

THE VALUE OF DESIGN RESEARCH

FASHION CURATING IN THE FIELDS OF DESIGN: ISSUES IN THEORY AND PRACTICE.

11TH EUROPEAN ACADEMY OF
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ABSTRACT

Within contemporary society, the ways of apprehending design disciplines have been complicated. Their status is less and less associated to the materiality of objects, their functionality, and progressively connected to broad cultural phenomena.

In continuity with the development of fine art shows, design exhibitions have in this way imposed themselves as a privileged context in which to decipher and deepen our understanding of these new significations. Indeed, curating¹ design exhibitions and events is a subject of growing interest in the context of visual arts as for actors in the field of design. On the one hand, academic interest increases following the strategies and critical perspectives of research fields such as Cultural Studies. On the other, the market leans on the valorization of production in its search for an ever-renewed itemization of "added value." Nevertheless this necessarily implies deepening a still insufficient reflection concerning a practice that is nonetheless widespread.

The choice of fashion in order to inquire upon this topic has particular relevance. If a critical reading of design aiming to reveal its cultural salience has historically been complicated due to its functional and commercial aspects, fashion has been subject to the same difficulties and suffered even more resistances because of its frivolous and decorative connotations.

Following this perspective, a theoretical consideration of fashion curating as a practice can bring value to design research in general, exploring opportunities to clarify the specific relevance of popular and material cultural production – which we are mainly accustomed to experiencing in the context of daily life – in the broader frame of contemporary culture and aesthetics.

Keywords: fashion, curating, exhibition, art, semiotics.

¹ This research has been initiated in a francophone cultural context. The italics highlight that the term fashion curating is employed in its untranslated English form. This choice is argued below in the article.

1 INTRODUCTION

Within contemporary society, the ways of understanding design disciplines have been complicated. Their status is less and less associated to the materiality of objects, their functionality, and progressively connected to broad cultural phenomena.

In continuity with the development of fine art shows, design exhibitions have in this way imposed themselves as a privileged context to decipher and deepen our understanding of this new significance.

Indeed, *curating* design exhibitions and events is a subject of growing interest in the context of visual arts as for actors in the design system. On the one hand, interest in the academic context increases following the strategies and critical perspectives of research fields such as *Cultural Studies*. On the other, the market leans on this form of valorization of production in its search for ever-renewed itemization of “added value.” Nevertheless this necessarily implies deepening a still insufficient reflection concerning a practice that is nonetheless widespread. The choice of fashion in order to inquire upon this topic has a particular relevance. If a critical reading of design aiming to reveal its cultural salience has historically been complicated due to its functional and commercial aspects, fashion has been subject to the same difficulties and suffered even more resistances because of its frivolous and decorative connotations.

Following this perspective, a theoretical consideration of fashion curating as a practice can bring value to design research in general, exploring opportunities to clarify the specific relevance of popular and material cultural production – which we are mainly accustomed to experience in the context of daily life – in the broader frame of contemporary culture and aesthetics.

This introductory piece of research envisions *fashion curating* as a syncretic practice. It merges a theoretical consideration of fashion as a cultural phenomenon, fashion design as an applied practice and exhibition design, understood as the conception of “vision machines” liable to reveal original syntax among exhibited content and its meaning.

Far from being anecdotic, this assumption demands the importance that the critical examination of *fashion curating* has to the whole field of design research. On one side it evinces the pivotal role of exhibition curation in recognizing the meaning of those cultural productions trivialized by their inclusion in the context of daily life. On the other, the value of this reflection extends from research in the academic world to the public context of cultural divulgation, as museums, galleries or performative events, in which broader audiences meet the pedagogical and experiential aspects of these explorative projects.

2 THE CHALLENGES OF AN EMERGING DISCIPLINE

Fashion is nowadays perceived by its creators, the consuming public, and by actors in the artistic and academic fields as an expression of aesthetic tendencies that structure culture. However, in contrast to what may be observed in other domains of curating (such as in art or museography) the growing position of fashion curating in the contemporary cultural panorama has not yet given shape to a formalization of its theoretical dimensions nor to its professional application.

