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Reflections on Sculptural Thinking in Fashion Design

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Dr Kevin Almond is Head of Department for Fashion and Textiles, University of Huddersfield. He has previously worked as a fashion designer, pattern cutter and fashion illustrator. Research interests include: pattern cutting, toile making, fitting and collection preparation: in 2013 he organized the first international conference dedicated to pattern cutting. He is a trustee of The Costume Society.

Steve Swindells is a Professor of Creative Practice, University of Huddersfield. He has exhibited his work as a practicing artist, across Europe, Asia and North America. His current research has two strands: public engagement and in art and design, and interrelationships between art and fashion. Awarded a PhD in 2004 on the relationship between art and citizenship.

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Photo : © Pierre Antoine

Figure 1: Madame Gres exhibition at Musee Bourdelle, Paris, 2011. Photo courtesy of © Pierre Antoine

Abstract

This paper explores three-dimensional thinking in fashion design; it does this by engaging with theories, concepts and philosophies related to thought and the experience of creating three-dimensional artifacts, which are common to both sculpture and fashion. Central to this relationship is the employment of the senses with respect to perception and cognition. Of particular interest is the sense of touch, and how sensory experience encounters notions of empathy and mimicry in a phenomenological encounter with others: whether

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animate or inanimate. The research emerged through conversations between a fashion designer, Kevin Almond and a contemporary artist, Stephen Swindells. The sensibility of the paper, and much of the analysis and debates, thus adopt a creative practitioners perspective.

A conceptual current running through the conversation, and subsequently the paper, touched upon whether following a line of thought becomes analogous to visually and mentally tracing a human form in a psychological space – and what is the significance for fashion of the interrelationships between sculptural thinking and phenomenological encounters with others within urban environments?

KEYWORDS: touch, empathy, mimicry, phenomenology, social, city

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Introduction: a conversational platform

A number of starting points were referenced during the initial conversation, which are discussed in more depth later in the paper. The theoretical platform commenced with Rowan Bailey, ‘Herder’s Sculptural Thinking’ (2011), Laura Marks ‘The Skin of the Film’ (2000) and Theodor Lipps (1851–1914)¹ notion of aesthetic empathy. Bailey’s paper presents the German philosopher and theologian, Johann Gottfried Herder’s² ideas of human expression derived through the acquisition of language, which is enabled through the interconnectivity of all the senses, whereby thinking is composed of, and aligned to, both physical and social experience. Marks introduces ‘tactile epistemologies’, where knowledge is conceived as something gained not from vision alone but through encountering the world via mimesis and physical contact. Whereas Lipps proposes we gain knowledge by means of aesthetic empathy, understood as objectified self-enjoyment in the form of things we perceive being analogous to the expressive and desirable qualities of the human body.

The initial conversation opened with some seminal examples, notably the work of Madame Gres³, Jean-Paul Gaultier and Andrea Zittel.⁴ An exhibition of the work of Madame Gres entitled: ‘Goddess of Drape’,⁵ involved garments displayed in the living space of the sculptor Antoine Bourdelle (figures 1 & 2),⁶ suggesting parallels between both sculpting with stone and draping with cloth. At the onset of her career Gres declared her wish to be a sculptor,

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citing the similarities of working with fabric and stone. Another exhibition by fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier: ‘Pain Couture’⁷, featured sculptures of bread shaped into Gaultier’s signature designs. Gaultier asked some of France’s leading bakers to work with his couturier’s to create a collection of garments and accessories made from bread and breadbaskets. A further example is contemporary artist Andrea Zittel, whose work traverses across visual art, performance, interior design, architecture and fashion to arrive at hybrid, sculptural-fashion sensibilities. In ‘Smockshop’ Zittel designed a simple double wrap-around apron style garment. Each of these smocks were sewn by a different artist who reinterpreted Zittel’s original design based on their individual skill sets, tastes and interests – providing a communal aspect to the project.

Through these initial conversations and opening theoretical platforms we became interested in whether fashion thinking and sculptural thinking share the same traits and possess similar modes of activity in the making process. A conceptual current running through the conversation touched upon whether following a line of thought becomes analogous to visually and mentally tracing a human form in a psychological space – and what is the significance of the interrelationship between sculptural thinking and phenomenological encounters within urban environments?

