Retail Design, a discipline in its own right

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This paper aims at adding knowledge and arguments to the idea of retail design as a discipline in its own right. Before a definition is proposed, the discipline and how it came into being is first described. The word 'retail' refers to the selling of goods to consumers. So, retail design should be about designing spaces to facilitate the selling of these goods. This also includes the selling of services. Designing retail interiors started to be recognized as a design discipline only in recent decades (Fitch and Knobel, 1990). Beforehand, it was rather an intuitive expression of commercial acumen. Similarly, traces of branding could already be found a long time ago, although traces of creating a recognizable identity with store design are of more recent times. In a first stage, graphics such as logos and fascia were used to communicate the brand values. Later, the design of the store interior also came into play (Fitch and Knobel, 1990). In the 1960s, though, it was still approached more artistically than functionally. Since the 1980s, the emancipation of the profession of interior design also impacted the professionalization of retail design, which started to lose its exclusively artistic dimensions (van Amerongen and Christiaans, 2004) to the benefit of more informed aspects.

Professionalization of the discipline
Several steps led to this professionalization of the discipline, its definitions and its methodology: an increasing urge for differentiation, a shift in our economy that made the consumer become the focus of attention, and today's society that has developed into an environment where shopping and looking for new experiences are essential. Also the latest development known as the digital disruption (that is still ongoing) asks again for new ways of retailing. The intertwining of retail and society makes it challenging for retailers to stay relevant in relation to our changing habits (Christiaans and Almendra, 2012). Although retailing - as commerce - is timeless, retail design is one of the most challenging fields among the new frontiers of design, embracing both design disciplines of architecture, industrial design and communication design, as well as social science disciplines such as environmental psychology, sociology and marketing (Christiaans and Almendra, 2012).

To define or not to define
The (still ongoing) professionalisation of the discipline makes it difficult, however, to describe or define what the profession of retail design actually is. Kindleysides (2006) argues that retail design involves an understanding not only of what will work aesthetically within the space, but how it will perform functionally and commercially, and how it can be built to budget and meet all of the regulations governing the use of a public space. I believe that two aspects are missing from Kindleysides perspective: the online 'space' (cf. digital disruption) and the consumer oriented approach. Since a decade ago, space has no longer been solely a physical space, but it has also included virtual spaces - web shops, social networks like Facebook and Instagram, and other platforms that retailers and consumers continuously utilize to buy and sell products. Thus, the current difficulty lies within the fact that store story and experience starts well before its front door, via another channel like a website or a social media platform. Each and every aspect, channel, and part of the story need to be consistent with what the consumer expects of the brand. And let it be that it is the digital world which pushed the consumers to turn from a passive unaware partaker to an informed, active participant who has above all higher expectations. Therefore, being a retailer or a retail designer has become an increasingly complex and trans-disciplinary issue, since every channel needs to be designed into a holistic and consistent story with a sharper focus on the consumers' needs.
Although we live in a digital world, I believe store design will always remain one of the most important media retailers have to communicate with consumers, which is why it should be emphasized in retailer differentiation strategies and retail positioning. To this end, retail spaces should offer inspiration, tell a story, and engage customers into an intense sensory experience with one main goal in mind- to trigger an emotional connection.

From this point of view, I define retail design as follows: "**Retail design refers to designing spaces for selling products and/or services and/or a brand to consumers. It is trans-**

disciplinary in its intention to create a sensory interpretation of brand values, through physical or virtual media. A retail designer therefore tends to conceptualise the consumers' needs and wants into a spatial program."

The chart allows us to highlight the different aspects as functionality, aesthetics and atmosphere (see figure 1).
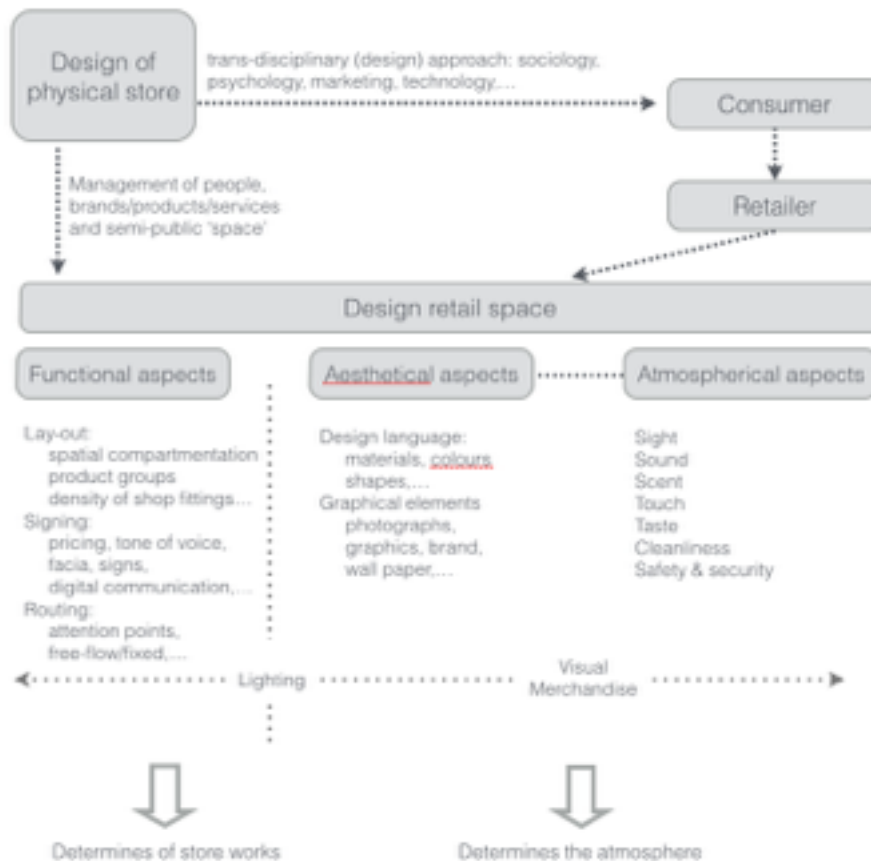
Research and education
Retail design is often taken as a design discipline closely related to, or as a sub field of interior design. From a historic point of view, this is quite understandable since designing for retail spaces has always been a task carried out by architects and interior architects/designers. Today, however, as mentioned before, there is a growing need for a holistic approach embracing different design disciplines and social science disciplines. Not only is this holistic approach necessary in the area of designing, but it is also needed within the field of education and research, as proper attention should be given to this new way of looking at and dealing with commercial spaces. Both educational programs and research projects tend to prefer a rather conservative approach starting from a focused and monodisciplinary domain related to either (retail) design or social science disciplines. In the field of research, for example, retail research has traditionally been undertaken by marketing and consumer research for decades. Moreover, interior design has recently assumed an active role in research in retail design. As regards education, we also argue that designing for retail asks for an extra, specialized, training. Over the last fifteen years retail design education has come to the fore at university level. Before that, only retail management had its own curriculum (Christiaans and Almendra, 2012). We see that retail designers are trained in different design disciplines ranging from interior design, product design to architecture, leading to specific trainings with each their own accent. Precisely because of its trans-disciplinary approach, as stated in our definition, this is beneficial to the field. Nevertheless, it is our opinion that truly combining both

social sciences with design disciplines (i.e.. working together) leads to significant gains for all stakeholders (retailers, marketers and designers).

In sum, the changes in our society, the emancipation of interior design and the growing interest of different design disciplines in retail design has made it a fast-emerging discipline with a sophisticated design approach of its own.

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