Fashion studies at a turning point.

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Abstract

The recent literature on fashion studies features frequent attempts by a variety of scholars to extend fashion studies beyond the representational paradigm that has dominated the field for many years. The claim is that seeing garments as mere tools to express real or ideal Egos leaves out the affective aspects of being dressed emerging from the materiality of both our bodies and the clothes we wear. In this chapter I outline one possible approach, which, in my view, constitutes a promising direction to develop an affective politics of dress. More specifically I propose to further develop a dialogue between fashion studies and body studies as a way to uncover the affective aspects of being dressed. This process involves revisiting ocularcentric notions of subjectivity, based on the idea of the self-contained body as the centre of individual identity, to instead emphasise the body's constant affective relations with the surrounding world as the trigger of its potential becoming. Finally, I show how dress and fashion can facilitate this shift, acting as lines of flight out of the Ego-territory towards unpredictable outcomes.

The recent literature on fashion studies features frequent attempts by a variety of scholars to extend fashion studies beyond the representational paradigm that has dominated the field for many years. The claim is that seeing garments as mere tools to express real or ideal Egos or as techniques individuals use to shape their personality leaves out other important aspects of our relationship with clothes; namely the affective aspects of being dressed emerging from the materiality of both our bodies and the clothes we wear, as well as the atmosphere in which the clothed body is immersed (see Findlay 2016; Sampson 2018, 2020; Parkins 2008; Eckersley 2008; Eckersley and Duff 2020). While authors, mostly contributing to affect theories, have proposed different ways of tackling this complexity, I want to focus here on one possible approach, which in my view constitutes a promising direction to develop an affective politics of dress. It is the invitation to further develop a dialogue between fashion studies and body studies (Eckersley and Duff 2020) to explore their interconnections and finally uncover the affective aspects of being dressed that have for long eluded the attention of fashion scholars as well as designers and consumers.

Body studies is a broad interdisciplinary area where inputs from different sources converge to create a complex network of ideas and concepts. However, to a sociologist's eye, one crucial point soon emerges from this ample literature: namely the idea that the body can never be thought of as a purely

[1] This chapter develops ideas and concepts previously discussed in Ruggerone (2017) and Ruggerone and Stauss (2022). Although it aims at extending the arguments previously presented, some materials are drawn from those sources, properly referenced. However the context in which the materials are used here is novel. I wish to thank my co-author, Renate Stauss, for granting me permission to retrace some of the ideas we developed together when writing the 2022 article.

material 'thing', but is always, in all our apperceptions, already a 'cultural object'. In other words, and contrary to common belief, we cannot conceive of the body as an entity separate from culture -a 'natural element' prior to social involvement-, because the very ways in which we can experience and attend to it (either our own body or the other bodies) are always already embedded in culture. This view notably implies that the human body can only be apperceived in relation to a set of formal and informal norms or rules that circulate in a given social context. The idea of the cultural body, which, in the 1980s, the then new sociology of the body quickly embraced, was by no means novel nor original. Decades before sociologists started considering the social actors' bodies as worthy objects of study, in the 1930s, the anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1979) had introduced the notion of *body techniques* to refer to those apparently instinctive bodily practices and gestures that, he argued, are the results of learnt and embodied dispositions. A few years after Mauss, albeit in a less explicit form, the importance of bodily language underpinned Erving Goffman's nearly ethological descriptions of how bodily behaviours (our deference and demeanour, but also our stigmatised traits) inform and shape the ways in which we communicate with others in interactions (Goffman 1959, 1963, 1972). The idea that culture is firmly embodied in our conduct, comportment and allure also famously inspired Bourdieu's (1984) notion of *habitus*: that set of pre-conscious or semi-conscious dispositions that make up one's identity and shape one's relation to the world. Moreover, it is at least since the 1960s that feminist analyses have continued to show the multiple ways in which a sexist culture gets inscribed onto women's bodies, both in the ways that women come to hold themselves in public and in the various forms of symbolic or material violence perpetrated on them (Conboy et al. 1997; Bartky 1991, Bordo 1993; Marsden 2004). In all these contributions it is already clear that the norms pertaining to bodily practices are not separate from, but on the contrary partake to, the processes of identity construction, deeply influencing the ways people think of themselves and relate to the world.

