to be adjusted slightly: neither ecology nor sustainability (including cradle-to-cradle) is connected to ethical trade. Indeed, ecology and sustainability means that the
workers are not being obliged to get in touch with harmful chemicals and by this avoiding any threat to health is adapted from the human rights.\(^4\) Yet, it does not imply a direct effort to bypass split up social relationship nor is committing this effort in a palpable way and insofar has no consequence on alienation and the social footprint of a firm.\(^5\) Consequently, two comparable brands were chosen, both just with published CSR.

Additionally to the 40 brands belonging to ASFB, I added Gudrun Sjödén and Nudie Jeans.\(^6\) Gudrun Sjödén is a brand coming across as close to nature and environment concerned. However, no evidence for a sustainable or ecological concept within its brand philosophy could be found, yet, as expected, some concerns regarding environment are mentioned. On the other hand, Nudie Jeans, an internationally renowned jeans brand, which is Fair Wear Foundation (FWF) labelled indeed, but without any CSR policy online.\(^7\) However, Nudie Jeans mentions a project in cooperation with Amnesty International.\(^8\) Finally, the examination shows the following results:\(^9\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand Philosophy Online</th>
<th>No Brand Philosophy Online</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No CSR</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Found</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the chart shows, only six out of the 42 brands had a CSR agenda published on the Internet. Out of these six brands, only two told their history or mentioned a particular branding philosophy. Against one’s expectations, the largest group – counting 21 firms – commit neither to CSR nor publish any special branding ideas. This is, according to the general “hype” around CSR, unexpected.

Out of these findings above, Filippa K and Cheap Monday were picked out to be objects of study for this work since their CSR section is easily traceable on the webpage and they both acknowledge their membership to Fair Wear Foundation the organisation’s principles. The two brands do not address the same target group which is an interesting and central point of CSR policy: it is not about a justification of statements only for an older,\(^4\)see chapter 3.4.2.
\(^5\) Nowadays ecological footprint, using the natural resources and pose it to ecology’s self-regeneration, is a common expression. On the internet also some websites bob up on social footprint, inter alia the English footsteps organisation: http://socialfootprints.org.uk/.
\(^6\) I do not know why Gudrun Sjöden and Nudie Jeans are not members of ASFB.
\(^7\) I will come back to Fear Wear Foundation in detail in chapter 3.4.2.
\(^8\) For more detailed information, visit http://www.nudiejans.com/this-is-nudie-jeans/, visited 2012-04-17.
\(^9\) A detailed list with all brand names including notes is added in the appendices.
more settled generation, but also a motivation to commit to social responsibility for the upcoming generations.

2.1. Filippa K

Founded in 1993 by Filippa Knutson and Patrik Kihlborg, Filippa K mediates a style of “personal minimalism, clean & pure design, modern yet timeless look” (Filippa K 2010d). Another designer, Karin Segerblom, joined the two at an early stage and they ran the company from home.

Their entrepreneurial spirit together with a unique early design ambition, allowed the brand to grow very quickly. Today, Filippa K has developed from a ‘kitchen table project’ into one of Scandinavia’s most successful fashion companies, with a strong position in the fashion market as leading in modern minimalism, high quality and long-lasting wearable design. (Filippa K 2010b)

In 1997 Filippa K opened the first brand store in Stockholm (cf. 2010c). Today, Filippa K counts 200 employees, is sold in 20 countries among 600 selected retailers and has a yearly turnover of about 50 million Euros selling women’s and men’s wear, accessories and shoes (ibid.). The price level is to locate at the upper middle-class and the simple and classic style caters to people, who are living a settled life and found time in life to pursue their passion.

2.2. Cheap Monday

Cheap Monday started in 2004 as follow-up project of a successful second-hand store in a Stockholm suburb, following a modern design with a good prize, quality and visually present with their unmistakable skull-logo (cf. 2011b). As a combination, the store Weekday was opened, high-street fashion and exclusive denims with hip vintage clothing, exactly the thing for trendy Stockholmers (ibid.). Still, they felt there was need for cheaper jeans. “The first Cheap Monday style ‘Tight’ was born, at this point made exclusively as an in-store brand. An unwashed, very tight fitted stretch denim jean for a shockingly good price! It was an immediate success and the first 800 pairs sold out in a couple of weeks“ (ibid.). This was the moment when the skull logo hit the ground. Since 2005 Cheap Monday produces full scale collections including baby clothing, accessories, glasses, underwear and shoes (ibid.). In 2008 Cheap Monday joined forces with H&M and is today spread over 35 countries, in 1800

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10 The accurate information about the following sources are in the references. Nonetheless, I want to give a short introduction: Filippa K/ Cheap Monday 2010a stands for the CSR policy from the webpage. Since I have several Filippa K and Cheap Monday sources from the same year, I numbered them consequentially from “a” to “c”.

19
different stores across the globe (ibid.). “Despite the fast growth our original idea still remains: to offer our customers pieces that compete with high-end brands both in attitude and fashion-level as well as in quality – always at an extremely good price“ (ibid.). Cheap Monday targets young people who are on the move, not yet as settled as their parents, curious and spontaneous, yet interested in designed quality-clothing for a good price level.

3. CSR applied: Analysis

Responsibility is progressively an important topic of managing companies, increasing with the dispersion of the subparts of a business. A cleft industry like the fashion system poses a good example to visualise the need of companies taking over obligations to keep the overview and stay in charge of control.

3.1. The Body-Check – approaching each concept

When the two different CSR credos of Filippa K and Cheap Monday were compared, some general basic, but also some detailed questions were posed to the texts. Following, the analysis shall be presented, completed with the interview questions posed to the CSR manager of Filippa K and an annual Social Reports (cf. Cheap Monday 2009; Filippa K 2011).

3.1.1. Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct is the important cornerstone to further developments of CSR policies. It is the entity which contains the regulations for the contract and by this is the basis of the contractual relationship and, according to de Neve et. al., “private standard initiatives”, acting as “new forms of regulation within supply chains” (2008: 19). Codes of Conduct often are known by the suppliers, describing the conditions applicable to production and purchase and require the suppliers to follow the law (cf. Filippa K 2010a; Cheap Monday 2011a). Codes of Conduct are not specified in the CSR and not findable on the band’s webpage.

Filippa K, the brand “without the unnecessary riffraff”, established their Code of Conduct in 2000; seven years after their foundation and three years after the opening of the first store in Stockholm, whereas Cheap Monday, “the Stockholm hip-chic label”, who

### 3.1.2. Corporate Social Responsibility policy

Corporate Social Responsibility is a concept, which gains increasing popularity amongst companies but also publicity in research and public interest. The term was mentioned the first time in 1953 by Howard R. Bowen, pandering to increase responsibility and orientation on expectations, aims and values of society in general business (cf. Bassen et. al. 2005: 231). The principle of CSR programmes is to focus on a morally correct business ethos. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) defines CSR as follows: “Corporate Social Responsibility is the commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local community and society at large to improve their quality of life” (WBCSD 2000: 10). Included in programmes of social responsibility, so Rajak in her text on CSR in South Africa, are points such as working condition, health and safety (not only at the production site but also medical help in general, such as vaccination), employee training and development (cf. 2008: 299). Nonetheless, CSR is often described as “human capitalism”: “[C]ontemporary CSR claims the confluence of economic value and ethical values packaged together as a new human or even ‘compassionate capitalism’” (ibid.: 300). Often this tool is used to empower workers and to avoid as little social footprint as possible. Still and not to forget, CSR is located in the “orthodox logics of the Market while introducing possible alternatives to traditional economic stances” (De Neve et. al. 2008: 13).

