

Fashion in the Digital World - The Future is Now!

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In this paper and presentation I will discuss the growing relationship between fashion designers and digital technologies. Still in its embryonic stage, fashion that embraces digital technologies forecasts a future in which our selves, fashion and technology are one.

It is easy to forget, that in the modern era marriages have comfortably existed between fashion and technology, running contrary to the popular belief that fashion design and advanced technologies are mutually exclusive. Many innovations at the dawn of the industrial revolution were responses to changes in the production of textiles; among them, the flying shuttle, spinning jenny, spinning frame, and cotton gin. These inventions facilitated the handling of large quantities of harvested cotton, much of which resulted in clothing. The first sewing machine appeared more than 150 years ago; an invention which made possible today's fashion system.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the Futurists demanded the inclusion of technologies in clothing to celebrate the beauty of speed, dynamism and the machine. The Constructivist also ventured into fashion design demanding consideration of function and technology. Schiaparelli included elements of 'advanced technologies' in fashion in the 1930s as did Courrèges in the 1960s, using textiles developed by NASA.

The idea of partnering cutting edge technologies and the body in the form of fashion is by no means new. It is something we have lost sight of within the broad concept of fashion. Many recent designers who have responded to digital innovations and built them into fashion concepts, have done so as a reaction to the ideas of supermodernist, Marc Augé who describes the supermodern condition as an overabundance of space, of information and of individualism. Designers like Vexed Generation and You must Create have included digital technologies into garments to address Augé's concept of 'transitional spaces' and 'non places' which are part of the supermodern condition.

Digital fabrics have application in fashion addressing health, fitness, communication and identity. Although many were developed for military use, the potential application in design is only limited by the imagination. Hussein Chalayan has extensively incorporated digital technologies into couture in response to the concepts expressed by Marc Augé, manifesting ideas inspired by the 'transition space' of flight and aerodynamics. LEDs, optic fibres and digital fibres all lend themselves to the medium of couture. Fashion designers

are no longer reluctant to brainstorm with digital designers and the global fashion industry. Starlab saw a blue skies collaboration of France Telecom, Courrèges, Adidas and Samsonite in 1999. Since May 2000, Belgian designer Walter van Beirendonck has been working with the i-wear consortium to develop intelligent clothing that embraces digital technologies.

Within my teaching practice, a studio has been created in which students include digital technologies in fashion design and a trans-disciplinary interactive design studio is being set up for later this year in which RMIT fashion students and industrial design students at TU Eindhoven in Holland, communicate design solutions through digital space.

As a designer and a fashion academic, I believe fashion designers should take the initiative in concepts of digital design. Why remain passive, 'aloof' from the possibilities afforded by digital technologies. Imagine the wonder of being able to wear a computer, i.e. your garment is a computer, whether it is a sports jacket or an evening gown. It may be a traveling jacket that instructs/navigates you through the procedures of the airport, regulates your temperature within and without the airport, identifies the person meeting you, notifies your family of your arrival and tells you how to get to your hotel. This is not science fiction. It is possible and someone has to design it.