

# The Body Of Design

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## Introduction

by Giovanni Maria Conti

What is the design *Body*?

If you look up the meaning of the word *Corpo (Body)*, the Illustrated Dictionary of the Italian Language<sup>1</sup> by Giacomo Devoto and Gian Carlo Oli gives the following definition: “*Any quantity of matter limited by a surface or defined by one or more properties that lend it an individual identity*”. The authors continue with the following explanation “*The physical aspect of a human (in contrast with the soul) and an animal organism*”.

Continuing our search under the *Corpo* heading we come to Tullio De Mauro's<sup>2</sup> definition which splits up the basic meaning into “*Material object that has a shape and certain physical properties*”, the technical-scientific “*extended mass of material*”, and finally “*physical and material part constituting the structure of human beings and animals*”.

Thus, when we talk about a *Body* we enter a complex and extended discussion which necessarily needs to be circumscribed on the basis of the intended investigation.

We consider an issue implicit to Designing<sup>3</sup> for the fashion world and the subject that fashion addresses, as the synthesis of its design culture: the body that wears another body.

At the Faculty of Design, in the INDACO Department, we consider the theme of a Doctorate in fashion and the relation this has with Industrial Design Culture.

As designers, fashion can be treated as a specific design area that deals with the body and everything that covers its surface.

But what is the fashion body? What form does it take and how can we intervene in its design? Are we dealing with a *real Body*, made up of flesh and bones, or do we mean a *virtual Body*, made up of mechanical parts more or less independent of each other?

## Keywords

Fashion, design, body, epistemology of research

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<sup>1</sup> Reference: *Corpo*, pg. 679

<sup>2</sup> Reference: *Corpo*, pg. 597. The definitions of each reference are divided into areas of meaning including basic, refined, high frequency, common, slang, technical-scientific, literary, regional, dialect, obsolete, esoteric.

<sup>3</sup> “*The etymology of design can be traced back to Latin de+signare, to give sense, design*” Klaus Krippendorff (AA.VV, 04/2003: pg. 4).

“*In English the word design is both a noun and a verb. As a noun it means - among other things - intention, purpose, plan, intention, aim, attempt, conspiracy, pattern, basic structure, and all these meanings (and others) are strictly linked to those of astuteness and deception. As a verb (to design) it means to plan something, simulate, draft, organize, act strategically. The term derives from the Latin signum, which means “sign” from which it retains the ancient root*”. (Flusser V. 2003: pg. 1).

“*A designer is someone who designs with aesthetic sense; the success of certain industrial products depends, to a large extent on him. Almost always in the shape of an implement [...] the designer gives the appropriate importance to each component of the object being designed and knows that the definitive shape of the designed object has a determining psychological weight at the moment of decision to purchase by the buyer [...] the designer strives to construct the object with the same naturalness with which things form in nature, and does not impose his person taste in the design, trying instead to be objective.*” (Munari B. 1999: pg. 25,26,27).

## **(Di)solution Of Identity**

by Chiara Colombi

Living as we do with the obsession of finding, expressing, and distinguishing the quintessential self, it might seem hard to believe that the idea of a human being as a singular system, unique and special, has not always been part of human history and is still foreign to many non-Western cultures. Consider the Medieval subject, completely predetermined by the conditions deriving from their social, economic, and religious status: only with the rise of Humanism did the idea of an autonomous subject capable of individual consciousness and self control begin to take shape. A decisive step in the process of construction of the identity of the Western subject was the separation of mind and body conceptualised by Descartes, who in the face of the development of an ever more technical and scientific rationality, led to a perception of discontinuity between an active, rational subject capable of action, and a passive object: nature awaiting the intervention of man.

The world becomes object of investigation, deified, transformed into an object, separated from the subject. The subject experiences the world as a separate entity, observing its dynamics from a privileged position, constructing its own identity through the affirmation of this very distance. Self-sufficient and impermeable to the world, the Cartesian subject identifies fully with the *cogito*, the overlapping of self and rational consciousness, to which all material things are subordinate, leading to the foundation of Western identity on the hiatus between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, between mind and body.

