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Retail stores as brands: performances, theatre and space

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The scholars of Consumer Culture Theory studies as well as practitioners have recognised the potential power of spatial design in stores in constructing and communicating retail brands. Retail space and the aesthetic structuring of a range of expressive artefacts have become the stage on which shop attendants perform. This paper focuses on how management and shop attendants of Dutch menswear fashion house Oger communicate and construct the Oger brand, with a special focus on the spatial settings of the retail store. This study shows how the management carefully combines elements generally found in Italian ateliers, English gentlemen's clubs and boardrooms. The symbolic message behind the spatial design of the Oger flagship store is that of human quest for wealth and fame removed from the everyday life. In addition to this earlier observed interplay between design, display and consumption processes, this study indicates the important role of shop attendants in constructing and communicating retail brands. By forging links with organisation studies, we show how retail management carefully designed, managed and orchestrated retail space, objects and shop attendants' roles to construct and communicate the Oger brand. The selling of products through performances in designed theatres connects organisation and economic and aesthetic realms. Finally, the paper introduces "internal design proxemics" as an extra analytical concept of spatial settings.

Keywords: space; retail store; brand; theatre; performance; visual ethnography

Introduction

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is increasingly focusing on the potential power of spatial settings in terms of communicating fashion brands (e.g. Olins 1989; Crewe and Lowe 1995; Schmitt, Simonsen, and Marcus 1995; Miller et al. 1998; Schmitt 1999; Smith 2000; Gregson, Crewe, and Brooks 2002a; Turley and Chebat 2002; Kent 2003; Schroeder 2003). CCT studies define branding as the process by which a cultural work is designed and communicated to function as its own advertisement in order to create an audience (Lury 2004). As branding is currently the dominant strategy around which retail competition is structured, retailers use the material environment of retail stores to distinguish themselves from their competitors (Smith 2000; Gregson, Crewe, and Brooks 2002b). This is done through the architectural design of shopping malls, retail shops and interior retail spaces (Olins 1989), with fashion houses, clothing stores and shopping centres attracting special attention (Kent 2003). Examples of innovative retail architecture can be found in Prada's flagship stores in New York, designed by Rem Koolhaas, in the fashionable Aoyama district in Tokyo, designed by Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, and finally in the

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ESPN Zone. Kozinets et al. (2002) described the architecture of this zone, demonstrating that the building:

> is constructed around a circular theme, such that the gently curving lines on the periphery always return to their originating point. At the centre of the circle is the "production booth" in which the programmer sits, surrounded by monitors, deciding which sports events (and, occasionally, other programmes such as soap operas) will be broadcast on the dozens of embedded screens. With a curved sky-painted dome, a stratospheric cathedral ceiling reminiscent of natural and spiritual realms, a circular staircase and a circular logo-embedded rotunda, the circle is multiply present within ESPN Zone. (Kozinets et al. 2002, 22)

The symbolic message behind the circularity as expressed in the ESPN Zone is one of human continued attempt to grasp eternity, completion and infinity (Kozinets et al. 2002). This example typifies how a built environment may use the concept of circularity to create a brand on a physical level. Thus, spatial settings and the aesthetic structuring of a range of expressive artefacts are increasingly pervasive components of the construction and communication of brands (Peñaloza 1998).

Within CCT, servicescape studies generally include environmental dimensions such as ambient conditions (noise, music and aromas) and space (design, layout and furnishing) as well as signs and symbols (style and personal artefacts) (Bitner 1992). In the space dimension, a special emphasis is placed on the impact of spatial design and physical environments on customers and employees (e.g. Bitner 1992; Habraken and Teicher 1998; Peñaloza 1998; Sherry 1998; Sherry et al. 2001; Arnould and Thompson 2005; Rosenbaum 2005). Peñaloza (1998), for example, studied Niketown and showed how its architectural design with atriums, passageways and concept rooms helped siphon consumers through the place, providing multi-sensorial stimulation at every turn and thus inviting imaginative associations. Other examples include the socially constructed meaning of place in Creigton's (1998) study of the Japanese retail store SEED and Sherry's (1998) study of Niketown. We learn that the spatial design of retail space not only influences consumers' and shop attendants' behaviour but also, in return, gives a symbolic meaning to spatial design (Rosenbaum 2005; Schembri and Boyle 2005). In their study of the American Girl brand, Diamond et al. (2009) found that the brand was located within a complex system of sources with connections that are not linear and causal but rather probabilistic and reciprocal. Retail space is thus "brought into being, orchestrated, performed in interaction and, as negotiated, is accepted, resisted and interpreted by both consumers and shop attendant" (Gregson, Crewe, and Brooks 2002b, 1663). If brands represent symphonies of meaning, managers must be viewed as orchestrators and conductors as well as composers, whose role is not only to coordinate and synchronise but also to create (Diamond et al. 2009, 131).

