The appearance of the body in dress culture

Tanja Devetak, University of Ljubljana, ORCID: 0009-0007-5629-4772

Alenka Pavko Čuden, University of Ljubljana, ORCID: 0000-0002-9225-5128

Abstract

This study explores the inseparable relationship between body appearance and dress culture in the contemporary Euro-American context, with particular attention to body movement, gender distinctions, phenomenological embodiment, presentation and the virtual body. Drawing on phenomenology, fashion studies, cultural sociology, and body theory, it examines how the clothed body co-constructs meaning in both individual experience and collective social contexts. The research aims to analyze the phenomenological dimensions of embodiment in dress, to explore clothing as a medium for identity construction and social communication, and to develop a framework that reflects the complexity of bodily experience within fashion systems. Methodologically, the study combines theoretical analysis, cultural critique, case study research on fashion design practices and participant observation. The study's key innovation is the original categorization of the body into four interrelated dimensions: as user, producer, representation and digital self. This model provides a novel analytical lens to understand how bodies operate across dressing practices, production systems, fashion media and virtual environments. The findings show that the body is not a passive recipient of clothing, but an active agent of cultural meaning shaped by aesthetic norms, sociopolitical systems and digital technologies, thus offering a new perspective on embodiment in dress culture.

KEYWORDS: body, dress culture, identity, fashion

Introduction

The relationship between the appearance of the body and the dress culture is a fundamental aspect of human social experience. While previous research has examined fashion as a cultural expression (Davis, 1992; Kaiser, 2012; McCracen, 1988; Mikuž, 2006; Miller-Spillman, 2002, Troy, 2003) and the sociology of dress (Bartlett, 2002; Entwistle,

2003; Entwistle, 2007; Entwistle & Slater, 2012; Kuhar, 2004; Polhemus & Procter, 1978), little attention has been paid to the phenomenological dimensions of embodied dress experiences and their role in identity construction.

Fashion and dress culture function as primary mechanisms through which individuals negotiate their relationship with their own embodied existence and communicate their identity to others (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). The clothed body functions as what Merleau-Ponty called the "lived body"—a place where consciousness, physicality, and social meaning intersect.

The paper discusses dress culture and fashion in the contemporary Euro-American context, drawing from fashion studies, dress culture research, and sociological studies of the body and clothing. At the center of this study is the body, which is considered not only as a physical object, but also as the central medium through which individuals experience the world. It functions both as a perceiving subject and as a perceived object. In the context of dress culture, clothing becomes an extension of the lived body, participating in the individual's engagement with the world. This perspective aligns with Telban's (2002) argument that the body can not be reduced to biological substance alone, but should be understood within a specific cultural context. The paper addresses the inseparable relationship between body appearance and dress culture, emphasizing the importance of the wearer's body movement, the distinction between the male and female body, the phenomenological understanding of the body, the presentation of the body, and the virtual body. The meaning and appearance of the body in dress culture are discussed from the perspective of understanding the body as a user, in production, as a representation, and as a virtual self.

The study also conceptualizes identity as something that is performatively constructed through repeated bodily practices, such as clothing choices. Dress culture provides both material and symbolic resources that individuals use to express and negotiate different aspects of their identity, including gender, social class, profession and cultural background. This research considers dress culture as a complex system in which clothing, body modifications and styling choices function as symbols that convey social meanings. The body functions both as a carrier on which these meanings are embedded, and as an interpreter of fashion messages.

The significance of this research lies in its approach to address contemporary society's increasing focus on body image, digital identity and sustainable fashion practices, which requires a more nuanced understanding of how dress culture shapes individual and collective identity formation.

The specific research objectives are: to explore the phenomenological dimensions of the relationships between the body and dress in contemporary culture; to analyze how dress culture functions as a medium for identity construction and social communication; to examine the role of embodied experience in fashion design and consumption practices; to develop a framework for understanding the intersection of phenomenology, embodiment and dress culture; and to propose a new categorization of the meaning of the body in contemporary dress culture through clearly defined dimensions.

The study employs a theoretical analysis methodology that combines literature research and cultural analysis of contemporary dress phenomena with a case study investigation of fashion design practices, and participant observation.

Theoretical foundations

Dress culture and fashion are activities through which individuals express the sense of self, transform their own body, and create a desired image. In addition to the physical nature of the human body, dress culture is also a consequence of the spiritual and intellectual nature of the body. The latter is also noticeable in fashion design; departing from Karl Marx (Sullivan, 2016), who defines such human work as a conscious cultural production with the goal of creating aesthetics that go beyond the necessary. The body has been analyzed in scientific literature from various perspectives, the most significant of which are outlined below.

Body movement

According to Cvitan Černelić (2002) clothing is the membrane of the body, whichtogether form an indivisible, unique whole, because clothing moves with the body, adapts to it, reveals and conceals the body. A dress without a body is without a clearly defined form and without a movement impulse generated by the body. The dynamics of the body movement affect the changed shape of the dress. Without it, it is like a shell without content. The opposite is also true, that clothing also determines the way the body moves, especially when walking. Certain models have developed a specific way of moving that has become their trademark: Naomi Campbell's walk called "strut" in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and in the 21st century walk of Karlie Kloss called "panther", Gisele Bündchen's "bounce" or Hailey Bieber and her characteristic "speedster" walk (O'Malley and Nyadundu, 2024). Clothing is a direct extension of the body and semantically forms a unity with the body, which is particularly emphasized when the body moves. With the latter, clothing changes its form and conveys different perceptions. The shape of clothing

takes on the characteristics of the body and exposes it to the outside world. The inseparable connection between the body and clothing is one of the most important sources for understanding the history of society; in ancient Egypt, the visibility of the body through transparent fabrics is an expression of the abundance of purity in society, while the negation of the body in the 16th century is a reflection of the strict morals of the society of the time (Cvitan Černelić, 2002).

