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Introduction to Chapter 2 Future & Inspiration. Design, Art, Craftmanship, Material and Culture

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SPIRIT OF LUXURY AND DESIGN

A Perspective
from
Contemporary Fashion
and Jewellery

Edited by
Jie SUN Elizabeth FISCHER

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Introduction

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The essays in this chapter show how design in fashion and jewellery has opened new avenues, both in their respective fields but also through what could be called cross-pollination, with various types of interactions between the two domains. A telling example is given by Donatella Zappieri (jewellery business and creative consultant), who explains how Italian jewellery has come to play a defining role in trends and fashion since the 1980s. Guillermo Garcia-Badell (director of the fashion studies program at the Universidad Politecnica in Madrid) teaches students that design, in whatever field, is a holistic discipline, transcending boundaries and involving a mix of approaches, from the technical to the technological, from craft-based to concept-driven, combining both scientific and humanistic knowledge. Independent curator Nichka Marobin's compelling visual narrative on the affinities between objects of art, fashion, and jewellery offers a vivid testimony to the vitality that comes out of interconnecting disciplines. Naomi Filmer (designer and senior lecturer in the MA Fashion Artefact at London College of Fashion), supports students in pushing the boundaries of design and fashion to explore more deeply and dynamically the body as the site and means for confronting ideas of wearing and adorning, in an industry where art, craft, design, and performance overlap with each other. Questioning the designer's practice provides means to assess creative methods (Mala Simptani, visiting lecturer at London College of Fashion) to address pressing issues in sustainability (Volker Koch, director of product at Silent Goods) or to re-contextualize strong craft and design traditions in relation to new techniques and technologies (Yong-il Jeon, professor at Kookmin University in South Korea; Akio Sake, chief curator, Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum).

In this framework, identity and the body remain the core focus of fashion and jewellery. As indicated by Naomi Filmer, “accessories have evolved beyond adornment, and become key to expressing ways of thinking for design and living.” The essay by Eelko Moorer (designer and head of the MA program in footwear at London College of Fashion) is a case in point, showing how the practice of footwear design can become a tool for critical thinking in design. The way fashion and accessories situate the body and the individual in society are evoked in history by Emily Hammen (lecturer at Institut Français de la Mode Paris), Paula Rabinowitz (emerita professor at University of Minnesota), and Cristina Giorcelli (professor, University of Rome III). These three essays show the power of fashion and accessories in daily life through their symbolic meanings in literature, film, and other iconography. Finally, Christine Lüdeke (designer, professor at Pforzheim University) explains “how the making and wearing of jewellery, accessories, and fashion provide amplifications of the body and of the self—whether physical or immaterial: the body provides the context, the body is the context.”

As the body is central to jewellery and fashion, the context, we need to know what body we are referring to today. Before coming to this point, I will provide a brief overview of the historic relationships between fashion and jewellery in relation to the body, as primary objects of material culture and of our symbolic system. “Diamonds are forever” and “Fashion is fickle,” if we are to believe those two sayings, which refer to the realm of luxury, jewellery, and fashion, stand worlds apart. Mainstream jewellery and fashion, however, share a lot in common as products that human beings use on a daily basis. Clothing, accessories, and jewellery are situated on the human body and in direct contact with it. Furthermore, all of them provide some functional or communicative extension to the body. In this way, they constitute our contemporary daily equipment (Farren and Hutchinson, 2004), the things we cannot live without to be able to function in society. These intensely personal items act as a primary means to express at once individual and social identity and to perform our daily tasks.

Initially, the importance that jewellery and accessories have acquired during the 20th century is due to the fact that Western mainstream daily dress progressively boiled down to variations of the uniform of blouse, shirt, or T-shirt paired with trousers, in a restricted range of colors: black, blue, gray, and white, worn in Western culture by both men and women. The feminine wardrobe includes the by now compulsory LBD or little black dress, worn in formal and informal occasions, easy to dress up or down, as introduced by Gabrielle Chanel in 1926. Hence, accessories and jewellery have become distinguishing elements of a person's attire and, by extension, social identity. They have become contemporary conversation pieces through social media, with people flaunting what they buy and wear on the web.

For the last 30 years accessories have brought in the most income for high and low brands. In the hierarchical relationship between clothing, considered essential, and accessories, considered secondary, sales have tipped in favor of accessories. Jewellery is now in the fore, indispensable in the performance of fashion on the catwalk and in the street (Evans, 2007, 231–33; Brand and Teunissen, 2007; Fischer, 2013). By means of aggressive marketing, jewellery and accessories have become a way of expanding a brand's message, sold to the audience as coveted "must haves."

