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Sonic Imaginations for Future Fashion

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I. EPOCH OF VISUALS

epilogue

We are born in the world that is designed already. Our natural environment is replaced by a world of design. People know more brands and logos than birds or tree species. Nowadays we are living in the multivisual imaginature – the avatar of nature. We are living in the artificial life – internet space – the flat screen of the computer. It is just like a duplication of being in the world. With countless layers of images and identities. With unreliable images and personalities. It is a real reorientation of the senses and world perception. We are living in the epoch of self-obsession: we are feeding our new totem (Facebook) with every day(-hour) Selfies, Tweeting what we had for breakfast – we're living in the age of over-exposure and over-sharing, where our constant sharing means that digital narcissism is the norm. We believe in the trend of Publicness. We are layering our (usually) fake identities to an impressive composite. We are re-inventing ourselves with cosmetic surgeries and hiding our age with the make-up. We materialize our identity(-ies) through the fashionable outfit that is based on the powerful wearer-viewer relationship. The Identity became a production of appearance. Fashion industry attracts us with a common trend (mass-customized products) and invites everybody to become a designer (User-centered approach). Fashion industry cultivates a desire for the NEW. That is the way the things we design end up designing us. We have a strong believe in the Visual and forget other senses. We isolate inclusive communities, e.g. people with different seeing abilities, because of the lack of their interest in visuals.

Can we rethink fashion as a visual and material culture?

What comes after the Image / Iconic Turn?

What if the garment would be a sound instead the vision?

The visual culture is predominant in the fashion as a material culture. What would happen if the visual value changes to the sonic perception? If we could not see, but only percept the world and self by hearing? If our garments would become the garments-antennas? How the cupboard would look like, how we would form it if our clothes would have not visual but only sonic value? If sonic value would be the main qualities of wearable what kind of sound would we wear?

How we would understand our body? Would it be sonic body? Your room and your home would become part of you, and you would become part of them. Would we extend our body and collide with spaces?

The total visual effect of dress can be analyzed by describing its formal aesthetic components; that is, the colors, lines, shapes, textures, and space that body and dress represent. We imagine that the ensemble for man consists of suit, shirt, tie, socks, and shoes. Would it be something similar with sounds: would we compose to get a harmony or the opposite-disharmony? Would it be based on high/low frequencies? Styles of music? Soft sounds? Sensation of tone? The trace or range of sound? How we would collect, select, combine them?

Will we try to form our identity using the sounds? Would our sonic garments transmit the music we listen? Could anyone be silent all his life and do not care about his / her identity? Would someone do a voice surgery to change his identity?

We make many sounds now by wearing our clothes, accessories, and shoes (heels, lipstick container popping, jewelry jangling, nylon stockings, handbag being swapped, etc.). Would we learn to recognize people and bring the awareness of unexpected sound? What kind of interaction / communication between us then it would be? Would our communication be based on the hyper-connectivity? If we would have a possibility to mute surroundings what kind of soundscapes would be muted? Maybe we would amplify ourselves? Or discriminate people using the loud sound for people from Diasporas or refugees?

Would fashion production sector grow by suggesting sonic wearable, garments-antennas and sounding objects / accessories? Would they promote the personalization, user-driven design even more and create many applications for the market? Would the

techno-topia grow a lot and the fashion industry would be fulfilled with the new sound based technology for the wearable?

Would we need the exercises for training for sonic fashion?

How would we wear the sonic garments? What would become the underwear? Would we have a secret sounds that we wear only in private surroundings?

Would the utopian model replace the dystopian? Would we have only one garment at the end (as a hyperdermis / second skin), which is evolved to different surfaces with various functions, but not based on the visual appearance?

The soundscape is constantly changing. Old sounds are disappearing time by time. (Where are the museums for them?). How many sounds can you remember hearing from your youth that are no longer heard today? Would we be interested in the archeology of sounds? Would it be popular the retro sounds and we would wear the sounds from the past (e.g.: imagine the sound of 15th century Italian suit of metal armor)? What kind of sound would be the future steps? Digital? Constant? Fast? Would we loose the rhythms of the body and identical sounds of steps?