Fashion curatorial practice is born from the necessity to show through the vehicle of exhibitions how fashion production is conceivable as an expression of contemporary aesthetics and its meaning. Consecrated to putting forth exhibitions of artistic content, the whole culture of *curating* defined itself in fine arts as early as the beginning of the 20th century owing to the important complexification of the importance attributed to contemporary art. In this regard, Giorgia Calò and Domenico Scudero (2009) have recently sketched the first stages of this process in a succinct and useful reading of the shared history of fashion and art.

In art, the display of the artwork reveals to the public its immaterial and conceptual aspects. In the same way, in fashion, the context of the exhibition imagined by the curator manifest intangible dimensions of fashion productions, starting from a plastic, semiotic, sociological, or anthropological reading. The practice of *curating* reveals the invisible relationships between fashion production and its context, such as the gesture determined by the experience of clothing or accessory on the body, the many manifestations of identity in the construction of the subject through the means of fashion, to symbolic and aesthetic implications of a type of production normally known only for its material expression or its applied *savoir-faire*.

Beyond rare academic programs and monographic publications, which are specifically dedicated to them (STEELE, 2008), reflection and research concerning such an approach to fashion and *fashion curating*, as a specific practice, are still little developed and remain fragmentary.

The reasons for this, can be better understood by considering at least two factors: on the one hand the late and often polemic context in which *curating* in general is in the process of being formalized as a subject of academic study and, on the other hand, the "historic" suspicion in the academic *milieu* regarding material cultures which sit astride artistic creation and the market (such as design and fashion), which makes them peculiar objects of study.

3 A RECENT SUBJECT

One of the primary reasons for this lateness is the recent emergence of what is called "fashion" today, that is to say, a radically different type of production than what was known as fashion just a century ago and which is more and more appreciated for its immaterial, aesthetic or experiential value (MICHAUD, 2013). As Gilles Lipovetsky (1987) has analyzed, in a contribution among the most complete on this subject, the process of evolution of clothing towards a vestimentary culture for the expression of social origins and – finally – toward a "fashion system" perceived as the expression of identity from individual points of view, began in the Renaissance, certainly, but experienced its greatest acceleration in the first decades of the 20th century. Among others, the analysis of Barbara Vinken (2005) has more recently revealed how within postmodern society the significations of fashion have lately been complicated, bringing it to be perceived as an expression of contemporary aesthetic culture, on equal standing with the other artistic disciplines.

In fact, despite these profound and recent evolutions, the practice of *fashion curating* emerges in a cultural context in which fashion does not yet benefit from

the same semiotic maturity as art. This cultural and temporal discrepancy renders the research of new expressive formats even more pertinent, in order to communicate these transformations as they occur, which now is at the heart of *curating* fashion exhibitions..

4 AN AMBIGUOUS STATUS

Another aspect which has served to brake contacts between fashion and contemporary art touches on the very nature of fashion production and, consequently, on its cultural status. Between the 19th and 20th centuries, certain artistic movements, such as *Art Nouveau* in France or *Weiner Werkstätte* in Austria, hoped to consider fashion and art on the same plane, just as the very first sociological research on fashion was carried out by renowned intellectuals of the time (SIMMEL, 1905/2013). However, these initiatives favoring an emancipation of fashion revealed at the same time resistance vis-à-vis the legitimization of vestimentary creation on the part of an official culture that did not recognize artistic value in it. These very factors were at the origin, in the 20th century, of the academic milieu's indifference toward fashion and other productions stemming from decorative and applied arts.