The first section of this paper explores one’s ability to think, nurture and conceptualize abstract ideas and forms. In particular, exploring

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how the experience of spatial concepts, people and materials within a cultural context all serve as a platform for thinking sculpturally. The second section is much shorter, and more prosaic and practical in orientation as it examines something of the cross-over between sculpture and recent fashion design practices. A note on the methodology intervenes, and acts as a pivot, between sections one and two. The paper concludes by drawing the two sections together to suggest new insights and further research on how sculptural thinking may instigate, or act as a conduit, for engaging with other disciplines and forms of knowledge in the understanding and development of fashion design.

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Photo : © Pierre Antoine

Figure 2: Madame Gres exhibition at Musee Bourdelle, Paris, 2011. Photo courtesy of © Pierre Antoine

Section One: Thinking Sculpturally

Rosalind Krauss essay ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’ in *October* (1979), (Krauss 1979:30-44) analyses the three-dimensional art form known as ‘sculpture’. Krauss’s essay proposed, that since the 1950’s, sculpture became something that could be defined by what it was not. Krauss concluded by proposing contemporary sculpture occupied a situation between landscape and ‘not-landscape’, and between architecture and ‘not architecture’. In brief, sculpture

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explored the possibility of landscape, where the actual site defined the work: And some sculptures occupy the place of architecture, where sculpture is seen as an, “intervention in the real space of architecture” (Krauss 1979:41). In the postmodern era, sculpture continued to encompass a much broader range of medium, such as, ‘photography, books, lines on walls, mirrors, or sculpture itself’ (Krauss 1979:42). Krauss essay now has canonical status for seemingly opening the definition of sculpture for artists to adopt an expanded field of differing materials, locations and techniques. Krauss proposition of an expanded field in sculpture has some resonances to how some fashion designers in the 1980’s equally adopted strategies normally associated with contemporary art: such as, the work of Rei Kawakubo’s *Comme des Garçon*,⁸ and Hussain Chalayan fashion-art installations.⁹

Since Krauss 1979 essay, definitions of sculpture continue to offer an open-ended approach. For example, the historian and philosopher Robert D. Vance, merely claims that sculptures are simply objects in three dimensions with an occupancy of space (Vance 1995). Similarly the art historian Erik Koed’s also has an open-ended description when he proposes in his paper, ‘Sculpture and the Sculptural’, that sculpture, theoretically, is just a distinctive way of using materials as an artistic medium, the dimensions of sculpture and the sculptural having a utility and relevance without being an overly prescriptive practice (Koed 2005).

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Against this loose backdrop on defining the sculptural we started to engage with other disciplines to seek a deeper understanding on what it means to think three-dimensionally within creative practice, and what of this thinking process in relation to fashion design.

Philosophers and cognitive psychologists agree, from the psychologist Jean Piaget¹⁰ through to contemporary cultural theorist like Laura Marks, that in the acquisition of language and means of sociability, humans acquire a stock of simple abstract spatial concepts; concepts of lines, planes, angles, spheres, cones, cylinders, curvilinearity, rectilinearity, convexity and concavity. Thus we are capable of making abstract concepts and constructions into complete physical forms, whereby thought evolves by thinking *in-the-round*; realised over time in various ways from memory, social contact, the acquisition of language, and the development of tactile intelligences.

Transferring these skills into the studio, to grasp forms in their full spatial completeness, sculptors and fashion designers alike tend to combine innumerable silhouettes or projective views, and accordingly a sense of touch with the materials they work with in the development of their work. Sculptural and fashion thinking thus share the same traits by requiring the practitioner to think and simultaneously handle and work materials in their hands, thinking and working *in-the-round*, often with specific technical equipment.

Piaget's theory of cognitive development explores how humans acquire, construct, and use knowledge. Piaget claims that our first

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spatial concepts are derived not only from looking at objects, but from how we touch and engage with them. In the early stages of cognitive development touch reinforces thought, or more precisely touch helps to complete thought.

Sculptural thinking is, hence, the accrument of knowledge gained from the handling of materials, and this experience is also a conflated intelligence of haptic and cultural competences: Krauss,

“Yet I would submit that we know very well what sculpture is. And one of the things we know is that it is a historically bounded category and not a universal one. ...[sculpture] sits in a particular place and speaks in a symbolical tongue about the meaning or use of that place” (Krauss 1979:33).

Piaget refers to the acquisition of spatial concepts as a 'sensori-motor phase' of one's development: Krauss refers to one's culture, first enabling, and then, with respect to the 20th century, giving 'permission' to work in an expanded field.