Clothed body

Dressing is a social process in which clothing is an indicator that enables the identification of what individuals should be in an abstract space (Dant, 2007). A clothed body is a constructed body. Therefore, individuals perceive a gap between the body as an object and their own body (Ogawa, 1983). The meaning and appropriateness of the clothed body depends on the cultural space, political demands or simply the occasion; a black, tight-fitting leather jumpsuit is considered unacceptable at a business meeting in the financial sector. Individuals evaluate bodies in terms of their understanding of the aesthetics of beauty, which in contemporary times transcends physicality and expands into a moral imperative (Župevc, 2007). Clothing and body together functionally constitute social interaction in measured aesthetic norms that do not allow excessive deviations from socially acceptable standards of beauty in modern societies.

Through clothing, individuals form the meaning and identity of the self. In society, the identity of the individual is also determined by the appearance of clothing. Fred Davis (1992) argues that the dress that wraps someone's body is a metaphor for their identity. Dress is also a way for individuals to feel "at home" in their own bodies. They help them learn to live in their bodies. It is a personal experience of the body and at the same time its public presentation. Clothes thus become an extension of the individual's body and, depending on the feelings they develop towards clothes, an extension of their soul (Entwistle, 2007). People should feel good physically and psychologically by wearing selected clothes as they protect their physical body and its abstract value. Thus, the expressive power of clothing and the body are inseparable. If clothing is perceived in this context, then it is not possible to socially evaluate the meanings of dress independently of bodies; in this way, bodies are also subject to the same division.

Body as a transmitter

The body is an essential medium that positions individuals in time and space, and clothing is its social avatar. In this context, cultural norms and social expectations determine the content and meaning of clothing. At the same time, it also defines the position of the body wearing that dress in an abstract social space. The clothed body thus represents the inseparable environment of the body itself (Entwistle, 2007). The body is the tangible and visible external frame of the self, but as a clothed body, it is a collective experience of the relationship between an individual's action and external space. As Maurice Merleau Ponty (2000) argues, the real object, the dress, is distant in its physical appearance but present in the immaterial perception of the body. The paradox he points out is that objects and bodies are material appearances, but people perceive them immaterially in their minds as part of their physical body. The body is therefore a two-layered being of the inseparable connection of mind and body (Merleau Ponty, 2000); the body is one of the physical objects, but it also has an immaterial dimension of visual and sensory experience of them. An important function of the body is its ability to perceive the physical appearance of other objects. Experiences are formed, which individuals store and rely on, even before the actual sensory perception of seeing takes place.

The dress becomes a kind of double of the wearer's body. Departing from Flügel (Bartlett, 2002), society conditions the enjoyment of one's own body through clothing and adornment. The characteristics exposed are objective or subjective; they can be hidden or revealed. Very little of an individual's own physical body is visible. Most of the body is covered and decorated with fabrics or other embellishments. Thus, in a sense, clothing transmites between our physical body and social body. The function of clothing is, among other things, protection, which does not necessarily mean only physical protection from weather and climatic factors, but also provides psychological protection. Can individuals also protect themselves from the gaze of others? Is it legitimate for people to use clothing to protect themselves from gazes? As Polhemous and Procter (1979) argue, the protective function of clothing is also to satisfy the physical need for psychological comfort, which bodies also transmit to the outside through clothing.

Body as a symbol

The physical body is the form on which the greatest pressure of society is exerted in the context of dress culture, both in its material value and in its abstract symbolism. The individual is always striving for a social consensus on the existing ideal body norms. By striving for the body's ideal of beauty, the physical body must be strictly controlled and

fashionably enhanced with clothing, makeup, and beauty accessories (Kuhar, 2004). Clothing is closely linked to the symbolic value of the fashionable body (both spiritual and physical). Therefore, it is a key initiator of the expression of individual and collective identity. Creating one's own identity in postmodern society is closely linked to the project of the body as a symbol (Svensen, 2006). The body and its embellishment (clothing, tattoos, makeup, hairstyle, piercings, etc.) are constructed with many meanings that communicate information about the individual, society, and the broader context of space and time. Dress culture reflects not only the physical characteristics of an individual clothed body, but also symbolizes many aspects of abstract space, such as economics, technological progress, religious constraints, social relations, geography, and cultural values. The dress culture of an individual society creates projections and distinctions between the bodies of individuals or between bodies within a community (McDowell, 2013). Thus, the body individuals perceive is not only a biologically given body, but a socially and culturally symbolic body. The individual adapts the body to the symbolic values, norms, requirements and ideals established by the consensus of the community in a given time and space. The subject of the consensus is also the proportion of the exposed naked body and the definition of its individual parts that may be seen in public. In addition to the erogenous zones that are "of interest to the coming fashion," James Laver also makes relevant the covered parts of the body—sterilized zones that are "part of the fashion that is leaving" (Laver, 1938).

Naked body

The art projects of Tomislav Gotovac or Marina Abramović are interesting from the point of view of the acceptance of the naked body in public space. By freeing themselves from the socially accepted clothing restrictions, the artists use their own bodies as the only medium of communication. The art of doing this is possible precisely because of the fact that the bodies are unclothed. They are exposed to the social unacceptability of the naked body in public. However, this is only possible in art, which is not feasible in fashion. There are very specific rules about when, where, and with whom individuals can show themselves unclothed (Entwistle, 2003). With clothes, the naked body is individually protected, hidden, revealed, and limited, but in relation to other bodies individuals physically encounter, they bring their bodies closer to them in similarity and distinctiveness. People dress because of the socially and culturally conditioned modesty of their naked body or body parts. The body is experientially individual, but in relation to other bodies it is not exempt from the collective experience of dress culture (Entwistle,

2007). Thus, the nakedness of the body becomes the reality of the biological nature of the individual's body; it is an expression of modesty, discomfort, and/or acceptance. From Telban's (2002) cross-cultural analysis it is understood that the body in relation to norms about dress—modesty and exposure—is always mediated by cultural specifics, which frame how bodies are displayed and perceived. In most communities, there is a social consensus that the only acceptable body is the clothed body. Nudity is inappropriate, even in the swimming pool and while sleeping. However, social norms regarding the acceptability of the proportion of nudity in a clothed body have changed several times, shaped by geographical and time context. Nevertheless, there has always been a consensus on certain social rules for the proportion of acceptable nakedness, as naked bodies have always been considered disturbing and subversive in public space. Flügel (1930) interprets clothing as an indicator of the state of a sexual transaction, related to the proportion of the wearer's visible naked body; it is true, however, that the parts of the body that are exposed or the ways in which certain parts of the body are revealed through clothing primarily refers to the female body.