If on the one hand, objective value can be attributed to fashion owing to its creative and artisanal dimension, on the other its compromises with the market, as well as its functional, decorative and ephemeral characteristics make it a trivial object, frivolous even. Roland Barthes (1970) was incidentally interested by the unfavourable connotations in western metaphysics attributed to artefacts and signs exhibited on the body's surface and in contact with the skin and the sociologist Frédéric Monneyron (2001) has devoted an entire work to the key role held in postmodern culture by a fashion with an ambiguous status, between frivolity and essence. It is not until the 1960's and *cultural studies* that more informed research was undertaken on popular cultures and among them, fashion.

5 FASHION/ART: AN UNCERTAIN RAPPROCHEMENT

Modern fashion was born in the context of the applied arts in the 19th century. Yet its inclusion among the domain of the arts and its legitimacy in that context still animate the debate today. As in the academic milieu, after an initial phase marked by art history's suspicion toward fashion, study and research that bring them together take on more and more importance. However, the literature on the subject demonstrates that these relationships have been especially analyzed under the aesthetic, historic or socio-cultural angle, while more specifically conceptual and theoretical contributions, such as the illuminating study by Germano Celant (2008, pp. 204-216), art critic and curator, "Tagliare è Pensare" are more rare.

Parallel to the rapprochement established by critical writings, contact between art and fashion solidified through the production of works, increasing since the beginning of the 20th century (CALÒ and SCUDERO, op. cit.) It is important to recognize that these exchanges have not always been inspired by the development of an artistic discourse toward the fashion commodity and they have often arisen in order to give to fashion an intellectual standing or inversely to connect art to a new public of potential buyers. The inequality of these rom time

to time opportunistic collaborations, have on the one hand fed the indifference of a part of the artistic milieu and on the other discouraged interest for research to the detriment of the opportunity to develop a serious critical reflection on important productions such as the exchanges between *haute couture* and theatre arts in the teens and twenties of the previous century, to the activity of festivals and biennales devoted to fashion, or the work of artistic foundations born within large luxury houses in the contemporary panorama².

6 FASHION EXPOSED: DIVERSE EXHIBITION PRACTICES

If it is feasible to consider that curatorial reflection on fashion began with its “educative” role toward large and non-specialized publics, such as the “universal exhibitions”³ of the 19th and 20th centuries, it is only after the contribution of the Bauhaus in terms of the aestheticization of the everyday and of design that the place given to fashion could be considered as a “machine for vision.” This sensibility guides, among others, the work of Frederick Kiesler, theoretician, artist and architect, in the conception of vitrines devoted to fashion displays for the New York department store Saks Fifth Avenue. Almost a synthesis of previous research on art exhibitions and of the necessity of a narrative spatialization for a full understanding of a fashion display (DAVIDSON and RYLANDS, eds, 2004), the project inscribes itself in the aesthetic and sociological reflection of the time on “the epiphany of merchandise” (BENJAMIN, 1936/2003) and on the work of art. At the same epoch, surrealist artists theorized and experimented with new installation formats exploiting tools used on the sales floor while at the same time the format of the white cube imposed itself as an apparatus that valorizes the work of art (O'DOHERTY, 1976) and re-enchants the “luxury” product in order to thwart its vulgarization faced with a larger and larger mass public.

Starting with the second half of the 20th century, the fashion sales space is more and more often considered as a veritable exhibition space. Transformed by a global process of “artialization” (LIPOVETSKY and MANLOW, 2009), it presents commodities according to the spatial and identitary codes of the art gallery, it anticipates and contributes to define the monumental vocabulary of museum architecture in the 90's and 2000's in reaction to the breakdown of traditional means of advertising (CAMMARRESI, 2008), and goes so far as to integrate contemporary art in the content which is presented to the public (MARCHETTI, 2009) according to the choices and suggestions of professional curators and advisors.

The fashion show has also evolved from its original function as an event to “communicate” a product to a moment of “performance” in which artists, architects, choreographers and composers join the fashion designer and artistic

² As the Fondazione Prada in Milan (I) or the Fondation Galeries Lafayette in Paris (F).