With regards to the significance of touch in sculptural thinking, the philosopher Arno Böhler¹¹ proposes western philosophy has tried to address what it means to touch or is it possible at all to think touching? Böhler suggests the relationship between touching and thinking is, in itself, an aporetic one because the performance of thinking is a meta-physical gesture *par excellence*: thought is

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something that cannot be physically touched – one can only touch upon thought in a *thoughtful* way.

Böhler thus questions the relationship between the body, touch and visibility. Whenever a person physically touches something, she or he will experience the fact that one's body comes to an end point.

Böhler states:

“If one touches a table one senses its reality insofar as its physical presence exists at the very borders of one's fingers – and that something else starts to be: namely, the table. The ‘table’ is real insofar as one will sense a difference between the table and the finger-tips. Whenever we touch something we are convinced by the very evidence of the sense of touch that there exists something else, something real, as I have indeed been touched by something.”¹²

Accordingly, to acknowledge touch as a mark of reality provides us with a sense of ourselves as being a finite entity, framed in space by other things: clothes, people, objects, materials, spaces, environments ... and so on. In this respect we experience oneself when we acknowledge our physical contact with something *other*, whether it is animate or inanimate. In phenomenological terms, philosophers such as Kant¹³ and others, refer to this as self-affection. Touching provides us with a transitive sense of real things insofar we experience an encounter that halts our extension; Jacques Derrida, similarly called

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this aspect the *alter*-auto-affection at work in touching (Derrida 2005). In his book, *On Touching – Jean Luc Nancy* (2005) Derrida proposes thinking is a mode of touching the untouchable – which is, *thought* itself. Thought defaults to remembering and imagining touch as much as registering the actual sensory experience of touch at the time of thought. According to Derrida, thinking is bound by the very aspect of something that cannot be touched, namely its literal meaning.

Sculptural thinking is, hence, referred to as an expanded field of a multi-*sensori* experience; it is to experience difference, heterogeneity and haptic competences within one's culture. The distinction is not just an aesthetic, or even ethical issue, but simply the development of sensing one's body phenomenologically and Kinesthetically in relation to other people and *things*.

The Exposition of Creative Practice

Within creative practice, the artist or designer will always feel they are part of a real world, engaged with contemporaneity, as long as they are actually able to be in touch, kinesthetically, with other things that have cultural significance: such as, materials, techniques, styles, aesthetic currency and so on. In the production of their work, the fashion designer and/or artist, may subconsciously absorb, that the performance of touching is not merely an *inner* performance of *inner* feelings; rather touching actually gives physical and

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psychological form to something that in fact exists outside of oneself.

At the very border of the body, where one is in touch with the world, is where a heterogeneous entity commences; the crucial point here is this is a person's continuous engagement with both society and the material world. Thus, the feeling of being in the world is also an experience of being *ex-posed* to others, albeit from differing cultures, attitudes, social norms and practices. In this respect, the designer or artist can only find their creative currency when they are able to recognize their personal *exposition* with the world in a tactile, three-dimensional way. Touching something, and acknowledging the significance of what one is touching, is the performance of an extroversion, it is the *exposition* of one's sculptural thinking toward others: it is not an inner private feeling, but a kinesthetic social act located in a particular cultural context.

Phenomenologically speaking, one could argue sculptural thinking is a performance of leaving one's body behind, or at least acknowledging its edges, in order to perceive, adopt and understand the form, shape and materiality of something else, and in doing so, immerse oneself fully with the world one is affected by. In this context, sculptural thinking, and the practice of fashion design, suggests escaping the frame of the inner, private body, in order to become a lived body; as Böhler intimates, through the process of thinking and touching, our bodies become 'skin-like, porous, bright and world-wide.'¹⁴

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The application of sculptural thinking, to touch and handle materials *in-the-round*, and ascertain the order and status in which we place them, contributes a plastic grasp of reality. The design, production and craft of making *things*, by thinking through form and materials; becomes a material embodiment of reality; it is the *raison d'être* for artists and designers seeking a personalised engagement and outward signature to the world.

Sculptural Thought: emotional and aesthetic investment

With regards to the emotional aspects of sculptural thinking, the German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder believed our cognitive abilities and emotional sensibilities are co-dependent. He proposed, thought is essentially dependent on, and framed in scope by the acquisition of both emotion and language (Moore 2006:211). In other words, a person can only think once they have grasped a language through which they are able to express themselves linguistically, emotionally and physically. As soon as a person has an understanding of, and use of, words, they are able to participate in the practical activity of making abstractions and articulating their thoughts to others. Herder was particularly interested in sculpture as a distinct art form because he too thought it holds a fundamental position on how we understand a sense of touch as much as vision.

