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Faux pas? Faking materials, and languages of luxury

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ABSTRACT
The connotations of luxury with exquisite craft, unspoken quality and rarity of materials is no longer an assurance of its status or significance within contemporary fashion practice. The definition of luxury articles has changed from solely evoking a sense of exclusivity and has extended into items of inferior materials and less preciousness. The conspicuous consumption of luxury figurehead brands in the nineties, where the attainment of authentic luxury items was symbolic of status, is no longer as relevant. Instead designers celebrate the irony of appropriating and using the language of luxury for ironic and unexpected outcomes. This is an approach taken up by luxury fashion brands such as Chanel; where the symbolic value of a familiar luxury item such as a fur coat is transformed by use of materials or techniques that are in contrast to the articles familiar provenance, or it is also emblematic of many approaches of emerging contemporary designers who use the idea of luxury as a design language.

This paper looks at luxury fashion articles that have been developed into highly recognizable forms symbolic of expense, craftsmanship and rarity that are increasingly being diffused into a design language as a known or generic form without the legacies of craft, tradition or griffe. Contemporary fashion practitioners readily appropriate these symbols, altering the article with a use of ‘fake’ materials or subvert the craft and techniques involved in the original. The use of design examples will indicate an appropriation of a familiar luxury items or language, which will draw on sociology, philosophy and fashion based theory in rendering the definitions of how design is renewing the language of luxury. An example of this is New York based designers “Slow and Steady Wins the Race” in appropriation of luxury brand ‘it’ bags produced in calico versions or the Hermés “Birkin” remodeled into a four sided ‘double’ version. This presents the way in which design languages use the notion of luxury articles and transcends the meaning previously attached to them. As a main case study I will also follow the trajectory of the animal hide or fur coat, particularly due to its popular associations with luxury. Contemporary fashion designers will be used as examples, in combination with my recent research project, which has seen the use of a fake elephant hide digital model to produce a series of knitted coats.

Design can update the symbolic value of luxury items, by offering a gesture to the former glory and significance of those items by mimicking their forms, but also by offering new ways for us to understand and engage with luxury. Perhaps luxury can be identified as a symbolic language, rather than particular tangible qualities? The challenge or refusal of the staid criteria of luxury is a consequence of the multitude of ways and means we can now experience fashion articles. The proliferation of a luxury item exceeds simply those who can own it, but now is traded in design terms as a language ready for both appropriation and ironic and ulterior uses.
INTRODUCTION

The once lowly status of the ‘fake’ has been recently transformed in contemporary fashion by its new role, impacting both design and subsequent languages of luxury. Designers of established luxury figurehead brands have begun to subvert traditions of luxury endorsed by their own brands and high fashion designers on the periphery of the luxury sector are ‘referencing’ iconic luxury articles. This is significant of greater cultural shifts that have meant that obsessive consumption of luxury products, and their proliferation through expanding luxury markets, has tarnished the desirability of many such items. This departure is reflected by emerging high fashion designers who take various stances on the use and design of ‘luxury’ articles, and those from known luxury brands that expose and mock the cult of mindless, mass assimilation of luxury articles from recent years. This prompts the question of whether the prominence of the fake or *faux* (in choices of materials and as a design concept) has been used as an antidote for designers in coming to terms with an increasingly saturated market of luxury goods, and a way of reinventing these items?

The legacy of excessive consumption, proliferation of ‘it’ bags and other popular displays of wealth such as fur coats, has meant that in producing new visions of these articles designers engage narratives that challenges the qualities of authenticity. Whilst it is a given that known luxury brands produce luxury articles, the luxury sector’s profound influence has fragmented and decentralized the practice of high fashion. There are now high fashion designers who assimilate the language of luxury, producing articles that imitate luxury by either using it as conceptual reference for a design, taking fragments of iconic designs to use in a *montage* or by the use of imitation or inferior materials. Designers are challenging the quotients of luxury using fake or *faux* materials in the place of their real counterpart. This form of fakeness is distinct from the deception of authenticity that we associate with the counterfeit, and instead acts as transparent imitation. I will focus on how designers are engaging the fake with growing boldness, and its subsequent amelioration in cultural value and appeal. The new fake is symbolic of many things; globalization, expanding and developing luxury markets, and it has also become a language in itself, part of an accepted vernacular that designers are now using.