When designer Louis Reard first publicly introduced a bikini at the Piscine Molitor in Paris on July 5, 1946, he could hardly find a woman wearing a swimsuit that covered very little of the body. The first to wear it at the pool was Michele Bernardini, an exotic dancer from the Casino de Paris. The bikini became a hit at the time, but was banned on the coasts of France, Spain and Italy until the 1950s, and in the United States even until the 1960s. The bikini can be seen as an object of female liberalization in a certain time and space. However, individuals can look at the same clothing item in another time and space as a reflection of female identification or subordination to the values of a sexual object. The relationship between the exposed naked body and dressed one depends on the aesthetic requirements in accordance with firm social norms. Fashion also challenges nudity rules from time to time. Rudy Gernreich, in his fashion design work (the most famous of which is the Monokini topless swimsuit from 1964), explored the relationship between the nakedness of certain parts of the body, both male and female, and clothing. In his design response to social change, Yves Saint Laurent designed a black chiffon dress in 1968 that was completely transparent in the upper part, thus making the woman's breasts fully visible.

Body as identity

In postmodernity, one's identity is closely linked to the project of the body (Svensen, 2006). The identities individuals choose and the identities they are assigned to them are

visualized in clothing. The body and its associated clothing play an important role in constituting individuals' identities such as sex, racial and ethnic origin, religious beliefs, class, and political opinion. From this point of view, sex and gender in dress culture are one of the most obvious segments of this value framework, where sex is a biological given, and gender is a social construction that changes through time and space (Kaiser, 2012). The significant distinction between sex and gender has always been present in fashion and clearly expressed through various creative means (materials used e.g. transparency and the visibility of certain body parts), but it has only been more strongly challenged in recent years. In January 2011, Jean Paul Gaultier's haute couture show ended with the image of a blonde bride in a see-through dress. The bride was model Andrej Pejić, who is one of the first models to alternately wear both men's and women's collections.

Movement, grooming, youth and body proportions are expressed through a person's clothing style. Fashion media are important creators of images and meanings that users want to emulate. They are unrealistic, but they are the cultural body ideals to which users aspire. The reference point for evaluating and recognizing the identity of individuals is the overall appearance of the body and clothing (Finklestein, 1996; Entwistle, 2000). Thus, not only are the visual parameters of the clothes evaluated, but the identities of the body wearing them are also summarized. Clothing is judged according to acceptable cultural ideals of the meanings on which the clothing is worn.

Clothing is inextricably linked to the body and people use it to declare what they want to be /how they want to be perceived by others not what they really are. The purpose is therefore not to communicate what the body actually is, but rather what identity it seeks to form. As Joanne Finkelstein (1996) summarizes Simmel's idea, the beautification of the body is closely related to its distance from the body. Distance should reflect the relationship between identity and social status and the inclusion of the body in the image of the body itself; tattooing involves beautification and inclusion of the body, so it is about individual embellishment, while jewelry can be transferred from body to body. People dress according to their vision of their body, creating an image according to how they want to be seen by others. Seeing one's own body is determined by psychological self-image, but also by community pressure to accept the body ideal in dress culture. Despite the many possibilities for appearance and style, the choice is conditioned by the social consensus of time and space and consequently limitations of choices; clothes become an extension of the physical body and, paradoxically, an extension of our identities. Thus, clothing becomes a kind of uniform, also with messages of belonging (McDowell, 2013).

Classification of body as interface—merging with user, producer, presenter, and digital self

Based on theoretical foundations from fashion studies, body theory and cultural sociology, the body can be understood as a dynamic interface through which individuals engage with dress culture. This perspective views the body not only as a passive but also as an active participant in the production, representation and interpretation of fashion.

The following section presents examples of fashion designers and brands that have explored different meanings and aspects of the body in the fashion design process: Christobal Balenciaga, Christian Dior, Rudy Gernreich, Jean Paul Gaultier, Knitting studio Draž and others. The discussion outlines issues of defining the different roles the body plays in dress culture, the (dis)connections it forms with clothes, as well as the formation and positioning of its meaning within the social value system and the diverse contexts of its appearance in fashion.

Within this framework, the body acts in multiple dimensions, each reflecting a different way of interacting with clothing and appearance. These dimensions can be categorized as a fusion of the body with the wearer, the producer, the represter and the digital self.

Body and wear

Clothing is experienced individually by the wearer's body and is used to protect, conceal or restrict it. The clothed body also becomes a cultural text imbued with various meanings, shifting the focus from the form of clothing to the visual aspects of the appearance of the body itself (McDowell, 2013). In dress culture, the body has an important role in shaping what is considered fashionable and influences how clothing is perceived and valued. However, this does not necessarily mean that dress is losing its relevance; instead, the focus has shifted to how dress accentuates or is aligned with the cultural body ideals.