The online CSR credos look dry and formal. Both CSR texts are written black on white and split up in several paragraphs. When the programmes were printed out, it depended on the formation of the site and the size of the writing to conclude how many pages were printed. Finally, both companies’ CSR filled slightly more than two pages. Often the CSR link is named with sections like About, Jobs, Contact or Press on the webpage and easily trackable. This suborder was the same with both brands.

Filippa K founded their CSR section in 2011 and then also a manager entered (cf. Larsson 2012). A sign, that CSR in the fashion industry is a young phenomenon. No accordant data about the founding date of Cheap Monday’s CSR section could be found, but

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since the online available Social Report derives from 2009 the section must have been founded earlier (cf. Cheap Monday 2009).

3.1.3. Social Reports

To be authentic and transparent, the companies let Fair Wear Foundation write the Social Report which contains a summary of the last year, sourcing strategy and monitoring and remediation, training and capacity building and forthcoming CR work (Filippa K 2011; Cheap Monday 2009). Through that, the consumer has the opportunity to participate in the ongoing changes, what got better (results), and what is still topic of struggle (challenges and unsolved problems). The CSR policies made public look formal, thus differ from each other more than the Social Reports. The Social Reports share almost exactly the same titles and are generally more standardised and a formal format.

The amount of pages varies between eight pages (Cheap Monday 2009) and ten pages (Filippa K 2011). Always included is an organigram showing that CSR management is positioned between the chief executive officer (CEO) and the rest of main departments of the brand (Filippa K 2011: 3; Cheap Monday 2009: 1).

Filippa K starts the Social Report with the chapter “About Filippa K” and introducing the brand and its philosophy:

The Filippa K philosophy is based on the values Style, Simplicity and Quality. We apply these values to every detail in everything we do. Style in the way we are authentic, creative and passionate about what we do. Simplicity in the way we communicate the Filippa K brand in a straightforward, uncomplicated and honest manner. Quality in the way we are demanding, responsible and respectful in all our processes. By being true to our core values of Style, Quality and Simplicity we aim to keep providing sustainable solutions in the way we do business. As citizens in a global world, we want to contribute to a more sustainable future for our customers, suppliers, employees and business partners. (Filippa K 2011: 3)

Filippa K embeds the three keywords of their philosophy to every department and every step as well as aiming at integrating all involved parties, from customers over suppliers, employees to business partners in general. CSR acts as a branding narrative not in a storytelling marketing strategy though. CSR and ethical trade published in form of a Code of Conduct do not need to be mediated with storytelling techniques. It seems, that CSR and ethic business play on another level than fair trade branding narratives but nevertheless telling their own stories. Cheap Monday does not include an “About” in the Social Report and is thus not referring to their brand philosophy (Cheap Monday 2009).
3.1.4. Excursus: Ethical Trade

In the excursus ahead I’m introducing the concept of ethical trade to complete the list of the most important concepts. Sometimes I will refer to fair trade since this concept shares some principles with ethical trade, thus always being aware of the fact that ethical trade and fair trade basically are not the same. While only primary products can be labelled Fairtrade (such as crops or metals), ethical trade conceptions can be part of the Code of Conduct or be written in the business ethics despite of being part of Fairtrade or fair trade philosophy (cf. Boris 2006).

Opposed to the capitalistic approach of CSR programmes, ethical trade as a concept emphasises the people as stakeholders in the production and supply chain. “[E]thical trade initiatives seek to transform the dominant model of market exchange by introducing ‘ethical’ practices that make trade relations fairer and price paid to producers more just” (De Neve et. al. 2008: 13). To get further to a Marxian denotation of ethical trade, De Neve et. al. point to the original meaning of trade: “Ethical action is a move to restore some kind of balance, or reciprocity: that which normatively should exist” (2008: 25). In my study it appears that this normative existence of reciprocity is in the company’s awareness thus like alienation in a shrouded way. De Neve et. al. allude to the moral aspect of the discourse while mentioning the “ill-feeling” emerging with the separation: “[F]air trade movements seek to re-establish a direct link between consumers and producers, and to re-embed consumption in the social relations of production and exchange” (ibid.: 5).

We can assume that Marx would have wished us to backtrack supply chains until we reach the very end.\textsuperscript{12} This failed at the stage of emerging division of labour and the increasing outsourcing of obligations of today’s capitalistic system. The almost forgotten people at the beginning of the supply chain, where the crop is harvested to create a thing out of it, gain awareness and the relationship is revived more and more. Dolan in her paper on Kenyan flower (fair) trade makes the point even more succinctly: “By foregrounding a consumer’s relationship with a group of producers/workers, fairtrade aspires to figuratively and literally lift the veil on the commodity fetish, making visible the social relations of production through a system of transparent exchange” (2008: 279f.). Yet the term fairtrade cannot be found in the documents of investigation, however some implicit aspects coming along with it are obvious: The goal to uncurtain the actual background to the foreground end-consumer. Hence,

\textsuperscript{12} This backtracking-storytelling technique is also applied by the New Zealand brand icebreaker: If you buy a garment you can trace its farm in New Zealand by simply typing the Baacode of the tag into icebreaker.com.
dialogue, partnership and equal exchange become the shibboleths of ethical trade (ibid.).
Finally, it can be summarised, that ethical fashion is a possible opportunity to, from a
consumer’s side, engage in responsibility for distant workers and operating in a corporate
conscious way. Or, according to Dolan: “Fairtrade responds to these risks [the risks of
corporate power] through a moral discourse of responsibility that situates the consuming
individual rather than institutions and states as the agent of social and economic
transformation” (ibid.: 276).

3.1.5. The Quick-Check
My first observation was the actual number of clicks to be done until one reaches the linked
CSR programme on the website. To get to Filippa K’s CSR it takes two clicks, whereas
Cheap Monday presents the CSR link directly on their main page down below.

The rhetoric style of the formulated responsibilities is identical: Filippa K and Cheap
Monday write in the “we”-style, a colloquial approach to attain a family-character and
embedding the consumer into it when reading this (Filippa K 2010a; Cheap Monday 2011a).

While Filippa K has offshore producers in Portugal, China, Romania/Italy, Estonia,
Italy, India, Lithuania, Spain and Turkey, Cheap Monday has suppliers in China, the Baltic
and in parts of Europe (cf. Filippa K 2011: 5ff.; Cheap Monday 2011a).

Summarily even though the standardisation of the Social Reports is higher and less
tethered, the uploaded CSR policies appear in a more different way though sharing the
 colloquial language and addressing the same matters.

3.2. Redundant keywords and rhetorics used in the text
In this chapter I shall mention the keywords, which are named in a higher frequency or
phrases, which are redundant to point out how central concepts are highlighted in the CSR
policies. Repetitions were particularly found in the first half of the policy.

