

## **SO IT'S ALL A TREND OR WHAT? ON FASHIONS, TRENDS AND TREND RESEARCH**

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The „Hamburg Trend Convention“ proves that "Evil is cool". The "Wiener-Trend-Ted" comes up with "As long as Jurassic Park is still showing in cinemas, dinosaurs will stay hip". FOCUS sniffed out: "In Munich, white socks are back in trend". The daily newspaper announces: "The trend is towards 3-telephone households". In the trend medium "Internet", one finds the glad tidings: "When Elvis died back in 1977, there were 37 Elvis impersonators the world over. Today there are 48,000. A computer prognosis of this figure shows that by the year 2010, every third person in the world will be an Elvis impersonator".

There's nothing as trendy as a trend, not only in the fashion business but in other branches too, in management seminars, in lifestyle magazines, everywhere you look people are tracking down the trend. And thanks to a new species of consultant, the so-called trend researcher, they find it too, all over the place.

What is it about trends? Are they developments which deserve to be taken seriously or mere media waffle? The driving force behind progress or manipulation by the advertising industry? If there is such a thing, who is behind them? Why do we go along with them? Can they be predicted? What exactly is trend research?

After outlining various types of trend research, I shall present my own conception of social scientific trend research. Then I shall deal with some of the main trends of the 'nineties, using examples to describe their effects on different areas of lifestyle. - sport, body care, nutrition, dress.

Bearing in mind the view of René König whereby fashion involves the person as a whole and modern trend research embraces every conceivable area of lifestyle, there will be less focus on clothing fashions, or so it might seem at first, than you are accustomed to from this series of lectures.

## **Trend Research**

Trend research the way we know it today has only been in existence since the late 'eighties. Specialists on the future were of course around a good deal earlier than this: the prophets of the Old Testament, the Roman augurs or Nostradamus whose work, in a way, is still with us today. But here we shall concentrate on the more recent past. The so-called future-world researchers have been around since the 'sixties. Pertinent names here are Alvin Toffler or Robert Jungk. In a nutshell, it was their job to extrapolate the likely technological, economic and other developments within the affluent society for subsequent decades and to deduce the social consequences of the same. Two points appear to me to be of special relevance. Firstly, the then prevalent idea of a society continuing along a path of linear development and secondly, the generally socio-critical flavour of the prognoses. A glance back at the future sketched from these scenarios shows, in some places rather amusingly, how wrong the future-world researchers sometimes were. Looking at the way our society really did develop, we also appreciate the importance of such scenarios for critical appraisal of social development.

In the 'eighties, when social development was no longer linear but confusing at best, and when the meaning behind the whole jumble of more or less attractive appearances was extremely tricky to reconstruct or of little interest to anyone, the new species of future-world specialist moved into the limelight - namely "the trend researcher".

Contrary to future-world researchers, the trend researchers are less concerned with the "hard core" of social development and more with the ephemeral sphere: with fashion, consumption, leisure, entertainment. Contrary to future-world researchers, they are generally commissioned by companies, one reason, but not the only one, why so-called socio-criticism has no role to play here.

But here ends the common ground, since these days those bearing the label "trend researcher" are a motley collection. Without claiming to cover all of them, I shall now list the main types:

#### *Type 1 - The Guru*

The guru projects himself as a person - preferably in the media and in exclusive seminars. He surrounds himself with a fractocloud comprised of futuristic-sounding vocabulary and prognoses, uttered as resolutely and yet as vaguely as possible ("In future, 'evil' will be cool". These prognoses stem from the "mind" of the guru but it is imperative that the latter draws on gut feeling.

#### *Type 2 - Designers*

Present in the fashion sector in particular. As with the guru, intuition provides the basis for their trend statements. However, here the results relate to a sole product area - e.g. clothing fashions - and a certain period - e.g. summer 1997 - and, furthermore, are translated into a product in the form of fabric, colour, cut.

#### *Type 3 - Trend Agencies*

Special agencies which collect concrete material on a regular basis: newspaper cuttings, snapshots of disco-goers, etc. In extreme cases, the service goes no further than to supply raw material of this kind. The thematic onus is on youth culture and like-oriented products and manufacturers.

