

UNIVERSITY OF ART AND DESIGN

CLUJ-NAPOCA

Field of doctorate degree: Fine Arts and Decorative Arts

ABSTRACT OF DOCTORAL THESIS

FASHION – WORK IN PROGRESS

Designing to Embodiment

Main doctoral guide:

Prof. Alexandru Alămoreanu, Ph.D

Doctoral guide for joint supervision:

Prof. Cornel Ailincăi, PhD.

Ph.D candidate: Lavinia Ban

CLUJ-NAPOCA

2012

Contents

Argument / 5

1. Fashion fascination and magic / 9

2. From fashion theory to fashion practice

2.1. Theorizing fashion / 15

2.2. Can we draw together fashion theory and practice? / 20

2.3. Fashion as a profession / 23

3. Fashion and body culture

3.1. Natural body / cultural body / 26

3.2. In search of the ideal body / 34

4. In the Studio

4.1. Tools, materials, techniques / 38

4.2. Designer's anticipated body / 46

4.3. From 2D to 3D - an imagined anatomy / 50

4.4. Imagination exercises. Fashion in East Vs. West / 60

5. Ways of articulating the garment on the body

5.1. Classical techniques / 63

5.1.1. Draping / 63

5.1.2. Tailoring / 66

5.1.3. Mimicry / 70

5.2. Alternative techniques / 73

5.3. Autonomous garment - the object / 77

6. What are the dimensions of the fashion body?

6.1. Surface / 83

6.2. Form / 91

6.3. Structure / 97

7. The “culturalization” of the body by extreme manipulation

7.1. Camouflage, enhancement, forgery / 105

7.2. Body erotization / 108

7.3. Extreme fashion and the body transformed / 112

8. Forms of adaptation and “inhabiting” of the garment

8.1. Raw material of fashion - “old togs” / 120

8.2. Garment from design to embodiment / 123

8.3. Fashion and Anti-fashion / 129

9. Spectacle of the clothed body

9.1. Performing Fashion / 131

9.2. The alternative fashion shows / 135

9.3. Cultural mediators: art, dance, photography, cinema / 140

10. The spectacular body

10.1. Mutations of the gaze / 144

10.2. Myths and contemporary models of corporeality / 147

10.3. Fashion and *cyberpunk* influences / 155

11. Fashion and utopia

11.1. Contemporary directions, trends and meta-trends / 159

11.1.1. Basic / 160

11.1.2. Vintage / 161

11.1.3. Transformer / 162

11.1.4. Emotional / 164

11.2. “Impossible” objects / 165

11.3. Think outside the box! / 167

12. How do we imagine fashion and future bodies?

12.1. Science, technique, illusion / 170

12.2. From *fashion design* to *bio design* / 175

12.3. A new fashion morality – from eco fashion to the ethics to approach the body / 179

13. About my projects

13.1. Fashion in Romania / 185

13.2. *Eat Cake!* / 187

13.3 Other projects/ 200

13.3.1. Swimwear Design / 200

13.3.2. Underwear Design / 211

13.3.3. Fashion Salad / 215

Conclusions / 217

Bibliography / 220

Annexes / 225

Abstract

This thesis reflects my concerns and curiosity in fashion. Being a designer, I have started from a basic aspect, present in repertoire of every fashion designer – the relation between fabrics and the body they wrap up. Referring to the literature (and dwelling especially on recent literature), I have discovered a theoretical background previously “heated”. Terms such as *fashioned body*, *skin+bones*, *extreme beauty* foreshadow a “bodily” orientation in contemporary fashion.

At the same time, I noticed that the studies of fashion tend to neglect the practice in the studio. The aim of this paper is to create a (necessary) bridge between theory and practice in fashion. I propose a method orchestrated “from the inside”. Choosing to investigate fashion with the practitioner’s eyes, I used mostly observation, comparison, experimentation in studio. I tried to make a selection of the significant projects in the development of contemporary fashion design and then I tried to analyze them using my own experience.

The paper is addressed to designers and other enthusiasts who actually work in fashion. I was particularly interested in fashion design evolution from the 20th century until today, but I also appealed to several historical references which I considered necessary. My approach is synchronic and operates connections between major issues in fashion.