In the CSR of Filippa K plenty of words can be detected implying the social closeness
of their partners. This part of the explanation of the social situation comes first in the text,
followed by the environmental concerns and its issues. Redundant words like “presence”,
“dialogue” and “relationship” are repeated for example in “maintaining a presence”, “high-
quality dialogue” and “long-term relationships” (Filippa K 2010a). In addition, working
closely and visiting the sites several times a year and in order to nurture a close bond is
described in this context (ibid.). Technical tool such as inspections and audits (including on-
site interviews, physical check of the factories, agreed date until which improvements must be made) are applied to control the process (ibid.). De facto these are also instruments to uphold contact (ibid.).

Cheap Monday puts its rhetorical emphasis on humanity and companionship. The latter is described by phrases like the care about the involved people, belief in people, the sharing of views and values, the need for partnership between people and local and global engagement (Cheap Monday 2011a). Further, Cheap Monday comes up to the point where they mention the “greatest opportunity to make improvements” is through partnership and engagement (ibid.). Humanity, though, is paraphrased by the basal human rights and accompanies by words like “fair” and “humble” (ibid.).

After the last chapter where we saw that “humane capitalism” is at least openly discussed in the Social Report of Filippa K, this section points towards the more philanthropic impact of CSR. As conclusion it can be said that as Filippa K and Cheap Monday uses narratives and rhetoric to visualise the sustenance of relationships and showing on-site presence. Thus, since the visits are conducted due to inspect and audit the factories the maintenance of the relationships is always connected to staying in charge and the control of the processes (ibid.).

3.3. Examination of the limbs – detailed analysis

After the general overview of what is visible at a first glance, now it is time for a more detailed exploration of the object of study. Therefore I will now, firstly, focus on a comparison between the use of the headings and subtitles, and then secondly, introduce the central idea delineated by these titles.

3.3.1. Main titles and subtitles

Subtitles mentioned in the policy could be considered resembling each other, however they are showing some differences: Filippa K writes general and simple and includes three subsections such as Code of Conduct, Suppliers (inclosing: Long-term relationships with suppliers; Checking compliance; Reporting inspection results) and Environment. Cheap Monday introduces the CSR programme first with more detailed information on Values and CSR, but then dividing the main body in three main chapters such as Humanism (inclosing: Suppliers and our Code of Conduct; Good working conditions and Fair Wear Foundation), How we work (inclosing: Supplier audits; Partnership; International standards; The UN
declaration of Human Rights; International Labour Organisation’s core conventions; the UN millennium development goal – halving poverty by 2015; About the Swedish chemicals agency and REACH: Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals) and Environment (inclosing: Products; Environment and climate). Only the Environment chapter, which is the last one in both CSR policies, is common. The other two headings of the chapter differ. Important key aspects, however, are mentioned: Filippa K calls one chapter “Long-term relationships with suppliers” whereas Cheap Monday twice mentions “Humanism” in the heading and once “partnership” (2010a; 2011a).

At this point, alienation can be comprehended in several ways: there are judicial tools described, such as Code of Conduct, the United Nation’s human rights and the core conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Also both companies share the belonging and cooperation with FWF. Furthermore, and this might be logical, cooperations with organisations of several kinds create a momentum of legitimation and underlines the serious effort of the firm. This implies the formal frame of CSR, guidelines which have to be complied.

Furthermore, a more philantrophic stance is indicated by the positivity of the subtitles and its promising headings, by what the actors who are involved in the supply chain gain visibility. Due to Filippa K naming “long-lasting relationship with suppliers” and Cheap Monday their “partnership” one could assume that their “corporate care” must be happening between the company and their surroundings (more on that below).

3.3.2. The central idea: Humanity and the “real change”

CSR aims at changing the world to the better, at least for the people involved and the natural sources used, but by this the company also fights the typical characteristics of alienation: Exploiting workers for the capitalist system’s sake. In this chapter, I will illustrate how Cheap Monday and Filippa K describe the goal to bridge social and geographical dislocation.

Filippa K considers social work as “very important” and mention in their Social Report, that […] we want people and partners to grow with us, in our business. We care for our relationships and base them on honesty and transparency. Doing business in a long-term sustainable way will secure financial growth and profitability” (2011: 9). Filippa K does
openly communicate in there that sustainable endeavour feeds into economic profit (ibid.). Hence, “humane capitalism” seems definitely to be an issue (De Neve et. al. 2008: 17).

Cheap Monday, however, writes in “Values and CSR”: “At the same time we want to play fair and be humble. We care about the people involved and the environment, and how the clothes are manufactured. We approach business with humanity.” (Cheap Monday 2011a). This comment implies also the ongoing alienation and separation of social spheres and by this, the company’s effort to draw closer any stakeholders. Even so the intention to monitor and control them for humanity’s and environment’s sake.\footnote{By monitoring is meant, that factories are spot or in-depth checked. The spot monitoring includes a brief and basic check concerning factory facilities such as ventilation or lighting, bathrooms and protection at the workplace (cf. Spyer 2009:188). The in-depth investigation takes several days, whereupon 500 items are being checked (cf. ibid.).}

For Filippa K CSR manager a CSR credo means a policy where the focus lays in contributing to a real change and this “is absolutely dependent on the fact that responsibility aspects are taken into account in each process through out [sic!] the whole company and there for [sic!] it is very important to have a closeness to the daily business” (Larsson 2012). Furthermore, Larsson states the general importance of the implementation of CSR policies in companies in the fashion business, especially at Filippa K: “Crucial for our responsibility is to provide products that can last for a long time both concerning design and quality. I also believe it is important to do what ever possible to prolong the life of a product as much as possible and try not to contribute to over consumption [sic!]” (ibid.). In regards to this, a movement towards more control and knowledge of “what is going on over there?!” can be assumed. If we analyse further on, we will see different ways of making aware the stakeholders’ presence and contribution to the production process and supply chain.

As conclusion it can be said, that Filippa K’s CSR compared to Cheap Monday’s include similar key-ideas in the headings as well as in the chapters and channel the focus of their work on the same issues. At this point I want to mention, that in none of the two CSRs I’ve found something on disabled workers or employees. Even though this could be part of such a social responsibility programme, it is not mentioned with one word. This seems to be an area in CSR politics not yet developed nor studied.

I claim that this implies Marx’s concerns about division of labour and split-up relationships among people constituting a separate part of a whole (globally dispersed) supply chain and thus reveal semi-aware alienation. But how do companies precede?
3.4. Corporate care versus division of labour

“Corporate care” is an expression described in De Neve (2008: 236) counteracting the increasing division of labour also due to the common outsourcing and subcontracting practices in order to reduce financial costs of businesses. These practices are also established in the fashion business. De Neve defines: “The expression of ‘corporate care’ in the garment and textile industry predominantly take the form of company codes of conduct and global labour standards, through which western buyers and chain stores seek to improve the conditions of labour in the firms from which they source” (2008: 236). In the analysed CSR policies, some important strings could be detected and constituting “corporate care”, which discussed in the subchapters below.