Let us now take a closer look at the shop attendants and their interpretation of spatial settings (Turley and Chebat 2002; Pettinger 2004). Recently, organisation and management studies have placed spatial settings for work and their effects on employees centre stage (e.g. Hernes 2004; Kornberger and Clegg 2004; Hernes, Bakken, and Olsen 2006, Rafaeli and Pratt 2006; Strati 2006; Yanow 2006; Dale and Burrell 2008; van Marrewijk and Yanow 2010). These studies teach that spatial settings in organisations shape action and interaction by employees and in turn are reshaped on the part of these employees. The production and reproduction of space are what Hernes, Bakken, and Olsen (2006) called the recursive view on organisational

space. In summary, it can be stated that shop attendants form an important factor in the shaping of retail space.

In view of the above, it can be argued that a recursive view on retail space and shop attendants in the construction of retail brands has been understudied, despite a number of earlier investigations (e.g. Olins 1989; Crewe and Lowe 1995; Schmitt, Simonsen, and Marcus 1995; Peñaloza 1998; Sherry 1998; Schmitt 1999; Smith 2000; Gregson, Crewe, and Brooks 2002b; Pettinger 2004, Diamond et al. 2009). In this paper, we seek to answer the call for empirical studies (Gregson, Crewe, and Brooks 2002a; Küpers 2002) on space and spatial arrangement(s) in retail shops as used to construct and to communicate a brand.

This theoretical exploration leads to this paper's research question concerning the way in which a brand is communicated and constructed by management and shop attendants, with a special focus on the spatial settings of the retail store. To answer this question, we investigated the Dutch Oger fashion store, the leading menswear retail company in the Netherlands. We selected Oger because personal service is more extensive in top market segments as stores become more and more exclusive (Pettinger 2004). In addition, clothing stores and shopping centres tend to attract the most design attention (Kent 2003). We were allowed to film the interaction between customers and shop attendants as well as backstage work processes. The visual recording of events, rituals, physical settings and interviews has proven to be highly useful in consumer research (e.g. Emmison and Smith 2000; Belk and Kozinets 2005). In addition to filming events, this study engaged in qualitative ethnographic research in terms of participant observation, observation and interviewing.

Thus, this paper forms an extension of previous studies of spatial settings in CCT literature. Earlier studies (e.g. Peñaloza 1998; Kozinets et al. 2002) have observed the interplay between design, display and consumption processes in constructing and communicating retail brands. By forging links with organisation studies, our study adds the important role of the staff members in constructing and communicating a retail brand. The findings of our study show how Oger management carefully designed, managed and orchestrated retail space, objects and shop attendants' roles to construct and communicate the Oger brand. Furthermore, this paper introduces "internal design proxemics" as an extra element of Yanow's (2006) analytical concept of spatial settings and helpful in the analysis of spatial shop design.

The paper is structured as follows. First, a theoretical discussion is presented on the performance of shop attendants in the spatial settings of a retail theatre. The methodological section addresses the question how spatial settings can be studied in retail stores and theorises about the use of film as a research tool. Next, the case of Oger fashion is discussed and findings are presented. Our discussion presents the spatial settings and the sociomaterial performances that construct the Oger fashion brand. Finally, conclusions are drawn on the production of retail space.

Performances in the retail theatre spatial settings

In developing retail shops, retailers and designers have converted the ordinary experience of consumers into a form of entertainment and hedonistic experience (Miller et al. 1998). The store offers consumers exclusiveness and authenticity by creating factual and spatiotemporal links. In their study on coffee establishments in Sweden and Denmark, for example, Kjeldgaard and Ostberg (2007) found three types of brands, which they called "americana," "culinaria" and "viennesia," referring to places of

origin. For example, the "culinaria" establishments mainly refer to Italian names, Italian décor, with baristas from Italy and menus written entirely in Italian to reinforce their Italian identity. In doing this, retail space has become a show stage attracting consumers and allowing retailers to charge a premium price for what may be termed commodity products or services (Kent 2003). Dovey (1999, 15) called this seduction the most subtle and embedded form of spatial power in which people identify themselves with specific spatial settings. Here, one might think of a beautiful up-market shopping arena, a cool and aesthetically pleasing space that draws one into its folds through the delights of the market that it contains – if only one strolls through and lets oneself go with the unfolding spectacle of beauty, fashion and scents. Gallérie Lafayette in Paris would be such an example. In summary, retailers now frequently use the metaphor of the retail shop as a theatre (Baron, Harris, and Harris 2001).

The notion of retail experience as a theatrical experience has been discussed in earlier marketing and consumer literature (e.g. Fisk and Grove 1996; Peñaloza 1998; Sherry 1998; Baron, Harris, and Harris 2001; Kozinets et al. 2002; Grandey 2003). These studies frequently refer to theatre concepts such as front-stage, backstage, scripts, roles and settings in the context of service encounters, which originates from Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective on human behaviour in everyday life. This perspective allows us to understand how a theatre removes consumers from everyday life and isolates them in a constructed environment in order to create a unique and aesthetic experience (Fisk and Grove 1996; Gagliardi 2009).