The chapters of the work reflect my own artistic turmoil and, that is why, they raise some questions. How does garment articulate on the body? Why do clothes have this form and not another one? What are the dimensions of the fashioned body? What actually happens in the studio? What happens beyond the studio? Why a design is more valuable than another? How important is body? Why do cult objects exist? When can we talk about innovation? How does it show under physical aspect? What is the future of fashion?

Beyond the ambition to answer all these questions, I will try to highlight the need for their formulation.

This paper was structured in 13 chapters. The first three chapters act as an introduction, determining the nature and the highlights of this research. The next four chapters address key aspects of the work in the fashion design studio. Chapters 8, 9 and 10 follow fashion beyond the studio as an

interactive spectacle. Chapters 11 and 12 analyze fashion trends and future orientations. In the last chapter I presented my projects as a personal interpretation of the principles discussed in this work.

The first chapter, **Fashion fascination and magic**, is an introduction to the world of fashion. In this context, I analyzed visible and “invisible” arguments of fashion, its “tangible” and “intangible” aspects, I showed the extensions of fashion and its role in the contemporary culture. Fashion is not only a financial industry but it is also a cultural industry, that besides producing clothing, it produces images, habits and aesthetic models. Fashion fascination is justified by its ability to outline a seductive fictional universe, by its ability to enter into dialogue with the human body and to produce spectacle.

In Chapter 2, **From fashion theory to fashion practice**, I gave a brief overview of fashion theories, emphasizing their nuances along the 20th century, but also their limitations regarding the practice of dress.

If the first papers on fashion tried to define it, after the mid-twentieth century, fashion began to be put in relation to other cultural areas: art, literature, philosophy, sociology, etc., and theorization of fashion took a new turn. In recent years, with the development of Internet and the “democratization” of information, the interest for fashion has experienced a real *boom* and references were significantly enriched.

Wondering how I could approach theory to fashion practice, I concluded that this is possible only by analyzing it from the “inside”, from the perspective of those who work, try out, explore and thus they make fashion. In my opinion, fashion should not be regarded as a finite process (as generally approached in theoretical papers), but as an ongoing activity (a *work in progress* process). The last subchapter presents the designer’s position in contemporary fashion system and his tasks.

Analyzing the profession of *fashion designer*, as well as other complementary professions, I have shown that fashion is made through teamwork.

Chapter 3 deals with **Fashion and body culture**. Before talking about fashion as creative process, I found it necessary to make some observations on the body that fashion wraps up and articulates in culture. I distinguished between natural body and cultural body, showing that there is nothing really natural in fashion. Fashion “culturalizes” body, reviewing its appearance and attire, clothing and posture, and sometimes even the anatomical shape. Therefore, fashion cannot be limited only to clothes. In a broader sense, fashion refers to other body manipulation, too, such as hairdressing, manicure, body shaping by *fitness* exercises.

The ideal body (which I have analyzed in subchapter “In search of the ideal body”) is a major reference in the evolution of fashion, a concept that, in the happiest cases, is at the intersection between public’s aspirations and projections of the designer. In fashion, these ideals quickly succeed from one season to another: what was “grotesque” yesterday will be “beautiful” tomorrow, what was „unacceptable” once becomes after a while a matter of *bon ton*. Designers who have made history in fashion are those who have contributed to the final articulation of these ideal models.

Beginning with Chapter 4 of the paper, we enter **The Studio**. It is natural to begin with a brief presentation of materials and working tools. We will continue with some observations about *The Designer’s anticipated body*, referring to the character addressed by the designer, character that is anticipated throughout the creative process, using *storyboards* and *moodboards*.

Fashion design involves, in the first place, shifting from flat material (2D) to the spatial body (3D). The quality and means of that translation directly influence the shape of clothes. I have followed this spatial articulation, as it evolves from sketching to defining the prototype. The principles according to which clothes are structured directly influence their image as finished products. In this context, I outlined the major shift that occurred from the model of garment worked *sur mesure* in the tailoring studio, to industrial production of large series and to new technologies encouraged in the last decade.

I found it necessary to introduce here a subchapter analyzing Western clothes compared to the non-Western clothes, highlighting the differences in approaching costume, as well as the role played by Eastern cultures in the revitalization of Western fashion.