Digging deeper into subjectivity….

Although all these ideas (and others that I didn't mention) are crucial to understand the role of the body in social life and in the formation of selves, I contend that we can dig even deeper to show that the contemporary notion of the body is linked to our sense of self in ways that transcend body techniques and pertain directly to the individuals' inner sense of identity. Interestingly, in the current debate across social and psychological sciences, the body has taken centre stage: bodily (and neurological) functions are increasingly focused on, when trying to explain people's behaviours, beliefs and even feelings. Like some experimental psychologists remark, the body is now commonly treated as the starting point for a science of the self (Tsakiris 2017, Caldwell 2016). Although many factors contribute to create this line of approach, I propose that an important role is played by the

long-standing ocularcentrism of Western culture with its prioritisation of the sense of sight to accrue knowledge and attain truth. In the last decade the importance of vision has been further magnified by the unstoppable proliferation of screens and images that punctuate not only medical practices and investigations, but also, more prosaically, the daily experience of many of us. Modern technological devices, commonly used by virtually everybody, are now capable of producing an almost infinite flow of images and mirror-reflections of ourselves that ultimately impinge on your notion of selfhood and strengthen the definition of a vision-based subjectivity.

It is perhaps not surprising that some authors have coined the label "somatic individual" to indicate the form of individuality that seems prevalent in the contemporary socio-cultural context. Although the definition of somatic individual initially proposed by Rose (2001) refers mainly to the ongoing trend, in the health and human sciences, of regarding neurological processes and neurochemical reactions as the bases of selfhood, thereby transforming the psychological and mentalistic notion of personhood, I wish here to adopt the modified, 'softer' version of the term proposed by Heyes (2007), to characterise the current tendency towards an identification (or perfect fit) of self with body.

As Heyes (2007) has argued, for the somatic individual, selfhood still relates to the body in an inner/outer mode; however, this split cannot, in my view, be assimilated with a straightforward revival of a dualistic perspective, according to which mind and body are completely separate entities, with human value only residing in the mind. On the contrary, I contend that, in the contemporary regime, the self is conceived as a site of authenticity and truth (this corresponding to its value) that can only exist if/when it is made visible in the flesh. In this context, the body, far from being disparaged as a prison to be evaded in order to free the true spirit, becomes the only terrain on which we can/must operate to express our inner self and enact our plans of self-optimization. The care of the body is thus assimilated to the care of the self and takes on a moral value: if, to lead the 'good life', we are to implement the correspondence between the inner and the outer, we then need to make sure that our selfhood visibly shines on the surface of our flesh. In this sense, somatic culture is a culture of total visibility, where self and appearance coincide and profoundly shape subjective experiences (Ortega 2013, 86).

To uncover how this regime was brought about and how it affects our understanding of the body in terms of its relation with clothes and fashion, I here propose to use an approach inspired by Foucault's genealogy. Writing in the 1960s, Foucault (1966) described the emphasis on the body as a typical trait of modernity, concomitant with the emergence of a certain kind of individuality, a modern idea of the self as a unique and somehow sacred individual who needs to take priority on the collective. In the realm of sociology, and approximately at the same time, Goffman (1967, 47) too underlined the process of sacralization of the individual as a characteristic of modern secular society. Commenting

on Goffman's position on subjectivity, Collins (1986, 107) argues that the self "is the archetypal modern myth. We are compelled to have an individual self not because we actually have one but because social interaction requires us to act as if we do".

