

DART - NEW TEACHING METHODS FOR ORGANIZING INTUITION

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DART (Driver Analysis – Reading Trends) is a new approach co-developed by the author to organize and develop intuition in the research and development phase of a creative process within the field of fashion and design. At its current stage, the model has been targeted teaching at design schools. The method is based on the author's Ph.D. dissertation ('On the Nature of Trends: A Study of Trend Mechanisms in Contemporary Fashion', 2010), teaching experience at design schools, and methods from fashion forecasting. DART is intended to support design students on two levels:

1. To qualify the students' sensibility or *hunch* when preparing a collection or other design projects.
2. To prepare future designers for working on the still more unpredictable fashion and design markets. The DART model suggests that the task of identifying and organizing trends often outsourced to trend forecasting agencies may be better placed within each individual designer or brand. So far, the model has been tested on fashion and design students at all the major design schools in Denmark: The Danish Design School, Designskolen Kolding, TEKO Design and Management College, and The Copenhagen School of Design and Technology (KEA).

NEW PREMISES, NEW METHODS

The purpose of the paper is to explore new approaches to teaching at design schools specifically in relation to developing a flexible framework for the initial research phase in a creative process. DART (Driver Analysis – Reading Trends) is a model designed for organizing intuition. In its current form, it targets future designers, forecasters, and communicators.

DART was developed by myself, a trend scholar at The Danish Design School, and designer Lene Hald who is a communications teacher at The Copenhagen School of Design and Technology (KEA) with a background as a trend forecaster. Based on our teaching experience, we found that there was a need among both students and teachers for a model that could help organize, communicate, and qualify the complex process of maturing a 'hunch' for a visual product or concept. We had seen that students generally experienced a more fruitful and less frustrated creative process the more their concept was based on thorough research. But they often needed the framework to direct the research process.

The creeds of individualism such as 'Anything goes' and 'Creative consumers' bear witness to the challenges facing the fashion industry. It appears that relativity is threatening to take over (Magner 2008). How can the fashion world, which to a large extent is still organized according to seasons, become better at navigating on a premise that appears to be more and more fragmented, democratized, and decentralized? DART is designed to aid teachers in supporting the cultivation of the students' intuition without either standardizing the their talent or promoting design that does not relate to a context. The statistics for employment for new designers is still too low and perhaps DART can be a small contribution to changing this by training designers to be more attuned to the context in which they operate without compromising their creative vision.

The output of the model is a scenario or moodboard that may form the basis of the design. The output may also be an article, blog, or video making the model a much needed contribution to heightening the level of especially fashion communication

The DART model is still in a stage of development.

Informal digital networks in the shape of social media, user-driven innovation online, and blogs have created

both opportunities and challenges in relation to the innovation and diffusion of trends in fashion and design. The development in fashion is moving towards a larger degree of democratization and decentralization (Agins 1999; Thomas 2007). The consumers have far more opportunity practically, culturally, socially, and economically for engaging in fashion and design. They have gained more influence, which is seen in the greater degree of exchange between consumers and industry. The distinction between high and low has become blurred as seen in capsule collections in fast fashion chains such as H&M. This horizontal, dynamic structure opens up to the individualization of fashion and design as both a visual expression and a dogma of difference. There lies a paradox in the individualization as a phenomenon because the understanding of personal style is played out collectively. The paradox is evident when Danish Elle proclaims 'personlig stil' (personal style) on the cover of its November 2010 issue. A fashion magazine is per definition a joint effort that aims to gather and spread trend information (Langley 1971). So the message on the cover seems to indicate that individuality is a collective quality. However, the democratization of fashion and design does not remove the need for an aesthetic common denominator as identity marker. Trends are necessarily collective in nature. Therefore the knowledge about trends holds potential for designers for navigating the altered premise. Not as a prescriptive measure as seen in most fashion forecasting, but as a tool for supporting and developing original ideas.