This *cogito ergo sum* approach has been challenged, starting from Nietzsche, by the principal theoretical currents of the twentieth century (psychoanalysis, phenomenology, constructivism, etc.) and in post-modern thought finds its radical negation. The unitary and stable identity (expressed essentially through a binary paradigm that opposes and establishes a hierarchy between centre and periphery, inside and outside, subject and object) is refuted, arriving at a negation of traditional parameters like race, sex and sexuality, religion, work and family. In Anglo-Saxon Cultural Studies the theme of identity is dealt with in terms of the intersection of specific historical, cultural, and political conditions within social structures that are increasingly fragmented, with the dynamics of aggregation and interaction of individuals constantly renewed in relation to multiple factors and variables.

Considering these degrees of oscillation, the uncertainty of identity of the contemporary subject is no surprise, with a yearning to consolidate and reassert personal identity in order to resolve the doubts about individual belonging.

Reasserting personal identity leads to the question "Who am I?", or, the even more pressing "Where am I?", focusing the debate on questions of space and position.

And once the geography, cartography, mapping, location and dislocation of the subject have been resolved, you pass from the surface to depth, from space to the transitions made in order to move from one point to another. Which means dynamic and no longer static; movement and not only position; connections between points.

It is important to understand with which movements and at what speed you move, what the effects are of these movements on the subject and, in particular, what the effects are of these movements on the material making up the subject. But even more important is that the representations of these transitions are not limited to metaphoric strictures, and so open to interpretation, instead becoming mappings of trajectories and intersections between material, bodies, forces, that move subjects who are active agents producing experimental reality. It is pointless talking of positions, alignments, coincidences, borders, frontiers in an allegoric way, thus remaining forever entirely within a purely representative sphere. Multi-dimensional maps must be developed that take the flesh of the bodies into account, "... it is necessary to reposition the entire concept of the subject in a material-corporeal context, radically embodying the terms, plunging drastically into the chaos of material, of the forces and practices that make it move and from which it arises".<sup>4</sup>

In this view attention shifts from the subject as identity, to consideration of the flows and processes that define it, differentiating it, and no longer observing the individual isolated points within a system but the connections between system, territories, multiplicities.

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<sup>4</sup> Marengo B. 2002: pg. 66

Conceiving of the subject as a field of force, the product of differentiations, a set of vectors, does not mean making it into a metaphor, but rather setting up an elastic, mobile, reticular structure of ideas.

Discussing identity thus means dealing with difference not through a system of binary comparison: the subject defined in the equation *identity = difference from the other*, arriving instead at the subject as the result of the equation *difference = difference within itself*. With the transition from *difference from* to *difference in itself*, transformation is approached as a fluidity, without the obsessive quest for a stable and static identity within predefined and predictable schemes.

If identity means being identical to yourself and if it is possible to conceive of a subject non-identical to itself, subject and identity no longer coincide. It is possible to think of subjectivity in terms of process of differentiation and to find non-identity, that is, always being different from the self, in the gestures performed in lived situations.

The elaboration of subjectivity is then based on experience, tested through experiment, rooted in the body: it is the embodying of the subject.

## **The Mechanized Body**

*by Giovanni Maria Conti*

There is a popular expression for describing someone born of noble lineage: "a blue blood". Various efforts have been made to find an explanation for this saying.

In fact it all began in Spain, around the middle of the XV century. There was a fashion in the court, imposed by very strict canons of convention, for clothes with very close fitting cuffs, collars, and waists. The idea was that the clothing was so tight that courtiers were forced to make slow placid movements and never sudden or involuntary. For this reason the clothing of the Spanish Royals was so tight that it hindered normal blood circulation, with the result that the wearers developed a bluish colour around the neck, face and hands.