#### *Type 4 - Social-scientific Trend Re-search*

This is generally offered by larger market-research institutes who are regularly involved in carrying out - representative - surveys on values, consumer preferences and leisure activities in the course of their work. They then deduce future developments from the changes observed. In this case, the information basis is scientific and verifiable. Since these large random samples normally ascertain the status quo for the majority at a fixed point in time, there is a risk of only recognising the trend once it has reached the main stream and is conceivably already on the way out.

What is a trend exactly? In customary usage it refers to anything that happens to be "in" or the direction in which something is moving. As a rule, this "something" is the fashion

of the day, consumer habits. The entry that appears in the dictionary under "trend" reads "general direction of the statistically ascertained development of a time series. It embraces lengthier and long periods of time, always represents an excerpt and is therefore of limited validity. It's sole value for the past is declamatory and it cannot be extended into the future due to the unpredictability of external factors".

Modern trend research, the essence of which is concerned with the former definition, is based on a model for development which more or less allows an "extension into the future". We are familiar with such models from fashion research in the narrower sense. Basically speaking, they can be reduced to the following basic pattern:

1. The fashion is dictated at will by an influential instance (designer, manufacturer, advertising). (Manipulation model.)
2. The fashion sways from one extreme to the other, relatively unaffected by social or cultural factors: the long skirt is followed by the short, and so on. (Pendulum model.)
3. The fashion is created within the social sphere. Certain social groups (upper class, middle class, sub-culture) initiate a new fashion and the others follow. (Social model.)

According to the manipulation model, something like trend research is superfluous. Unfortunately, the model itself is just as superfluous having been substantially refuted. Famous examples of this are the failed campaigns to gain acceptance for longer skirts in the 'twenties and early 'seventies. Neither is there any supporting evidence for the pendulum model. The course of trends and fashions is not as straightforward and one-dimensional as claimed here. Which leaves us with the third model. In brief, there is more than enough evidence to support this. The questions which remain are: who are the innovative groups, according to which principles do they launch something new into the world, why and how do they influence the rest of society?

In answering these questions, we at *SOMMER-RESEARCH* work use an approach - we refer to it as **Trend Vision** - which uses the latest results from reputable social-scientific research and applies them in a practice-oriented fashion. How might one describe this?

As indicated earlier, trends are not born in the minds of marketing experts, nor in the editorial offices of zeitgeist magazines. They come about "out in the wild, on the

streets". Trends are changes in lifestyle which can be traced back to changes in society. They do not emerge just anywhere in the world, but in metropolises with strong aesthetic innovation potential: London, New York, Tokyo, Paris for instance. The first signals of new trends become apparent in social groupings caught between traditional values ("learning a trade for life") and new social demands ("being mobile and flexible") and who lend active expression to this in their lifestyle. Such groups are often particular youth scenes (for example "punk", "grunge", "hip-hop"). The styles of such scenes are an extreme representation of needs and stylisations which could well become interesting to the main stream in a more diluted form a little later on. As such, the earlier hippies with their penchant for ecstatic hedonism - naturally involuntarily - constituted the symbolic vanguard in the transition from work-oriented reconstruction to an enjoyment-oriented consumer society.

When it comes to the dissemination of new trend signals, the role of creative intermediary is played by designers, media and marketing. Via their stylisations, avant-garde designers - such as Vivienne Westwood or Jean-Paul Gaultier from the world of fashion - pluck the new, often provocative symbols (punk hairdos, sloppy look) from the ghetto of anti-fashion and introduce them into the recognised sphere of art and design.

Young, high-earning persons working in branches such as advertising or the media, whose jobs require them to present themselves as creative, original individuals in touch with the pulse of the moment, adopt the new signals precisely for this purpose, thus causing them to be associated with ideas like "trend" and "status". Subsequently, the trend can be taken up - albeit appropriately modified - by more conservative groupings. In this way, the sugared water originally used by punks to spike up their hair gave rise to the "New Wave Gel" with which the "early adopters" and eventually also young policemen or postmen styled their hair.