In uncovering the role of the fake in design and languages of luxury, I will first address concepts of luxury and definitions of the field of fashion that situate my argument. I will examine the way the design of luxury articles reflects two key processes that circumscribe the traditions associated with these items, particularly the use of fake, *faux*, or *ersatz* materials and the use of ‘mimetic’ processes by way of referenced luxury items imitated. I will draw upon a vast array of philosophical, sociological and fashion based theories to illustrate my points. The application of these is filtered through my perspective as a fashion design/research practitioner and will include examples derived from a recent research project. Reviews of literature are thus dispersed and used throughout the paper in different ways, and the research methodology is folded within the structuring of the paper. To represent the complexity and prolific rise of the area of the fake within design itself, I will touch on interconnected, overlaid and lapped concepts that best reflect the complicated and expansive nature of the of fake within. In approaching this now favorable fake, and challenging the *faux pas* that an imitation of a material or item is of less symbolic and cultural value than the real thing, I will focus specifically on animal hides, and their trajectory of uses in the form of hand bags and fur coats.
LUXURY FASHION

Within the field of contemporary fashion practice, divisions between high-end fashion and the luxury fashion sector have become increasingly ambiguous. The notion of luxury is preserved and perpetuated by those I describe as luxury figurehead brands. Even within this sector it is increasingly complicated to define these, as there are iconic luxury brands, often with a rich legacy and heritage, but recent operations perhaps diffuse their own past philosophies. This has happened simply from expansion in size and scale, and by belonging to known luxury company conglomerates such as LVMH. With diffusion lines, product licenses, and collaborations there are more ways to access and consume these brands that contrast the core fundamentals of luxury, that of exclusivity and rarity. Therefore there are more and more imitations of the original essence of the brand. This affects the usefulness of applying the model of ‘fashion as a system’ due to the disintegration of such sharp divides between the different levels of luxury practice. Yuniya Kawamura describes this as the ‘increasing decentralization and complexity of the fashion system’ (Kawamura 2005, p.49) with specific example to the ‘French Fashion System’ relating to practice levels of Haute Couture to Prêt a Porter. However, the notion of one empirical fashion system implies a uniformity of structure and a set flow and order of operations which does not account sufficiently for ways in which the development of luxury items occurs or the designers and brands that champion them.

As discussed by Peter Braham (2007), there is a less distinct influence from luxury brands occupying higher levels of practice within the field. The favored diffusion theory of ‘trickle down’ does not reflect changing movements and directions of influence or innovation and are better described by ‘multiple fashion systems’ (Braham 2007, p.363). The multiplicity of clusters operating adjacently and with connections, compliments Pierre Bourdieu (1995), concept of the ‘field’ as being a descriptor of practice locales and operations that he applies to arts production (Bourdieu 1995, p.30). This more accurately accounts for the phenomenon of the production and consumption of luxury goods.

Therefore, in considering the luxury sector as its own field with several connected or ‘sub – fields’, I would also place adjacent to this others related, such as emerging or known high fashion designers that produce ‘luxury’ items. In doing this I have also referred to categories set up by online shopping mecca, Farfetch.com, which unites ‘the world´s best independent fashion boutiques, in categories of ‘Luxe’, ‘Lab’ and ‘Cult’ (Farfetch 2010). In this way we can see that luxury, has become a descriptor for particular qualities known as ‘luxe’. Within this online shop’s description ‘Luxe’ fashion is:

‘The most coveted fashion labels from around the world. These include Alexander Wang, Balenciaga and Givenchy’ (Farfetch.com 2010).