The fashion *Body*, the body that has always been the support for the presentation of another body, the clothing, has from the modern era onwards, undergone the most violent constrictions to the extent of mechanizing movement.

In the history of fashion there are various outstanding examples. Again in the XV century in France the invention of the first steel corsets gave voice to what the "Fashion Body" of the time had to communicate: a sinuous and elegant line that, by way of artifice, can enhance the final shape that a woman's body assumes.

The sixteenth century saw the introduction of the *ruff*, the stiff lacy collar with a very wide diameter to be worn immediately under the chin so that the head is always kept straight and the neck cannot be turned.

With Queen Elizabeth I the *hourglass* line was introduced. Using a very stiff corset, tight at the waist and very wide at the shoulders, and a *Spanish Farthingale*, a rigid underskirt formed with wood or metal hoops to widen the bottom of the dress, the woman's body was supposed to assume the shape of two perfect triangles on top of each other.

During the Rococo we find the hairstyles of Leonard, person hairdresser to Marie Antoinette. He invented the high styles with a metal framework (*pouf*) supported on the lady's neck. "*Poufs became ever more complicated: they displayed naval battles pastoral scenes, bird's nests, and even fresh flowers conserved thanks to bottles of water hidden among the curls.*"

*Artifice in first place.*

*The culmination was achieved with hairstyles that by means of mechanical pulleys could be raised or lowered at will.*" (Giorgetti C. 2000; pg. 241).

The truly great revolution for the fashion *Body* was introduced by Gabrielle Chanel when in the 1920s he fitted shoulder straps to handbags. This was the great invention of the early 1900s, by way of which Chanel restored women freedom of movement of both hands. Clothing is thus responsible for the structure and behaviour of the body and conditions its movement.

Eleonora Fiorani in her essay *The New Conditions of Life – work, body, territory*, writes, “We have always domesticated and “worn” the body, constructing on top of it another body, another skin with painting, tattoos, body-sculpting, piercing, or simply with clothing and decorations.<sup>5</sup>”

## **In/corpo(r)action**

*by Chiara Colombi*

Surfaces, material, and relationships are categories that immediately imply bodily transformations, epidermic and material, of the subject aimed at producing looks and inventing possibilities through action of/on the body.

And, talking of bodies, difference, subjectivity, choice, desire, it is useful to consider the issue through the perspective of Spinozian thought.<sup>6</sup> Spinoza was interested above all in the concept of difference, not negative difference, not based on a dialectics of comparison, but difference in itself and for the sake of itself, positive, pure and absolute, that does not depend on a second term of comparison in order to be defined and thus refers back to the idea of singularity and indivisibility.

In this way the subject, unique, indivisible, and singular produces difference only within itself. Its very singularity generates differences and the subject thus becomes “re-markable”, that is, actively producing differences and at the same time being marked by the same in a passive way.

Thought leads to action: it is not the thought that defines the subject but the inexhaustible drive for transformation of the subject itself that constitutes the essence. The subject produces and is produced, acts and is acted upon, desires and is desired.

Mind and thought are no longer considered superior to the body. Intellectual and corporeal are on the same level since both expressions of the same substance. The power and capacity of one is directly proportional to the power and capacity of the other: the more the body is capable of acting and being acted upon the more the mind is capable of perceiving. There is no relationship of control or dependence nor a causal relationship. Both participate in the construction of being.

Breaking completely away from dualistic Cartesian thought, Spinoza delineates the possibility of re-conceptualizing bodies and subjectivities as events emerging from interconnections with other bodies and subjectivities. Existing in the world means being exposed to the forces, powers, passions, and desires of others, and at the same time being capable of leaving a sign, exercising influence over them. It means being constantly and continuously in a condition of mutation, subject/object of imagined, desired, experienced, chosen, and endured transformations.

The body, in constant mutation, is the place and means for the creation of new forms of subjectivity and embodiment. It is both material and imaginary, the concretization of forces and desires.