To this end, shop attendants need a mixture of scripted role-playing and improvisation (Sherry et al. 2001, 502). They have to create, clearly visible to all visitors, a drama performance in the spatial settings of a retail theatre (Fisk and Grove 1996). This performance of service is a continual and forced repetition of organisational norms that have the effect of embedding and stabilising cultural practices (Schembri and Boyle 2005). It means that shop attendants need the capacity to perform services as emotional labour (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993). Here, emotional labour is the display of expected emotions by shop attendants during service encounters. It is performed through surface acting, in which emotions are a careful presentation of learned verbal and non-verbal cues, and through deep acting, in which one actually experiences the emotions that one displays (Grandey 2003).

At this point, it has to be noted that employees in the retail industry are generally not used to performing scripted role-playing in retail theatres. Traditionally, they receive low wages, are bored with their work and unmotivated, and they frequently resign from work (Baron, Harris, and Harris 2001, 112). Therefore, employees are commonly trained to be actors, to perform corporate acts, to interact with customers and to involve with the store and its products. These roles played by shop attendants in the retail theatre are related to consumer roles.

In this respect, Baron, Harris and Harris (2001) introduced new concepts to denote four different roles that consumers can play in a retail theatre, namely "voyeur," "spect-actor," "sense-ceptor" and "connoisseur." For each of these roles, employees have to act differently. First, in what Baron, Harris and Harris (2001) called the consumer as voyeur, there is minimum employee–consumer interaction, and employees perform backstage roles (supplying products when required and changing environments) or front-stage roles as characters in a scenario. Second, in the case of a consumer as spect-actor, both customers and employees are fully aware of their roles, with employees acting as the primary facilitators of information exchange among customers rather than acting as experts in the field presented. Third, in the case of a consumer as sense-

ceptor, employees are backstage, handling merchandise, as well as front-stage, acting as assistants, advisers and facilitators in trials. Finally, with the consumer as connoisseur, employees play front-stage roles as human exhibits, interacting creatively with customers, as well as backstage roles, changing the environment (Baron, Harris, and Harris 2001). In summary, for each type of retail theatre, shop attendants need to display distinct roles.

We have now gained insight into the role-playing expected from employees, but how is this related to spatial settings in retail theatres? Diamond et al. (2009, 131) stated that powerful brands are the product of dynamic interaction among multiple sources and, therefore, suggest a more complete and holistic understanding of sociocultural branding. In line with this view, we feel that a stringent demarcation between consumption phenomena and their context is not possible and not desirable (Peñaloza 1998). On the contrary, it is especially a holistic analysis of spatial settings and social behaviour that results in a better understanding of organisations (O'Toole and Were 2008). Therefore, the social and the material should no longer be seen as distinct and largely independent spheres of organisational life (Latour 1993; Orlikowski 2007). Increasingly, tacit meanings of material forms interact with consumers in retail theatres (Kozinets et al. 2002). Peñaloza (1998), for example, described how sculptures, glass and wooden cases, lighting and the use of velour ropes and other theatrical props, such as cables suspending athletes' portraits from the ceiling, were effective in invoking a new reality for consumers and shop attendants. This sociomaterial perspective of retail theatres is helpful in studying the material and symbolic stage as well as the social performance displayed by shop attendants in constructing and communicating the Oger brand.

Methodological reflections on studying organisational spaces

Key methods used in CCT are ethnographic research and qualitative data collection focusing on the experiential and sociocultural dimensions of consumption that are not plainly accessible through experiments, surveys or database modelling (for an overview, see Arnould and Thompson 2005). Similarly, in our study, these methods have played a key role as well. We used ethnographic methods of participative observation, non-participant observation, systematic data collection, recording and filming in a natural setting (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006).

In view of the above, it must be noted here that ethnographic literature emphasises the ways in which the researcher himself or herself is the primary research "tool," because the researcher's self is not separable from interpretations and events (Van Maanen 1995). We believe that empathic understanding presupposes an emic perspective: the researcher studies the organisation "from within" and puts himself (or herself) in the employee's shoes (Wallendorf and Belk 1989; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006). Researchers might then gain a "feel" for organisational behaviour within the spatial settings of an organisation (Strati 1999; Warren 2008). In this way, researchers themselves can become valid sources of data through their own experiences, refining their capacity to empathise with others and imagining what it might be like to be them walking through and/or working in these same spaces (Warren 2008, 563).

In this way, initial observations have been made concerning location, atmosphere, in-store design, retail space, clothing, uniforms and customers. Our field research started with a guided tour of the Oger Fashion stores in Amsterdam. Following this introduction, we spent 2 months observing shop attendants and customers in the

Amsterdam-based Oger flagship store and during fashion presentations held by Oger Lusink in The Hague and Amsterdam. Furthermore, desk research was carried out to understand the history, development and vision of the fashion house. We analysed the Oger website, newspaper and magazine articles, and television interviews as well as two television documentaries on the fashion.