We thus observed a few years ago how young whites in London, looking for ways to set themselves apart from their original milieu and seeking a strong identity, adorned themselves with so-called "dreadlocks". They did this partly by platting and matting the hair and partly, where volume was lacking, by weaving in strands of wool and additional hair. Some simply stuck on the hair pieces with glue or sticky tape. In no time, the

whole venture was professionally perfected: sub-culture coiffeurs used small soldering devices to weld artificial hair onto the real thing. A boom of wild dreadlocks in every conceivable thickness, length and colour was the result. We followed up this technique practically worldwide. In brief, the road to bourgeois assimilation of this rebel trend began with the recommendation by a Spanish woman's magazine to its innocuous readers to use this technique to add frivolous coloured strands to their hair at carnival time; it eventually ended up with the print ad of a Milan coiffeur promising women whom nature had failed to endow with a fine head of hair that they could still achieve the traditional ideal of the Italian "donna's" lion's mane.

So trends do not end with the "trendy people", but pervade - albeit modified or ever less conspicuous - in all grouping of society. This process takes time, not necessarily for technical but above all for psychological reasons. Months and years pass by before the various milieus fully adapt the new symbols to their own psyche and everyday-life world. It is therefore just as futile to publish new "in and out" lists each month as it is to specify the concrete realisation of trends without naming the respective target group. One and the same trend can manifest itself very differently depending on the milieu, precisely because it becomes it always becomes assimilated by the prevailing values. With alternative-minded people for example, the nature orientation leads to their doing without a car in order to save the forest whilst social climbers are prompted by the same orientation to buy an off-roader with which to venture into this very forest.

This basic mechanism of trend diffusion applies in principle to all aspects of lifestyle, to home furnishings and nutrition, to leisure activities and to cosmetics and clothing fashions. One or two peculiarities of the latter are all that distinguish it from the rest. One of these is that clothes, as our "second skin", have a special significance as a means of projecting our identity and thus our values. Another is that the translation of trends into fashion has long been institutionalised, if not ritualised (seasonal structuring, umbrella associations, committees which "determine" the trends in advance).

Whatever the area, trend research sets out to pick up signals for new trends as early as possible, assess their substantiality and take into account any signs of adaptation in the needs and aesthetic norms of various target groups.

After all, it is now commonly accepted that the issue of trends is not merely of academic or journalistic interest but also of considerable economic importance. A company in the process of developing a product today must reckon with a time-span between conception and distribution of up to two years or more. It is doubtful whether consumer needs and preferences will have remained the same in the meantime. And since nobody can afford to invest in a product that no-one wants, it is important to get every possible guarantee that that one is on the right track.

For this purpose, our trend-research concept "**Trend Vision**" combines journalistic research with social-scientific analysis and creative imagination. This takes place in six steps:

- Trend scouting®
- Evaluation by experts
- Media analysis
- Synopsis and evaluation
- Recommendations and creative application
- Testing

By trend scouting®, we mean the use of a worldwide network of trend scouts. These are especially trained free-lancers who, as participating observers, have access to the most innovative scenes within the major metropolises. They deliver authentic information firsthand: photos, interviews, insider info. This provides us with a rich documentation of the needs and styles of the creative scenes, whereby the motives behind the styles are of overriding importance. Do these lie in a longing for all things natural, a hedonistic pursuit of pleasure, asceticism? Only when these questions are answered do the new symbols acquire meaning and allow predictions to be made on how such needs are likely to find expression amongst other groups.

A selection of this material is subjected to an initial examination by appropriate experts. Experts are professionals such as avant-garde designers, specialist journalists, market experts, etc., who fulfil a gatekeeper function in trend diffusion and are in a position to give pointers on the substantiality of the new trends and any modifications which may be required. Added to this is an analysis of the media, which play an important role in

rendering transparent, labelling and diffusing the trends. They range from scene media to specialist journals through to mass media.

These data from all over the world are analysed in the light of available knowledge and tested for trend potential in general but also in connection with specific target groups and product areas. The outcome of this is recommendations which, together with the input of specialists in R&D, product management and design, can be translated into creative solutions. Their actual chances of market success with the end-users can subsequently be tested via market-research methods.