Materiality and imagination.

Imagining yourself and your own body different from what they are means already recognizing the possibility of change. It implies changing the vision of the self, constructing an idea of a different self, and putting the material being into play in order to realize this desire.

Imagining a different body from that of the present, desiring its transformation, putting into action a process of differentiation, one assumes the appearance of a being coming into being. Imagination is thus preview/vision, design/action. The body, through its coming into being, defines its own new material nature, and this mutating material in turn makes it mobile. It creates a new changing bodily material, transforming in desire, imagination, experimentation, experience.

New material in experience.

It is immaterial material, non-material material, immaterial skin.

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<sup>5</sup> Fiorani E. 2003: pg. 165

<sup>6</sup> We note that Spinoza was a lens maker.

## Body: One, None, Hundreds Of Thousands

by Giovanni Maria Conti

"I am Body in everything and for everything, and nothing else"<sup>7</sup>, the body is our sole and great assertion.

It is our representation in the world. It is our belonging to the world.

From the theories linked to the anthropology of the "Vicinia", we know that each one of us is made up of our experience. I have meaning, my body exists only if there exists a subject that moves away from me due to lived experience.

Our body is what we have been taught, and includes within itself what we have been obliged to learn. In philosophy, Husserl distinguishes between *Körper*, the "inorganic body", inert, exterior, that is presented to an observer, the body of the other and of things, and the *Leib*, the personal body. Therefore, according to Husserl, we live both as the inert, extraneous body, that which is presented to the observer, and the "I", "me", body. As it is lived and perceived the body is never completely constituted, always presenting more than one meaning, and can never be forced into an objective analysis.

Knowledge of your own body "*is not knowledge*"<sup>8</sup> sustains Merleau-Ponty: it is a fleeting knowledge. We can thus talk of the enigma of the body; it is its own opaque identity, a being that is "*everywhere and in no definite place*."<sup>9</sup>

In the light of these considerations, we can state that the body is a "thing" that you feel, perceive, and in turn feels and perceives.

Continuing the theme of the body, Merleau-Ponty, identifies it as the place of communication between the subject and the world. Obviously the body about which he is speaking is the organic body, lived in first person and manifesting and perceiving external sensations.

Never more than today has there been so much discussion of the corporeal, of the importance of the body, the need to safeguard the body.

But the body under discussion is not the *Leib*, that is, the body lived in first person. "*It is increasingly the body seen as a work machine, tending towards the symbolic world of prostheses*."<sup>10</sup> The boundaries thus disappear between body and technology, between mind and machine. Our body is increasingly a technological body, subsequently perception is redefined, and this affects the body in its totality. Ubaldo Fadini, in the essay *Technological development and personal identity* sustains that "*Man should be viewed as a technical being, since biologically programmed for action, for well calculated reasoned expression of the natural fact*"<sup>11</sup>. It is a natural body but since it is designed for action, a "virtual" body, because it is mechanised.

Technology has helped spread the image of the body. What we define as virtual reality initiates the dispersion of the body within the networks and virtual spaces.

"*Reality has already disappeared*"<sup>12</sup>, states Baudrillard. What is called virtual reality without doubt is generalised in nature and in some way has absorbed, substituted itself for reality in the sense that in the virtual sphere everything is the result of an intervention, is the object of various operations. In this type of reality everything can be realized, even things that previously were incompatible with each other. First on one hand there was the real world, and on the other the unreal, the imaginary, the dream. In the virtual dimension all of this is absorbed in equal measure. If previously reality was the place in which the subject was immersed, now, with the arrival of virtual reality, the screen becomes the place of this interaction. Certainly in a place/non-place like this the contradictions between reality and imagination, true and false, are sublimated within a hyper-reality space that envelopes everything, undoubtedly including what seemed to be fundamental: the relationship between subject and object. In this new reality the subject no longer has its own location, a true condition as subject. In virtual reality

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<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche, "of the denigrators of the body", in Thus Spoke Zarathustra.