According to Foucault, the process of formation and sacralization of the individual, as we conceive of it today, finds its origin in a more distant past and starts with a new conception of the body emerging around the end of the 18th century. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), while examining the transformation of power from the *Ancien Régime* to the Enlightenment era, Foucault *de facto* reverses the platonic idea of the body as the prison of the soul by arguing that modernity is on the contrary an age of "docile bodies", an era in which "the soul (has become) the prison of the body". By this, he alludes to the idea that personality is not an innate endowment of human beings (and Goffman concurs) and a mark of each individual's subjectivity, but on the contrary it is a modern invention. More specifically, he argues, it is an effect of processes of subjectification enacted on the body and in the course of people's lives, through discursive formations mobilised by (disciplinary) power. On this crucial point it is worth quoting Foucault directly (2006:55):

> We can say that disciplinary power (…) fabricates subjected bodies; it pins the subject-function exactly to the body (…) Disciplinary power is individualising because it fastens the subject-function to the somatic singularity by means of a system of supervision (…) which projects a core of virtualities, a psyche

In Foucault's view, this process of subjectification is interestingly linked to a reversal of visibility and invisibility characterising the transition from sovereign to disciplinary power; in the new regime, those who were once invisible spectators of a visible power are turned into visible, self-contained individualities because, and in as much as, they are subjected to a (now invisible) power. To use Crossley's poignant remark: "Power functions, in part, by making people visible" (1993, 401). The notion of persons as self-contained subjects, each endowed with their own self is, in this paradigm, an effect of a complex set of technologies which constitute persons as individuals within a specific field of visibility. In this chapter, I wish to suggest that the mirror is one of such technologies and that an exploration of its effects is important to understand how we tend to formulate and study our relationship with clothes. Furthermore, I wish to draw attention on the subjectifying role of fashion and clothes. For a long time fashion has functioned as a marker of gender and class affiliation, while more recently (and since the appearance of the somatic individual) it has become a way of expressing the presupposed 'inner self', whose character must be converted and made explicit in the mirror image while getting dressed.

The mirror and the visual construction of subjectivity

Mirrors images are commonly understood as neutral reflections (Coleman 2013a, 2013b) of bare facts and, yet, as I will show, they are implicated in many of the theories that modern Western thought has produced to explain the construction of selfhood and subjectivity. Indeed, I would suggest that in our culture, the idea of subjectivity is mostly theorised as an effect of the ability to see ourselves as reflections of our bodies. This ability, which apparently is typical of human beings and only shared with very few other mammals (highly evolved apes and dolphins), allows us to look at ourselves in the same way we look at others. As philosophers have repeatedly remarked, this is the very skill that provides the basis for the formation of a mind (the human) capable of developing objective thought. Indeed, particularly after Descartes, western thought has been marked by an ocularcentric bias implying a split between a subjective (human) self, looking (down) on an objective world exterior to it, as from a vantage point and "outside time" (Jay 1994, 263)[2]. When in the 20th century, psychoanalysis emerged as the science of human behaviour, one of its main task was indeed to explain how human selfhood is formed. Perhaps not surprisingly, both Freud and Lacan brought to the fore the perils of a vison-based subjectivity. Freud's renowned theory of narcissism ([1914] 1962) characterizes it as the absorption of the self in its mirror image, while his definition of the "uncanny" is "the name for everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light" ([1919] 1962, 224). The importance of the mirror in forging our individuality and, at the same time, the alienating potential of the mirror-image is epitomized in the work of Jacques Lacan. In his influential lecture on the "Mirror Stage," Lacan ([1949] 1977) explains that when, between 6 and 18 months, the infant begins to recognize and identify with their image in the mirror, they derive from it an illusionary sense of wholeness totality, and, importantly of *self-containment*. Some commentators have emphasised the fragility of this sense of self, calling Lacan's subject "decentred" (Evans 1999) and always on the brink of dissolution, or "a hoax by which we normalize an incoherent inner reality" (Wiley 2003, 504), which we cannot make sense of and cannot be symbolized nor represented. However, although critical of the illusionary representation of the ego, which they see as founded on a mis-apprehension[3], both psychoanalysts describe modern identity as "rooted in the visual—the image of the self as other" (Evans 1999, 18). The distrust of the mirror was echoed in mid 20th century France by phenomenologists Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, both drawing attention in their works to the

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[2] Reflecting on this ocularcentric tradition the German philosopher Heidegger (1977, 134) describes it as "the conquest of the world as picture," which he regards as "[t]he fundamental event of the modern age."