In Chapter 5, **Ways of articulating the garment on the body**, I referred both to the classical techniques of clothes manufacturing, and to the alternative techniques (more experimental). I analyzed the principles of tailoring and draping, as well as the mimetic approach of dress as *second skin*. The alternative techniques I insisted upon are: bandaging (at Herve Leger or Una Burke), assemblage (Maison Martin Margiela, handcrafted line), *spray-on* fabrics (Manuel Torres x FabriCan), *rapid prototyping* technology (Iris van Herpen). The last subchapter covers the category of object-garment, making a presentation of items of clothing that are detached from the body and can live independently (as works of art or design).

What are the dimensions of the fashion body? In Chapter 6, I continued the dimensional analysis, trying some sort of dress radiography. The three chapters insist upon the basic components of clothes

morphology: surface, form, skeleton.

For surface chapter, I analyzed the resources of fabrics and share of “surface” design in the projects of the designers. In the subchapter about form, I talked about textile volumetrics and types of silhouettes on which they can articulate. The subchapter about structure follows the skeleton of dress, the relation between the reinforcements, suspensions, tensions that define garment architecture. I analyzed through comparison flexible and rigid, interior and exterior clothing structures, as well as the possibility of some clothes devoid of skeleton.

The “culturalization” of the body by extreme manipulation is a chapter which emphasizes the role of clothing in disguising body imperfections, valuing individual characteristics, image distortion and forging bodily realities. Fashion provides a favorable setting for various manipulations, from extreme trammeling to lengthening of the legs or neck, widening of shoulders or head deformation.

Fashion has a strong erotic substrate and many absurd clothing practices are justified at this level. Radical models as those promoted by Comme Des Garcons, Hedi Slimane, Thierry Mugler or Alexander McQueen managed to redesign the human figure by means of clothing.

In Chapter 8, **Forms of adaptation and “inhabiting” of the garment**, I have shown that fashion is also “done” beyond the studio, developing as a *feed-back* between the projections of the designer and consumer’s attitude. Starting with the raw material of fashion (clothing items -“old togs”, which I have followed from the studio to different stages of production to consumer market distribution), I emphasized the active role of the wearer in reshaping the garment. Customers’ *feed-back*, various adjustments and reversals, the DIY trend (“do-it-yourself”), tend to have an increasing role in the work of contemporary designers, inspiring them.

In this chapter, I initiated a discussion about anti-fashion, highlighting the impact of artistic avant-garde. Avant-garde designers preferred to encourage experimentation, cultivating a transgressive repertoire revising our automatisms and conventions related to dressing.

This chapter shows that fashion should be regarded as an interactive process. Fashion is not only a window where we can contemplate clothes, fashion is about how we choose to experiment with clothes, which we can wear, transform or embezzle.

Since fashion is a show-biz industry, Chapter 9 follows **The spectacle of the clothed body**, referring both to the catwalk parades, and to the means of broadcasting images in fashion.

Fashion can be presented on the *catwalk*, by *performance* or alternative show. Fashion shows perfect the work of clothing creation, because, beyond clothes, they present new images of the body. In this chapter, I also made a brief history of the *catwalk show*, following its evolution from the exclusive parades of *haute couture*, to popular large scale performances.

Further on, I analyzed the alternative shows (or anti-shows), which ironize the stereotypes of standardized performance. A type of alternative performance is the *virtual fashion show*, such as that realized by the designers from Viktor&Rolf.

In presenting fashion, a particularly important role is played by cultural mediators, who evaluate, filter and disseminate the proposals of the designers (fashion magazines, music, photographs, *bloggers*). I wanted to point out that fashion does not trade only clothes, but a complete package of

image, in which clothes represent only the pretext from which a complex visual repertory is developed.

In Chapter 10, I talked about **The spectacular body** as the ultimate product of the fashion system, because fashion is less about clothes (objects), than about the image of the dressed up body, of a style or of an emblematic pose at a given time. The evolution of the spectacular body in fashion discourses must be related to the mutations of the gaze and with the means to illustrate fashion – drawing, photo, computerized processing. Sport and dance have a final role in the emancipation of the Western costume and in the modeling of new bodily ideals.