<sup>8</sup> Merleau-Ponty. 1995: pg. 110

<sup>9</sup> Merleau-Ponty. 1989: pg 18

<sup>10</sup> Fiorani E. 2003: pg 163

<sup>11</sup> Fadini U. 2000; pg. 11

<sup>12</sup> Baudrillard J. 2004

the location of the subject is dangerously threatened since it becomes a place where anything can happen, of transformations and mutations. The body thus risks annulment if not elimination.

With the introduction of virtual reality the body has also undergone mutations. Borrowing the terminology from the computer world we can state that the body has become the interface through which we interact on a daily basis.

We have always domesticated and "worn" our bodies, constructing another body on top of them, a different "skin". We have to distinguish ourselves in order to differ from others as individuals and from animals. We have to create a location for the body within social processes, says Lévi-Strauss. The body lends confirmation to social processes and is personalized by the "wearer". It stages itself for itself, and for whoever observes, to create one of the many possible appearances that it is capable of assuming.

## The New Fashion Body

by Giovanni Maria Conti

The birth of virtual reality, the interaction between "real" and virtual reality, has opened up new possibilities in design and research, it has made us aware that our body's "look" is not given in any single moment. The body is the history of a series of artifices carried out and undergone.

The body is the surface that we cover with other bodies. And every time we put on new bodies our perception of our own body, its history, changes and we change along with it.

The recent debates on fashion, the fashion Body and its constant mutations have introduced the definition, coined by Vanni Codeluppi, of "flow body"<sup>13</sup>.

The flow body is a body without boundaries, without fixed identity, that merges with the external world, a body that modifies infinitely.

The 1980s highlighted a phenomenon already underway for some time, that the body is no longer something to consider as given once and for all, but rather an ever more important protagonist in the social scene. In the same period, linked to what some have defined as the "unforgettable '80s"<sup>14</sup>, the dominant model of use of the body became a narcissistic conception.

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<sup>13</sup> Codeluppi V. 1995: pg. 84

<sup>14</sup> Exhibition "EXCESS. FASHION & UNDERGROUND IN THE 1980s"- 8 January-8 February 2004, Leopolda Station, Florence - Pitti Image Discovery Foundation

The exhibition presented three sections:

\_ **section one: SUPERBODY:** daytime atmosphere, for a plastic body, constructed, naked. Garments that construct and model the body. But also a body that begins to define its structure with gymnasium aerobics. The garment is designed to lend personality and strength to the individuals. The padding expands the shoulders making the female figure imposing and authoritative. Fashion sets off the figure against the background, constructing sharply defined silhouettes. The female superboddy is at ease in the uniform of the career woman but also in a sexy heroine costume. To be fashionable the man becomes soft and sensual, colourful and open-minded. The male superboddy is sculptural and is not afraid of becoming a neoclassical gay icon.

\_ **section two: TRANSBODY:** nocturnal atmosphere for a disguised, transfigured body, made up and excessive. The desire to be different, to be unique and extraordinary. Being beautiful does not count what is fundamental is being a protagonist. The atmosphere is nocturnal, of discothèques and clubs that hold theme nights. The body is transfigured to become unforgettable. Leigh Bowery is the icon of all those, artists first and foremost, who choose their own body and their disguise as an artistic and combative medium. Excess becomes a way of communicating and experimenting. Creativity and individualism are the key words of the moment. Everyone can improvise as stylists, graphic designers, artists, designers just for one night. There is no longer a single point of view and fashion is a seismograph recording the accumulation of movements and transformations.