Sound is abstract, intangible, and ethereal. Sound is surrounding us; it is not directional as vision. It is a kind of extension of seeing: "seeing with ears". Would the use of sound and resonance give the intensity to the sonic object / subject? How a sonic garment would change the perception of bodies in the space?

How would we fashion the embodied sounds? What kind of sonic silhouettes would we create? How the sonoric fashion landscape and fashion acoustics would change? How would we listen to fashion? Would it be audio labels and sonic fashion catalogues? Would we have a murmuring wardrobe? Would there be identical sounds for recognizing particular people?..

Would we develop the pre-recorded memory?.. and binaural listening that would give us a three-dimensional sonic presence and the sense that the recorded sound is inside us?

How the sonic imagination for fashion and body would change the perception of these phenomena? How this vibrational practice and auditory dimension would effect the sonic relationship?

Would Utopian and Dystopian models become as a natural shift or just as contestable futures / Sonoric simulacrum?

II. SOUNDTOPIA

Soundtopia is a speculative sonic fashion scenario for the future possible sonic bodies and behaviors. I created this scenario and used it as an introductory part for my workshops with fashion, textile students, and people with different seeing abilities. Soundtopia consists of five possibilities and speculates on the change of fashion, people, and space.

Possibility 1. Amplified Self

Making Sounds

Fashion: Big Bang in the production sector – many new products for making sounds, such as sounding objects, sounding accessories, sonic textile, garments-microphones, garments-loudspeakers. The growth in service sector: suggesting the apps for sound making, identity magnifiers, mixer-garment applications, attachable sound makers, etc.

People: expressing their identity by wearing sounding objects; amplifying their movements by sounds; talking often and loud as the voice becomes the most important for transmitting the identity. They are developing new sounds and sound combinations to wear and express identity

Space: noise everywhere; some groups of people are getting tired and ill because of the noise

Figure 1. Wearing attachable sounding objects

Possibility 2. Listening to Surroundings

Homo Listener

Fashion: sells isolative materials and various sound filters

People: Homo Sapiens becomes Homo Listener; learns how to listen to the world by making their own sound mirrors. Developing different listening modes and practices.

Homo Listeners experience an amplified surrounding, talk very silently or whisper

Space: silence and ambient

Figure 2. Wearing a sound amplifier

Possibility 3. Extraordinary Sound: Wearable Antennas

Beyond the silence

Fashion: creating various wearable antennas for specific sounds. Haute Couture fashion is creating ‘new senses’ antennas and accessories for extraordinary sounds (infrasound; ultrasound; underground sound; underwater sounds; distant sounds;

sounds from the past, etc.). The industry is making antennas for listening to others' minds, distant sounds from cosmos, different aliens' speeches, etc.

People: amplifying their identity using extraordinary sounds

Space: very noisy; people are becoming deaf because of intense sound pollution

Figure 3. Skin-antennas for capturing the infrasound and ultrasound

Possibility 4. Isolating Sound and Self

Homo Isolator

Fashion: only the isolative materials are in production

People: isolating themselves from the sounds; making communicating tunnels that absorb sounds; covering surfaces with acoustic isolators; creating wearable-isolating-spaces

Space: calm and relaxing

Figure 4. Isolating self by wearing glass headphones and growing layer for sound isolation

Possibility 5. Hyperdermis Evolution: Second Skin based on eliminating self

Anonymous Community

Fashion: creating a sustainable second skin for life long wearing

People: using second skin 'Hyperdermis' for camouflaging themselves: reflecting sound, isolating their own sounds and voice by wearing various filters that eliminate identity

Space: ambient, sounds of nature

Figure 5. Growing layer for sound reflection, dermal layer for voice filtering

III. Aesthetics of the Invisible: Towards a Sonic Fashion Ontology

I am doing a practice-based research in the field of fashion design that is based on sonic value and sonic identity. This new field of investigation in the non-visual aesthetics of fashion is unique and has a big potential for establishing a program on Sonic Fashion. The study on sound ontology in fashion is limited and presents a new and interesting potential territory to be explored. The research introduces sonic qualities and sonic identities and suggests the new possibilities for alternative forms of design-thinking to open in research programs in non-visual aspects of person-object relationships in design.