[3] Talking about the self, Kaia Silverman (2006, 36) argues: "This object (the self) is able to masquerade as a subject because it is what provides us with our sense of identity, and for most of us identity equals subjectivity. But identity is foundationally fictive: it is predicated on our (mis)recognition of ourselves first within our mirror reflection, and then within countless other human and representational '*imagoes*'".

alienating potential of the mirror reflection and to the fall-outs of a vision-based notion of subjectivity. More specifically, Sartre ([1943] 2003) linked the objectification caused by the mirror to the experience of shame and its power to supress the individual's freedom by turning the subject into an object of an Other's gaze. On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty (1968) held the mirror responsible for the split between "bodiliness" and "corporeality," the objectifying transition from the body schema to the body image, and showed how the transition hinders the automatic coherence of the subject with the surrounding world by prioritising vision as our relationship to an objective world. However, as Merleau-Ponty indicates, the appearance of our body is never just an object in the world, but our means of communicating with it and, as such, relates to it with all our senses. For Merleau-Ponty the awareness we have of our bodies is never just visual but fundamentally determined by the kinaesthetic sense deriving from our immersion in the world[4]. In this context phenomenologists argue in favour of a recovery of the multisensoriality of our being in the world. In the field of sociology, Nick Crossley (1995) attempts to develop a carnal approach to shift the attention from the analysis of body techniques as inscribed on the body, towards an emphasis of the body as an active agent in implementing these techniques. In the area of feminist studies, and talking specifically about the relationship between women and their clothes, Iris M. Young (2005, 69) suggests that: "we might conceive a mode of vision, [...], that is less a gaze, distanced from and mastering its object, but an immersion in light and color." What Young proposes is a notion of perception that involves the use of all senses alongside the mere sense of sight and that entails the immersion of our body into the world, by erasing the distance between the origin of the gaze and the field with which the body is mingled.

While taking on board these insights about the 'dangers' of a vison-based notion of identity, I here want to draw attention on another consequence of the prioritisation of sight: seeing the reflection of our body in the mirror, does not only carry with it an objectifying effect, but also clearly returns to us the image of the body as a bounded entity separate from its surroundings. In other words when we see ourselves in the mirror, we see the contours of our body as boundaries of the self. Thus, our personal identity emerges as a "skin ego"[5], where the skin is perceived much more as a barrier between the inside and the outside than a permeable surface facilitating the flow of energies between human bodies and other human and non-human ones. This idea underpins the modern myths of autonomy and independence of the individual and constitutes the unacknowledged assumption of

[4] It is worth noting that, at the core of the phenomenological perspectives there is an interest for the dynamic body–self–world relationship where subjectivity is understood from and as a first-person perspective of oneself as a self, and this includes the level of sensing one's body – one's heartbeat or breathing – as embodied, and as 'above all a relation to the world' (Zahavi 2001, 163) which must involve all senses

[5] I am indebted to Renate Stauss for introducing me to this expression through her mentioning the work of Didier Anzieu (1989) during our discussions.

many forms of knowledge: that human beings are self-contained, clearly bounded subjects, whose bodily outline coincides with the territory of the self. Indeed the notion of the somatic individual explicitly traces (outlines) this correspondence, whereby body and self are like the two sides of a coin; if I mould one side, the other changes in a corresponding way. With these premises, although individuals are theorised as 'embodied', the transcendental subject in the world still remains intact, as does its 'window' on the outside: the body boundaries as the borders of the ego [6].