The divisions between established luxury brands and emerging high fashion designers such as Alexander Wang dissolve, in being placed adjacent to Balenciaga and Givenchy both houses with strong legacies and also known as luxury brands (Okonkwo 2007, p.45). Even though Wang’s brand is not definitively a luxury brand as yet, they are linked together here due to current desirability and the production of ‘luxurious’ products is perhaps a given within the practice of such topical high fashion designers populating and practicing within fashion capitals, such as Paris or New York.
LANGUAGES OF LUXURY

Alison Lurie in *The Language of Clothes* states that in considering clothing as a language it too “must have a vocabulary and grammar like other languages” (Lurie 1981, p.4). If we consider this in relation to the language of luxury, we can thus attribute to this that there too must be ‘words’ that relate and symbolize luxury. If we continue with Lurie’s way of looking at the language of clothing, designers conjugate these words to fit their particular expressions, and in this case those seen to convey luxury. The act of conjugation is a fitting analogy for the design process, designers will take ideas, words if you like, and in combination with others strive to create an original or innovative ‘word’. These factors that contribute to the qualities that denote ‘luxury’ or being ‘luxurious’ have drastically shifted in recent fashion practice. It is not so simple to define a luxury article as being symbolic of superior craftsmanship and materials, as now these very quotients are challenged by design languages which mock and celebrate with irony the hierarchies and symbols of luxury. Luca Marchetti (2007) in commenting on the nature of luxury suggests that the value of these articles are dependent on relationships between the articles themselves and the contexts in which they are produced:

“The value of these objects does not derive only from the materials they are made in or the way in which they are made, but from a special relationship between those factors and the cultural significance of the context in which they are produced and received”.
(Marchetti 2007, p.43)

In reflection of this I will be examining in focus how varying definitions of luxury or languages of luxury are used within design and the subsequent context of their production.

Of key interest are several notions of luxury that account for the intention or message behind the design of luxury articles, and the definitions reflected in new approaches in the design of luxury articles. The transformative, and ‘magic’ qualities attributed to legendary luxury items and how designers may refer to these in the creative process is related. Core to this is several ideas by Giles Lipovetsky (2007), who defines the premise and vision of luxury brands to be ‘built on references to the myths and legends of their past’ (Lipovetsky 2007, p.25). This notion of the legend relates to the selection of two key iconic representations of luxury, the handbag, and the fur coat.

Designer handbags are among the more accessible of luxury articles, their desirability hinges on the *griffe* or designer label that adorns them. Dana Thomas (2007) describes the bag as a ‘neutral’ and easily covetable item as it can compliment anyone (Thomas 2007, p.173). Furs or fur coats are less associated with a brand name and are more so connected to the rarity, or exoticness of the animal used, operating differently as a luxury article. I will focus on these with a variety of examples, and also by way of relationship, an animal hide is a material, and can be transformed into a handbag, but also takes on its own particular aesthetic code when used as a coat where its animal origin is more definite. This concept melds well with Lipovetsky’s notion of luxury related to reincarnation:

“Luxury was as much a way of ensuring the cycle of reincarnation – a kind of magical combat between the enduring and the perishable – as a symbolic inter-human struggle.”
(Lipovetsky, 2007 p.25)
FAKE AND FAUX

In dealing with both the animal hide in its trajectory of uses from abstracted into a material such as leather, or its more direct use as a fur coat I will be considering how it is represented in design languages by the use of fake, faux or ersatz or materials and the concept of ‘mimesis’, which involves imitating its form. The ersatz, a German loanword meaning ‘substitute’ relates to the way changing materials transforms and re-orders the design process and exposes new opportunities encouraged by the qualities of these materials. Mimesis, meaning a deliberate imitation focuses the intention of a design process to represent a known form, and opens up the possibilities for this form through transformations that occur during the design process.