3.4.1. Long-term relationship and high-quality dialogue

Presence, engagement and respect are central characteristics to maintain relationships and dialogue. Filippa K writes frankly in the beginning of the CSR credo, that “inspections alone are never enough” (2010a). The company points out, that it is of crucial significance to maintain presence, sustain high-quality dialogue and let collaboration lead the pace for creation of change (cf. ibid.). The CSR manager mentions in the interview, that the company visits “each production site once a year, some even more often” (Larsson 2012). That (time-to-time) presence is central to every relationship, indicated also by the following quote out of the Social Report by Filippa K:

Filippa K staff is present at audits, together with representatives of FWF, as this gives us a deeper understanding of factory conditions. We believe in the importance of carrying out professional audits – both to show respect to factories and to demonstrate the importance of worker’s rights. (2011: 9)

Further down in the CSR policy internet-version it is mentioned, that to “nurture a close bond” denotes the relationship between Filippa K and their suppliers (2010a). This connection might be intact, though only little is mentioned in regards to the suppliers’ employees or workers; most of the time they only refer to suppliers (ibid.). The next point, which seems central then is the engagement with customers and partners (cf. Filippa K 2010a). This is also assured in Filippa K’s Social Report: “We make always sure we have an open and transparent relationship with our suppliers thus leaving room for discussion and improvements of conditions rather than termination of cooperation” (2011: 6). In a different way Cheap Monday handles relations, who on one side accentuates to build up and maintain long-term relations, but on the other hand puts emphasis on partnership as central union to make the
vehicle of production roll: “We believe in engagement and partnership on a global and local level and we work with a range of stakeholders to create better conditions within the textile sector. It’s here we have the greatest opportunity to make improvements and to work for ethical and environmentally friendly production” (Cheap Monday 2011a).

Filippa K’s inspections are conducted by Sustaina World AB, Cheap Monday is assisted by Fabric Scandinavien AB, but also FWF accomplishes audits (cf. 2010a). In the Social Report, Filippa K describes in the chapter “Coherent system for monitoring and remediation” how audits are executed: Meetings include interviews with the management and with workers, and also local stakeholders are consulted to gain an overview on the current situation in the country (2011:7f.). The workers are being informed and also have the possibility to complain (ibid.).

Cheap Monday, however, describes in an own chapter on the CSR policy online, how inspections and audits are handled:

A team of auditors carries out inspections on-site in the factories where our clothes are made. They are trained by FWF and are fully experienced in auditing compliance by suppliers with the Code of Conduct. During their visits they use a checklist, interviews are carried out with the company management and employees, and documentation is checked. They also carry out off-site interviews with staff before the visit to the factory so that they can focus on areas where improvements can be made and so that interviewees are able to speak freely. After the visit, a report is written by the auditing team with recommendations for improvements and there is follow-up to ensure such improvements are made. (Cheap Monday 2011a)

While Filippa K underlines the importance of being present, showing understanding and respect for the factory’s workers and the implementation of their rights and even willing to communicate these points transparently, Cheap Monday centres the importance of the partnership and the consolidated engagement pointing at ethical and environmental friendly production to reach long-lasting impact. These aspects are evidences for the effort put in the relationship between company and production. No matter on how relationship and partnership is described or how often the tools to execute control of processes are applied, the fact that alienation happens in terms of diverging the social and geographical cleft seems obvious and with this the purpose of CSR: formulating a credo to give this bridging concepts a formal shape.

3.4.2. Cooperation with the third party “watch-dogs”

Working in cooperation with third parties can act as a “hygiene factor”, cleaning the outward and inward appearance of firms (Larsson 2012). Third parties are like dogs, watching what is going on, assisting and supporting the company with their expertise.
United Nation’s Human Rights (UNHR)\textsuperscript{16}

Often in the Code of Conduct are the United Nation’s Human Rights basic for the further development and extension of a CSR policy. At Filippa K the rights are part of the contract with the suppliers and Cheap Monday even exerts a summary of the rights:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and everyone has the right to education. (Cheap Monday 2011a)

The United Nation’s human rights are the cornerstone to the Code of Conduct implemented by Filippa K as well as Cheap Monday.

International Labour Organisation (ILO)\textsuperscript{17}

Often simultaneously as the UN human rights ILO’s conventions are mentioned, which include freedom of association and collective bargaining; elimination of forced or compulsory labour; abolition of child labour and elimination of discrimination (cf. Filippa K 2010a; Cheap Monday 2011a). In the ILO conventions, Filippa K and Cheap Monday see another cornerstone for the basis of their Codes of Conduct.

Fair Wear Foundation (FWF)

While reading the CSR policies of Filippa K and Cheap Monday the first time, I came upon the umbrella organisation Fair Wear Foundation. This organisation assembles companies, qualified according to the FWF formula, which is inspired by the basic human rights and the ILO core conventions.\textsuperscript{18} FWF functions as a verifying third party (called auditing firm), improving components for sustainable change and conditions in the supply chains, such as controlling and improving production processes and assistance to the company regarding work to be executed locally, and names their partner brands on the internet. FWF advocates for the two organisations above, with the mission to obtain better working conditions all over the world. “We work closely with a growing number of companies that produce clothing and other sewn products and that take responsibility for their supply chain”.\textsuperscript{19} To be a member of the FWF family then means that this particular company cares for their supply chain.

\textsuperscript{16} For more detailed information visit http://www.un.org/en/rights/.
\textsuperscript{17} For more detailed information visit http://www.ilo.org/global/lang--en/index.htm.
\textsuperscript{18} For more detailed information visit FWF, visited 2012-04-17 on http://www.fairwear.org/488/labour-standards/1.-employment-is-freely-chosen/.
\textsuperscript{19} Visited 2012-04-25 on http://www.fairwear.org/22/about/.
constituents and wants to take responsibility for them. This is an effective reference for the CSR policy. As mentioned above, the FWF Code of Labour derives from eight labour standards of the United UNHR and the ILO conventions including questions of employment, working hours, wage, health or social relationships. Signing a contract with Filippa K, so they state in their Social Report, means signing these eight standards (cf. 2011: 6). Even though Cheap Monday does not explicate the like, it can be assumed that these regulations are fundamental to the contract.

**Other cooperations**

Cheap Monday refers further to their commitment to the United Nation’s millennium development goal to half poverty by 2015.\(^\text{20}\) Their aim by that is to take social and environmental responsibility on-site to strengthen the local community and region but also the company supporting it. There is obviously reward for the company in doing so and this is mentioned publicly in the CSR policy on the webpage. In terms of controlling chemicals and pollution, Cheap Monday is part of the Swedish Chemical Agency and REACH (Cheap Monday 2011a), whereas Filippa K joined the Nordic Ecolabel for a two-years-period to meet the Swan-standard, contributing to a more sustainable consumption by conducting life-cycle analysis, and complies with the SIN list.\(^\text{21}\) Furthermore, a cooperation with The Natural Step takes place to develop Filippa K’s environmental policy and strategy (Filippa K 2010a).\(^\text{22}\) Additionally, they are a member of the STWI, an organisation bringing together the leather and textile industries and caring about the responsible use of water.\(^\text{23}\)

In conclusion we can see, that “watch-dogs” function as actor connecting production site and company. To be verified and controlled by a third party, as neutral as possible, is a trustworthy indicator for fighting for the right and step-by-step improve the world. Likewise successful storytelling and ethical trade, cooperation with third parties induce an indisputable “halo effect”(Dolan 2008:279). Furthermore, using third-parties as agents for the company, pictures the division happening between production and companies, not only socially and geographically but also professionally. Alienation and division of labour are not only counteracted by CSR programmes, as we saw in the last chapter, but also naturalised through the deployment of third-parties.