In general, researchers access space through observing spatial vocabularies, with whatever degree of participation, and then through interpreting them (Joy and Sherry 2003; Warren 2008; van Marrewijk 2009). To analyse spatial vocabularies, Yanow's (2006) analytical concept for the study of organisational space is applied here. She proposed a systematic analysis of space and physical arrangements by means of four different categories. First, her "design vocabularies" concern a building's shape, height, width, mass, scale and material and involve a situation-specific comparison of similarities and differences with surrounding buildings. Second, what Yanow called "design gesture" concerns design elements that ignore, contrast or align with surrounding buildings and spaces. Third, her "design proxemics" incorporate the context of culturally specific meaning and involve the social and personal spaces between people that shape human behaviour and interaction. Finally, "décor" includes not only furnishing, furniture, art, chairs, statues and photographs but also dress codes and hairstyles (Yanow 2006). These four categories were used in our study and amended to include what we term "internal design proxemics" as an extra element in design proxemics.

In our preliminary investigations, we analysed data gathered during the first 4 weeks on the basis of traditional ethnography, which offered us a framework for filming the Oger theatre. From the first analysis, a series of important topics emerged: street facade, interior design, customer and shop attendant interaction, special boardroom treatment for exclusive clients, backstage control, management philosophy and, finally, the Oger Academy. Visual media were used for further data collection. As was stated in the introduction, filming is an effective and reliable method for the observation of interaction between customers and shop attendants within the spatial settings of a retail store. This enabled us to use camera shots, stills and slow-motion pictures to analyse and to reanalyse, if necessary, behaviour in the greatest possible detail. Film registration allows the researcher to concentrate on different aspects of the image and to recognise diverse and subtle details which would otherwise have been missed (El Guindi 2004; Belk and Kozinets 2005). Our film shoot was taken during 2 full weeks by a cameraman – a student of the School of Arts working on his examination project – and a freelance sound technician. Scenes to be filmed were based upon the topics discussed earlier. Similar techniques have been used by Collier (1967), Barbash and Taylor (1997), Ruby (2000) and Belk and Kozinets (2005).

Still, in view of the above, it must be stated that the presence of audiovisual media may hinder the interaction between researcher and field of study (Pink 2007). In our case, however, this phenomena proved to be of little influence because the people we filmed (many of them were media and soccer stars) had a wide experience with public exposure. We had permission to openly film customers in the shop but were not allowed to interview them, as they wanted to go about their business undisturbed. Customers were always asked permission before filming. It took shop attendants approximately 3 days to become used to the camera presences in the store.

In-depth interviewing is generally viewed as an important part of market-oriented ethnography (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). During the shoots, in-depth interviews were held – and filmed – with founder Oger Lusink, his two sons, two management

team members and five shop attendants. We chose not to be filmed ourselves when conducting research as our main focus lay on the interaction between shop attendants and consumers. Film shoots started at 8.15 a.m. and lasted until 9.00 p.m., resulting in 22 tapes with a total of 17 h of film.

It is a well-known fact that the analysis of visual data is time consuming (Pink 2007; Rose 2007): it took us roughly 80 h. First, all 17 h of film were watched in their entirety as we made notes on the topics of interest mentioned earlier. A second viewing of the film data focused on the interaction of spatial settings, materiality and the performance demonstrated by shop attendants. Next, the selected scenes were viewed again and transcribed. This could result in the translation of (Dutch) interview data or a description of an interaction between shop attendants and customers. These findings were compared with the results from data gathered earlier.

Spatial design of the Oger theatre

The Oger flagship store in Amsterdam is located in the middle of one of the most expensive and prestigious Dutch shopping streets. Customers of the Oger flagship store first enter the Pieter Cornelis (PC) Hooftstraat – named after a sixteenth-century Dutch poet. Many flagship stores and luxury shops are established in this exclusive shopping street, with the flagship stores of Louis Vuitton, Lyppen Diamonts and Ralph Lauren neighbouring the Oger flagship store. However, Oger is the largest of all and occupies the street numbers 75, 77, 79 and 81. The shopping street attracts rich and wealthy consumers as well as consumers looking for a special shopping experience. On a daily basis, international media stars, soccer players and other celebrities drive their luxury cars in the street to go shopping. The Dutch language even has a special name to denote these massive cars: "PC tractors." On many occasions we observed Oger customers parking their cars in the loading area in front of the shop where they were not allowed to park. In summertime, the shopping street itself has the décor of a large "catwalk," visited by numerous Dutch celebrities and thereby attracting media attention. The location of the Oger flagship store in the PC Hooftstraat, what Yanow (2006) called the "design gesture," attracts rich and wealthy consumers and simultaneously excludes consumers who are intimidated by the spatial settings (Dovey 1999). Customers approaching the Oger flagship store notice that:

> Two flags with the Dutch national colours are flying above twenty-five meter wide shop windows. On these windows, the first name of the founder can be found in five different places, printed in large gold letters. Wim, a 26 year-old shop attendant is impeccably dressed in his Corneliani suit, cleaning the lower part of the window with a white cloth. It is his job to do this every morning as the entrance has to be perfectly clean. Two consumers passing by can now clearly observe the menswear and the shop interior through the windows and are given a red-carpet welcome at the open entrance. (Film observations)