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A person's ability to conceptualize, whether empirical or abstract, is intimately bound up with both perceptual and affective sensation; meanings, concepts and the realization of forms are thus to be equated with our linguistic and expressive capabilities. Herder argues we are only able to develop abstract ideas and forms (non-empirical concepts) by metaphorical extension, or use of the imagination, which is derived from a perceived reality (empirical concepts) (Moore 2006:211). In a similar dimension to Böhler's kinesthetic body, Herder would arguably propose that sensation, which includes a combination of emotion and touch, is the source for all our concepts. What we receive through the senses we also reinterpret, so there is no distinction between how we think and what we do, or make.

Another 19th century German philosopher Theodore Lipps, proposed our understanding and use of empathy is underlined through the conflation of philosophy of aesthetics and psychology, this conflation combines both affect (how we are affected by experience) and the perception of form and space. Lipps introduces the notion of empathy to explain not only how people experience inanimate objects, but also how they understand the mental states of other people. Lipps believed that our experience of the world affects us to see an activity of both 'force' and 'counterforce' as a perceived geometry. In one's ability to project an aesthetic sensibility into objects and spaces, Lipps's proposed that aesthetic enjoyment is best

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understood as objectified self-enjoyment – that is, the perception of form and shapes to the eye and mind become analogous to the form and expressive dynamics of a desirable human body.

According to Lipps, our engagement with the world, how we perceive others and objects, is based on an involuntary, instinctive mimicry. In brief, in order to understand other three-dimensional forms, be it people or inanimate objects, we adopt the capacity to act like them or it. By example, Lipps describes how audiences watching dancers have the habit of swaying and moving in correspondence with the movement of the performers in what he terms a sympathetic tension, or internal mimicry.

He writes:

“Even this, my own striving, I perceive as part of the movement that I am viewing. I experience it as something that belongs to that movement implicitly. I feel myself to be striving with this movement, even striving with the kinaesthetic movement image that corresponds to the visually observable movement and thus feel myself to be striving in effect together with that movement. To put it in more general terms, I feel myself to be striving to complete a movement.”¹⁵

So our encounter and relationship to other people, materials and objects, and the culture in which we live, all serve as a platform for sculptural thinking: thus ‘taking-awareness’ of the world is made

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possible through the conflation of sensory bodily experience and mimicry. Moreover, we are only able to think through sharing our experiences of touch and sight, gained through the acquisition of language, and in this respect tacit intelligence, the application of a designers craft, also becomes social, cultural and ultimately, emotive.

Tactile Epistemology and Fashion Design

In fashion design a kinesthetic sensibility is the controlling force dictating the designer's vision. A fundamental skill imparted to fashion students dictates they do not attempt to design without first grasping a range of fundamental considerations, such as attention to human form and knowing how a body moves in space, both acquired through life drawing: as well as understanding what type of physical restrictions may apply to a design, such as, relating the type of fabric to the initial design concepts. Sourcing the feel and drape of the fabric is extremely important as it indicates the possibilities and limitations of the design. For instance a soft drape fabric will not create a structured shape and *vice versa*.

For fashion designers and artists alike, relating these fundamental considerations to a live situation, or distinct social setting, is equally paramount to good design or composition. Madame Gres always began the process of her designs with the manipulation of fabric on scaled down shapes of the human figure. The artist Joseph Beuys

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believed in ‘thinking forms’, that is, how we begin to shape our thoughts is akin to ‘how we mold and shape the world in which we live.’ (Beuys, Kuoni, 1990: 19). In Beuys work, thought and sculpture are equally combined in the making of his work – for Beuys sculpture is a thought being performed; and thus sculpture becomes a conflation of thought and artifact in relation to what art and society can be together.

In discussing her ‘smockshop’ work, the artist Andrea Zittel, discusses the aprons as ‘structures’, conceived within a social platform, whereby their very intention is for them to be used in a lived life rather than exist as a mere gallery exhibit. Though Zittel describes the importance of presenting ‘smockshop’ first within a gallery setting in order to provide an economic stimulus for the platform, thus enabling them one day to be economically self-sufficient.

In fashion practice one is touching something all the time, the quality of the surface material being touched is what gives clothes their status, and correspondingly the status of the wearer. The qualities of the fabric, and its feel between the hands, will relate to both thought and emotion of the maker, thus informing the design process.