The example of the animal hide is an interesting one due to the key ways in which it is used as a design language. Not only is the animal hide subject to little transformation from its original state to become a fur coat, it is also the base for many other luxury articles particularly handbags. In considering this within a design ‘language’ we could say that the animal hide is abstracted into a handbag, by cutting, finishing, stretching and the animal hide is appropriated to be a fur coat by ways of cutting, and fashioning. The way designers use the fake as a material or a reference in the form of a ‘copy’ to an original form impacts this language of luxury. This notion challenges the faux pas that an imitation or copy of a material or item is of less symbolic and cultural value than the real thing.

Faux pas has been appropriated in English, where this ‘misstep’ has come to signify an erroneous judgment in personal style or taste. I will consider this less in the sense of a personal style objective, and more so related to how designers rewrite the rules on the assumed faux pas related to what is and isn’t suitable as a luxury item. In addition it also challenges the way within design we approach the notion of the fake. I will also use it to structure the other parts of my argument in considering it in terms of the fake, the faux, ersatz and mimesis. The cloudiness in distinguishing the differences from this family of terms is difficult and to consider it in detail would require extensive analysis and reference to several threads of philosophy. For the purpose of this paper, I will contain the definition of the fake to imply the general copying of another form or material, faux as materials which are directly imitating a naturally occurring one, ersatz as a substitute or replacement material and mimesis as a process which accounts for a form being imitated by another.

Both mimesis and the use of the fake within design languages are present in recent collections from luxury brands, and high fashion designers. Martin Heidegger, describes mimesis as a means of ‘copying, that is, presenting and producing something in a manner which is typical of something else’ (Heidegger 1991, p.173). This idea can be overlaid, as the notion of mimesis accounts for much to do with the fake as a thing and faux and ersatz materials. Whilst there is a long philosophical history dealing with mimesis, I will be explicitly considering it as a way to explain the translations and transformations that occur in the design process. Of particular use has been Marcus Boon’s excellent study, In praise of copying that considers the legacy of the copy and copying, dealing with mimesis and the use of montage as practice of compiling fragments of references (Boon 2010, p.145). In design this can mean a reference being used, and the design involves a close translation of this reference, an imitation of core parts that still bare a trace to the original item. For the ersatz, I will concentrate on the symbolic value and cultural reading that is affected when a material is substituted with one of different quality. In addition these can be used together, where additional processes are added that further transcend the reference of the ‘luxury’ material or form.
‘BECOMING’ ANIMAL: FORMS AND MATERIALS

Animals as material and as forms have been synonymous with luxury in recent contemporary culture. The use of animal hides as garments can be seen to imbue the wearer with attributes of the animal. As Lurie suggests, in wearing a fur one is also presenting oneself ‘as’ animal, whilst in wearing leather it is ‘not usually to assert that one is a cow, a calf or a bull’ (Lurie 1981, p.232). To wear a pelt is to become animal, to wear leather is to wear an abstracted version of the animal. Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s concept of ‘becoming animal’ even though its true meaning does not actually imply imitative qualities (Delueze & Guattari 1987, p.237) can be literally applied here. Leather is a flat 2D material, with little connections to its previous state. Pelts are perimeters, even though largely abstracted through the tanning process, can be read as basic maps of the body parts of the animals they once encased. The notion of becoming, does however lend itself particularly aptly to the design process as it is described as ‘creation’ (Delueze & Guattari 1987, p.106). An idea ‘becomes’ tangible through choices of materials, and processes that render this material with form. For the example of the animal hide, the animal itself is the idea, and is fed through a process that seeks (in varying degrees) to imitate its form.