³ Without distinction, between the Great Exhibition of London and other “grandes expositions” that followed in France and elsewhere.

directors in order to achieve a multi-media and multi-disciplinary global concept (ZAZZO, ed., 2006).

More recently, installations with artistic characteristics in boutiques and experiments between fashion shows and performance have constituted a turning point for the contemporary culture of *fashion curating*. Diverting attention away from the object in favor of contextualization, these experiments represent for fashion what the slippage from a “plastic” aesthetics bound to the object toward a “relational” aesthetics tied to the artistic gesture was for art (BOURRIAUD, 1998).

7 “CONSERVATOR” AND “CURATOR”

While fully considering of the essential contribution of museum conservation stemming from the museographic tradition, the question here is privileging an approach which encourages methodological hybridization and favouring “relations” as a structuring principle: those between works themselves, those of the artist directly implicated in the conception of the work and those of the public (DURING, et al., 2011 and OBRIST, 2014). Translated as an exhibition format, this point of view shows itself to be particularly compatible with the trans-disciplinary and “trans-aesthetic” (LIPOVETSKY and SERROY, 2013, p. 25) nature of fashion, but also raises the question of its legitimacy and that of the status attributed to “the author” of the exhibition.

The distinction and the differences between the terms “conservator”, “*commissaire*”⁴, and “curator” are far from clear and are currently the object of a debate which concerns as much the specialist milieu as well as general cultural media with the widest reach (BOUDIER, 2013). Presented here in a sequential order that retraces their chronological appearance, the three terms share a common origin in the naming in the 19th century of the *métier* “museum conservator,” an epoch which is not without relation to the erosion of the objective order of things initiated by modern and postmodern culture (LYOTARD, 1979). The work of art can no longer simply be collected in a museum and shown as such, but requires an “interpretation” faithful to criteria established by art history or a specific cultural context.

Even though they are often employed interchangeably in the French language, the terms “*commissaire*” and curator (or *curateur*, according to a more contemporary vocabulary) offer differences. The designation “*commissaire d'exposition*” often goes hand in hand with a more open and transversal methodology than that which is used by the conservator, lending the idea he or she has been “invited” to the museum for a limited period or for one exhibition and does not occupy a permanent position. The meaning of the term supposes however the idea of a *master plan* from which the exhibition is organized. The term curator (or “*curateur*” and the derived adjective “curatorial”), employed especially in relation to contemporary art (JEANPIERRE and SOFIO, 2009) as a synonym for “conceptor of exhibitions” (BABIN, 2011) makes reference to a sharpened independence of the practice. In this regard, Harald Szeeman is often cited as the “first to have fully assumed the role of *creator of exhibitions*,” (UZEL, 2011) in terms of methodological transversality and in liberty of established relations between supports presented in the exhibitions. Such a concept of curating, well represented in the contemporary context by the practice of Hans-Ulrich Obrist –to cite but one- focuses upon on the experimentation of contexts

⁴ In French.

and non-canonical exhibition formats and seems the most pertinent to us in order to grasp the composite nature of fashion as well as its disciplinary transversality and its polysemy of language. This preference also explains the choice to use for this article the expression *fashion curating* in English rather than “*commissariat d'exposition de mode*,” in the hope to enhance disciplinary and methodological openness with which it is frequently associated.

In parallel to the profile of the *curator*, the practice of *curating* devoted to fashion is also in the process of becoming defined. Exhibitions and artistic initiatives in this domain are numerous and have been realized with diverse approaches, at least in part authorized by the heterogeneity that characterizes diverse manifestations of fashion. This diversity currently prevents categorization on the basis of format or theoretical principles. It equally shows that today we are not yet able to consider fashion curating as a discipline founded on shared criteria.