Archetype models which dominate Western imaginary have been always reflected in the work of the designers and in the way of choosing clothes. Superhero pattern, the model of ideal dolls, of diva or cyborg have been processed in the repertoire of the designers and in their efforts to reinvent the “human creature”. In their obsession for superlative representations, the designers revived the model of tribal body (either it is *punk*, *hip-hop* or *indie*), they glorified sportive body (the athletes and the super models of the ‘90s), conceived hybrid bodies (sensual cyborgs at Mugler), they ratified the anorexic look (*heroine chic* style), they trifled with the image of androgynous body (from Grace Jones to Lea T.).

SF imaginary had also a significant influence on fashion. Cyberpunk trend cultivated the model of hybrid character that prefigure the images of the future bodies.

Chapter 11 – *Fashion and utopia*, explores the fantastic resources of fashion. I referred both to fantastic scenarios produced by designers such as Alexander McQueen, and to fashion tendency to go beyond its own limits, reconfiguring the texture of the reality we live in.

I have done a short introduction to fashion trends, distinguishing between those “of surface” and those “of depth”, showing that, besides the changes conveyed from one season to another one, there are fundamental changes which are more relevant. I analyzed four contemporary concepts which contain a utopian gist: *basic* clothing, *vintage* style, *transformer* concept, emotional design.

Impossible objects, which we can find in the contemporary fashion scenery, have their own sense – they stimulate our imagination. I have illustrated some examples of this paradoxical type, such as *non-products conceived by Sruli Recht*.

In the subchapter “*Think outside the box!*”, I underlined the fact that the most fascinating solutions are those which defy “normality”, because, in fashion as in other creative fields, the most important steps forward are those beyond any imagination. In the context of contemporary fashion, the phrase “*think outside the box!*” invite to review conventions and automatisms and to go beyond limits and common places. Sometimes, in order to innovate, designers choose to start from scratch. (see the projects of Iris Van Herpen or CDG).

Chapter 12 launches a challenge of maximum interest for designers: **How do we imagine fashion and future bodies?** The image of future dress is prefigured by the major trends and orientations analyzed in the previous chapters and it cannot be treated ignoring the most recent technological innovations. We can anticipate but we cannot predict accurately because fashion does not develop straight, most of the times, it goes by leaps, as it happened with the introduction of synthetic fiber and elastic thread.

In the subchapter entitled “Science, technique, illusion”, I have analyzed the statement of a creator who doubts the concept of *honest design*. Marloes ten Bhomer refers to adopting new techniques (for example *rapid prototyping*) which prefigure a new generation of products and a new profile of designer.

The subchapter “From fashion design to bio-design” analyzes the trend of “internalization” of the clothing item, by contemporary bodily practices. The role of corset, of transparent tights, of clothing decorative design was taken over by the new exercises and diets, by beautification rituals, by old-style tribal practices or aesthetic surgery (all act directly on the body and modify it). At the same time a new generation of designers develops clothes from bacterial cultures which could replace one day manufacture technologies we are used to. Fashion can be regarded as a bio-technology that shapes clothes, and also other bodies and identities.

I insisted on the ecological dimensions of fashion, that remains a problematic issue. Fashion ethics should not be limited to the impact of industry on the environment we live in, because it also

implies the working conditions of those producing it, animals rights or the effects of new technologies (such as *wearables*) on the human body.

In the last chapter, **About my projects**, I concluded this thesis, completing the theoretical approach with a practical exemplification taken out from my own experience as a designer. I especially analyzed the design process and completion of the object of large series, referring to the segment of fashion where I have worked the most – underwear and swimwear. I have followed the series of swimwear *Eat cake!* from the stage of documentation, to planning, choice of the materials and completion of prototypes, until final transposition and presentation to the customer.

I have presented in a sub-chapter an *online* project, Fashion Salad blog, which I developed in parallel with this research work and which provided much of the material illustrated in this paper.

In the final conclusions, I resumed the objectives and points of interest of this paper, which I structured as a studio research, especially addressed to designers. Fashion is a very complex creative environment that cannot be exhausted by a purely theoretical approach. I summarized the peculiarities of this research and the possibility to develop it further on.

Key words:

fashion, designer, fashion design, studio, body, materials, techniques, structure, tailoring, draping, form, silhouettes style, object, fashion industry, culture, ideal, technology, aesthetic, functional, avant-garde, trends, anti-fashion, performance, alternative.