Clothing the body/self

By applying a genealogical approach inspired by Foucault, I have above tried to explain how modern subjectivity (in the form of the 'somatic individual') is a function of a power regime that shapes our selves through disciplining our bodies in various, culture-dependent ways. I have also proposed that the prominence of the body-image, as the exemplar type of contemporary subjectivity, not only endorses an objectified concept of selfhood, but also stresses its separateness from (and its ability to control) the world outside. This approach draws attention almost exclusively to the humans' ability for conscious deliberation, as rational (albeit) embodied subjects making (discursive/rational) sense of their experience. I now want to examine the impact that such notion of the body and self has had on the ways in which fashion studies have traditionally conceptualised the relationship between people and clothes. Broadly speaking I suggest that, because of the way subjectivity is defined, mainly through vision and therefore foregrounding the idea of the body as pre-eminently a body-image, scholars of fashion have traditionally been led to examine clothes and fashion as props in a representation of subjects' (supposedly) authentic identities.

Limiting the scope here just to contributions dating from the late 20th century onwards, I note that scholars tend to focus their attention on the ways in which clothes might assist people in representing themselves in everyday life. For example, Fred Davis (1992) is interested in fashion and identity ambivalence and argues that, when selecting the clothes to wear, individuals are mostly attempting a synthesis between contradictory pulls concerning their identification with one or the other gender, their membership in a social class or group, and the more or less overt expression of their sexuality.

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[6] The whole of phenomenology, by the way, is permeated by the notion of subjectivity and subjective meanings, which are repeatedly described as unknowable by other human beings. For example, when exploring the conditions of intersubjectivity, another phenomenologist, Alfred Schutz (1967), recurrently argues that, while it is impossible to share the exact experience of another, the best we can do is find overlaps between our individual experiences of the world. All this contributes to solidify a notion of the individual as a self-contained subject endowed with a consciousness, i.e. an ability to make sense of their engagements with the world.

Fascinated by Goffman's dramaturgical approach, Finkelstein (1996, 1998, 2007) describes clothes and fashion as a way of enhancing our social persona, by attracting the attention and the admiration of others; in her analysis, clothes are ways of self-promoting, aimed at representing to the world "a more complex ego" (Finkelstein 1996, 40). In her view, fashion and clothes serve people in the processes of self-invention they constantly need to carry out in the various situations in which they engage. Other scholars prefer to take a semantic approach and consider fashion and clothes as a kind of language (Lurie, 1981) or at least a form of non-verbal communication expressing social identities and cultural affiliations (Barnard 1996; Hebdige 1979; Polhemus 1994). It is actually not until the dawn of the new millennium that fashion studies start opening up to a consideration of the body, with Entwistle's (2000) analysis of clothes as situated embodied practices and a flurry of anthropological studies aimed at recuperating the materiality of clothes when encountering human bodies (Woodward 2007; Guy and Banim 2000; Miller and Woodward 2010; Woodward and Fisher 2011). Indeed these more recent studies do focus on the body as culturally shaped by its adornments (in the form of garments, accessories, etc.); however, many are still predicated on a dualistic view of the inner/outer duet, and implicitly accept the notion of selfhood as the authentic core of a person that needs to be 'worn' on the body.

Some other recent 'waves' of fashion studies include scholars equally interested in recuperating the materiality of fashion by drawing attention to the multisensoriality of being dressed that, they argue (and I agree), has been completely disregarded in the dominant representational paradigm. These contributions mainly draw their inspiration from feminist phenomenologists such as Iris Young (2005) and Sandra Bartky (1991), who extensively applied Merleau-Ponty's and Sartre's insights to the study of women's bodies in the world. Echoing Entwistle's call for a paradigm shift in fashion studies, Negrin (2016) proposes the adoption of a framework that enables researchers to explore those aspects of dress that elude the visual and urges researchers to follow the path opened by Young and Entwistle. Rosie Findlay (2016, 81) also evokes phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty in her exploration of getting dressed as an "imaginative act" in which "the selection and wearing of clothes mediates one's being in the world (…) by affecting one's sense of who one is as clothed". Again, using the phenomenological notion of "lived body" Sampson (2018) explores how selves and garment become entwined and at the same time cleaved when they encounter. Finally Bruggeman (2017) shows, in a more applied way, how the emphasis on images, paralleled by a disregard for the embodied dimension of dressing and for the materiality of making and wearing clothes, has contributed to make fashion and textile one of the most exploitative and ecologically unsustainable industries in the world.