The technological developments ushered in by the 21st century have had a major impact on the role of accessories. Wearables and connected items (mobile phone, headphones, iPods, computers, digital tablets, and so forth) have become indispensable equipment for the contemporary "supermodern" human being in an era of connected flows, speed, permanent mobility and an overabundance of information (Augé, 1995, 35–36; Bolton A., 2002, 7). Younger and older generations have wholeheartedly adopted the culture of equipment in dress with accessories and wearables. Mobile devices are kept permanently close at hand as an extension of their owner's identity. They are the depository of our social selves, harbouring all our contacts, pictures, messages, and

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personal timelines. The day's outfit comes with the universal 21st-century necklace, i.e., fine white cables that link earpieces to portable electronic products. Engineers at Logitech, a Swiss company specialized in state-of-the-art computer peripherals, have found that today's challenge is to accessorize the person rather than the wearables¹. The focus has therefore shifted to the wearable as part of fashionable equipment, while the necessary engineering, functionality, and ergonomics, indispensable to this type of product, remain in the background. The same process that transformed eyeglasses from medical necessity to fashion accessory is at play. This revolution has come about through embracing the design culture of the fashion industry (Pullin, 2009).

Thus, in contemporary fashion, accessories and jewellery are not mere adornments of clothing and/or the body, rather they have become the most necessary items of human beings' daily equipment. As C. Giorcelli has noted, Derrida's view on the necessity of the ornament with respect to what it supplements offers a fruitful interpretation of the role played by accessories in contemporary dress and for individuals today, as an artifact that fills in a lack, enabling an entity to become truly complete (Giorcelli, 2011).

A parergon comes against, beside, and in addition to the ergon, the work done (fait), the fact (le fait), the work, but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside. Like an accessory that one is obliged to welcome on the border, on board (au bord, à bord). ...The parergon inscribes something which comes as an extra, exterior to the proper field...but whose transcendent exteriority comes to play, abut onto, brush against, rub, press against the limit itself and intervene in the inside only to the extent that it is lacking from itself (Derrida, 1987, 53–56).

Derrida derived his notion of paragon and ergon from Kant's *Critique of Judgement* in which Kant discusses, among other things, picture frames and the dress of Greek statues as examples of parergon. For Kant the picture (the ergon, the work) becomes a picture only once

1. Conversation with Jean-Michel Chardon, engineer in product development and technology strategy at Logitech, 2016.

it is framed (the frame as parergon), just as the Greek statue (ergon) needs drapery (parergon) to be perceived as a statue. In this way the parergon has a definite impact on the existence of the ergon as a whole. "In other words, although an accessory, the parergon influences the ergon. What is more, for the parergon to exist, the ergon must lack something. Neither inside nor outside, neither superfluous nor necessary, the accessory is thus almost indispensable" (Giorcelli, 2011) for contemporary individuals' performance in society.

What is the contemporary individual lacking today, how is it incomplete? Human beings evolved as permanent bipeds, with the result that our feet and hands acquired different functions: our feet provide stability and locomotion, while our hands have specialized in the playful and practical manipulation of materials and tools (Warnier, 1999). One can argue that the need for equipment (i.e., any object/tool required by an individual for a specific activity) arose from this unique evolution. From very early on, human beings resorted to artifacts as means of agency in their daily life.

In the supermodern context ushered in by the end of the 20th century, dominated by a fascination for performance and connected technology, our bodies are perceived as inadequate. They need to be enhanced so we can live longer, so that signs and effects of aging or sickness are counteracted. The ethics of sports competitions now dominate leisure activities: sportswear is devised to enhance athletic performances, while functional clothing designed for outer wear is modelled on the extreme conditions of scientific expeditions to the Arctic or to the desert, to the marine abysses or to outer space. New accessories are needed to help face global warming and pandemics, from fans, hats, masks, and other protective wear, to electronic devices constantly monitoring our health and whereabouts. Designers today work with this inadequate body as the norm, a body that has to negotiate the transitional spaces of worldwide urban life, spanning numerous time zones. They are required to create:

practical, functional clothing...[which] facilitates bodily movement, provides shelter against the inclemency of the weather as well as against noise and pollution from traffic, affords physical protection against street crime and psychological protection against the gaze of passers-by and the neutered gaze of the surveillance camera. Designers of supermodern clothing look to high-performance sportswear and military dress to achieve these functions. They also incorporate wearable electronics. Supermodern clothing promotes the idea that we can anticipate all contingencies, that our clothes can be complete and completely functional (Bolton, 2002, 7).

We have come a long way from the biped using artifacts for our daily activities. With connected electronic device and wearables, our selves have become ubiquitous, our body remaining in one place while our mind is transported elsewhere by the miracle of technology. We can interact with someone at the other end of the world while remaining seated on our office chair or on living room sofa. We seem to live in the age of speed: speed of information, speed of travel. However, we paradoxically spend most of our time in a seated position. We have in effect become sedentary beings more than ever before, our minds disconnected from the body. Furthermore, our fashion culture imposes an idealized and increasingly disembodied vision of the self, fragmented among the myriad of screens that surround us. Though a large part of our world now occupies an immaterial dimension, we are still material girls and boys. Personal equipment has become essential in order to overcome our bodily failings. We still depend on the material and design culture of accessories, which are primarily situated on our body, to provide us with the agency we need both in the real and virtual dimensions of our existence.

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