One way of doing this is by incorporating the various mechanisms that drive trends forward, which is what DART proposes. This approach to trend mechanisms is comprehensive in the sense that it attempts to encompass the multifarious mechanisms that are at play simultaneously in trends.

With the knowledge available today about trend mechanisms, there is no need for a speculative approach that characterizes much of the work done on trends especially within trend forecasting. Rather, the knowledge should be used to support and prepare a qualified basis for the design process.

Trends are about more than which colors, cuts, and materials are on the fashion horizon. There is potential for the industry in understanding and working with trend mechanisms in a new way. Trends are the visual manifestation of trend mechanisms, which are motored by a series of needs and agendas ranging from social identity (King 1963; Field 1970; Simmel 1971), market logic (Callon 1998), shifting perception of gender and beauty (Laver 1959; Entwistle 2000), and the construction of zeitgeist (Nystrom 1928). DART is an inspiration tool that holds the potential for qualifying intuition through incorporating knowledge of trend mechanisms into the creative process.

The current appearance of fragmentation and individualization in fashion does not need to be dealt

with as either absolute relativity or uniformity. Rather it may be possible to develop tools that could allow each designer or brand to administrate the task of qualifying a hunch as opposed to outsourcing the process to forecasters. Forecasters generally identify and organize trend information for the fashion and design industry in a way that may be incompatible with the current development towards decentralization. With DART, it is possible to develop an idea *as* it is contextualized. The ambition is that navigating trends can be situated within the visual, emotional universe of each designer or brand without having the process be so expansive as to reinstate the need to outsource the task and hence remain at status quo.

DART / Driver Analysis - Reading Trends

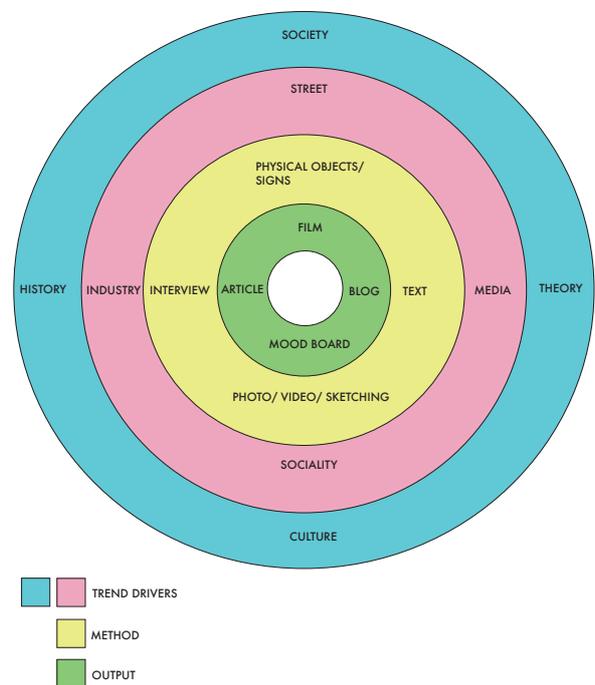


Figure 1: DART model

DART – HUNCH TIME

DART is an inspiration tool that can help designers and communicators qualify their hunch and help them get from intuition to output. The output is understood as a scenario of a fully developed idea in the shape of a visualization or text.

DART combines traditional methods from trend forecasting such as observation, visual registration, and intuition with state of the art academic methods for exploring trend mechanism while always rooting intuition in context. This context is determined by historical, social, economic, and psychological factors that are both unique to the specific time and place while

still holding knowledge of mechanisms and agendas with analytical potential on a more universal scale (Harding 1991). Central for the process is to reach an output that has been through each of the categories in the DART model. It is also an important factor that the designer is able to communicate the results verbally, written, and visually. Whether designing a fashion collection, furniture, textiles or visual communication, identifying the initial idea as precisely as possible is crucial to the sharpness of the final design expression.