I am using a speculative design method to question the possibility for the future of sonic identity. I am questioning what is the form of change and the possible ways of future living. The research introduces sonic qualities and sonic identities and suggests the new possibilities for alternative forms of design-thinking to open in research programs in non-visual aspects of person-object relationships in design.

Visuality is an increasingly contested phenomenon. Art and Design are for the eyesight. Some artists and designers investigate the non-visual aspects and senses.

As Fors states the “sensory turn” is a part of an emerging body of literature across humanities and social sciences that focus on sensory perception, and its role in the process through which people experience and make their everyday environments (Fors 2015). The “critique of visual culture is needed” as outlined by Hans Belting and William Mitchell. From the interpretation of the “Iconic Turn” as situation of crisis and aesthetic transformation follows the need for the sciences of image to provide a “critical iconology” in order to be able to theoretically reformulate the ideological and political presuppositions of some dominant contemporary forms of visual representation.

The emancipation of art as new cultural object presupposes the decline of the cult of images, and therefore not only the social crisis of a given technical production of images, but also the crisis and transformation of gazes and vision practices, which intercept and experience images. (Bertolini 2015)

As Mitchell writes: “What makes for the sense of a pictorial turn, then, is not that we have some powerful account of visual representation that is dictating the terms of cultural theory, but that pictures form a point of peculiar friction and discomfort across a broad range of intellectual inquiry”. (Mitchell 1994)

The iconic turn is thus marked also by a theoretical rearrangement of the relation between language and images, as well as of the relations between sight and the other senses (notably hearing and touch). Such rearrangements lead to a “crisis,” i.e., to opposite positions, extremely and naively positive critical judgments (the euphoria for the alleged hegemony of the visual), and negative apocalyptic judgments (iconoclasm stigmatizing the damages produced by the domain of the visual in contemporary societies). (Bertolini 2015)

Anyway, why do we persist in talking about some media as if they were exclusively visual? Is this just a shorthand for talking about visual predominance? The claim by Mitchell that “there are no visual media” is that all media are mixed media. That is, the very notion of a medium and of mediation already entails some mixture of sensory, perceptual, and semiotic elements. There are no purely auditory, tactile, or olfactory media either.

With regard to the senses and media, Marshall McLuhan glimpsed this point some time ago when he posited different “sensory ratios” for different media. As a

shorthand, McLuhan was happy to use terms like visual and tactile media, but his surprising claim (which has been mostly forgotten or ignored) was that television (usually taken to be the paradigmatically visual medium) is actually a tactile medium: “The TV image is an extension of touch,” in contrast to the printed word, which in McLuhan’s view, was the closest any medium has come to isolating the visual sense.

McLuhan’s notion of media as “sensory ratios” needs to be supplemented, then, with a concept of “semiotic ratios,” specific mixtures of sign functions that make a medium what it is. Cinema, then, is not just a ratio of sight and sound, but of images and words, and of other differentiable parameters such as speech, music, and noise.

Like all fetish objects, the eye and the gaze have been both over- and underestimated, idolized and demonized. Visual culture at its most promising offers a way to get beyond these “scopic wars” into a more productive critical space. (Mitchell 2005)

To give a brief statement of my main points, I can state that the visual culture is the field of study that refuses to expand vision as non-visual phenomenon. There is a need for the shift in people’s relation to images, the popular perception of the world, the production and consumption of visuals. There is a need to reopen art and design to expand the field of images and visual practices including non-visual perspectives in the discourse.

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