\_ **section three: POSTBODY:** the body is dematerialized, the garment is a psychological fact. It carries with it many atmospheres. The garment participates in the play of allusions, the "post movement" epoch. Styles coexist and the garment is the result of a reflection on fashion, on styles, history, and traditions. The post-modern body is wired, connected to the network as happens with Gibson's Neuromante. In a reality that is starting to become virtual the garment is a psychological fact: wearing minds and attitudes. Fashion proposes lifestyles that permit each individual to live different dreams and atmospheres. Citation allows the use of fragments of the past, and also from contemporary life, to transform its aesthetics of customizing and allusionism. Architects and philosophers struggle with the concept of the Post-modern, artists are trans-avant-garde, allusionists, and the new new ... in the meantime another story begins.

Narcissism involves the psychic energy of the subject being directed above all towards the self. Narcissists close the door on the external world because they do not want to be open to comment, and it follows that the body also defines its boundaries in relation to what is outside of itself. However, the narcissistic nature needs, as underlined by Christopher Lasch, constant confirmation from others, because it is surrounded by illusory images generated autonomously as projections of the self.

With the passing of time, social changes, and the images it has been exposed to, the body can no longer bear being regimented within a rigid cage of the narcissistic model and tends to flow outwards. This means that fashion cannot count on a constant, compact nucleus of the narcissistic body. If in the past it had to accept the body as something that could not be modified, today the garment is forced to strive constantly for a personal match with the body. The match between body and garment is not always easy to achieve given that it is the body itself that transforms freely. Again, the garment is the other body that is worn by the body itself.

The garment, *the dressed body*<sup>15</sup>, the decoration of the skin, *realizing* the body, forges it together with the surrounding world. What in sociology is defined as the "big zero", the nude body, is already charged with sense, because it has always been, as confirmed by Barthes<sup>16</sup> "*the result of an absence that plays a fully signifying role, or a construction invaded by meanings and values.*"

What is developing today in the collective imagination, the acceptance of a flow logic for the body, necessarily implies that it is not only man that modifies his own body, but that it is possible for the body itself to autonomously choose the path of its metamorphosis.

It is along these lines that the discussion initiated by Antonio Caronia who, in the essay *The cyborg, in The wise artificial man*, presents the result of the establishment of this "machine" conception of the body that has been produced by the arrival of industrial culture and modern science. In the latter conception the machine body transmutes the very "raw material" of the biological body, identifying the human body as the object of a scientific discipline.

If, in the words of Merleau-Ponty, it is the body that speaks, that communicates with the surrounding world, today we can identify in multimedia and virtual communication the new frontiers for the presentation of the body.

The processing of digital images, *morphing*<sup>17</sup>, makes use of malleable, fluid bodies which can be moulded into any other type of form and can assume every appearance and deformation. It is thus the new technologies that redesign the new territories in which the hybridization of men with machines opens up new aesthetic experiences and new modes of consciousness and fruition.

## **Body And Surface: The Garment Interface**

*by Chiara Colombi*

The surface of the body is a common area for experimentation and research in art and design. The surface is what is seen, the interface with the environment. The fabric that covers it is thus not only a protective layer, nor is the garment that we are wearing only an element denoting a status, but what we wear is the vehicle of information and fertile ground for research and provocation. Designing for the body means making explicit all the relationships that are established, forming, and breaking around it. The body and the corporeal represent a language of difference. Clothing has always had a fundamental communicative vocation. It is, following in the wake of Barthes,<sup>18</sup> a true non-verbal language articulated into a system, made up from traditions as a social phenomenon, and in a process, realized in clothing in the individual act of dressing. The "dressed" person can thus no longer be separated from the body, which is not simply the support: in the interaction between tradition and clothing the "dressed body" is the structural unit of the social communication.

The dressed body today is a fully communicable body, an interface: clothing becomes communication: in the *Airmail Dresses* by *Hussein Chalayan*, the clothing is ironically raised to the vehicle itself of information, to the extent of being put into an envelope and posted.

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<sup>15</sup> Calafato P. 1999: pg. 43

<sup>16</sup> Barthes R. *Writings. Society, text, communication*, (1993-1995), edited by G. Marrone, Einaudi, Torino 1998

<sup>17</sup> Codeluppi V, 1995: pg. 82

<sup>18</sup> Barthes, Roland, *Writings. Society, text, communication*, Einaudi, Torino 1998, p. 73 and *passim*.