The experience of the body has two dimensions related to the wearer—how others perceive our body and how individuals perceive it themselves. Throughout history, the socially accepted image of the body ideal has been shaped by the images of clothing forms. The meanings that are formed in different time frames and geographical environments, with the support of various tools and processes, are transferred to dress culture, which in turn create new demands for desired and appropriate culture body ideals (McCracen, 1988). The wearer's body ideal is a cultural ideal, and dress contains coded messages that support that ideal. The coded message is initially tied to the visual elements of the dress, such as silhouette, cut, color, and accompanying visual factors such as hairstyle,

makeup, and other embellishment (McDowell, 2013). An acceptable body ideal with an accompanying dress image is a means of integrating an individual into a particular social structure. It is used to confirm the norms of a socially acceptable image (Bruna, 2015).

Since dress changes its shape when the body moves, it is meaningless to talk about a static body in fashion. So, the designer does not determine the final form in its entirety, but part of the dress form changes depending on the characteristics of the moving body of the wearer. The dress is designed with the intention that the body will wear it and move in it. The movement associated with the dress is a dynamic functional form associated with aesthetic perception; it goes beyond actual and useful movement—it is placed in the context of the creative capacity of the body and the cultural ideal of the body. The main means of realizing the body ideal is the dress, which is created by fashion designers to correct the "inadequacy" of the body. Therefore, numerous interventions in the cultural body ideal have developed, such as supportive structural forms, beautification, tattooing, cosmetic surgery, sports activities, etc. (McDowell, 2013). Supportive dress structures (such as petticoats, farthingale, crinoline, pannier, corset) have historically been used to correct body image. In addition, the clothing is also the result of a complex construction process that allows its shape to be independent of the body. The combination of hardened and non-hardened parts of the dress exposes the dynamics of the body's visible movement and further reshapes the body. Thus, people modify the dress by using shoulder pads or reinforcements with interlining, support fabrics or processing methods that stabilize the dress or the fabric used. The form of the dress becomes independent of the shape of the body and its movement, but at the same time it is visually transformed and so is its perception. Examples like Jean Paul Gaultier's spring summer 1983 collection or Skeleton dress by Iris van Herpen's haute couture fall 2011 collection or Comme des Garçons' spring 2012 ready-to-wear collection, are proof that transforming physical bodies with supportive clothing structures to achieve a desired body ideal are (were) always present in the history of fashion. The way in which movement is aesthetically experienced in fashion is the coherence between the subjective capabilities and the capabilities of the wearer's standardized movement. However, the movement of the body in fashion results from the full inclusion of the dynamics of the movement of the body as an expression of ideas, concepts, emotions and other phenomena (Csepregi, 1999). The uniqueness of fashion design is that the result is brought to life only through the movement of the body, although the dress already has its own movement on a micro level (the fabrics used are rarely stabilized, so as a result they do not physically move). The clothing is perceived as an object that changes as the body moves. The effect of

movement on the perception of clothing is visual and physical, and certainly the one that attracts the most attention. When analyzing the body movement of the wearer of dress, there is always a relationship between comfort and aesthetic purpose. Depending on the physical properties of the fabric used and the technical design solutions of the clothing, it changes its form. This is particularly evident in knitted clothing, as its three-dimensionality depends on the shape of the body. Only this gives the knitted clothing its final form (McDowell, 2013). The same applies to clothing that are made of softly falling fabrics, use few construction elements, and are made using techniques such as draping, wrapping, and the like. Other materials also change the final dress form depending on the use and movement of the body. This is particularly pronounced in leather clothing, which take on the characteristics of the wearer's body shape after a few days of wear, as body heat and moisture affect the transformation of the clothing form. Simmel (1998) links the body and clothing in such a way that clothing determines our posture, gait or general body movement. There is a difference between new and old clothes; unused clothing has not yet been "remade" in terms of our individual body characteristics, creating a kind of equality of appearance; unlike second-hand clothing, which often reveals information about the specifics of our bodies (Lehmann, 2000).

In dress culture, bodies are primarily differentiated by gender. Therefore, this differentiation in clothing is a very clear and rather still strict norm of fashion, and often in clothing culture. The relationship between the female body and the male gaze is related to the relationship between the physical and spiritual parts of the body; in this context, there is a female–female dualism in addition to the male–female dualism (Župevc, 2007). The experience of the clothed body is assessed by social normative requirements related to body proportions, visible skin irregularities, age, obesity, hair color, and much more. Aging is one of the key aspects of body evaluation, because in dress culture the socially accepted body ideal is the young body. Thus, the fashion ideal is tied only to physical body, and in doing so creates a dominant and decisive role in the evaluation of the individual's body image and the clothing that goes with it. The terms "beauty" use and their derivatives refer exclusively to the physically clothed body.

For the representation of the wearer's identity, clothing is a necessity, because the individuality speaks only when dressed (Mikuž, 1991). Thus, the body is involved in the creation of its own identity through dress culture. The clothed body is a performance, a construction of material identity in progress (Calefato, 1997). The symbiotic coexistence of body and clothing is most vividly described by Miller-Spillman in The Body in Cultural Context (2005). She highlights the feelings that individuals face after the loss of a

loved one, when they have to part with the clothes of the deceased. It is as if the clothing carries the spiritual body within it, even though the physical body is no longer there.

Body and production

Bodies in the process of clothing production have been recorded as a set of numerical data throughout history since the Industrial Revolution (Atkinson, 2017). Before that, it was custom-made, for each individual separately, which was not just a collection of numerical data. Even later, the proportion of custom manufacturing was still high. In the 1950s, the share of custom-made clothing in Slovenia was still 75%. With industrial production came the need for body measurements and determination of body types. The latter are references on the basis of which fashion designers approach their design. In production, clothes are systematized by size numbers and body types; producers measure the physical body and reduce it to the numerical data given in the tables. The size data as a whole defines the physical characteristics of the average body in the statistical processing of measurement data. A few numbers are intended to fully categorize the visual characteristics of an individual body. A normative body is created so that there is no longer an individual body, but only a body similar to another body. In production, manufacturers use standardized body measurements that are the result of the average collected measurement data of different physical bodies. Accurate, statistically processed measurement data of physical bodies are used. Each body belongs to a group with a certain size number, and the formation of individual or collective identities is irrelevant.