3.4.3. Communicating results and challenges

Social Reports depict the emphasis of the company to unfold their CSR work – good and bad. Such reports usually start with a short introduction of the brand followed by a part, summarising goals and achievements such as percentages of audits, changes in the work plan, shifted foci, development of agenda and a brief outlook for the upcoming year. The next chapter is dedicated to the sourcing strategy, including pricing, production, organisation of the department, the production cycle, selection of new factories, monitoring activities and sourcing decisions. (Filippa K includes here also production in Europe, whereas Cheap Monday lists this topic in the next chapter.) The third main chapter is called “Coherent system for monitoring and remediation”, describing the processes of production in China and a comparison of audited factories. If a company provides the possibility of complaint procedure it is to be named here. The section about “Training and the capacity building” shall introduce to the effort done to inform staff members, agents and manufacturers and their workers. Finally, the report is finished by “Transparency and communication” and Filippa K even writes some lines on “Forthcoming CR work – 2012” (2011).

This leads to set goals, results, improvements and challenges. Both companies allude to some set goals, connected to a timespan. While Filippa K is aiming at fully accomplished inspection of 90% of the Chinese factories and 100% of the factories located in Portugal, Italy and Turkey, Cheap Monday does not take a stand in these regards, yet they refer to their 60% coverage of the supplier audits of production in 2009 (Filippa K 2010a; Cheap Monday 2011a). In terms of organic cotton or eco friendly material both parties are pursuing concrete targets (ibid.). The results then are gathered in a CSR report including numbers and figures about the state and suggested improvements, which is written by the auditing team (Cheap Monday 2011a). The reports are available in English as well as in the local language (Filippa K 2011).

In these reports, not only goals and improvements are described, but also issues and challenges. Filippa K and Cheap Monday come up with the problem of the working overtime. Either the production process is not reliably planned or the wages are so low, that people have to work more to be able to cover living costs (Cheap Monday 2011a; Filippa K 2011). Supplementary, Filippa K’s Social Report explicates China’s problem of restricted law in terms of joining unions and worker’s self-organisation (ibid.). If suppliers do not carry out
agreed improvements they are dismissed and not allowed to supply the brand anymore. Cheap Monday’s CSR bespeaks even that subcontractors are not tolerated (2011a).24

3.5. Summary
Filippa K and Cheap Monday pursue the same ideas in their CSR policies: to provide good working standards in the suppliers’ factory including the UNHR and ILO conventions. These endeavours always include environmental issues, since this contributes to healthy working conditions. Furthermore, they aim at building up relations and partnerships to all involved stakeholders, by physical on-site visits in order to audit and inspect but also by upholding a good working communication and a high-quality dialogue along the supply chain. “Finally, corporations, driven to reduce costs by outsourcing and subcontracting across the globe, nevertheless have an incentive to engage in ethical, longer-term practices where they do hit the ground” (De Neve et. al. 2008: 25). Even though I could find evidence for “humane capitalism” it does not appear only being a question of charity or philanthropy, but rather the quest for establishing proper standards to develop business on solid and ethical ground.

4. Alienation in today’s fashion industry
Central to the concept of the alienated work are the interrupted relationships the worker has to the product, to labour, to species-being as well as to other people (Mészáros 1986: 14). And central to the increasing interest in CSR, both on sides of companies to execute control in order to be reliable and trustworthy, but also on the opposite side of end-consumers, competitors and the general public, is also the concept of sustaining relationship and dialogue. As we have seen along the comparison of the CSR policies, they are a positive way of accepting the capitalistic system of the world economy thus maintaining long-term relationships and a good dialogue from the company to different parts of the supply chain and the end-consumers.

End-consumers might not only be wondering what exactly happens on the sites of production tied to questions of the origin of a garment, the treatment of a pair of jeans or showing interest in knowing more about working conditions in the fashion factories. More

24 Subcontractors are not workers with a contract, but temporary personnel hired for only a certain time or a particular job.
and more the interest is changing over to the active input of the favourite fashion brand and the companies’ obligation in terms of outsourcing and division of labour. Today, sales assistants are quite often confronted with questions like this. A probable answer could be: “Visit our website, we have a CSR policy uploaded.”

4.1. Alienation happens in a naturalised way

I tied my question of research to the general formulated question Marx already was concerned about yet expanding it to the realm of fashion studies: What is the reality of alienation in the fashion industry and how is that reality mediated to us (Wendling 2009: 5)? However, such an object of investigation is huge and has to be narrowed down, whereupon I focused on the effort done by intermediaries like companies to revive the lost “human essence” of the relationships defining the supply chain (ibid.: 4). To approach this reality in an adequate way, I targeted the relationships between the companies and their stakeholders, particularly and foremost what endeavour companies performed to cross the diverging parties.

In her dissertation paper Amy E. Wendling is writing about

[...] an environment in which alienation has become so definitive and real that it disappears as a concept and term of analysis. [...] It is the capitalist world that reduces labor to labor-power; that eliminates human agency from political revolution; and that makes alienation unthinkable because there is no longer any human essence to lose. (2009: 4)

The significance of this quote will put the cornerstone for the interpretation of my analysis: Alienation is not absent; it is naturalised as a “reality” and not recognised as pathologic state.

Despite alienation not being that obvious, I identified two codes of business managements revealing characteristics of counter-alienation mechanisms: Corporate Social Responsibility and with it ethical trade.

4.1.1. Corporate Social Responsibility - integrated

In my study we can see, that CSR definitely is a concept attempting to visualise exploited business relations between different involved groups. As Larsson (2012) points out, CSR is about connecting several departments within a business, but also to revive overseas-relations from the daily business at the production site to the everyday tasks at the head office. This gives the impression, that CSR aims not only at valorising stakeholders from all levels and their relationships, but also that these connections are connoted with a certain value.
Empowerment

Empowerment appears to be one of the key approaches, crucial to the philosophy of “corporate care”. According to Larsson, CSR is the only way to do business: “[I]f not you will not survive as a company and it is all about empowering. […] I believe it is a hygiene factor that every one needs to work with. You as a company have a responsibility for the business you are doing and how it effects the world around you” (2012). Empowering is also a central factor in Rajaks text, thus rather criticised as window-dressing. She claims, that the general hype around empowering – “empowering through enterprise” – reshapes former relationships of patronage and clientelism instead of setting the recipient free in order to act autonomous and empowered (2008: 300). Likewise, the thought of reviving relationships and by entitling these parties appears not to be fully developed. Empowering and entitling means in this sense giving away, but by the use of a corporation supervising the social responsibilities, it is also a strategy that is always connected to some kind of keeping control (cf. ibid.: 316). Remembering Carrier’s notion of alienation, executing control is a way to counteract alienation: the more control the less alienated (cf. 1992: 540).