Oger Fashion is regarded as one of the top menswear business enterprises in the Dutch fashion industry (Van Dijk 2008). Together with his brothers Martin and Rob, Oger Lusink started the company in 1989. It was his first of seven stores, located in the most prestigious PC Hooftstraat in Amsterdam. Later, the company expanded to Haarlem, Rotterdam, Den Haag, Enschede and, in early 2009, to Antwerp, Belgium. Furthermore, Oger Lusink runs franchise stores of the Italian label Ermenegildo

Zegna, of women's designer Erny van Reijmersdal, and he runs the Donna Oger shop for ladies wear. The company's headquarters, based in Purmerend, coordinates the purchase of Italian menswear brands such as Corneliani, Borelli Cucinelli, Brioni and Canarelli, and they also outsource the tailoring production of two house labels to Italy. Oger Fashion is a family business with both Oger's sons, a number of nephews and nieces and more than 130 employees.

The front-stage of the Oger flagship store in Amsterdam is designed to host three different spatial areas, each on a distinct split-level floor. The areas, connected by stairs, have numerous spaces, settings and corners for shop attendants to interact with their clients. In each area, a different range of products is presented, with casual clothing in the Informal area, business suits in the Dressed4Success area and the self-selected made-to-measure wardrobe in the Atelier Italia area. The three areas are designed according to the Dutch cliché values of an "Italian fashion atelier": quality, style, warmth, chaos and passion. "Our stores have to reflect the hectic atmosphere of an Italian atelier," the store manager explained. Although Oger management frequently visit Italian ateliers to buy fabrics and suits, the shop attendants are Dutch and have never visited an Italian atelier.

The "Italian design" is combined with the spatial setting of an English gentlemen's club. Oger Lusink's earlier work experience in London formed the source of inspiration for the club idea. Management and employees associate "English" with warmth, intelligence, respect and trust:

> It may be chaotic, but it has the warmth of an English gentlemen's club. On our desk lies a book of the most beautiful libraries in the world and that's important to us. For Oger, a library implies the knowledge of generations and that's quite powerful; to browse and indulge in the book in a peaceful atmosphere. It provides the employees with a feeling of security. (Interview with store manager)

The front-stage of the theatre serves as the platform for the social interaction between customers and shop attendants. Although its design has a clear philosophy, the question is whether the shop attendants actually experience any security from the spatial settings (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Split-level floor (still of film Broos "Getting acquaintance with Oger" © Broos).

Sociomaterial performances in the Oger theatre

The Oger flagship store is decorated with a large number of theatrical probes, such as golden handles and banisters. In the shop, large mirrors measuring 2 × 1 and 2 × 2 m, with golden antique-looking frames, are located in front of a round table with two leather Chesterfields. The mirrors reflect chandeliers and wooden parquet, which is polished every morning. In addition, a huge basket full of apples is placed upon a long table at the entrance. Next to the basket stands a three-layered fountain pouring out hot chocolate. Other objects stem from the shop's range of menswear accessories: ties, watches, cuffs, aftershave lotions and shoes are presented in luxury compartments. There is even a special cabinet with different coloured braces. Finally, objects can be found with shop attendants wearing tape measures around their necks, while others carry them in their suit pockets. All shop attendants are dressed in suits – which have to be purchased from the store – making them human exhibits.

In this setting of theatrical probes, customers are served coffee under the soft tones of lounge and jazz music. At the same time, the customer listens to the shop attendant who discusses different kinds of fabric. The shop attendant thus constructs a performance using a mirror, table, coffee and suits in racks (Figure 2).

> Peter, a 24 year-old shop attendant is busy with a customer. He has four different suits hanging on the wall, while the customer fits a jacket and moves towards a man-size mirror. Customer to Peter: "It is too tight, especially on the shoulders it does not fit very well, but I very much like this fabric. If the fit were slightly more natural, that would be fine." Peter, "Shall we start with selecting the fabric? Would you like to have another cup of coffee?" While the customer sits down in the Chesterfield chair at a wooden table to drink his coffee, Peter brings in his colleague Taco. Taco shakes hands with the client. Peter to client: "Together, we will customise your suit." (Film observation)

In the example given above, we see a discussion between the customer and the shop attendant about suit details and fabric. Here, the shop attendant plays the role of an adviser with his colleague acting as the assistant specialised in "measuring." In the above performance, it is not so much the actual presence of shop attendants but

Figure 2. Theatrical probes in Oger shop (still of film "Getting acquaintance with Oger" © Broos).

rather the number of attendants that symbolises luxury (Csaba 2008). Other artefacts – such as ladders – are part of the script. To collect the items of clothing required, employees have to use a small ladder to reach the upper parts of the cupboards that go up to the ceiling, while the customer is watching and drinking his coffee. According to the shop attendants interviewed, this symbolises the level of service: "we do everything for the client."