The design and manufacturing process of clothing is closely related to the pattern cutting process. The garment is made according to the dimensions and construction standards derived from the static body, although the garment is always used later in moving, changing body shapes. From this point of view, construction is extremely important in the relationship between clothing and the body, adapting to the requirements of a moving body as a kind of "translator" of clothing into a materialized image. The choice of textiles in the design plays an important role in the possibilities of body movement in this garment. In this process, the body is a theoretical approximation of the physical body in its static position during measurement. The data are derived from vertical and horizontal measurements of the body in an upright static position (Lindqvist, 2015). The construction lines obtained in this way are particularly characteristic of clothing made of fabrics and less so of knitted textiles, which have greater flexibility due to the characteristics of the manufacturing process. The correlation between the shape of the garment and the pattern cut according to the type of textile used is noticeable in the analysis of

the work of the Draž knitting studio based in Slovenia. The clothes are designed directly on static mannequins, but taking into account the fact that the garment is designed for the moving body that will wear this garment. The way the knitted fabric falls and the places where the knitted fabric breaks/folds is the location of a specific point where the materiality of the knitted fabric guides the designer in the construction process in accordance with the design process. In this way, lines, textiles, and shapes move harmoniously with the body, creating a garment that is directly related to the body in motion (Lindqvist, 2015).

Most of the history of dress culture is based on customization, which means taking measurements of each physical body - clothes are made-to-measure for each body. This was the case until the industrial revolution and the possibility of mass production. Therefore, standard clothing size designations developed relatively late and introduced the concept of a body that follows the dimensions of clothing. In the 19th century, the production of standardized military clothing developed based on the average height of men measured in the United States. After World War I, there was a need to apply the same principle to women's clothing. When sizing was introduced for men, only the measurements of the chest area and its derivative were considered, which is insufficient data for the female body. Therefore, in 1938, the U.S. Department of Agriculture conducted a more comprehensive study entitled Measurements of Women for Clothing and Tailoring (Robinson, 2015). The study included 14,698 women (only white women were included in the final report) whose weight and 58 different body measurements were taken. Most of the women had a body type of the so-called hourglass. Using the data obtained, they determined that only five selected measurements were important for standard clothing production, namely weight, height, and bust, waist, and hip circumference. They soon found that weight was closely related to the latter three measurements, so they omitted it from the size data. The statistical data obtained later in 1958 formed the basis for the formation of the first clothing size standard in the United States, which consisted of a combination of size numbers from 8 to 42 for waist circumference, T / R / S for height (tall / regular / small) and the symbol for hip circumference (+, - and no indication; full, thin and average) (Ashdown, 2007). The clothing sizing system, which was based on average measurements of physical bodies, was supplemented in 1970. In order to achieve a more general and harmonized standardization, including of clothing sizing, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) was founded in 1946. Its founders included various European countries, the Soviet Union, India, China, and Australia. The international sizing system thus came into effect in 1969. Nevertheless, there are several standards for clothing sizes around the world based on statistical physical body mea-

surements. In Slovenia, JUS was used for the textile industry (F) from 1976 (first published in 1964) until the adoption of ISO (European) standards, and in Germany a sizing system was developed based on nine body types and the ratio between hip circumference and height. According to the JUS standards, the size system is linked to body height and body measurements (for men, only chest circumference). For height, a distinction is made between extremely short, short, medium tall, tall and extremely tall. For build, a distinction is made between slender, normal and full figure, similar to the American system (Ashdown, 2007). Besides the numerical size designation, the letter designation of the size system is in use, namely S, M, L and XL, which was developed after 1996.

The production of clothing is closely related to the involvement of bodies in the process. Despite technological developments, the production of clothing is still based on intensive human labor. Production itself has not changed significantly since 1850, when Isaac Singer developed the modern sewing machine. Clothing production is a labor-intensive industry, which means it depends on workers (bodies) to directly produce the products. The basic production technology in the clothing and fashion industry has not changed significantly over the centuries and is still mainly based on human labor. Women are predominantly employed in the production process. In clothing production, women make up the majority of the labor force (International Labour Organization, 2019), and it is a sad fact that 160 million children are also involved in production (International Labour Organization & United Nations Children's Fund, 2021).

In the production of clothing, the physical body is necessary, and its position in relation to the product (clothing) has not changed significantly since the advent of mass production. The method of production has remained almost unchanged, and the greatest change has been in the speed of production. Fashion is produced at the expense of the workers who produce the clothes. The abstract, symbolic value of the body in the production process of clothing is therefore evaluated from the point of view of the ethical values of society and human dignity. Respect for fundamental human and workers' rights in the fashion industry is a priority. This situation arises from the fact that supply chains are highly diversified and production is far from the point of sale of the final product. The latter is no longer linked to the body or bodies that produced it.

Body and representation

In fashion representation, bodies are discussed in the context of models who have significant impact on the development of contemporary consumer culture, attitudes toward women, and issues related to various identities (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2012). The body ideals of fashion have always dictated the images of body ideals in society. Fashion created body ideals based on the looks of the models that were extremely difficult to achieve. In this age of visual dominance, models are signs of cultural values (Soley-Beltran, 2012). Moreover, the representation of fashion mainly deals with female bodies. The majority of modeling work is tied to female models; male models are a minority in the fashion world. In fashion, models' bodies are seen as contributing to the formation and stabilization of the dominant female body ideal in society (Volonté, 2019). However, models are not only physical carriers or indicators of clothing images, but also mediators of attitudes, values, and meanings that fashion conveys in the image of models. It is also a fact that the physical body ideal of models includes a young body, so the professional career of models is limited in time to their youth.