In my opinion, it is no use in doomming empowerment, pursuing the purpose of keeping control by entitling factory workers. I rather suggest highlighting the outright positive effects on business, which could be the answer for Marx’s *alienation of the self* (ibid.: §24). Marx emphasises the relation between the workers and the activity of production as a state of powerlessness, an activity not belonging to them and something extrinsic to them: “[T]he worker is alienated from the process of production” (Marx 1844: §19ff.). Rebecca Prentice’s article *Looping the Value Chain* (2008) on the common practice of copying designer garments, which are distributed along social networks and thus not being extremely alienated of them is an example for this state of alienation. The studied material of Filippa K and Cheap Monday did not describe the like.

But for all that, I claim that empowering and entitling workers is an evidence for *alienation of the self*, being a sign of too little self-responsibility in the production process and hence leading to alienation. It can be assumed that in Marx’s eyes empowerment is not the solution, in fact alienation must be eradicated completely. Opposed to this absolute creed, I want to assess the positive results of CSR: changing individuals’ life positively and reviving partnership significantly are positive steps forward.

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25 On the website of Nudie Jeans was at this time an “Empowerment Challenge” uploaded with benefits to Amnesty International (visited 2012-05-07 on http://www.nudiejeans.com/empowerment-challenge/).
Reciprocity

In addition, Larsson but also Rajak describe the lack of real reciprocity: “The long-lasting relationships between corporate sponsor and beneficiary has been severed, thus denying the expected reciprocity” (2008: 313). While Rajak points on reciprocity between company and producer, Filippa K verifies the lack of it, but pointing on the “little reciprocity” between company and end-consumers and that hopefully more aware consumer demanding for change are to come (Larsson 2012). Reciprocity, consequently, has to be developed further in both directions and by this the question of interest about a brand’s online CSR policy arises. Who exactly, if at all and why in particular someone is reading the CSR text on a webpage is unknown to me, thus could be studied in a future project. The fragmented supply chain reveals that reciprocity is not given in the contemporary fashion industry but an increase would probably directly counteract alienation.

Inspections

Another way of integrating CSR as reviving practice for relations is the on-site visit. This visit in form of inspection of a factory, conducted by the CSR manager and an auditing team or visits to get more inspiration, to go and see someone is a sign of upholding a relationship. Correspondingly, Snyder describes in her book on jeans several causes to see production sites: “Sometimes, they [the brand’s managers/designers] are simply taking […] ‘inspirational’ trips. Sometimes they are checking on the factory, or how the more complicated orders are coming along. Sometimes they just need to further establish the relationship” (2009: 304). Even though Filippa K claims that it is not all about inspections, travelling along the supply chain tracks is expedient. Presence is still exhibited best by physical appearance. Snyder quotes a jeans-brand owner, himself appreciating the workers behind his label: ‘Nothing serves you better as a business owner than visiting your suppliers, and understanding the needs and constraints on someone else’s business” (ibid.: 307). Physical visits bridge social, cultural and geographical borders, coming along with division of labour.

Studying Marx’s alienation from man, we could find a probable answer in the inspection-practice (cf. 1844: §37). Even though Filippa K and Cheap Monday conduct several visits a year, this does not mean that alienation from man to man is rescinded, though presumably alleviated. Most of us never meet the manufacturer or the seamstress of our garments our encounter with the truck-driver delivering the brand: “As a result [of the prevalent habit of outsourcing], the producers of an increasing range of economic goods (…)
live in a different society from those who consume them” (De Neve et. al. 2008: 4). As a consequence of the lack of shared social and political space there are indeed neither relationships between producer and end-consumer nor between producer and company (ibid.). Factory visits, though, help to bridge the producer-company relationship and communicating them can act as narratives of transparency and authenticity towards the end-consumer.

**Bringing back the “human essence”**

As conclusion, it could be claimed that CSR practices are usually rather more about mental rapprochement towards de-alienation in order to bring back the “human essence”, but still showing physical approximation conducted through inspections and philanthropic craving for more reciprocity (Wendling 2009: 4). Even if the general public should believe the efforts done by a company to commit to equal exchange and ethical trade, critical voices would state, that this is done to earn legitimisation for higher economic goals. De Neve et. al. formulate this in a adequate, yet positive way: “Likewise, CSR can be read as a response by industry to consumer demand to regulate the social conditions and environmental consequences of production, and thus as an attempt by corporations to underscore that a “humane capitalism” is possible” (2008: 17). In a modern stance towards the issue of alienation, I claim, it is not wrong to adapt to the contemporary fashion industry. But if you run a fashion brand, what can be said against operating in a humane and compassionate way?

**4.1.2. Ethical trade - integrated**

Ethical trade was nowhere explicit mentioned neither as part of the CSR nor as a guideline for the branding’s philosophy. Thus, I could observe that Codes of Conduct basically lay the foundation to trade in an ethical way.

Fair Wear Foundation defines eight points, which are checked at their audits. These eight points include freely chosen employment, no discrimination, no child labour, freedom of association and collective bargaining, payment of a living wage, no excessive working hours, safe and health working conditions and legal contracts.26 Accordingly, these conditions depict the interest to lay a general base for building more and more fair and responsible business. Filippa K and Cheap Monday accept this bricks as their ground for the regulations of the contracts (Filippa K 2010a; Cheap Monday 2011a).

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“Corporate care”, bringing back “human essence” and “compassionate capitalism” are well-defined narratives of social responsibility, imbued with ethical business ideas. Including workers into the daily business is a goal targeted by Filippa K as well as Cheap Monday, but also within the meaning of Marx’s approach.

4.2. Producing for individuality’s sake

One of Marx’s states of alienation seems to be a keynote of the capitalist system nowadays: The fact that the fashion industry produces not only for our need but for its self-perpetuation and for the end-consumers’ desire to consume more fashion (cf. Belk et. al. 2003). This condition is also given in the most globalised business, the fashion industry, with its weekly changing assortment, which is indeed an extreme yet adequate example. The workers of the factories transform their life activity to the purpose of universal production, producing free from physical need (Marx 1844: §31). The single parts of the fashion supply chain function now as means for man’s conscious life-activity – production for individuality’s sake – instead as life activity for the essential (species-) being (cf. ibid.: §32). This seems to be so common, that it is not registered as alienated state any longer. A proof therefore is the quote by a non-governmental organisation representative quoted in Dolan:

Companies earn huge profits while they take advantage of people so poor they are desperate for a job they will accept any conditions. So companies have to act responsibly. We need to expose the fact that workers are paid slave wages and live in appalling conditions – have to get this discussion out internationally and call the bluff on all this talk about cheaper destinations for industry. It’s cheaper because they exploit human rights and the environment, and because people don’t have the power to reject them. (2008: 278)

Apparently, working for production’s sake instead for the species essential sustainment is as definitive as alienation itself. But exactly because mankind produces universally, the more money shall be saved in production processes and some workers are more exploited than others. A concrete example is the problem of exceeding working hours:

We tell the workers to work only 8-hour shifts, but they work 16 hours and even 20 hours … Why? It’s the workers own fault … they shouldn’t work that long, but they want more money and keep spending and therefore they have to keep working longer hours. Here we have no control over labour anymore. (Union leader in De Neve 2008: 225)

This problem is discussed in the CSR of Filippa K and their Social Report (Filippa K 2010a; Cheap Monday 2011: 7). It seems obvious, that alienation from the species-being is a naturalised state of alienation, not questioned but taken-for-granted. While accepting any conditions to be able to feed the family, workers even expand their chance to earn more by working much more than allowed. The union leader in the quote above refers to the lost
control whereas CSR managers target such problems and aim at and combat the actual cause: too little wages.