New York based designers Slow and Steady wins the Race (SSWTR) have developed a practice that conceptually folds many of the quintessential elements of luxury into an ironic and playful series of products that embrace the everyday, and poke fun at the desirability of rare and exotic materials and cult ‘it’ bags. For their ‘No.19 Luxe’ collection a ‘fox fur stole’ was available in either calico or black velvet. This article is literally translated into a pattern to produce a rendition of the form of a fox using garment making techniques. The pattern making process simplifies the form, creating a vague but still recognizable semblance of the fox. Complexities of the volumes are simplified, as woven material, seams, and thread mimic the natural form. The idea behind such an article is not to have the same significance as a real fox fur stole, but to humorously play with its associations in a design language that celebrates the poor mans version of an expensive item. The SSWTR version is the animal sans fur with no deception in even pretending to be a real fox. In draping a fake fox fur around ones neck, an immediate semblance of the real form is produced. This attributes to the phenomenon within design for fashion of certain garments or accessories that become immortalized as generic items, through their proliferation in interpretations and reinventions by designers. Those who wear the SSWTR fox are doing so, because they advocate and form a preference for a type of fashion that is embedded with critical commentary, and one that enjoys the irony involved in having a poor version of a usually exclusive and expensive item.

On a similar path, in using a mimetic process within design to represent an animal I recently completed a research project that saw the development of a fake elephant hide from a digital model to produce a series of knitted coats. The elephant hide itself does not have a popular history of being used in personal luxury articles, but instead was often used as hides to dress rooms, body parts including tusks and feet used in parts of furniture and as exhibits of conquest from exotic hunting adventures. Inserting the elephant into a fashion equation brings forward a humorous play considering like Lurie suggests that a fox brings out ‘fox-like’ qualities in its wearer (Lurie 1981, p.232), being ‘elephant-like’ has not been as popular a choice in fashion. Certainly a fox can be seen as offering immediately more attractive qualities to women such as agile, slender, with glistening coats of palettes of rich amber colors. The elephant and the connotations and idioms such as ‘the elephant in room’ convey a sense of being awkward, large with dry, dull, and drab matte grey skin. The elephant used was a 3D digital model used in modeling software. This model already imitating the qualities of a real elephant life size, was scaled down and simplified to be able to enter into clothing
techniques, in this case 3D seamless knitting. The elephant was ‘unfolded’ into patterns which were further simplified into a crude and simplistic version of the real with ‘elephant hide I & II - front legs and back legs, ‘elephant head, ears, & trunk’ and a ‘pair of tusks’. The garments were developed to be exhibited, which again played with the concept of the ‘elephant in the room’ literally, and audience members where invited to try the ‘hides’ and be photographed in varying poses as lone elephants, couples or as a herd. The project questioned and examined the role and arbitrary nature of the references used in fashion processes, and a new approach in using a digital fake model to generate garment forms. The outcomes, knitted in a fine grade Italian merino, entailed elements that we associate with luxury such as exaggerated volumes (Lurie 1981, p.232), and softness to touch, despite it depicting a less than fashionable animal.

A continuation of this humourous or ironic appropriation of the language of luxury can also be seen in Chanel’s Fall/Winter 2010 Prêt-à-Porter collection. Recognized in ‘a trend report for Fall 2010’ by Style.com in what was described as ‘Fur Real. Faux Too’ the collection embodied and excessive use of faux fur in every possible way (Style.com 2010). The opening look from this collection featured model Abby Lee Kershaw in full faux fur ensemble, congering the eskimo, set amongst ‘giant chunks of bona fide iceberg, specially transported from Scandinavia’ (Style.com 2010). All parts of the outfit, coat, pants and shoes were covered with faux fur in clumps and patches of different colors mimicking the discrepancies found in real hides. This extreme use seems to celebrate the accessibility of faux fur, and its opportunities in uses. In advocating the faux it also acknowledges environmental and ethical concerns about the farming of furs by presenting it as luxurious and fashionable. Even though the material is not intended to resemble or posture as the real, it’s advantages and design opportunities were exploited with humor within Channel’s collection by the myriad of ways in which it was used, in excess, woven into signature bouclé and tweed, and flaunting the qualities that the real material does not have.