For years now, this procedure has enabled us to predict phenomena as specific as the success of streetball or in-line skating in the sports sector, the natural and semi-permeable solutions used in hair styling or the decline of Nouvelle Cuisine. Nevertheless, such one-off phenomena should only be viewed within the context of broader trends, so-called basis trends affecting all aspects of lifestyle: clothes and cuisine, home furnishings, leisure pastimes or body care.

## **Basis Trends**

Several years ago, we came across an interesting youth sub-culture in Great Britain, the so-called "New Age Travellers". As back-to-nature neo-hippies seeing no future in the towns hit by recession they adopted a nomadic way of life, styling themselves on the old tradition of British gypsies, living in caravans or suchlike, and moving across the country (nature-oriented) as the mood took them (individualism). They used computer networks and similar high-tech equipment to arrange their occasional - mass - meets at short notice.

The exciting thing about this was the blend of individualism, back-to-nature orientation and high technology which had never before been present in this form - particularly not in the youth culture. The hippies had shunned technology and sought refuge in nature, the equally individualistic punks resisted nature wherever they could. The former three

aspects had always been regarded as incompatible, not only in the youth culture but in general terms.

Our research and analysis showed that the New Age Travellers, despite having turned their backs on society, symbolically anticipated its further development by introducing basis trends which would most likely become relevant for society. Today, we know for sure that this specific mixture is a decisive constellation in many areas for the 'nineties.

By this I mean not only phenomena such as grunge or raving which seem the obvious associations in this respect. I also mean relationships which only reveal themselves at second or third glance. For example, in a symbolic sense the real high-tech-supported nomadism of the New Age Travellers stands for the increasingly self-evident - essentially mental - nomadism which we are living and experiencing today. We are already familiar with it in areas like television where it is known as zapping - hopping from one thing to another - or in advanced electronics - wandering through data banks or through virtual-reality rooms.

What makes this triad - individualism, back-to-nature orientation and high technology - so interesting for today's society as a whole? What effects is it likely to have on our lifestyle?

First of all, the link between individualism and back-to-nature orientation is typical for our experiential society of the 'nineties. Individualism calls for spontaneous freedom of decision, individual experiences. Back-to-nature orientation demands authenticity, simplicity, ecology. These two orientations used to represent a contradiction; the individualistic, egoistic, convenient stance had no regard for naturalness. Today they need one another. How did this come about?

The growing disintegration of binding values and yardsticks has led to the individual being left more and more to his own devices in deciding what is good, what is right. Thus the question at hand is no longer what is good in principle, but what is good for

me? The yardstick for this can only be that which is satisfying to the person as an individual. The essence here is the search for the right experience, in other word an experience which does the person good but which, above all else, tells him who he is.

This search feeds the fast growing "experiential market" catering for appropriate types of experience for the various social milieus with their specific interests and values, offering anything from Disneyland to meditation workshops through to Himalayan trekking or bungee jumping.

The uncertainty as to whether or not one has hit on the right option for oneself from amongst the overwhelming selection on offer - which is also tantamount to finding oneself - leads to a variety of typical reactions:

1. Constant experimenting with different types of experiences
2. Search for particularly intense ex-periences, "testing one's limits" (it is precisely by discovering one's limits that one finds out who one really is)
- 3 Social comparison with others and their experiences: great interest in the authentic experiences, emotions of others (boom of reality TV)

The fact that, ideally, these experiences are natural experiences is no coincidence. Key words for the connection between individualism and back-to-nature orientation are "authenticity" and "sensuality". On the look out for orientation, for identity, people search for their "true self", their "true feelings" without the artificial jumble of social obligations which make one into something that one isn't. People want to experience themselves "unplugged", so to speak. And this is best done within aspects of life and in situations which are seen to be natural, particularly those out in the open. All in all, getting to grips with the natural environment outside serves to help people discover and reassure themselves of their own "inner nature". As such, sensuality - the active, individual experiencing of interesting inner as well as outer natural stimuli - is the typical ideal state of being for the 'nineties.