Such challenges of unequal exchange are the reason why CSR basically were launched. These problems are trying to be reduced: “One challenge was that working hours exceeded what was required in the Code. This was problematic and hard to change because of cultural differences, but we were able to persuade one factory to shorten working hours during spring” (Filippa K 2010a). CSR policies are generally trying to answer on all problems along the supply chain, rising with the companies’ loss of control in the global division of labour and their “bad face” of saving money at every possible corner.

4.3. The garment as an artefact of fragmentation

The discussed relationships are consolidated in the garment of production as an artefact of inequalities itself. According to Marx and the analysis above, the worker is intrinsically alienated from the physical product (cf. Marx 1844: §10ff.). The workers produce something they can neither own nor incorporate, thus aware of the fact that someone else commissioned to produce these objects and owning it after the work is done (cf. ibid.: §21). Concurrently Marx states, that alienation is not “finished” before an alien party acquires the product, which happens through commission (cf. ibid.: §8).

Acquisition can be considered as a product owned by the company or a garment hanging in a person’s wardrobe and constituting a commodity of its own character and history. The commodity which is crossing social, cultural, professional and geographical borders could tell stories no other person involved in the supply chain could. Hence, it is the physical evidence for alienation’s fragmented relations and daily existence.

4.3.1. Fetish obscures origin

At this point we should remember Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism, worshipping the added value of an object (1867). The added value of a commodity, commodity fetish, is a result of an economic system producing not for individual’s sake but in universal manners. Division of labour splits the supply chain up in several subparts, which are transited by the commodity. The commodity travels over continents and loses not only the geographical connection but also the cultural and social.

What the different types of fetishism have in common, is the process of disavowal … objects in our culture take on meanings that connect them to, or stand in for, other meanings
and associations: but the connection is lost or partially denied as a consequence of the fetishism [remark by J.N.]. (Gammon and Makkinen in Wilson 2004: 380).

Fetishism then always works in a manner of obscuring the original social and geographical setting where the thing itself was manufactured.

I assert, that this state of disavowal is as naturalised as alienation in general. An evidence for this can be seen in Larsson’s hope for more aware customers, responding on their CSR and being more aware of everything CSR targets to eradicate (2012). In the end, all work done by the CSR department tries to reveal the background and the origin of the designed garments, bringing “humanity”, “relationships” and “dialogue” to the foreground.

4.3.2. Branding perpetuates the fetish

Talking about commodity fetishism raises the question of who adds value and the how? Theresa M. Winge writes in her article on Green is the new Black:

Dress often gets fetishized through media (as association with types of materials), through form (such as shape and style), in an animate manner (as association with the human body), and as commodity (its associations with production, labor, consumption, and commerce). The commodity fetish of dress is often confused and overlapped with the other types of fetishisms, revealing complex layers of sociocultural and socio-political constructs, emotions, and relationships. (2008: 518)

The fetishising act, however, seems to happen between the company and the purchase of the end-consumer either by the use of a company owned label added on the good or through the consumers themselves adding a personal history of a passed on gift. In both cases, alienation is not counteracted but its self-dynamic is perpetuated. As a result, the vicious circle is perpetuated: On the one hand, the company tries to bypass alienation by implemented policies of social responsibility. On the other hand, the branding department launches a branded product and simultaneously establishes alienation from the product.

Hence, branding can be considered being authoritative regarding to put fetish on a product like a stamp and simultaneously generating a possible cause why a product is fetishised. Equally, commodity fetishism is set off through branding referring on its labour, production, consumption and commerce (cf. Winge 2008: 518).

According to this, one could expect that CSR, bridging the gaps of alienation, affects in any way the branding process, attaching fetish on a “plain” garment. Nonetheless, Larsson does not explicitly cater to the ambitions to cooperate between the CSR and branding departments of the business, though she mentions that without any close cooperation no real change would be feasible (2012). Summing up, I state that there is a crucial connection
between CSR and branding which lies on the ground to the naturalised semi-awareness of alienation nowadays.

4.3.4. Ethical trade to de-fetishise commodities
In spite of this, De Neve et. al. affirm, ethical initiatives stand for the intention to “de-fetishise commodities, to re-think how they are manufactured and traded, and to shift attention onto the workers and resources that produce them” (2008: 7). The obscuring moment of the fetish shall be counteracted by candid trade procedures what is also targeted by established CSR credos. CSR and ethical trade are about an exchange “in which commodities are not thought of as morally neutral or separable from the people who produces them” (ibid.: 10). Since clothing is not morally separable from their producers, establishing a CSR programme and trading ethically reveal the history and origin of products, which cannot be wiped off simply.

Opposing to this statement is Wing’s, claiming that the stereotypical eco-dress can function as “‘green’ commodity fetish imbued with ‘magical’ value” and reflecting the eco-conscious lifestyle (2008: 512). Being ecological to charge a dress with “green and magical value” is challenging the efforts of CSR and ethical trade, revealing the workers behind the goods. How this can effectively work together is not to be handled in the scope of this work, but could pose an interesting future project.

4.3.5. Capitalist society encourages commodity fetish
To sum up, it appears to be of value to study the brand’s aim to put worship-potential on that clothing (through branding or mediating lifestyle) while CSR policies are fighting against lost relationships and forgotten origins but for the erasure of inequalities. One probably has to agree that “[t]he very nature of capitalist society encourages, supports, and perhaps demands the commodity fetish in order to ensure a continuous and fruitful marketplace” (2008: 518). The question is, if commodity fetishism can exist without alienation (or at least less alienated relations); otherwise it is a matter of taking wood out of the fire on the one side while putting burnable stuff into the blaze on the other.

4.4. CSR as narrative itself
Even if none of the studied brands communicates a particular ethical brand philosophy, both brands reintegrate relationships with their CSR and Filippa K even incorporates its philosophy “Style, Simplicity and Quality” as guiding key-aspects in the Social Report. “A strong brand”, so Fog et. al., “builds on clearly defined values, while a good story
communicates those values in a language easily understood by all. A strong brand exists based on its emotional ties to the consumer or employee, while a good story speaks to our emotions and bonds people together” (2001:23). The language of the published CSR policies is easily readable and accessible, addressing the reader in a familiar we-style of writing. Fog et. al continue: “The physical product no longer makes the difference. The difference lies in the story, because the story is what drives the bond between the company and the consumer” (ibid.). So, CSR published on Filippa K’s and Cheap Monday’s webpage, read by an interested audience, can act as storytelling strategies, mediating authenticity and transparency. Though, since the brand’s philosophy is published on the same level under the link “About”, the brand communicates its fetishising ideas, why it is attractive to wear Filippa K or Cheap Monday. By this, the good ideas of changing the world but still launching unique products face a challenge: While CSR policies try to fight alienation by connecting and assembling fragmented relationships and make it publicly aware, branding counteracts this struggle and perpetuates its existence.