Some exhibitions in particular have been received as “manifestoes” for a vision of *fashion curating*, or they illuminate particularly innovative aspects of the exhibition of fashion. The work of Diana Vreeland⁵, as fashion consultant at the Metropolitan Museum of New York from 1972 to 1989 has certainly determined a shift in fashion museum culture. Exhibitions are no longer conceived only in descriptive and pedagogic terms, but are imagined as a meta-language: their principal finality is not to present a fashion production in and of itself, but to develop with the expressive means available to fashion a critical vision of the culture in the largest sense. To these ends, Vreeland privileges an immersive and theatrical spatialization, summoning to the museum new material, all the while respecting the necessary economy of the historic pertinence of the presentation (MONTI, 2012).

In parallel to and informed by the trans-medium approaches like those of Vreeland, the museum conservation of fashion has evolved toward new formats. The work of Olivier Saillard, author and director at Palais Galliera in Paris, extends the reach of a fashion exhibition beyond a simple diffusion of his vision and the documented presentation of collections. Through suggestive juxtapositions of works, videos, performances, or technological solutions of spatialization, the exhibition becomes intuitive and wholly accessible.

These different *mises en scène* suggest an inversion of posture as to the relation between the public and the work in the exhibition, placing at the center the perception of the visitor, without diminishing the content presented.

More recently, echoing the sensibility for exhibition space design in the transdisciplinary context that characterizes contemporary art, fashion also has more and more often imagined a language able to express a “conceptual” or “plastic” discourse. The exhibition *Il Tempo e la Moda*, the inaugural event of the *Biennale di Firenze 1996*⁶, can be considered as a milestone of this approach. The curator, Germano Celant, showed the work of fashion designers, artists and

⁵ Her work has been the subject of a recent symposium at the initiative of Maria-Luisa Frisa : The discipline of Fashion Between the Museum and Curating, IUAV University, Venice (I), 10 March 2012.

⁶ Curated by Germano Celant, Ingrid Sischy, Pandora Tabatabai, different locations, Florence (I), 20 September 1996 – 25 January 1997.

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architects –who sometimes collaborated- expressing themselves on the content of the exposition through installation.

Such a concept of *fashion curating* also expresses itself today in the institutional context of the museum or gallery, insofar as the panorama and market of current art welcome the productions of fashion designers, or artists of all stripes, for whom fashion is a subject of reflection without necessarily being the primary expressive language they choose. The work of Marie-Claude Beaud, as director of MUDAM Luxembourg and today at NMAM Monaco, is an illuminating example. Beaud collects and shows the work of artists as well as that of fashion designers, beyond any categorization by "genre," but for their ability to crystallize reflection on a conceptually or culturally relevant discourse. This choice suggests that raw material of contemporary creation consists of this "vector for transforming the world"⁷.

8 FOUR PROJECTS, FOUR SITES OF RESEARCH

The following projects in which I have been curator with Emanuele Quinz⁸ have been conceived as a means of experimental testing of extending these same principles. All were dedicated to disciplinary overlap between fashion, design, contemporary art and dance, while each explores and questions the practice of curating differently.

*en:trance*⁹ was imagined as an archipelago of projects scattered in time and space. Each of its phases of development (workshops, performances, conferences, installations) put in place strategies for perceptive and behavioral alteration, as much for the artist as for the spectator. The exhibition of clothing was addressed by a performative dimension and by gestural alteration derived from the person in contact with the clothing. For the Parisian edition, the choreographer Christian Rizzo and the fashion designer Romain Kremer were invited to experiment with clothing in the context of a workshop at the Centre Contemporain de la Danse de Paris. In the series of performances and installations that were produced, clothing and accessories concretely emerged through interaction and relations among the dancers who created them in real-time with materials gathered in the studio.

⁷ Marie-Claude Beaud interviewed in MARCHETTI and QUINZ, (2009), p. 12.

⁸ Art historian and lecturer at the University of Paris VII, Emanuele Quinz founded with me **mosign**, a consulting, research and artistic direction studio between design, fashion, art and branding which we founded and directed together from 2006 to 2013.