Clothing is a surface that identifies us, personalizes us, but is also the interface through which we have sensorial perception of the world around us. It is along these lines that the provocative latex garments by *Mathieu Manche* develop, with long elastic sleeves connecting the fingers or the upper limbs with the lower limbs. The garments become an extension of the body, like an elastic skin that partially limits movement, but at the same time generates awareness of the same. The project, called *Fresh*, is the outcome of an interdisciplinary study between art, industrial design, and high fashion in order to investigate the kinetics of the body, the dynamic interaction with other bodies, and the awareness of movement by the agent. It is a creative reading of human anatomy as well as a study of the garment as an "additional organ", a second skin. This explains the choice of latex: elastic, thin, with special tactile properties, lending particular sensitivity to the wearer.

The *Oricalco* projects of the *Corpo Nove* and *A-poc* companies by the stylist *Issey Miyake* have in common the idea that serial production can create objects adaptable to the individual: the user in the case of *A-poc*, actively participates in the cutting of their own personalized garment, while *Oricalco* adjust their shape to the body temperature of the wearer.

Garments can also represent a surface providing protection and insulation/defence from the external environment. *Corpo Nove* makes use of experimental materials from NASA to achieve physical barriers against external climate agents: *Absolute Zero* is a jacket capable of resisting down to -50°C, and *Cooling Jacket* is a flak jacket with an internal cooling system that can go down to 0°C.

In the same way the *Dynamic Layering* project by *Adidas* uses special fabrics to guarantee rapid evaporation of surface humidity in the name of comfort and the conservation of energy in extreme climate conditions.

Intelligent garments exploiting Bluetooth and Internet technologies represent the reference horizon of *Philips*: the integration of electronics in fabrics and within the structure of garments is the basis of the *New Nomads* project. The garments are designed in view not only of combinations but also possible applications: the range includes digital suits for professionals, sports clothing, high fashion content garments for youth. At this point it might be asked whether high tech garments offer a new sense to beauty and whether they allow the sublimation of instinctive impulses and compensate "perversions". Acute communicators like Vittorio Zambardino ask, in fact, whether the wearable computer will be limited to offering the user a wider access to technology, guaranteeing information, or whether you might talk of the birth of a new aesthetic.<sup>19</sup>

"It is possible that this entire area of technological evolution of fashion is driven by the tyranny of the market, but it is also possible that the "re-philosophers" will be able to take it under control. These investigators of the psyche and of bionics, fully up to date in materials science and marketing rules, remain faithful to their commitment to serving human beings".<sup>20</sup>

The idea of garments not only as communicative instruments but also as second skin was the foundation for the development of technologies towards the absence of stitching and the use of polymers and plastic derivatives in fabrics (a polymer based garment sprayed directly onto the skin like hair spray has already been experimented in American laboratories).

The idea of garments as interfaces has confirmed their use as a media support for advertising, although making it increasingly ambiguous who/what the means of communication is (the garment or the person?): an example is the use of human skin as a surface for branding, as in the case of *Skinthetic* by *Knowear*, who implant surgical silicone plates and polymeric gel into the skin displaying the brand trademark. So far there have been three experimental prototypes: *Nike's* consists of a cushion of compressed air implanted in the calf that improves sporting performance; *Mastercard* proposed an implant in the fingernail as a possible substitute of the bar code or magnetic strip of the credit card; and *Chanel* offers a padding implant that transfers the idea of branding directly onto the body.

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<sup>19</sup> Zambardino, Vittorio, "Will there be e-commerce?", in *Moda & Internet*, supplement to "La Repubblica", March 2000.

<sup>20</sup> Pacifists, Giorgio and Paolo Girardi, "Slaves and freed slaves in the multicoloured empire" in AA.VV., *Future Body, the human body between technology, communication, and fashion*, Franco Angeli, Milan 2001, pg. 193.