5. Conclusion

In this work, I outline some boundary points between Karl Marx’s theory of alienation connected to two contemporary Swedish fashion brands, Filippa K and Cheap Monday. The analysis contains the online Corporate Social Responsibility policies, the standardised and formal Social Reports and the e-mail interview with the CSR manager of Filippa K. By this I developed the argumentation line bringing into focus the companies’ endeavour to bypass and bridge the more and more fragmentation of social relationships along the supply chains and the other, also due to the global dispersion. Due to the findings, CSR is overall aiming at increase authenticity, transparency and trustworthiness.

Today, alienation happens naturalised and neither producers, nor companies or end-consumers are aware of it. However, according to Wendling (2009: 4) I claim, that companies are semi-aware of alienation – as I discussed, CSR containing approaches to ethical trade, is an instrument to counteract still-existing alienation. Notwithstanding, alienation itself is mentioned nowhere. Yet, some redundant keywords and ideas are appearing frequently introducing some possible entries. One of these is empowering and entitling factory workers to antagonise alienation directly; another is increasing reciprocity in order to develop vivid
relationships in direction to all involved stakeholders, producers as well as end-consumer; moreover, inspecting and auditing for the purpose of physically showing presence and control of the processes and improvements of the working-conditions. After all, these endeavours are aimed at bringing back the “human essence”, whose loss is responsible for the development of alienation and whose lack in the capitalist fashion industry adheres alienation’s existence.

The fact that industry produces universally for individual’s sake, leads to outsourcing of tasks and is thus increasing the degree of division of labour, as well as expanding the supply chain. Such an economy can hardly maintain solid social relationships over geographical dispersed areas. Filippa K’s and Cheap Monday’s CSR policies are fighting this condition by maintaining long-term relationships and high-quality dialogue between all involved parties.

The only thing trespassing all borders and transiting the supply chain from the very beginning to the very end is the actual fashion garment. It depicts an artefact of the fragmented relations, finally appropriated by an individual. While policies of CSR counteract corporate dispersion, the commodity acts as perpetuating force of alienation. Commodities are commissioned by a brand, after production labelled and by this carrying “added value”. This act of fetishising a “plain” product converts it into a brand-product ready to be worshipped. This commodity fetishism obscures and disavows its origins by shifting the focus on the brand. Although capitalist society stimulates the commodity fetishism, especially ethical trade and Corporate Social Responsibility work against its entity.

Finally, the analysed CSR credos and Social Reports, I state, work in the same mode as branding narratives and storytelling techniques: They communicate philosophy and commitment of a conviction to pursue the eradication of alienation. “CSR and [ethical trade] are driven by a conviction that the market offers opportunities for alternative engagements with commodities and that it has the capacity to transform existing relationships of inequality” (De Neve et.al 2008:1, resp.15).

Assumably, alienation in Marx’s eyes should be eradicated completely. Opposed to this absolute creed, I want to assess Filippa K and Cheap Monday’s efforts, as two attractive Swedish fashion brands part of the global sartorial industry where alienation and division of labour are inevitable and naturalised, to change individuals’ life positively and revive partnership significantly. To avoid and prevent alienation completely only one suggestion would have been successful: Robinson Crusoe’s own bounded economy (cf. De Neve et al. 2008: 11).
6. References

6.1. Literature


Larsson, Elin (2012): E-mail Interview on CSR, conducted 2012-04-24, added in the appendices.


6.2. Internet


6.3. Media

China blue – visited 2012-04-16 on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x55Rtq5JaUg. Only first part in English, rest in French.

7. Appendices

List of the 42 checked brands

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| Total                  | 13                      | 21                         | 34 + 8 without = 42
Interview with CSR manager of Filippa K, Elin Larsson (2012-04-24)

General:

When did you found the CSR section and when came the particular manager?
The CSR section was founded in September 2011, the same date as I entered the role as a CR manager. Up until then it had been up to each department within Filippa K to work towards the goals we had for social and environmental issues set by our code of conduct and our environmental policy.

Why was it considered necessary to have a CSR programme/executive authority?
We felt a need for someone to focus on the overall responsibility and to set a new strategy and direction going forward. A person who can make sure we stay updated, that we cover all related issues and to keep developing our CR agenda.

What was the “leading trail” or the “idol” programme for your own CSR programme?
I am not sure what you mean by this question but the leading trail for us to make sure we take responsibility for everything we do and are aware of all sides and effects of our business, which includes areas as ethics – the way we act, environmental – the way we care for the environment, social – the way we care for people and societies and economics – the way we do business

Within the company:

What does your daily work include?
It includes everything from setting the overall strategy for our CR work and develop business plans for that and setting goals. It includes developing the CR agenda, which describes the actions to make us realise the strategy. It also includes very operational activities, such as putting our Social Report for 2011 together, discuss with different departments on how to make sure we take responsibility into consideration in all processes. It includes close cooperation between the members of our Sustainability team and to support them in their work. I am also doing a lot of anchoring of our strategy towards different departments, countries and stores.

How far away or distant from the daily business is your job and your section?
To be able to make a real change and a real contribution it is absolutely dependent on the fact that responsibility aspects are taken into account in each process through out the whole company and there for it is very important to have a closeness to the daily business and I am part of that every day.

Is there cooperation with other departments within the brand?
As I mentioned before none of the ambitions in the CR strategy would be reached if we did not cooperate closely between the different departments, not only for marketing and supply – but for all parts.

How do you work together with the branding/marketing section?
How with the supply chain manager (if there is one?)

How does cooperation with umbrella organisations like Fair Wear Foundation function?
We are happy with the cooperation with FWF even if we see room for improvements.

Do you visit production sites?
In general we visit each production site once a year, some even more often. The visits are being announced in advanced if it is not a surprise visit from FWF. If we are doing an audit then a report will be filled out and that is done by FWF.

How often do you/ the company visit production sites?
Are the visits being announced in advance?
How are the reports being written? By whom (you?)

Personally:
What is your personal “ideal type” of CSR?
To take fully responsible and to take the whole company in consideration and that is what we are doing within Filippa K

Are you heading for this “ideal type” within the company?

How do you see the necessity for CSR in the general/overall business?
It is the only way to do business – if not you will not survive as a company and it is all about empowering. I do not know how I would describe it – I believe it is a hygien factor that every one needs to work with. You as a company has a responsibility for the business you are doing and how it effects the world around you. I believe the companies are doing better and better but also that we get more and more intelligent consumers that have higher demands and are more aware. But so far there is little reciprocity – I believe that will change though, which is good.

Would you consider CSR more empowering or as charity?
Would you describe CSR as humane or compassionate capitalism? Like the “nice face” of capitalistic corporations?
Do you think reciprocity between donors and recipients is happening?

Anything else to add which you seem is considered important?

Please add whatever you like and you think is typical and crucial for your particular CSR.
Crucial for our responsibility is to provide products that can last for a long time both concerning design and quality. I also believe it is important to do what ever possible to prolong the life of a product as much as possible and try not to contribute to over consumption.