Despite all these attempts to extend the scope of fashion studies by problematising the experience of the dressed body, it is worth pointing out that outside the academic debate, in the popular culture of fashion media, in the domains of digital platforms (such as Instagram and TikTok) populated by bloggers and influencers and constantly accessed all over the world by the public of fashion, the narrative of the outfit as an expression of the authentic self is still pervasive, with very few exceptions. The tale of the inner, deep, authentic self that needs to be put into existence through an adequately adorned body has never been stronger in a culture like ours, where identity politics keeps morphing into new demands (around the issues of gender, race, sex, sexuality, neurodiversity) to affirm the rights of the individual and his/her/their inner, unique core. Here I want to propose that, to a certain extent, this turmoil could be read in a significantly different key. I think that the pluralisation of claims in identity politics, rather than pointing to the uniqueness of the individual, may actually be revealing the precariousness of the subject and its susceptibility to change. Somehow, and perhaps subliminally, it speaks of people's frustration with the forms of subjectification that an invisible power imposes on their visibility and their (in the somatic individual) identity, it shouts out their urge to escape from the (cultural) cages, those inflexible pillars of identity that box them into docile beings. Sensing the precariousness of all identification *dispositifs* in a world continually producing different versions of reality, more people feel an urge to resist subjectification in an attempt to embrace the chance of *being* less and *becoming* more. It is my contention that, when examined in their affective potential, the encounter of dress and fashion with our bodies can be explored as a way of transmitting affects (Brennan 2004) which can activate processes of transformation into different, albeit continuously flowing, forms of life. In the following I try to explain how.

Through multisensoriality into the affects

The recovery of the multisensorial aspect of being dressed is undoubtedly a huge step forward in the uncovering of the traits of that experience, which a predominantly visual and representational (of identity) perspective had long left out of focus. When we are putting on an outfit, although we are probably doing this while staring at a mirror and judging the emerging image as an object of the generalised Other (the gaze), at the same time we perceive a whole set of other sensations (tactile, olfactory, acoustic and sometimes even gustatory) that indeed complete our experience[7]. However, this approach remains statically focused on the body subject and falls short of accounting for the affective flows that take place between human bodies, their clothes and the environment. Therefore,

[7] Interestingly scholars of fashion have underlined how these sensations often can and do connect to embodied habits and memory of past events and have shown that these connections give rise to specific subjects of fashion (Eckersley and Duff 2020, 1)

I want to suggest here that there might be a more radical way to capture a fuller sense of the affective motions involved in the event of being dressed, that exceed the multisensorial character of the experience and provides a chance for transformations of the body/self.

To outline this approach, I need to borrow, and partially 'misread', some concepts derived from Deleuze and Guattari's work: namely the notion of the body without organs and the related assemblage, the notion of territory and territorialisation, as well as lines of flight. As elsewhere discussed (Ruggerone 2017; Ruggerone and Stauss 2022) Deleuze and Guattari's notions of the Body without Organs (BwO) and that of assemblage[8] can assist in exploring a new dimension of our relationship with clothes: in particular, in the context of fashion theory, these concepts foreground the opportunity clothes afford us to start a process of becoming that leads to unforeseeable outputs. This conceptualisation ties into the reflections on subjectivity and the role of the mirror as an agent of subjectification epitomised in the act of dressing.