In **sport**, this manifests itself first and foremost in the outdoor orientation. Whether free climbing, spelunking or bungee jumping, the attraction of so-called extreme sports is not so much a senseless thrill but self-reassurance via confrontation with nature. The most immediate contact with natural elements (water, ground, air, snow) is achieved via gliding sports which, ideally, are practised with minimal but intelligent hardware (paragliding instead of Delta-gliding, bodyboarding instead of windsurfing). The so-called "multi-sports", basically stemming from the triathlon, are ideally tailored to nature-oriented individualism and are fundamentally individual, spontaneously combinable and nature-dependent combinations of various activities, particularly "mind-body" combinations such as "orienteering" or "spelunking". The significance of the mental and contemplative aspect of sport will continue to grow.

In this day and age, **body-care products** also need to offer sensuality. Here, the term natural effect also involves to a growing degree sensual experience of one's own body. Newer fragrance and cosmetics creations made from traditional foods (peach, vanilla, chocolate), like those by Thierry Mugler, are part of this trend towards holistic sensual perception and, in this particular case, also towards the blurring of boundaries between cosmetics and foods.

Sensuality in **foodstuffs** implies above all the fusion of food and the psyche. The ideas of the brainfood movement are fairly widespread in this respect (in a diluted form of course: instead of being regarded merely in terms of ingestion, food is seen as an expression of mood and, above all, as a means of enhancing one's mood ("mood food").

In all three traditional physical spheres, the body is increasingly viewed as an individual, natural mechanism whose healthy functioning can only be seen in terms of interaction between the psyche and the environment.

But the third component, **high technology** which traditionally stands in opposition to individualism and to nature, is still missing. In the 'nineties all this has changed. Firstly, this technology has contributed to individualism and secondly, it fulfils a catalytic function by allowing and facilitating the link between individualism and nature in a new way. What do I mean by this?

By high technology, I refer particularly to the advanced digital technologies. These bring with them technical and functional upheaval and far-reaching social consequences with decisive implications for trends in all aspects of life. The technical and functional aspects are:

- flexible forms of production
- miniaturisation
- telecommunications with special emphasis on interactivity
- new methods of depicting/reproducing complex processes, particularly natural ones

On the one hand, flexible forms of production lead to the disintegration of traditional job roles: gone is the rigid fulfilment of a job role defined from start to finish by the work situation. Instead, individual, flexible personality constitutes the decisive potential. This radically promotes and demands individualism by encouraging people to emphasise their individual potential, both in the workplace and in self-projection.

The trend towards individualistic partner orientation in sport which we have been monitoring for some time now (less team sports, more ad hoc teams, fewer rigid rules, more scope for individual creativity: small, flexible teams where each member can fulfil every function: streetball, Ultimate Frisbee) can in effect be traced back to similar changes in working life.

On the other hand, with the help of CIM the new technologies allow "made-to-measure mass production" which means gearing production to small target groups, indeed even to individual requirements and rapid changes, thus giving people the chance to exercise their individuality in clothes or cars also, at a relatively low cost in terms of time and money.

Together with the reduction in the size of machines and the new opportunities of interactive telecommunications, flexible forms of production promote the overlapping of workplace and home, work and play, business equipment and entertainment equipment, etc. - and lead in principle to a new, reinforced mobility and spontaneity.

This is apparent in sport, where the easy, spontaneous, individual switching between physical and mental, active and receptive, sporting and everyday activities, between high performance and relaxation - initially and most clearly symbolised by the mountain bike, also via the assimilation of streetwear and sportswear - will continue and intensify. It is indeed possible to draw parallels between "zapping" through TV channels or "surfing" through the Internet. In the same vein there are more and more places where it is possible to taking a sporting break without investing too much time and trouble (not only at home or at work), i.e. to a growing degree in places which used to be very far removed from sport such as the disco (aerobic inspired by breakdance through to hip-hop music, surf cruising in the disco, streetball to hip-hop music, etc.). And vice versa: fitness studios have long transformed themselves into multi-functional, experience-oriented premises, offering services which used to be the sole domain of discotheques or nonmedical practitioners. The incorporation of nature-related extreme sports into urban everyday life goes hand in hand with this trend: free climbing, bungee jumping, indoor surfing. The large number of "courts/pitches" required for this will subsequently lead to a reduction in the size of sports facilities (half-court tennis and golf, already the norm in Japan). Naturally, the marketing of the trend as a spectator event plays a big role here, but also the changes to team sports (streetball).