## The Return Of A New Naturalness

by Giovanni Maria Conti

Much has been said about the body, many affirmations have been made about the fashion body.

But returning to the question posed at the beginning of this brief text, what does designing for the *Fashion Body* mean today?

If Thorstein Veblen (1899) naively sustained that the cycles of fashion were born from the need to escape from the ugliness that with time characterizes every garment, and if Georg Simmel (1895) two centuries ago made a contribution considered fundamental for understanding the dynamics of fashion variation, dynamics that lie in the existence of an eternal conflict between imitation and differentiation, today what is the purpose of analysing and going deeper into the implicit issues surrounding the body and its relationships with clothing and fashion?

The body has to be conceived as an ambiguous entity, both subject and object, intimate and foreign, natural and social. The body is not passive and inert, attached to a living mind and true agent of culture, but instead is a "conscious body", with its own mind (the mindful body).

In the liquidity of modernity the body again becomes the raw material of social interaction, the place in which it occurs. Today the body presents itself as the last refuge<sup>21</sup>, the location par excellence of identity which is not given but has to be constructed, maintained and planned.

In 1995, Robert Altman concentrated on the fashion body in order to understand what fashion itself offers to society.

After the "magnificent '80s" the years of the fashion system and of excess, there was a period in which the need was felt to get back to "the origins". These were the years marred with scandals about the anorexia of fashion models, the drug induced deaths, eating disorders, and depression of the models themselves.

Altman denounced fashion and its world, which to him did not address the real issues facing the subject and thus the body, with the film *Prêt-à-Porter*, today a cult movie but scandalous at the time and far outside the limits of general good taste of the period.

The film narrates a frenetic week of fashion shows, presentations, and parties, with a very emblematic final scene. The stylist decides to parade the models naked, to demonstrate to the press and public present what effectively is the object of fashion design: the body.

While the scene unfolds an actor describes what is happening with these words: " ... and so new, so primitive, she (referring to the stylist) shows us the naked truth, so ancient and true, the newest of the ancient looks ... Simon has just shown us a celebration of fashion and here today has made a statement that will echo through the following decades, that certainly will influence all stylists, everywhere. And above all she has spoken to women telling them not what they should wear but on how to reflect on what they want and most need from fashion."

What is the statement that Altman wants to make with this final scene of naked bodies on a catwalk?

The answer is in the words of the song that forms the background music for the fashion show: the lyrics are as follows.

*You're so pretty  
The way you are  
You're so pretty  
The way you are  
And you have no reason  
To be so insolent to me  
You're so pretty  
The way you are  
La LAAll, you got to say it if you want to  
But you won't change me  
La LAAll you got to say it if you want to  
But you won't change me*

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<sup>21</sup> Bauman Z., 2002: pg. 215

*You're so pretty  
The way you are  
You're so pretty  
The way you are  
And you have no reason  
To be so insolent to me  
You're so pretty  
The way you are  
La LAAll, you got to say it if you want to  
But you won't change me  
La LAAll you got to say it if you want to  
But you won't change me<sup>22</sup>*

Against this backdrop Robert Altman suggests to those involved in the definition of new artefacts, operators in the fashion world and in the more extended system of operators in the fashion design culture, to consider first and foremost the subject that is designed for: the body.

*"Start again from the body, try to understand what the fashion body is, conceiving the self and the body from what one thinks and sees means opening up the possibility of change not only of the body.<sup>23</sup>"*

Working in fashion, in fact, no longer means thinking up a collection of garments but requires an analysis of the design processes that generate the purpose itself.

And the purpose must be that of designing for the *Body*.

## **Bibliography**

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<sup>22</sup> The Cranberries , *Pretty*, Album *Everybody Else Is Doing It So Why Can't We?*, 1991

<sup>23</sup> Fiorani E. 2003: pg 179