Influenced by Spinoza (2002), who invoked an attention on what the body can do as opposed to what the body is, Deleuze and Guattari (D&G 1987) discuss the notion of BwO as one term of a conceptual pair, where the body organism stands as the second term of the dyad[9]. In contrast to the organicist perspective of the human body, defined as an organized ensemble of organs with complementary functions, the BwO consists of pure desire and affective capabilities. It is a body that has been freed from the conventional organization and standardized classification of the corporeal, it is what remains after the "phantasies, and significances and subjectifications" (D&G 1987: 168) have been taken away; in Foucault's terms, it is a chance to break out from the categorical grid of the docile body. Furthermore, the BwO is not something we 'have', rather it consists of the intensities liberated by taking it away from the organization in systems and functions so that it becomes a site of virtual possibilities, an affective assemblage open to connect with other intensities in the surroundings. Against this background, the traditional notion of the stable (even though multisensorial) body emerges only as a "momentary sedimentation of [a] dynamic process of oscillating connections" (Stark 2016:71). In *A Thousand Plateaus* (D&G 1987) the theme of the organism is discussed in parallel with two other themes, or strata (namely significance and subjectification), where all three are seen as devices intent at tying us down to functions of meaning and subjective identity. In the context of this discussion, individual identity, materialized in the body organism and recognized in the mirror image,

[8] For a broader discussion of these notions, see Buchanan 1997.

[9] D&G' s theorising often makes use of conceptual pairs; other examples drawn from their work include 'the smooth and the striated', 'the molar and the molecular', 'the minoritarian and the majoritarian', just to name a few. Although related to different purposes, each pair includes a force that organises and a second one that breaks out and away from this organisation, to be eventually re-organised.

emerges as a *territory,* an ordered domain of being, functioning on the basis of an inclusion-exclusion mechanism. The body organism is a territory that generates selfhoods and defines subjects supposedly capable of dominating an object-world through science[10] and language[11].

As elsewhere proposed (Ruggerone and Stauss 2022), I contend that the mirror, commonly perceived as a neutral reflective surface, plays a crucial role in performing this territorialisation: it carves a frozen image of an integrated body out of a fluid composition of dispersive energies, thereby channelling the affective drives of the body into normalised directions. The mirror effectively turns the awareness of our body into a consciousness: a perspective on the body informed by the other's (social) gaze that enters the body into a power-regulated territory where norms and rules about how to manage and handle it are in force. In terms of the approach that informs mainstream studies of fashion and dress, I would suggest that it is this fixation of the flux of becoming into a solid notion of self-contained identity that influences the interpretation of the clothed body as a sign of a person's identity, a manufactured representation of their inner personality[12].

Following on from these premises, the attempt to make oneself a BwO emerges as a form of resistance aimed at exploring the bodily capacities before the territory of the body organism is formed (before Foucault's *dispositifs* of subjectification are enacted) and outside the paradigm of the body subject; it is also a project that, when applied to the relationship with clothes, can open up a different way of exploring the phenomenon of being dressed, as well as the becomings that clothes and fashion could trigger when donned on human bodies.

The possibility to capture the affective dimension of dress is premised on a process of, in D&G's language, *deterritorialization*. Through attempting to depersonalise oneself and renouncing the notion of body/selfhood as a linear identity for which experiences are related as to a subject that precedes and perceives them (the body subject of phenomenology), one may grasp the affects that ensure continuous becoming (Breuer 2015, 135). In the sphere of becoming, "the self that contemplates is nothing other than the singularities it perceives" (Colebrook 2002, 155), where each singularity alludes to the temporary positioning of a body which will immediately transform again, when relations with other bodies occur. From this standpoint a new perspective can be developed that focuses on clothes' capacity to intercept the affects that precede the formation of subjectivity

[10] Modern science has an iconic basis that can be traced back to the ancient Greeks (Plato's cave), through medieval science of optics and Renaissance perspective, to 18th century empiricism (Jay 1994, 38–40).

[11] In Lacan the acquisition of language marks the entrance into the Symbolic with the overcoming of the narcissistic mirror stage and the production of the 'healthy subject', emerging from the resolution of the oedipal phase and the formation of the Super-ego (Jay 1994, 351–2).