The nomad-like zapping mentality is also on the increase in the food sphere. The traditional meal schedule (three good meals a day) is being increasingly ousted by the habit of taking many small snacks throughout the day according to individual needs and mood (grazing). It is thus left up to the traditional form of taking food (joint meals) to satisfy hedonistic, individual and social motives (eating as an experience).

The new technical opportunities enabling the depiction and reproduction of complex processes, particularly natural ones,(one thinks here of materials resembling the shield of a beetle or spiders' webs) allow for a more differentiated understanding and production of naturalness thus also enabling naturalness and individuality to be far more accurately co-ordinated than hitherto possible.

For instance, this is done in cosmetics by high-tech procedures which exploit modern knowledge of physiological processes, putting them into practice in the most

sophisticated forms: fruit acids recreated from nature, refined techniques of "feeding" moisture and active ingredients into the skin, etc. Here again the fusion of nature and technology, but also of "hardware" and "software": the traditional procedure of introducing products into the skin has been more or less integrated into the product, into the hardware itself. The down-to-earth recipes from grandma's pre-industrial little treasure chest are hardly likely to match this form of natural effect.

The new, flexible and miniaturised high technology allows precise and flexible coordination of products, product applications and individual needs, not only in the manufacturing process, but more and more in the usage sphere also. Tiny, high-performance but easy-to-use machines will soon be employed to indicate the current state of the skin and its requirements (or those of the rest of the body) and prescribe or even mix appropriate remedies.

Such equipment will also be increasingly used for on-the-spot analysis of foodstuffs or current personal requirements. Another application of such equipment will be fast, critical analysis of the main points listed in manufacturers' information (concerning harmful substances, etc.)

This sort of thing is almost the norm in the sports sector. Here, the existing (mini) machines for analysing relevant body data will find more widespread use. The individual and up-to-the-minute condition and requirements of the body will be established online in a differentiated but straightforward manner. The optimum physical activity for such measurements and its effects, its "impact" on the body will likewise be precisely coordinated by "intelligent" machines (cardio-training).

High-tech also features in the materials for sports equipment and outfits. The natural experiences sought after these days are paradoxically only possible via high technology. Even the most back-to-nature paraglider would never dream of using hemp ropes. The new textile fibres which have long become a self-evident component of sport allow far better moisture regulation than natural fabrics. Even ecologically oriented

trend sports men and women have long ceased to regard the use of such materials as clashing with a pro-nature way of thinking - provided such materials are guaranteed non-allergenic and recyclable.

This attitude makes them the vanguard for the entire clothing sector also and not just because sportswear influences everyday clothes but also because our declining wariness of high technology is tending to find ever-greater expression in our outward appearance.

Finally, I would just like to mention the significance of this basis trend for the nature of our **outward appearance**. It will become clear that sensuality is in the process of shifting from its introverted pole to its extraverted pole and that the aspect of nature orientation will not disappear but will lose more and more ground to high technology.

At the onset of the (individualistic-natural) basis trend in the early 'nineties, the onus was on a move away from all artificial, outward show and a move towards natural and "inner" values.

With hairstyling and make-up, natural, warm colours are replacing artificial effects, thus expressing the drive towards individualistic, natural authenticity. The natural shade of one's own skin and hair is enhanced. Variable haircuts, gentle, alternating contrasts, natural-looking reflexes allow expression of individual, spontaneous, natural movement and the sensual experience thereof. In extreme cases, the purist heightening of natural styling takes the form of a transparent, "no make-up look", the practice of making up, sometimes with much time and effort, in order to look "like a fresh-faced child" (Kate Moss). Still more luxurious, individual, natural modesty in this area is inconceivable. Here it is all about demonstratively rejecting outward-oriented masking.

As in other areas too, the trend has put the phase of strict asceticism behind it and is on the way towards open hedonistic expression and admittance to "personality".

Lipsticks which react to body temperature and thus one's state of mind are a good example of this.