⁹ Bolzano (I), Freie Universität - Faculté de Design et Galleria Art Link, 2004; Paris (F), Observatoire de Paris et École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts, 2006-2007. Cf. MARCHETTI and QUINZ, (2007), *en:trance*, Editions de l'ENSBA - Actes Sud, Paris.

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Figure 1 - en:trance (edition #3, Paris, 2006), snapshot of workshop at CND Centre Nationale de la Danse in Paris, with Christian Rizzo and Romain Kremer. Photo: Chira Dolma.

The interest for the possibility to investigate the fluid and immaterial nature of fashion materials was also the origin of the exhibition *Dysfashional*¹⁰. Approaching fashion beyond style and the materiality of the product, the creations of fashion designers, product designers, artists, and choreographers in the exhibition explore aspects of creation such as experience, relationality, performativity and proprioception... which are today at the heart of contemporary aesthetics. The exhibition does not show clothes or fashion products, but plastic statements, questions, by those who produce fashion, wear it, think it or even just look at it.

¹⁰ Luxembourg Capitale Européenne de la Culture 2007; MUDAC, Lausanne, 2008; Passage du Désir, Paris, 2009; Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin 2010; Garage Centre for Contemporary Culture, Moscou, 2010; Galerie Nationale d'Art Moderne de Jakarta 2011. Cf. MARCHETTI and QUINZ, (2007) *Dysfashional*, Actar, Barcelone - New York.

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Figure 2 - *Dysfashional* (2009 edition, *Passage du Désir*, Paris), MAISON MARTIN MARGIELA, *Untitled*, 2007-2009 Installation / Original production. Photo: Morin



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Figure 3 - *Dysfashional* (2009 edition, Passage du Désir, Paris) PARASITE #3 / Original production
Space design: BLESS; Art Direction, Vydia Narine / Various artists.



Figure 4 - *Dysfashional* (2009 edition, Passage du Désir, Paris), PIERRE HARDY + DAMIEN BLOTTIERE
RDS(ardies), 2009, Installation / Original production, Photo: Matthias Heyde / MEA brand building
GmbH.

Even though *Dysfashional* considered a spatial placement in which the work is its own scenography, a veritable spatial organizing principle that favors visual and sonorous dialogue between the different artistic interventions, the question of exhibition format was approached more directly in the projects *Basic Instincts* and *Dutch Paradox*.

*Basic Instincts*¹¹ drew a multidisciplinary critical profile of recent Dutch creation. Going beyond the simply formal aspect of spatialization, the format of the exhibition was considered here as a trigger to different strategies of reading and attribution of sense. The spatial emplacement was specially considered with Henrik Vibskov, fashion designer and artist, who realized as many physical

¹¹ Elizabeth Kirche, Berlin, 2011; Biennale d'Arnhem, 2012; OCT Contemporary Art Terminal, Shenzhen, 2012.

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apparatuses as there were themes in the exhibition so as to show within each one a selection of works that embody it. Each one of these “landscapes” proposes a transversal and non-hierarchical reading of productions of design, fashion, art, architecture and photography guided essentially by the interactions and resonances between the works themselves.



Figure 5 - Basic Instincts (2012 edition, Arnhem Biennale), Soft Future, Design: Henrik Vibskov, Variuos Artists. Photo: Lizzy Kalisvaart.

Specifically devoted to Dutch design and fashion, the exhibition *Dutch Paradox*¹² was entirely realized within the vitrines of a department store. As in the research and projects by Kiesler (DAVIDSON, and RYLANDS, eds., op.cit.) on the sales space, the vitrine was considered as a “machine of vision” capable of transforming its contents. The objects and clothes of the exhibition, chosen for their identity ambiguity, in order to render their function almost unreadable, were shown isolated in the *white cube* of the vitrine and given to the complexity of interpretation that they themselves impose on the spectator. In parallel, a video was shown of a performer, filmed with the same objects which the actor was seeing for the first time, while he explored their use.