DART PROCEDURE

Traditional trend forecasters often identify signs in contemporary society to predict the way of the future (Brannon 2005). The assumption in this field is that trends occur at a particular time and end when the trajectory is finished (Rogers 1992; Gladwell 2002). However, recent research in the field of Trend Studies finds that trends do not in fact change rapidly according to radical shifts. Rather trends mutate over a longer period of time (Lieberson 2000; Mackinney-Valentin 2010). This realization poses challenges to designers and forecasters alike because the current cyclical rhythm of the fashion and design system is disturbed. So, the opportunity to integrate the trend work actively in the design process holds the potential for a more differentiated and hence more contemporary approach.

Before the DART process starts, the student needs to identify a hunch. This is done by completing the sentence: "There is something about xx these days." In other words, the student senses that there is currently a development taking place that they are inspired by and that could develop into a larger idea. Depending on the visual universe of the student and how he or she prefers to work, a hunch can take many shapes and forms: From the abstract such as a mood (local patriotism), event (wedding), or value (slowness) to the more concrete such as an animal (an owl), a culture (Greenlandic traditional footwear), a color (nude), a type (the nerd), a material (tweed), a subculture (Japanese Mori Girls), beauty ideals (voluptuous women), and body adornment (feather tattoos). Each of these examples stem from teaching DART where the students felt stirred by these hunches in some way.

DART is designed to prepare an idea for a design project. Therefore it is part of the process that the hunch may have to be opened, adjusted, simplified, or even rejected in order to unfold a potential that is solid enough to form the basis for a project. The process is intended for the student to become as precise and detailed about the understanding of the hunch as possible. This is intended to move the student away from the normative, relative, and speculative. The result or output of DART is a visual or textual verification of the hunch where it becomes clear whether there was in fact 'something about xx' but also *how* the hunch was perceived by the designer.

DRIVERS

The two outer rings are concerned with *drivers* understood as factors and phenomena that push a development or innovation forward. Some of the drivers may contribute more to the development of the hunch than others, and some drivers may overlap. Hunches vary and therefore place themselves differently in the spectrum. But it is important to apply all drivers for potential and even unexpected outcome.

The data is retrieved by exploring each driver. For instance: Is there anything in the current cultural production that might drive my hunch concerning Mori Girls forward? One might find that The Museum at FIT has an exhibit called "Japan Fashion Now." Less obvious results may also occur such as the opening of the movie "Red Riding Hood" that operates in the same visual field as Mori Girls. Each finding will force the student to consider whether this is something that drives the hunch or not. In either case, the result will be a small step in specifying the hunch as it is perceived by the student.

The organization of the drivers has been done to enable as comprehensive an approach as possible. Each DART circle has four independent categories, which will be described in the following with focus on fashion. The list of factors in each category is not final but can be expanded as needed. The Blue driver circle tends to be more general while the Pink is more current. However, the two are not strictly separated and a continuous exchange between them is to be expected.

DRIVER 1 (BLUE)

Society: Demographic development, statistical data, market conditions, macro-economic events such as financial crisis, climate issues, or war.

Culture: Cultural production such as film, art, literature, music, theater, sports, clubbing, and cultural events.

History: Broader historical context relevant to the hunch.

Theory: Research in the field relevant to the hunch for instance shifting beauty ideals, the role of the body in fashion, subculture theory, gender studies, post-colonial theory, etc.

DRIVER 2 (PINK)

Street: Registration of street fashion. How do consumers perform in real-time. What effects are used and what is the variation over a geographic area?

Sociality: Determining social identity. What is the relevant social premium? How is social status constructed at a specific time and place? Georg Simmel,

George Field, and Charles King are key in determining the social mechanisms involved.

Industry: Market conditions and possibilities. Survey and analysis of fashion week coverage, collections, brand management, communication strategy, collaboration, web, retail design, muses etc.

Media: Surveying print and digital media nationally and internationally. What characterizes the narratives and rhetoric concerning the hunch? Is there a development over time and discrepancy between various media?