The performance continues after the customer's measurements have been taken:

> The customer is drinking his coffee while Vincent brings two books with fabric samples. While the customer remains seated, Vincent bows down to show his client different fabrics, forcing himself into an uncomfortable position. The customer feels the different fabrics, takes a smell and then makes his decision: "I like this one, but I can't really see the colours well in this light." Vincent: "Ok, shall we walk outside?" Both Vincent and the customer descend the staircase, go outside and study the fabrics in daylight. The customer again touches and feels the fabrics and finally says "This one." "Ok" says Vincent. They return, walk up the stairs, and the customer sits down to finish his coffee. (Film observation)

Here we see that the shopping street itself also forms part of the Oger theatre. Walking outside to see fabrics in daylight, to feel the material – and even to smell it – is all part of the sociomaterial performance.

The Italian atelier

Central to the concept of the "Italian atelier" design are long wooden counters and tables which are used to tailor clothes. Given the size of the room, some tables are small and long, others are square or round. Tables with flower bouquets are situated everywhere in the shop. Most of these occupy a central position in the various shop spaces, with customers and attendants intermingling. It was frequently observed that attendants measure suits and fold them on these tables, that coffee cups are put on the tables and that social small talk between shop attendants and customers takes place at the edge of a table:

> Simon rests one of his hands on the table while responding to his international client who is standing at the other side of the table; "Everything is going well now with the family. It is such a joy, ours is just three now. Have I shown you the pictures? Don't children grow fast?" Client nods and takes a sip of his coffee. (Film observation in shop)

The tables are also used by craftsmen demonstrating their knowledge and craftsmanship to customers during special "Italian weekends." During these weekends, the atmosphere of an "Italian atelier" is imitated. One man in a leather apron polishes shoes at one of the tables while customers are watching him. A tailor shows his craftsmanship in the shop window by displaying how to stitch a hand-made suit. Other references to Italy can be found in many artefacts, such as the Italian Maserati cars that are parked in front of the store. An "Italian" smell is created by bowls filled with potpourri positioned in different places in the shop. In the interviews, employees and management frequently mention Italian-style elements, fashion brands, passion and Italian atmospheres in relation to Oger's Italian atelier concept. Oger Lusink even connects the organisation's family structure with successful Italian family brands:

> Thanks to the interest of my nieces, nephews and sons **…**we've built up a sense of family, because they all want to join (the company). Look at Italy, you see the Benettons,

> the Zegnas, the Agnellis. The most successful companies in Italy are family-run. (Interview with Oger Lusink)

Like an Italian "patron," the owner regularly acts as host and is physically present in the store: he walks around, exchanges kisses, makes jokes and shakes hands with customers as well as employees. He performs the role of a celebrity among other celebrities on Saturdays.

> On Saturdays, when he's in the store, he's really the centre of it all. He talks to people, they talk to him. He's really good at that. (Interview with shop attendant)

The "sacred" boardroom

The characteristics of the English gentlemen's club are best observed in the exclusive boardroom. This spacious room is located separately from the rest of the shop, on the highest floor. It is only open to members of the Dutch Royal family, business leaders and celebrities and, at the request of these customers, outside regular shopping hours. The room's limited access and its location are in line with the patterns selected for most executive's offices – on the top floors (Betts 2006). Indeed, the interior of Oger's boardroom with its large open fire, a library half filled with books, a large wooden table with a cigar box on top, four large silver candles, designer furniture, a chandelier full of small crystals, leather chairs and a wooden floor most resembles artefacts and spatial design associated with boardrooms as discussed by Betts (2006). She studied boardrooms in different organisations and stated that "the board room signifies that the organisation is important enough to have a separate space dedicated to holding particular, usually quite expensive, furniture" (Betts 2006, 162). The spatial layout and the special opening hours of Oger's boardroom provide an exclusive floor for the highest level of service: in total privacy and discretion, men can select clothing from the walk-in wardrobe.

Boardroom objects act in very particular contextualised ways to create and signify power (Betts 2006, 165). The boardroom in the Oger theatre, with its oak table, chandelier, elegant Chesterfields and a portrait of the Dutch Royal family, is meant to let each shop attendant think that:

> I'm surrounded by the most beautiful things in the world. Nothing can go wrong. What we've got here is to be found nowhere else. (Interview with store manager)

However, not all employees feel secure enough to offer the high level of service needed in the boardroom. For some of the shop attendants, the performance required is too difficult:

> I feel that it's not my cup of tea. You have to spend a lot of time talking to the customer and know a lot about big boats and expensive cars and watches. Well, that's too much for me. (Interview with shop attendant of Dressed4Success)

For others, the theatre is a pleasant stage for performing. During our presence, we observed how John, a good-looking shop attendant, is, in our perception, flirting with a client to break the ice:

> Clearly, she [the wife/girlfriend] is making the decision on buying. While the man she is accompanying waits for her decision in a corner of the room, she interacts with John. They

> laugh, while John moves his hair behind his ears as she does. They step towards each other, and for a moment the two touch, while laughing and drinking coffee. In the corner, the man is still waiting with his new outfit. (Film observations)

We interpreted John's behaviour in this scene as "deep acting" (Grandey 2003).