Models (women and men) create an external image and market themselves at the same time. Their body thus becomes an object of consumerism, and at the same time they create a fashionable clothing image that is also an object of consumerism; models are the interfaces of the two sides of consumer pressure. Their body is an actual body that is seen in fashion magazines, photographs, and other representations, and at the same time it is a "semantic" or "represented" body that in many ways has a greater impact on symbolic and material social processes (Entwistle & Slater, 2012). Because of the inert nature of their work, such as wearing clothes for pay, their bodies are treated as objects rather than subjects. This can be related to historical references, as in history new clothes were presented on static mannequins, whose role and content were only replaced by living models over time; a mannequin is only a subject, which can no longer be claimed in the case of a living model. Models are still chosen because the clothes look good on them. The expression that models "wear clothes well" is often used. Thus, the models move between living and non-living objects. Their bodies are tied exclusively to their physical value, a spiritual value is considered non-existent in modeling, one can even argue that it is disturbing. This image historically follows society's perception of the non-subjectified mute woman. In fashion, the body is used exclusively for the appropriate presentation of clothing forms; thus, in fashion, real physical bodies and socially constructed bodies are inseparable. Such an image is the approval of fashion designers, fashion brands, and fashion media that favor aestheticized, controversial images of the female and male body and the transmission of myriad messages and meanings of the

body being presented. The beauty of bodies in fashion representation is therefore no longer naturally given, but adapted; it is the result of a constant construction, correction, and adjustment of appearance (Volonté, 2019). In fashion, the body of models is one of the most controversial aspects of the relationship between the body and the fashion industry. Related to this are the social excesses associated with the appearance of models, which are directly and indirectly related to their bodies, such as sexual harassment, anorexia, bulimia, market value, and embodiment of gender. The traditional sexual role, sexualization, or valuation of body types is strongly present, and white and extremely skinny models are prevalent (Entwistle & Slater, 2012).

In the last fifty years, the body proportions of models have been at odds with the real bodies of users; the so-called zero-size boom, related to the US size 0 (81-56-84) and prevalent in fashion in the 1990s, led to a ban on extremely skinny models after some deaths of models; first in Spain and then at Milan Fashion Week, followed by Kering and LVMH, while London and New York Fashion Weeks did not adopt a ban. Extremely thin physical bodies have become fashionable in recent decades. Sizes 36–38 still predominate in models' sizes, although larger sizes 44–46 dominate in the general population (Volonté, 2019). Nowadays, this pronounced discrepancy is slowly transforming into comparable physical similarities between models and users. The importance of including different visual images of models has become crucial and necessary[RS1] [td2] . Indeed, the physical bodies of models must constantly conform to the requirements of the body ideal imposed by the social norms of fashion; their physicality is a value because models are already used in the production process for fitting and later in the distribution of fashion for the presentation of clothes in fashion magazines and for photography to advertize fashion brands and various fashion media.

In the middle of the 19th century, Charles Frederic Worth was the first to present his clothes with live models. Even before him, dressmakers and tailors employed women to present their products to customers, but it was Worth who institutionalized the work of models as part of the systemic operation of fashion. Worth's wife, Marie Vernet, handled the recruitment and forming of models at their company beginning in 1852, working as a model herself for the Worth brand. Later, the involvement of models grew. In the 1920s, John Robert Powers founded the first fashion agency in the United States. In 1924, French fashion designer Jean Patou selected only white models for his American guest fashion shows, which he believed would help his clients in the United States identify with visible clothing; for the first time, the identity of ethnicity and nationality was introduced into modeling (Soley-Beltran, 2012). Unlike Patou, who chose slender and tall

models, Christobal Balenciaga chose models who were physically similar to his clients. Therefore, the models even had to "reshape" their physical bodies in relation to the proportions of the clients' bodies; their bodies had to be as similar as possible to the clients' physical bodies. In France, fashion houses employed 14 to 18 permanent models until the early 1950s (Troy, 2003). During this time, models followed the proportions and body types of the fashion houses' customers. Despite the changes in live fashion presentations, their physical appearance at fashion shows was still static. In Slovenia, an interesting example is the combination of a joint presentation of static live models and mannequins at a fair presentation in the framework of the MODA 1966 fair in Ljubljana; the live physical body was equated with the object of the mannequin and there was no difference between subject and object in fashion.

In the late 1950s, Christian Dior's choice of the inexperienced eighteen-year-old Victoire Doutreleau introduced an additional dimension to the models' appearance strategy and introduced the concept of social class into modeling (Soley-Beltran, 2012). Based on this, Twiggy and Kate Moss later emphasized their working-class origins as an important influence on their public image. Thus, the limited diversity of models' physical attributes and identities continued until the 1960s, when changing social contexts and the development of ready-to-wear collections began to alter not only models' physical images but also their symbolic value in society. Models' body images became more and more standardized, and at the same time modeling became an increasingly serious business. In the 1990s, during the supermodel era, models upgraded their prestigious status in society, which had been developing since the early 1970s. According to Soley-Beltran (2012), supermodels are the embodiment of modern visual neocolonialism, as the image of a blue-eyed white model was introduced as a global standard; for example, it was not until 1974 that Beverly Johnson was the first black model on the cover of American Vogue.

However, deviations from the established, unambiguous cultural ideal of the body were also evident in the fashion system. In this context, it is worth mentioning the case of the brand AnaOno (designer Dana Donofree), which in February 2017 presented at New York Fashion Week a collection of lingerie worn by sixteen (16) models, patients with breast cancer. Famously, model Madeline Stuart, a person with Down's syndrome, has been successfully modeling since 2015, when she first appeared at New York Fashion Week, changing stereotypes about the cultural ideal of the body in fashion. In the fashion industry, there is a famous example of engaging Beth Ditto (singer of the band Gossip) as a model. Her abundant image certainly deviates from the standard cultural ideal in the fashion world. She was hired by Jean Paul Gaultier to open and close a fashion

show where he presented his spring/summer 2011 collection. Activist Sinéad Burke plays an important role in increasing the fashion industry's responsibility for greater inclusion and diversity of cultural body ideals, as she represents a group of people who are underrepresented in fashion.