The cultural theorist Laura Marks argues in a similar vein to her philosophical predecessors Herder and Lipps; that we conceive of knowledge through ‘tactile epistemologies’, as something gained not

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from vision alone but through physical contact. Marks point is what we perceive as a physical reality is also a tactile epistemology, involving a relationship, as per Theodore Lipps, to the notion of mimesis. Mimesis, derived from the Greek word ‘to imitate’, suggests that one represents or understands one thing by being capable of acting like it, or trying to inhabit its quality. Mimesis is thus a form of representation based on registering a material contact with something *other* – irrespective of whether it is a person or inanimate object.

Mimesis, a concept deeply rooted in western thought, presumes a continuum between the actual experience of the world and the production of signs about that world. In this context mimesis is where the fashion designer is capable of remembering the presence and quality of some other *thing*. For the fashion designer, being able to *inhabit* the qualities of a material and absorb the characteristics of the prospective wearer is fundamental to good design.

Perception and Fashion Design

In the production of fashion design, where touch and thought exist collectively as a continuing element of the designer’s development, thought is already sculptural, so the question arises does anything exist which is not sculptural? In a physical context, whenever one touches something, one experiences the fact that one’s self (or body) ends exactly at the point of touch with something *other*. Merleau-

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Ponty highlights in 'Phenomenology of Perception' that: "the body organism is linked to the world through a network of primal significations, which arise from the perception of things." (1962:48) Merleau-Ponty describes how thought itself arouses a kind of 'potential movement' rather than an actual one: the combination of sense, thought and action is only truly 'released' by employing tactile experiences, where the fullness of touch requires the mind-body organism to collect and negotiate a succession of characteristics of the world in which it inhabits. Therefore, one is locked into a permanent condition of negotiating perpetual experience, as such, perception requires the inhabitation of the persons or objects being perceived in order to see and register one-self perceiving. In general terms, through perception, we inhabit the *object* in view in order to register ourselves looking at it relationally.

According to Merleau-Ponty, we perceive the world through our whole-body as it becomes an embodied subject; which is an outcome of our ability to stand between subject and object, paradoxically one exists as both. This philosophical construct, of 'being-in-perception', has both spatial and socio-cultural connotations, in how we relate our own form, shape and body dimension to that of other people, and other things, in a cultural context.

For the fashion designer, arguably, good design is only attainable when one is able to perceive and embody the characteristic of the wearer. Through the sense of touch, the fashion designer has to

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experiment with fabric and a multitude of other textile fibers, such as interfacing and canvas, which can be applied to a garment in order to sustain silhouette and shape. Fashion design is therefore a performance of thinking and touching the world one is affected by, whilst simultaneously, as an intentional concept of consciousness, wishing to affect the world through one's creations. As a consequence of this, the borders of one's body continuously registers its perceptions, including feelings, identity and status, to the world in which it lives. Arguably, artists and designers may linger on Merleau-Ponty's 'release' of thought as a sculptural experience, which not only gives a three-dimensional significance to the world, but also, simultaneously, is shaped by one's own individual physical dimensions.

With regards to fashion design, being-in-perception is an embodiment of one's periphery, whilst simultaneously a projected inhabitation of the *other* one is perceiving. Sculptural thinking thus registers both a physical and emotional sense of being with others, as much as solely being-in-oneself.

A Structure of Feeling

In 'The Long Revolution' (1961) Raymond Williams describes his 'structure of feeling' theory as a collection of feelings within society related to the inter-relationship between culture and a period in history. In brief, William's was interested in feeling and sensations

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not in ahistorical or universal terms but related to a particular culture and a moment in time. At the time of writing in the 1960s, Williams would have been experiencing how young people were distinctly creating their own identity, their own sub-groups and becoming leaders in fashion. In particular, how the modern designs of the 1960s represented post-war liberation, alongside sexual revolution. The broader point in relation to William's observations is our relationship to materials, techniques, how we think about them and craft them, and accord them significance in fashion, will always be culturally specific and historically indexical to a particular time rather than ahistorical and universal.

It is in context to William's 'structure of feeling' that this first section can only highlight the significance of the philosophical concepts discussed so far to indicate further research is required on relating sculptural thinking to the phenomenology of fashion. Of particular interest is the fashion industry's unrelenting drive towards constant renewal. An industry whose whole economic impetus is fundamentally driven by serving an imagined continuous renewal of the individual, which paradoxically must remain unsated so they may once again experience and measure (both physically and emotionally) the status of the self in relation to others within a particular moment of history.