¹²

Galerie des Galeries - Designers Days, Lafayette Maison, 31 May - 23 June 2012, Paris.

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Figure 6 - Dutch Paradox, Bas Koster, Monster Dress et Straw Hat, Collection Fashion Mutant Automne-Hiver 2011.

Within these four projects, fashion has a particular role, to the extent that its value and its meaning always emerge from the context in which it is presented and by the relationships established between the fashion pieces and those coming from other disciplines. One of the principal axes of research concerning fashion consisted also of putting in place means of communication of the work and exhibition formats, capable of clarifying its plural semantic meaning and its experiential nature. To this end, the interpretive decisions proposed by each project sought independence, always reasoned and critical, opposing criteria suggested by the history of fashion and by museographic conservation in this domain, in favor of valorizing the conceptual proposition at the heart of the different exhibitions. Consequently, rather than a presentation of works which favours an unequivocal reading, or even an over-interpretation of the content; a spatialization by simple juxtaposition or –when it was possible- by performative experience, was preferred.

9 FOLDS AND VEILS OF FASHION EXPOSED

Such a multiplication and fragmentation of viewpoints on fashion, normally banalized by its decorative characteristics, hopes to produce a “visualization”¹³ of fashion production, in the form of a veritable “delaying”¹⁴ of the perception by spectator.

The image of the textile “fold” at the heart of Gilles Deleuze’s reading of the baroque thought of Leibnitz (DELEUZE, 1988) emerges as a particularly useful metaphor in order to illustrate a curatorial practice of fashion as “delaying.” Just as the Real is considered by Deleuze as such a multidimensional proliferation of “folds” –from the intangible to the material, from “macro” to “micro” – the complexity of contemporary fashion appears as composite amalgam in which formal and textile folds rub against others which are conceptual and imaginary.

Producing fashion exhibitions becomes, by extension, the context in which the fold explains itself¹⁵, or, that is to say, “unfolds.” The curatorial gaze submits the thick cloth of phenomena composing the *continuum* of fashion to the perceptual delay which allows us to undo its folding. But, as in any *continuum*, in the Deleuzeian Real or in fashion, an un-folding in one place necessarily implies are re-folding at another (DELEUZE, op. cit., p.124). Fashion, un-folded by the exhibition display¹⁶ finds itself re-folded at the level of perception and consciousness of the exhibition visitor. The exhibition apparatus is not designed to produce a definitive flattening of meaning nor to reach the objectivity of the content exposed. In other words, if its task is to reveal the meaning of fashion, it does so only in accordance with the paradoxical semantic meaning of the Italian verb *rivelare*, which evokes de-veiling and re-veiling simultaneously¹⁷. A fashion exhibition only shows folds and veils.

A curatorial practice able to preserve the semiotic fullness of fashion will be tasked with respecting this linguistic ambiguity that makes it as frivolous as it is essential (MONNEYRON, 2001) within contemporary aesthetics. Even more than trying to answer questions, curatorial practice must make us aware of these very questions by subtracting them from the numbness of meaning typical of daily artefacts (MARCHETTI, 2007). It is by posing the identitary ambiguity of works at the heart of the conception of exhibitions that curatorial practice can suggest an “other” reading of fashion and stimulate an enlarged understanding.

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¹³ “Mise-en-regard » (literally “put-in-sight”), in French.

¹⁴ “Mise-en-retard » (literally “put-in-delay”), in French.

¹⁵ From the Latin etymology “ex-plicare”.

¹⁶ As noted professor Mario Lupano, during a conference that I gave at the University IUAV, Venice (*Fashion Reveiled*, 10 may 2014), on the invitation of Maria Luisa Frisa, director of the Corso di Laurea in Design della Moda e Arti Multimediali, the etymology of the term display in English goes back to the same signification as “unfolding.”

¹⁷ For a reading of the semantic polyvalence of the veil in western aesthetics, see PEREGALLI, (2009).

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