Regarding male models, there is an economic gap and gender discrimination in fashion industry, as male models face significantly lower earnings then their female counterparts. According to 2013 data published by Forbes (Le, 2013), the top ten male models earned $8 million between September 2012 and September 2013, compared to $83 million earned by the top ten female models combined. Thus, the top ten male models earned only 9.6% of what the top ten female models received. This represents an illegal injustice, even though the difference between the revenue from the sale of women's and men's fashion is not as significant. In 2018, on a global scale, the share of women's fashion revenue was 53%, compared to the revenue of men's fashion, which was 31%, representing a little over half of the revenue from the sale of women's apparel.

The body in fashion representation is the result of the synergy of the social agreement on the appropriate appearance, fashion trends and the collective image of the ideal of the female and men body; it is not the choice of an individual body, but a constructed image of a body influenced by various factors in fashion, such as stylists, brands, fashion designers and photographers (Volonté, 2019). However, the body in fashion representation includes various aspects such as the actual appearance of the body, its created image, and its represented meaning. Therefore, the body of models has a more far-reaching influence on the development of society; it cannot be understood only as a carrier—a "hanger"—for clothes, but, with its appearance and meaning it has a key influence on social structure; the body of models has become the physical embodiment of ideal identities that represent accepted notions of beauty and social perfection (Soley-Beltran, 2012). In the representation of fashion, the body directly influences or forms the image of the wearer's body; thus, the woman performs the "third shift" (Entwistle & Slater, 2012, 19), as she must take care of her user body, which should be as close as possible to the body in the fashion representation. The latter sells not only clothing, but also the image and meaning of the body itself with a broader social impact.

Virtual body and digital self

In post-industrial society, virtual space, augmented reality, and digital clothing technologies cannot be ignored. In this context, the phenomenon of the virtual body and the digital self, and the self-quantification that comes with it, is significant (Benford, 2017). A

virtual body is not a real material body, but a constructed image of the body, as in fact any body in fashion. It is a way of forming the fashion ideal of the body in virtual space. Thus, the social body has shifted and multiplied in the context of the digital appearance of the disembodied personality (Thiel, 2017). Thus, the virtual body is the result of desires, images, and values created over the real physical body. It is available in different forms and for different purposes, both for collective and individual use (Petreca, 2017). When creating a virtual body, one can have reasonable doubts about the objective image of the created body. The latter is the result of a socially accepted norm of the body ideal, unrestricted individual images, and technological possibilities created by predetermined algorithms. The digitally created incarnation represents an open possibility of digital transformation or duplication of the real body. Photoshop and filters are the new cosmetics and plastic surgeries that are en vogue. The stronger the influence on the transformation of the body, the more the latter becomes alienated from the self. In virtual space, the body is a visual spectacle that lacks the essence of the real body, its materiality; a physical body that moves through space (Negrin, 2016). Artificial intelligence (AI), which is already implemented and will undoubtedly be further developed in the future, will play an increasingly important role in shaping the body and its perception in fashion, with a particular focus on ethical issues relating to database security and the impact of algorithms taking center stage. Projects such as the Fashion Avatar platform, a database whose operation supported by the New York Council of Arts and the Fashion Institute of Technology, presents a library of 100 different forms of avatars based on scans of real bodies that deviate from fashion ideals. The platform thus encourages sustainable aspects of fashion, such as the inclusiveness of the diversity of the body forms, thereby challenging standard perceptions of the fashion body ideal. At the same time, questions may be raised about people's voluntary entry into digital world of open data, in which images of physical bodies are left to purposes and uses that can no longer be influenced.

The so-called post-internet aesthetic, as summarized by Douglas Atkinson (2017), creates new ways of "transforming" the social body and seeing one's "own" body. A virtual body becomes a formed "real" body in fashion that conforms to socially defined standards. This, in turn, can put even more pressure on possible changes to the real body, as the virtual body has no, or insufficient, tactility, which is an essential part of the physical body. For this reason, the virtual body is merely an imitation of the physical features in digital simulations. So, when people create their virtual bodies in the virtual space of fashion, they provide data about their real bodies that are not exclusively objectively defined, such as weight or height, and from this perspective, the data is highly subjective. It is very likely that the virtual body is thus projection of reality. In the fashion industry,

there is already a virtual model agency called The Diigitals that offers virtual models. A virtual body allows you to see yourself through the lens of a cultural body ideal in which you dress best for your body to feel better. Even more interesting is Hanifa's Pink Label Congo collection, whose virtual presentation includes invisible digital bodies, with only the movement of the clothes visible without a "body" (Hitti, 2020).

In virtual modernity, the body loses its physical/material presence, which is replaced by a digitally constructed body image. The digitally constructed image is now the result of various people, agencies, and influencers. The latter are both real and fictional. Virtual influencers are created using computer technology, simultaneously superimposing meanings that are reflected and implemented in real social spaces. The individual follows the norms, ideals, beliefs, and values conveyed through social networks by a digital character—a body that is not biological, but merely a digital visualization of information conveyed in virtual space. The body created in this way reflects the human desire to become the creator of a controlled personality that does not exist in the material world. In fashion, one of the most powerful digital influencers is Miquela Sousa (Lil Miquela), who has more than 3 million followers on Instagram, has 3.6 million followers on TikTok and also "lives" on Twitter, Tumblr and YouTube. On her official Instagram page, her description states that she is a 19-year-old robot living in Los Angeles. "She" was created by the Californian startup Brud, which presented the digital character for the first time on the social network Instagram on April 23, 2016. Fashion brands Prada, Moschino and Calvin Klein collaborated with her as part of their presentations. As an independent person, she appears in interviews for fashion media. The digital figure encapsulates the socially constructed identities of the fictional body in the real world. A fake "person" that appears like a real person (Getgood, 2019). Thus, an individual's desires become a virtual visible reality through the images of imaginary bodies. In this process, the visual image of the digital body follows the real physical characteristics of the image, which is transformed in the context of the beauty of the cultural ideal of the body. In the virtual space, the individual body parts can be combined as desired. A virtual body is an "improved" physical body, disregarding the spiritual component of the real body. Compared to real models, the virtual bodies of digital influencers are also three-dimensional "hangers" with imaginary identities. Ideas about the desired body image are expressed in virtual realization. The body has disappeared.