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Methodology: a note on the body-mind-city

The initial conversation acknowledged the embryonic stage to the research problem: namely how does a creative practitioner think when making a three dimensional artifact or garment, and what are the implications and significances of this in relation to broader social-cultural frameworks, and, indeed, for trans-disciplinary ways of thinking and making? Thus, the aim of the research was to explore the potential for the unknown whilst engaged in looking and thinking in the crossover between fashion and sculpture.

Utilizing a *bricolage*¹⁶ model the process became a question of negotiating and documenting a range of concepts, theories and observations and, in so doing, make it possible to discuss sculptural thinking critically and creatively as an expanded field within creative practice. This approach played with the traditional relationship between the researcher and the object of study. It was not just the observation of the researcher applying a stock of methods in relation to something given; as new concepts and propositions were introduced they began to change the context of the research insofar as establishing a creative platform, whilst simultaneously opening the mind-set of an expanded field of sculptural thinking in fashion.

The approach to sculptural thinking therefore was for the concepts, theories and ideas explored to move, fluidly, conceptually and three-dimensionally, around an imagined embodied subject: Akin to how Michel de Certeau, when writing on ‘Walking in the City’ (1988),

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refuses to adopt a single viewpoint for the ‘panoptic eye’, in favor of multiple viewpoints that metaphorically move in, around and in-between form and space (de Certeau, 1988).

In this context, the methodology mobilized a phenomenological mode of *operandi* towards fashion that, with respect to Rosalind Krauss, paradoxically understood fashion design as both *sculptural* and *not-sculptural*, and *fashion* and *not-fashion*. In phenomenological terms, sculptural thinking in fashion is inseparable from the perceiving *body-subject*, since it is precisely through the body that one has the cognition and articulation of sculptural thinking in fashion in the first instance. In brief, the interconnectivity is conceptualised by an *alterity* of body and mind: that the thinking subject is the clothed body and the clothed body is the thinking subject.

This oscillation leads on to typify the thinking body in fashioned dress, and the fashioned body, thinking in the city. In the writing of Michel de Certeau (as well as Walter Benjamin) it is acknowledged that walking in the city is a performance of the ‘body-mind’, one that continuously reproduces the experience of the self moving through the streets with others: And for de Certeau, moving through the streets simultaneously recorded the lack of having a fixed ‘place’.

Metaphorically, the lack of a fixed place within an expanded field of practice enabled the thinking and writing within this paper to move in and around the fashioned body; de Certeau writes:

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“It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper. The moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking place – an experience that is, to be sure, broken up into countless tiny deportations (displacements and walks), compensated for by the relationships and intersections of these exoduses that intertwine and create an urban fabric, and placed under the sign of what ought to be, ultimately, the place is only a name, the city.” (de Certeau, 1988:103).

In Benjamin’s writing the rise of the modern city gave birth to losing oneself in a crowd, phenomenologically speaking, embodying its delights and distractions. Benjamin describes Baudelaire as the *flâneur* who observed the horrible social realities of modernity but equally became, intoxicated by moving amongst the masses (Benjamin, 2006:89). As Scott Schuman’s blog ‘The Sartorialist’¹⁷ continues to testify, the *flâneur* is not merely a pedestrian, she/he is an artist who ‘catches things in flight’ (Benjamin, 2006:72) and is able to creatively portray different facets of the individual, who experiences the self in dress, and consequently in many roles; “Flâneur, apache, dandy and rag picker” (Benjamin, 2006:125).

The relationship between sculptural thinking in fashion and urban space is thus dynamic and symbiotic, throughout history fashion and architecture have constantly reflected each other in form, style and

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appearance, particularly as they both share a fundamental role of providing shelter and protection for the body. In addition, fashion, sculpture and architecture all traditionally create space and volume from the thinking generated through a drawing and modeling process. The thinking method for the research therefore sought to acknowledge the metaphorical correlation between sculptural thinking, (*being-in-perception*) and moving through urban spaces and city streets, not only reflecting the body in motion, but also navigating the concerns of different personal, social and cultural identities within the currency of the age.