METHOD (YELLOW)

The Yellow circle is concerned with methods for registering the empirical material or information gathered from the Blue and the Pink circles. The purpose of the Yellow circle is to document and visualize the hunch and in that way move a step further towards a deeper understanding of the hunch and a more precise image for the student to work with.

The methods fall in four main categories that may be expanded if necessary: Visual registration (video, photo, sketch, observation, mind map), written documentation (notes, brainstorm, article, trend books), interview with actors (consumer, buyer, designer, editor, writer, blogger, stylist, producer), gathering physical signs (swatches, Pantone number, a stuffed owl, a wedding dress, Greenlandic folklore...).

OUTPUT (GREEN)

The final product of DART is a moodboard, forecast, or scenario that is based on a qualified hunch. The output does not have to be a moodboard but might also be a film, article, blog, or tableau.

The center of the DART model is not a bulls-eye but rather a doughnut hole of potential indicating that the process is not the goal in itself but leads to the design production itself - and eventually the next hunch.

CASE: CURVY WOMEN

To give a clearer impression of how DART might be used in teaching, a brief case study will be described with 'voluptuous woman' as the hunch. The case was used in a course on DART at the Danish Design School in October 2010. We used an article on the hunch: 'The Female Body Calls for Curves in Times of Crisis' ('Kvindekroppen kalder på kurver i krisetider') by Tina Splidsboel in the Danish newspaper Information from September 30, 2010. The article was used to explore how the journalist had supported her hunch that there was "something about voluptuous women these days."

The DART process is not necessarily linear moving from the outer circle and in. Rather, it might move

between driver and method that mutually inform each other.

We started with the Blue drivers, where the category 'society' offered answers that were also apparent in the title of the article, namely that curves and economic crisis were related. Here hunch was supported by an interview (Yellow circle) with Danish fashion writer Uffe Buchard, who argues that times of crisis give rise to a need for 'the comfort in the feminine and motherly' (history).

In the 'culture' driver, the hunch was supported by the popularity of the American TV show 'Mad Men' where curvy women are celebrated with characters such as Joan Holloway. The article draws in the 'theory' driver with references to two American researchers, Terry F. Pettijohn II and Brian Jungeberg. They have looked at the proportions of pin-up models compared to economic conditions over a period of 40 years. They have found indications that models tend to be young and slender during economic boom times and voluptuous and mature during recession. The 'history' driver added more depth to the hunch in terms of the development of ideals of beauty. The journalist refers to ethnologist Marianne Thesander, who has done research on the topic. This forms the basis for a comparative analysis between women today and the slim, liberated women of the 1920s. They experienced a shift towards a more curvy body ideal after the Crash in 1929 that lasted throughout the depression in the 1930s.

Moving into the Pink circle, the article also made use of 'industry' to describe the economic interests of the fashion industry in promoting a more curvaceous ideal. The article mentions how BBC – a 'media' driver – has estimated that about 62% of all American women are plus-sized rendering the market potential considerable. During recession, where the luxury industry tends to suffer, targeting plus-sized consumers might be seen as a pragmatic strategy on the part of the industry.

The article does not venture into the 'sociality' driver of the Pink circle though it may have held interesting perspectives. A celebration of curvy women in an age where health and fighting obesity is a national priority in many Western countries, the trend seems paradoxical. Exactly the paradox has been a primary 'social premium' since the millennium as a driver in fashion trends. This has been seen in the celebration of the *nerd*, the *homeless*, and the *bimbo* in fashion, which may have seemed odd or even inappropriate but have nevertheless been widespread. The explanation is to be found in the premium needed to create social distinction in an age where conspicuous consumption is no longer the primary status marker. Rather than demonstrating economic status, the surplus of time, creativity, and social courage have tended to dominate as social currency. This type of social currency has proven to be more effective in stalling the inevitable imitation process that forces trend setters to distinguish themselves again. This development can help explain

the rise of the voluptuous woman in 2010 as a result of the sociality driver and what might be determined the 'logic of wrong' in terms of social mechanisms (Mackinney-Valentin 2010).