Conclusion

Methodologically, the study combines theoretical analysis, cultural criticism, case study research on fashion design practices and participant observation. It integrates phenomenological, sociological and fashion theory perspectives in order to show that the clothed body functions simultaneously as subject and object. Clothing mediates between the individual and society and functions both as an expression and regulation of identity, gender, status and bodily ideals. It transforms appearance and at the same time embodies cultural and social codes.

By emphasizing body movement, the research challenges static notions of clothing. Movement changes both the perception and the meaning of clothing, making it an essential semiotic element of identity representation. Fashion is thus based on the moving, living body, redefining clothing not as a fixed form but as a dynamic interaction.

The study also criticizes the effects of standardized clothing production. Industrial sizing systems abstract the body into data and enforce homogenizing norms that conceal physical diversity. This discrepancy between real bodies and normative ideals leads to constant marginalization, especially in mass fashion.

Representation through fashion models reinforces narrow aesthetic standards. The model's body becomes a symbolic carrier of social and economic meanings and shapes ideals of gender identity. This paradigm, which in the past privileged white, slim and youthful bodies, has recently been challenged by calls for inclusivity, but gaps in representation remain.

In digital contexts, the rise of virtual bodies—avatars, filters and computer-generated models—marks a new phase in fashion's engagement with corporeality. These disembodied representations expand the aesthetic possibilities, but also harbor the danger of moving further away from material reality and reinforcing unrealistic norms and commercial appearances. Virtual influencers and digital garments elaborate notions of authenticity, visibility and embodiment.

The research also looks at the political and ethical dimensions of fashion. While idealized bodies dominate visual culture, the working bodies behind garment production, often women, remain invisible. This contrast reveals the systemic inequalities in the valuation of bodies within fashion systems.

The main innovation of the study is the original categorization of the body into four interrelated dimensions: as user, producer, representation and digital self. Through an analytical framework, the study goes beyond binary opposites. It presents the body as a site

of constant change, characterized by cultural ideals, technologies, aesthetics and socioeconomic forces.

Ultimately, the study emphasizes the central importance of the body in fashion discourse. To understand dress culture, one cannot focus solely on the garments. It requires a critical, interdisciplinary examination of how bodies are constructed, perceived and mobilized. The inclusion of bodily diversity forms the foundation for more inclusive, ethical and expressive practices in fashion and cultural production.

This discussion provides a general overview of the role and significance of the body in fashion. Future research based on comparative empirical data from diverse geographical, cultural, economic and political contexts is needed to deepen this analysis. Such an approach would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the body in fashion as a dynamic construct, shaped by both physical and symbolic factors and reflecting the evolving characteristics of different environments and historical periods.

AI disclaimer

The AI was used for linguistic assistance only, but was reviewed and edited by the authors. All scientific content and responsibility are original and remain with the authors.

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Povzetek

Prispevek obravnava pojavnost telesa v oblačilni kulturi sodobnega evro-ameriškega konteksta ter oblačenje razume kot utelešeno, družbeno in simbolno prakso. Na teoretskih izhodiščih fenomenologije, antropologije telesa, modnih študij in kulturne sociologije analizira, kako telesni videz, gibanje, spolne razlike in tehnološka posredovanost sooblikujejo pomen v vsakdanjih in institucionalnih kontekstih oblačenja. Članek najprej oriše ključne teoretske pristope k razumevanju telesa v modi, vključno z oblečenim in golim telesom, telesnim gibanjem, telesom kot simbolom in nosilcem pomena, ter vlogo oblačil pri konstrukciji identitete. Osrednji prispevek članka je analitični model, ki telo razčleni v štiri medsebojno povezane razsežnosti: telo kot uporabnik, telo kot proizvajalec, telo kot reprezentacija in telo kot digitalni jaz. Ta okvir omogoča celostno razumevanje delovanja teles v praksah nošenja oblačil, proizvodnih sistemih, modni prezentaciji in virtualnih okoljih. Analiza pokaže, da telo v sodobni modi ni pasivna podlaga za oblačila, temveč aktiven kulturni akter, preko katerega se proizvajajo, pogajajo in normirajo pomeni. V produkciji je telo reducirano na standardizirane mere in statistične norme, kar briše individualnost telesa in odpira etična vprašanja dela, spolno pogojenih delovnih razmerij ter nevidnosti teles v proizvodnih verigah. V modni reprezentaciji, zlasti v manekenskih praksah, telesa delujejo kot estetizirani in komodificirani ideali, ki utrjujejo družbene hierarhije in vplivajo na samopodobo uporabnic. V digitalnih kontekstih pojav virtualnih teles in digitalno konstruiranih jazov dodatno destabilizira materialno utelešenost ter krepi procese idealizacije in odtujenosti od izkustvenega telesa. Prispevek ugotavlja, da moda deluje kot pomembno polje upravljanja teles, kjer se prepletajo estetske norme, družbenopolitične strukture in digitalne tehnologije. Članek s tem prispeva k antropološkim razpravam o telesnosti, materialni kulturi in reprezentaciji ter telo opredeli kot osrednje vozlišče kulturnega pomena in sodobnih družbenih preobrazb.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: telo, kultura oblačenja, identiteta, moda.

CORRESPONDENCE: Tanja Devetak, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Engineering, University of Ljubljana, Aškerčeva 12, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia. Email: tanja.devetak@siol.net.