Backstage control

In terms of control, it can be stated that the Oger management orchestrates the drama performances demonstrated by shop attendants backstage, invisible to the consumers. These performances have to be absolutely perfect and in line with the company's management philosophy:

> Perfection is the slogan I live by. I love perfection; I love it when things are organised perfectly, when they're clean. When the lights all work, the van looks good, the store windows look fantastic, my employees look good. When the atmosphere is nice. (Interview with Oger Lusink)

To reach this type of perfection, the company's philosophy is transferred to new employees through training. Training takes place outside regular working hours – which is not paid extra – and the programme consists of four modules: (1) expert knowledge, (2) technology, (3) sales skills and (4) media training and team building. Every new employee is offered a temporary contract and is informed about the tasks and roles of a personal adviser (Van Dijk 2008). After a successful initial period of 6 months, the new employee obtains a contract for another 6 months. Then, he (or she) starts the second module in which technology and expertise are taught. In a third module, sales skills are taught. After successfully passing the tests, employees finally obtain a fixed contract. The training programme frequently uses the metaphor of the theatre. In "module 1," interactions between customers and personal advisers are discussed by the commercial manager:

> Seven new shop attendants are grouped around the darkly-polished wooden table boasting two silver candles. The commercial manager explains that the personal relationship between customer and shop attendants includes personal emotions and passion. The commercial manager "We offer a drama set, and you are to have a leading role in the play. I use this metaphor often, for I see people who do in fact have the right qualities don't always pay attention and may even disappear into the background, ending up with only a minor role." (Film observations)

As we saw in the example above, much attention is paid to drama, passion and roles. Nevertheless, we also observed a gap between managerial rhetoric and daily practices in the shop. Management rhetoric emphasised the moving away of the company's transactional history, where it was important how much one sold, towards a "culture where we talk about how many customers we serve" (interview with commercial manager). In daily practice, however, we observed the undiminished importance of turnover and sales:

> Saturday afternoon after closing time, all eighteen shop attendants gathered in a circle to listen to the commercial manager who complimented Vanessa, a shop attendant, on her "mega" sales that week. Commercial manager: "Friday, Vanessa called a number of people in her personal network to offer some new menswear and she sold for more than 10,000 Euros that afternoon. A mega sale. Very well done, Vanessa." Vanessa responded by saying; "I didn't do this on my own." (Film observation)

Such pressure is demanding for employees. Moreover, the high level of service, the need for perfection, the social interaction with customers and the drama involved all require an employee's total commitment. For some employees, these demands are too much.

> Recently we had a young man of 26 who became heavily overworked. This may have had various causes, but one of them could be that his inner feelings and his outside performance didn't complement each other. (When this happens) one can become exhausted. (Interview with commercial manager)

The spatial settings of the Oger theatre makes it hard for shop attendants to "hide." They are in fact, together with the customer, performing front-stage. To perform the role needed in the Oger theatre, shop attendants choose to wear a mask and select a strategy to deal with tensions related to the job.

> If you go to the PC Hooftstraat in the morning, you put on your mask and you change completely, so to speak. And if you go home in the evening, you take the mask off. It's the mask of something you really are not; what you have to do is keep it on all day to manoeuvre between all sorts of clients. With a lot of clients you normally wouldn't socialise, but you have to in business. (Interview with shop attendant)

The backstage control of the shop attendants' acculturation, commitment and role performance appeared to be important themes in the orchestration of the Oger brand.

Discussion

This paper explored how the Oger brand is communicated and constructed by management and shop attendants within the spatial settings of the flagship store. As with other branded servicescapes (e.g. Diamond et al. 2009), the Oger flagship store serves as a repository of objects and experiences gathered from outside sources. The Oger management has carefully designed, composed and orchestrated the Italian atelier, the English gentlemen's club and the boardroom in which customers have their momentary glimpses of identification with fame and glory. The symbolic message behind the spatial design of the Oger flagship store is that of human's quest for wealth and fame. These spatial settings together construct the Oger theatre (Table 1).

The spatial settings of this Oger retail theatre make up the stage for shop attendants to perform and play their roles. They follow a script in which they approach customers as celebrities, engage in a personal conversation on family, lifestyle and glamour and serve drinks and salmon bites. Shop attendants then passionately show new fabrics and suits to the customers using different theatrical props such as tables, books and chairs. When customers are interested, a second shop attendant will join the performance to measure the suit. Here, mirrors and tape measures play an important role. Then, the shop attendant invites customers to study the fabrics in daylight, outside the shop, before making the decision to buy the suit. This performance is what Baron, Harris, and Harris (2001) called a "consumer as connoisseur" retail performance. Sociomaterial performances in the spatial settings of the Oger flagship, such as discussed above, together construct and communicate the Oger brand (Table 2).

An important element in the sociomaterial performance is the "internal design proxemics." This incorporates the context of culturally specific meaning and involves the social and personal spaces between consumers and shop attendants that shape their

Table 1. The spatial settings of the "Oger theatre."