Section Two: Crosscurrent Thinking and Practices

The initial stages involved reading through the various philosophies, theories and concepts through the lens of a creative studio practice, which, in this section, were absorbed and then developed towards a practical, object-based enquiry; including observing and handling garments in workshops and archives, as well as reviewing fashion and sculpture exhibitions. Thus the latter part of this paper attempts to be far more prosaic and practical in thinking how the concepts of sculptural thinking discussed so far might be applied within a designers' studio. This is not to suggest that all the designers highlighted in this section are fully aware of the notion of sculptural

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thinking. Rather, the designers highlighted in this section manifest an understanding to thinking and handling materials *in-the-round*, which encompasses the embodied subject that moves amongst others in urban settings.

There is plenty of evidence in designers and artists' sketchbooks, and in manuals of architecture, to show that in trying to grasp new and innovative forms the creative practitioner must first make use of established schematic frameworks. In practice, it is common to compose ideas first by reducing them to simpler, more easily conceived shapes (such as cylinders, cones, spheres, squares ...) and then, if required, by analysing these initial developments into more complex constructions.

Several historical and contemporary designers and artists, whose work straddles both art and fashion include the Australian designer Patricia Black,¹⁸ American artists Robert Kushner¹⁹ and Andrea Zittel, to more conventional fashion designers adopting sculptural thinking such as, Madame Gres, Claude Montana,²⁰ Madeleine Vionnet,²¹ Pierre Cardin,²² Christobel Balenciaga,²³ Charles James²⁴ and Jean Muir.²⁵ In their own way, each of these designers demonstrate a diverse approach to the interrelationship between design, form and the drape of the fabric. James was renowned in the mid twentieth century as a master at sculpting fabric in a stiffened way for the female form. His garments were described as, '... a built environment, constructed on principles of abstraction but

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substantiated by ample materials, that the woman wearing becomes curiously self sufficient as well.' (Coleman, 1997:5)

James most famous garment was the 'Clover Leaf' dress.²⁶ It reveals his fascination with geometry and mathematics and the technical thought process of a designer, who was not only a fanatical perfectionist, but also, '... saw the female form as an armature on which to fashion sculpture, not just cover with clothes.' (Coleman 1997:182). Similarly, the exact proportional relations of classical Greek sculpture inspired Vionnet's work. The basis for all her designs was the interrelationship between body size, shape and the material. She worked directly in three-dimensions using scaled down wooden dolls, draping and pleating fabrics in the round before scaling the ideas up into human dimensions. In the 1980's, Japanese designers such as Issey Miyake,²⁷ Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto²⁸ revolutionised ideas about the relationship between the body and clothes; Miyake is noted for experimenting with the body's volume by significantly changing its dimensions.

Other contemporary designers who adopt sculptural sensibilities included: Iris Van Herpen,²⁹ Phoebe Philo,³⁰ Boudicca,³¹ Mary Katrantzou,³² Gareth Pugh,³³ Hussein Chalayan, Vivienne Westwood³⁴ and Aitor Throup.³⁵ The inflated clothing of Gareth Pugh became his trademark. His first collection used balloons to accentuate the models joints and limbs. Pugh is noted for experimenting with form and volume to create nonsensical wearable

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sculptures, which change the shape of the human frame.³⁶ Pugh has likened his work to a struggle between light and darkness; designs have included PVC inflated into voluminous coats, black perspex discs linked like chain mail, and shiny latex masks and leggings. The materials used to sculpt such shapes include diverse combinations of parachute silk, mink fur and plastic, all charged by electric currents.

Hussain Chalayan's work integrates fashionable clothing and the human body with science, technology, politics and architecture, often playing with ideas constructed around anthropology. His collection 'After Words' for the autumn/winter of 2000, speaks from the viewpoint of the displaced, on those who are obliged to leave their homes, possessions and identifications because they are debarred from their civil, political and social rights of citizenship. As part of the 'After Words' collection, 'Table skirt', goes beyond its original function of being a table that transforms into becoming a skirt. For Chalayan, the mutating 'furniture-clothing' represents the idea of a nomadic existence in both concrete and abstract meanings; illustrating sculptural thinking in fashion can adapt its physical nature towards a distinct socio-political context.

The London based design duo of Zowie Broach and Brian Kirkby, known as Boudicca, adopt a sculptural relief-collage approach on the body through *moulage*³⁷ and then start pattern cutting from the constructed installations. Their work adopts a dialogic approach, whereby a process of constructing and dismantling a sculptural

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installation on the garment influences the three-dimensional shape of the finished design, and *vice versa* – the intended design informs the installation in the making process.

To briefly conclude this section: Each of the fashion designers highlighted have demonstrated that thinking, looking and handling materials all become aggregated into a complex web of one's entire social, cultural and psychological experience, which, in context to sculptural thinking, enables the cognition of art and fashion traditions, including the history of the anatomy of the body to form a creative working logic that can be realised within the currency of its time.