Mind you, the desire for colour, for given contours does not mean that the pendulum is simply swinging back to the artificial, but that the sensuality from its introverted, sensual pole has switched to the sensual extraverted pole. The fact that the retreat of sex into a platonic feeling has given way to a revival of eroticism is simply an indication of this. (Moreover, the way for this was paved by the extraordinary interest of sub-cultures in pornography and suchlike which we observed around 2 - 3 years ago in Paris or New York).

Clothing fashion is also showing signs of this new extraversion. Whereas it was originally a question of "I don't need a facade, I am just myself", the trend now is "I am just myself and am going to show it". There is evidence of this in all areas: in the silhouette where there was initially a move away from unnatural forms (broad shoulders, etc.), then towards a grungy neglect of form and eventually back to the natural contouring of body lines (feminine /masculine), through to a confident, more outward-oriented demonstration of this authentic form.

Proven high-tech manufacturing methods enabling "mass made-to-measure production" are currently catering for this: with the help of digital video techniques, the relevant body data are collected and relayed to the manufacturer by telecommunication where, in turn, they undergo computer-aided translation into individual cuts and end-products.

When it comes to colours, the artificial shades of the 'eighties were followed by purist non-colour and natural, earth colours which are now becoming more expressive and playing a more offensive role.

Things get interesting in the case of materials. Here the new sensuality calls for appropriately expressive, sensual materials which stimulate sight and touch. This means growing acceptance of synthetic materials again - but not like they used to be.

Instead, appropriately sophisticated versions in line with the environmental and natural way of thinking, similar to developments in the cosmetics branch.

This trend towards expressiveness is also an important reason for the acceptance problems experienced by many eco-design lines offering a very limited range of colours. This appeals only to the relatively small group of purists. The others expect a blend of expressive individuality and natural-ness. And before ever renouncing the former, they would far rather compromise on the latter. (The crux about trends is, after all, that it has nothing to do with objective technical criteria - for example naturalness - but with the subjective interpretation thereof).

Products made using the new high-tech processes will allow for both. Nevertheless, the "cyber fabrics" currently being paraded on the catwalks merely express the yearning for expressiveness and a declaration of loyalty to the beautiful new world of technology. By means of sophisticated technology, the fabrics of the future, whether made from natural or synthetic materials, will look natural and give free rein to people's individualistic need for expression. One trend in this connection is still in the throes of being born: the ecological, healthy processing of natural materials using highly refined, modern processing techniques.

## **Conclusion**

I have given a rough outline here of the ideal line followed by the basis trends. If one adds to this the complex mechanism of trend diffusion mentioned earlier, one realises that further specifications are required in order to produce concrete, usable trend statements.

This means that product and target group must be specified. Products with short life cycles (textiles) absorb trends more quickly than those with long cycles (furniture, cars). Some target groups are quick to adopt the new developments whilst others are still in the process of digesting the old.

And on the way from the avantgarde to the stragglers, the trends are not merely copied. First of all, their effects fade considerably. Despite all the changes that have occurred in sport, a survey carried out in 1993 revealed that 86% of the population "never frequent a fitness studio", 70% never go jogging. And yet the influence is still there amongst this majority. These people show passive interest in certain types of sport, wear a corresponding outfit in everyday life or for traditional sport, greedily consume the latest fitness magazines and, duly inspired, try out river-rafting or body-boarding when on holiday. Not everyone starts eating ethnic food but the consumption of rice is increasing. Secondly, each milieu, each target group scans a trend for the elements which fit into its specific system of values and modifies them accordingly. I draw attention to the example I gave of nature and the off-road drivers. Similarly, our studies on the subject of the car show time and again that "Mr. Average" regards environmental protect as a top priority. On probing what he means by this, it is often the case that he wishes for interior filters in the car to protect himself against the exhaust of others.

In this sense, the trend towards ecologically compatible high-tech textiles for example will also mean that certain consumer types - and manufacturers - will revert to materials which pose a risk to health and the environment, whilst others still cling to traditional, "natural" processing techniques. This will have no bearing on the trend itself. But it does show that serious trend research is complicated, highly involved work requiring a high degree of competence and care.