The article does not refer to practice on 'street' level. It is to be expected that not all drivers provide material to qualify the hunch if the model is to be able to encompass a variety of trends and design approaches. But students are encouraged to explore all the drivers nonetheless because unexpected perspectives may occur. This happened when a fashion student at the Danish Design School had chosen a hunch regarding Greenlandic jewelry. She had not initially considered looking at the 'industry' driver. When she did, she discovered that Danish designer Peter Jensen had designed 'kamiks' in 2009 inspired by the traditional Greenlandic footwear. Consequently, he received death threats from angered Greenlanders who felt disrespected by the designer. The student then explored the 'theory' driver to become more reflected about her role as a designer in a cross-cultural context. Post-colonial theory gave her insight into the potential problems of using inspiration from a former colony.

In the teaching session, the Green ring was not used because the exercise had in a sense been backward in using the article – a possible output – to exemplify the process. However, being a type of output the article could in fact have formed the basis of a moodboard using the trend for curvy women as inspiration for a plus size collection. It may also have been used in a more abstract way as a scenario about the 'motherly' or 'maturity' as a hunch.

DART – PROBLEMS AND POTENTIALS

Despite rumors that trends have been going out of fashion (Cartner-Morley, 2007; Magner, 2008), there is still a need for spotting, tracking, and working with trends. Designers need inspiration and methods for decoding markets, moods, and consumers. Just as trend forecasting came out of historical events in the 1960s with the development in industrialization and the rise of youth culture as cardinal points, the current state of the fashion industry and consumer behavior have also created a need for new methods. These methods should root the trend work in the designer or brand to create original and innovative products that cater to an individualist credo while acknowledging the collective nature of trends.

We set out to develop a singular model with a differentiated result where each user works with his or her own sensibilities, qualities, and interests. The idea was to create a tool to map and read signs in a specific context, in order for future designers to be better able to operate more systematically in relation to the creative process without reducing the important role of intuition.

To ensure a broad sense of the potentials and problems of DART, teaching sessions have been carried out at the Danish Design School with fashion students but also furniture textile, and others; Designskolen Kolding with fashion students; The Copenhagen School of Design and Technology (KEA) in a course entitled "Trend Communication", and TEKO Design and Management College with students from retail management, brand management, purchasing management, and pattern design.

Following the teaching sessions, formal interviews have been conducted with selected students. The feedback has been remarkably positive. The students have highlighted the ability to create structure to the often confusing process of clarifying a hunch. They have also welcomed the framework that allows their hunch to be rooted in a specific context on a solid basis. The overall experience has been that the model serves to organize, qualify, and develop rather than limit the student's individual inspiration and disposition because the process is directed by the student's personal hunch according to relevant drivers.

But there have also been challenges. While The Danish Design School and Designskolen Kolding have university status and are therefore accustomed to applying theory to practice, the business-oriented design schools KEA and TEKO are not trained to do so. When given an introduction to trend theory, the students at these schools were fully equipped to embark on the DART process with useful results. However, without this introduction it would be more problematic. This foregrounds the current need for qualified teaching material in Trend Studies specifically for business-oriented design schools. When this is solved, this issue of working with theory in DART should be less pertinent.

The DART approach is currently still in development. One aspect not yet explored theoretically is the question of didactics in general and learning styles in particular (Schön 1987; Dunn 2000) in relation to DART as a visual learning tool. Potentially, this approach could further support the potentials of DART presuming that many design students are visual learners.

Another step is to study how a hunch that has been qualified through the DART method fares compared to the practice generally employed at design schools in Denmark. The general practice today seems to be less formally structured and based on each student's individual disposition and the particular idea or concept in question. An international perspective is also essential to completing the development of the DART model.

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