Spatial categories	Oger fashion theatre
Design vocabularies	Width of the façade indicates status Three distinct spatial areas represent different "theatres" (Informal, Dressed4Success and Atelier Italia) Each theatre is situated at a distinct split-level floor Four neighbouring sites in the centre of the most expensive shopping street indicating its prestige
Design gesture	Shop façade with its large golden letters resembles that of other shops in the street Twenty-five-metre-wide shop windows clearly distinguish the shop from other (smaller) shops
Internal design proxemics	Position of mirrors, tables, leather chairs, cups of coffee and suits stimulates and enhances personal performances involving shop attendants and customers Design set-up mimicking an Italian atelier with customers and shop attendants intermingling Corporate design is found in the boardroom
Décor	Décor features traditional theatre décor elements consisting of dark red colours combined with golden artefacts, mirrors and chandeliers Pictures of the Dutch Royal family Shop attendants wear special Oger "uniforms" Red-carpet welcome is organised at an open entrance with "Italian" Maserati and Porsche cars parked in the street

Table 2. Sociomaterial performances as demonstrated by shop attendants in the Oger theatre.

Sociomaterial performances
Spatial location of the shop attracts rich and wealthy consumers while simultaneously excluding others
Mirrors, tables, leather chairs, cups of coffee and suits combined with the social interaction between shop attendants and customers play a vital role
Corporate spatial settings and exclusive opening hours of the boardroom breathe the ambience of a royal lodge restricted to special customers only
Scripted enactment of intimacy
The showing, smelling and testing of fabrics inside as well as outside the shop
Shop attendants socially interact with customers in numerous spaces, settings and shop corners
The owner plays the role of an "Italian patron" on Saturdays
Demonstration of personal and emotional involvement with customers as well as the mingling of shop attendants and customers around tables
Extra attendants are called in for measurements

behaviour and interaction in the shop. In the Oger case, we have observed how objects and spatial settings such as mirrors and tables stimulate personal performances between shop attendants and customers and how the boardroom adds culturally specific meaning to the social interaction between shop attendants and consumers. This "*in*ternal design proxemics" is an extension of Yanow's (2006) spatial categories which, among others, focus on the design proxemics of a building's *ex*terior.

Critical to the success of controlling brand experiences are the processes of socialisation and aestheticisation demonstrated by shop attendants. In the current case, we have seen that shop attendants are selected and trained to perform the emotional labour needed. And it is not only shop attendants who carry out this type of labour, the Oger management, too, play a role as "patrons" or "family members" imitating an Italian fashion family. The spatial design of the Italian atelier, the English gentlemen's club and the boardroom stress the performative character of the job. Unsurprisingly, all the employees regard their work as a demanding performance. Some of them are uneasy about the drama and emotions that are needed to perform and perceive their performance as "putting up a mask," while others find it hard to show empathy and to interact creatively with customers. These are examples of private identities conflicting with the brand (Pettinger 2004).

Conclusions

This paper explored, with a special focus on the spatial settings, how management and shop attendants of Dutch menswear fashion house Oger communicate and construct the Oger brand. The study makes a valuable contribution in the quest for empirical studies on space and spatial arrangements in retail shops (Gregson, Crewe, and Brooks 2002a; Küpers 2002). The Oger case shows how management carefully designed, managed and orchestrated retail space, objects and shop attendants' roles in a "Oger theatre" to construct and communicate the brand. This theatre gives both customers and shop attendants a context for the performance of services and tells them about the nature of goods and services to be found in that specific store (Pettinger 2004). The shop attendants performed their "authentic" roles and interacted with the (not so) rich and famous to support the consumers' hedonistic experience of exclusiveness and authenticity. The store offers consumers exclusiveness and authenticity by creating a factual and spatiotemporal link with Italian fashion ateliers and English corporate boardrooms. Such a linkage was also found by Kjeldgaard and Ostberg (2007) in their study on coffee establishments in Sweden and Denmark. In both cases, we observe the interconnection between economic and aesthetic realms in selling products through "authentic" performances in theatres (Pettinger 2004; Schroeder and Salzer-Mörling 2006).

In these performances, we observed the importance of management and shop attendants in constructing and communicating the Oger brand. Earlier studies (e.g. Peñaloza 1998; Kozinets et al. 2002) have observed the interplay between design, display and consumption processes in constructing and communicating retail brands, but undervalued the roles of staff members. Their roles in the construction of retail brands could be explored by connecting organisation and management studies to consumer culture studies. This connection resulted in a deeper understanding of how selection, acculturation, training, control and management of shop attendants are critical in the construction and maintenance of the "Oger brand." In this construction and maintenance, retail spaces shape action and interaction by staff members and in turn are reshaped on part of these staff members, as indicated by Hernes (2004).

Literature on organisation culture and identity can be helpful to consumer culture scientist to better understand how brands are communicated through different communication channels and how espoused organisational values (Martin 2002), values that corporations want to present themselves to consumers, are aligned with enacted values, values that staff members and consumers experience in retail shops, and with practices of shop attendants. The case study of Benetton is such an example of

connecting the concepts of corporate identity and brand (Borgerson et al. 2009). In the same line, the connection of organisation and management studies with consumer studies increases our understanding of the production and reproduction of spatial settings in constructing brands (Gregson, Crewe, and Brooks 2002a; Diamond et al. 2009). We suggest that the literature of organisation studies may be useful for further research on consumer, markets and culture.

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