MONTAGE OF FAKES

Another example from Fall/Winter 2010 collections of the concept of both the ersatz in materials and mimetic process applied was from Swedish high fashion designers Acne. In this case Acne used lamb fur, to imitate other furs that we would associate with more exotic and rare animals. The piece aptly named ‘fur’ is described as follows on the Acne website as a “Patched lamb fur jacket in light shades tanned lamb furs and suede…” (Acne Studios 2010). The piece akin to the language used in many other garments from their collection, engages or alludes to a subversion of processes of construction. Germano Celant’s (2007) concept of ‘the cut’ as “an intervention into the traditional conventions of representing and seeing a body or thing” (Celant 2009, p.201) can apply here, where the image of fur coats appear to be both literally and figuratively cut and composed back together. As an existing form even as a reference to a fur coat, it is sliced and it’s fragments are used in a new combination. This relates to Marcus Boon’s (2010) description of montage as copying where the action of a ‘cut’ and compilation with other fragments results in a form which humorously shows it breaks and origin (Boon 2010, p.145) This approach to cutting up and montages of references, often applied with a mimetic intention is also taken up by SSWTR. In addition to the reference of the fox fur stole in their collections they also draw on luxury icons such as designer ‘it’ bags as references.

In considering the new ways designers approach the design of a handbag, and the quotients of luxury, this seems most notoriously depicted in the rise of the ‘it’ bag. The notoriety of ‘it’ bags connects with how luxury brands have worked out more ways to make accessible their
worlds (Thomas 2007, p.191). In documenting the rise of the ‘it’ bags Prada’s iconic nylon backpacks with triangle logo is said to be the origin of this phenomenon (Thomas 2007, p.172). As an ‘it’ bag, it reacted against the most preserved and cherished criteria of luxury goods, embalmed within the practices of brands such as Hermès, that of exquisite, rare and precious materials treated with skill and considered hand-craftsmanship. Miucca Prada bravely subverted the notion of the luxury handbag by substituting luxurious materials with industrial ones. Thomas is quoting Holy Bruback from the New Yorker described this as a tactic which subverts the languages of luxury because:

‘they were made of a material that, according to most people’s taste at the time, undermined their credibility. Real bags, the sort of bags people were proud to carry, came in leather, crocodile or silk, not nylon.’ (Thomas 2007:172).

In reflection of Bourdieu and Delsaut’s (1975) concept of the griffe, we can say that Prada's name was the desirability of the bag and that it subsequently ‘transubstantiates’ the nylon with greater cultural value. The humble past of the material, being in this case the nylon used in Italian military parachutes, and being machine made as opposed to hand crafted (Thomas 2007, p.172) congers a practicality and tough bag that surpasses frivolities of luxurious styling, shape or trims. Prada’s backpack didn’t use a fake material but an ersatz became symbolic with luxury.

Cunningness, or resourcefulness with materials is exhibited when a designer takes the icon of an ‘it’ bag and imitates it in ersatz materials. This is beyond the counterfeit industry, which profits from deceptive imitation, but it is an overt imitation used in combination with other techniques or materials that clearly transcends the form. Velisarios Kattoulas (2002) in her article describes the different levels of fakes, in extremes of those which are barely similarly to a badly applied logo, to that of the ‘Super Copy’ or grade AA copy which is deceptive to seasoned luxury brand connoisseurs (Kattoulas 2002). These levels perhaps lend themselves to interesting ways of mediating the mimetic process, from channeling the perfection of technique and craftsmanship to reach a ‘Super Copy’ or engaging in the naive charm of a bad reproduction of misappropriated language and technique, such as is evident in the work of SSWTR.