[12] BwO is not the sensorial body of phenomenology. The latter is a body organism where different organs are predisposed to experience different sensations, and a body subject that makes sense of them. On the contrary, the BwO is variable composition of molecules, neurons, cells but also ideas, signs, cultural symbols, etc

and are created by the flows of intensities among all the bodies involved in an event. For fashion studies such a perspective would entail capturing what happens between human bodies, clothing and the environment and eventually being able to grasp, albeit momentarily, the many subjects of fashion forming and re-forming in a given scene. When this approach is adopted, what stands out to the scholar's attention is not the looks, nor the sensorial feedback the subject experiences, but the new modes of existing spinning off the encounter along lines which cannot be predicted. What I want to ultimately suggest is that when clothes are donned on a body, they have the potential to function as Deleuzian lines of flight, thereby dragging the human body out of the conventional and power-infused body-image into unpredictable lines of becoming. As D&G (1987: 239) put it: "lines of flight […] never consist in running away from the world but rather in causing runoffs, as when you drill a hole in a pipe". When we put on our clothes and wear them in a live event, we open up the possibility of becoming by letting ourselves susceptible to what Teresa Brennan (2204) has called "the transmission of affects".

Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have tried to interweave more or less recent philosophical and cultural theories of the body with perspectives in fashion studies in an attempt to create a productive conversation between the two. It is my firm belief that fashion studies can only evolve towards an appreciation of the non-representational aspects of clothes, if they interconnect and cross-fertilise with body studies, their conceptualisations of subjectivities and their explorations of the place that human bodies occupy in a world where the boundaries between nature and culture are rapidly shifting. Conversely, I believe that, due to the fast-paced progress in the sciences of life and in the technologies supporting them, the human sciences of the body must continue to develop and deepen the study of the relationship between human and non-human bodies, exploring objects and their agency, including clothes. More than ever before well-being is now emerging as a disposition created at the intersection of (and striking a positive affective balance between) biological, psychological and social/collective factors. Interestingly many scholars are now actively re-engaging with some minoritarian strands of 19th/early 20th century philosophy and sociology interested in exploring experiences that were ephemeral, invisible and had to do with extra-conscious dimensions and with collective contagion (Blackman 2008a). Authors such as William James, Henri Bergson, Gabriel Tarde are currently being revisited and their work reconsidered by scholars investigating affects and mood (Brennan 2004; Despret 2004; Silver 2011; Ringmar 2017; Colombetti 2017), the body as a process (D&G 1987; Blackman 2020), the agency of objects and the limits of science to theorise affects (Latour 2007; Schiermer 2011; Massumi

2002; Stengers 1997). I believe that keeping in conversation with these developments is crucial for fashion scholars wishing to uncover and explore the affective dimension that fashion, clothes and all bodily apparel release, when encountering the human body in the lifeworld.

Of course, in this novel, interdisciplinary field, the issue of identity and subjectivity remains the elephant in the room. While most of these philosophical perspectives tend to hollow out the notion of the autonomous, unique subject, on the other hand, the attachment to the idea of the independent, unrepeatable, authentic individual has never been stronger among people, spreading from the neoliberal culture of Western countries to gain popularity all other the world. In an unstoppable process and almost virally, the myth of personalisation has evolved from a market slogan to lure consumers in, to an all pervasive mantra that shapes the approach to a whole set of practices, from the selection of everyday commodities through to educational methods, organisational systems and even medical an therapeutic treatments. In this context, I think the need for a strand of fashion studies geared to address the affective dimension of being dressed, will grow much stronger. The ability to explore the events of dress unburdened by the assumption of a fixed, self-contained personal identity will prove effective to overcome the neoliberal rhetoric of the all exceptional individual, bursting to express their unique personality in (paradoxically) ever more standardized lines of clothing. Instead it will help to shape an approach able to capture the incessant becoming of matter, ideas and practices in which the clothed bodies take part. As Deleuze explained, the dynamics of life proceeds through reiterated creation of territories (order) and deterritorializations (temporary disorder) and this pertains to all aspects of life. In terms of identity, it seems clear to me that many thrusts towards deterritorialization are currently ongoing and fashion studies are constantly called upon to refine their tools to be able to make sense of them.

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