Counterfeits and copies are always tender subjects for designers, as riffs seem to constantly circulate around the distinctions from being ‘inspired’ by an existing form, to the point of being ‘inspired’ to produce veritable facsimiles of other designer’s work. This perhaps is also embodied in SSWTR collections. At the core of their practice, which is described as having a ‘conceptual’ approach to accessories and clothing, is the notion of underpinning and playing with the hierarchies of particular symbols. This includes the generic garment styles that we associate with certain materials and immortalized luxury designer. In their ‘No.3 Bags’ collection they ‘interpreted’ several ‘it’ bags such as Balenciaga’s “Motorcycle”, Chanel’s “2.55” and Hermès “Birkin” into a collection which depicted these bags without luxurious materials or expensive trims but as basic ‘lo-fi’ versions. In a interview from Dazed Digital SSWTR explain the motivation behind imitating these bags:

“When we did bags, I was looking at status bags and thinking about the meaning behind them. Why do these things exist? What would it mean if everything was stripped down and it became a canvas. It’s almost like a fingerprint where people still recognize it. It’s recreating the scale, but altering the materials. People immediately recognize it. It’s a signifier of how iconic those bags have become in our consciousness.” (Taing 2009)
This suggests a future that is supported historically where the trade name of materials and products becomes the generic signifier. The qualities for examples of the “Birkin” are distilled and are the starting point of the process; and evolve depending on the chosen materials or other processes used.

This idea of taking the “Birkin” and ‘sampling’ it, as is done in electronic music, within the context of new elements thrown into the mix, reconfigures cultural meanings. In later SSWTR collections such as “No.19 Luxe” they took the “Birkin” and amalgamated it with New York designer As Fours’ bag, to become a four-sided mega status “Birkin/As Four” bag. As described by Boon (2010), humor is the determiner and quotient of a successful montage copy (Boon 2010, p.145). SSWTR “Birkin/As Four” bag is a success in design as it is humorous to see a rendition of the “Birkin” bag front view, and then to notice that both the side and the back are exactly the same, distinct from the original. Perhaps we make the connection with fake bags that are familiar and copious in quantity, littered throughout markets worldwide and a particular type of fascination with the façade as a single view of a form proliferated in the prevalence of Google image searches. There is a particular evocative hollowness in this piece, as it suggests a sense of finality in the search for originality, as referencing culture suggests there is no real ‘new’. The reduction of stylistic attributes of a bag synonomous with superior craftsmanship, prestige and finesse being reduced into a simple façade and then fed into a montage process creates a tension. The act of mimesis, and the act of montage, develops its own identity through the shared context brought on by the attributes of each reference, that whilst are broken still echo the originals.

CONCLUSION

The fragmentation and ‘decentralization’ of high fashion and luxury brands has drastically affected the notion of what is and is not luxury. Qualities deemed luxurious are applied to articles in and outside of established luxury figurehead brands. Subsequently, this has resulted in assorted strands of luxury that equate to languages designers use differently. This context of an increasingly saturated market of luxury and the proliferation of luxury articles in other market levels has meant designers have responded by renewing the value of the fake. From a trajectory of the animal hide as a fur coat or as abstracted into handbag, animals beings symbolic with luxury has been reinvigorated into new languages of luxury by the use of mimetic design processes or faux, or ersatz materials. Luxury brands designers’ subsequently reinvent their visions of luxury, by exploring ways that are at odds with assumed qualities of their own brands. Designers from emerging or high fashion brands comment, refer to and critique the languages of luxury by exploring methods of subversion. This includes the use of ersatz materials, or by using mimetic processes with montage, ‘sampling’, and cutting and pasting of fragments in design processes that take legendary luxury articles and produce new design innovations. The symbolic and cultural significance of the fake takes on new value as both a cultural reflection, and as a shifter in value in the stakes of luxury.

The methods for reinventing or innovating luxury articles and brands are dependent on the exploration of a more critical and conceptual approach that actively engages in questioning the quotients and assumptions of luxury. By doing this, it engages in design processes that use the language of luxury in new ways, challenging the convention of materials and techniques and creating engaging narratives that equate to equally innovative articles. The fake, within a design process, does not condone the counterfeit but challenges the faux pas that luxury should always be authentic.
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