Conclusion: and some continuing thoughts

This study reflects upon sculptural thinking through the lens of creative practice: it is the creative sensibility of practice, one that situates itself within an expanded field, which enabled the conceptual play to tease out new insights on fashion thinking.

It quickly became apparent during the research that sculptural thinking facilitated an intimacy between the *self* and perceived other, which led to the phenomenological dimensions of *being-in-perception* within fashion, and exploring this perception to urban spaces.

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Acknowledging the code of fashion is nothing new; it has been widely explored by writers such as Roland Barthes³⁸ and Fred Davies³⁹. However, fashion as a code, worn as an invitation or engagement with others, within a particular cultural context, became significant in phenomenological terms. The dress code one adopts cannot claim independence from Böhler's notion of the kinesthetic body, and consequently dress code, self and sculptural thinking are not independent entities but operate equally as interrelated co-requisites. In a public space, the kinesthetic body is a *being-in-perception*; it is there to manifest itself, relate to, and negotiate other people, objects and environments. Every town, city or place and culture has its own particular character of how people move together and engage with others, and this knowledge is taught and learned through sculptural thinking.

Conceptually and metaphorically, we began to think of sculptural thinking during the design and construction of garments as being akin to walking in the city, that is, to think of a close inspection of a garment in the same way one might experience and navigate a city and all it has to offer: So, folds, drapes, stitching, interfacing and so on could all become analogous to thinking about negotiating streets, buildings, shop windows and a multitude of urban reflections and intersections. This conceptual navigation became critical in drawing interrelationships between the philosophical complexities of sculptural thinking to a broader social context.

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Arguably, thought becomes three-dimensional through ones interaction with other people and in navigating complex form, spaces and environments. Fashion as a form of material culture, and a mechanism for individualism, has always had a close relationship with perceptions of the self. The kinesthetic body is the tangible outer limit of the self; its *being-in-perception* corresponds to a collective experience, to the extent that it mediates the interactions between a body, the external environment and natural social relations.

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu refers to this collective experience as *habitus*, where socialized norms or tendencies guide both individual thinking and individual behavior. Within a social setting, habitus becomes deposited in the kinesthetic body by trained capacities of social practice; including environments and structured cultural tendencies (Bordieu 1984). The relationship between sculptural thinking in fashion and habitus is just one example of articulating how the kinaesthetic body in dress becomes accepted socially, culturally and politically. As Lipps intimates in his notion of empathy, whether the literal tracing of a line of thought is affected by our aesthetic enjoyment or interaction with other human bodies, that is, the form thought takes will always be driven by a desire for the form of another human body? This will always remain an open question.

Thought is essentially dependent on, and framed in scope by the

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acquisition of both emotion, language and means of sociability. Thought is also dependent on the relationship between touch and a stock of simple abstract spatial concepts (lines, planes, angles, spheres, cones, cylinders...), which are mobilised in communication and sociability with one another. Communication takes place in fashion not just through the notion of style but equally, and correspondingly, through shapes, silhouettes and volume. Sculptural thinking therefore is not just a process of cognition, or a means of human development, it is something that holistically envelops us: ultimately, sculptural thinking is something we wear.

What we wear and what we touch provides us with the edge of ourselves, where the body that is *contained* by materials becomes in touch with itself by being in touch with something *other*; perhaps, it is in this context where sculptural thinking might adopt not only three-dimensionality, but, equally, figurative formations? Sculptural thinking is a performance of thinking and touching the world one is affected by, and as a consequence of this, the borders of one's body continuously registers our perceptions, including feelings, identity and status, to the world in which it lives.

There are a number of potential developments for future research relating sculptural thinking to other topical issues; of particular interest is how sculptural thinking relates to the notion of individualism within hyper-modern society. Gilles Lipovetsky has written widely on how the consumption of fashion, and ethical issues

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within fashion consumption, relates to the self within contemporary societies (Lipovetsky 2002). According to Lipovetsky, he does not see the rise of individualism as an inevitable moralistic decline in social values. By separating individualism from egotism he proposes an opportunity to recognize shared values through consumerism, with respect to mobilizing the responsible individual towards the struggle for humanitarian and ecological justice.

In addition, relating sculptural thinking and responsible individualism to subjects such as psycho-geography may also lead to further insights, particularly in the situation-creating technique of reading the city and its fashioned inhabitants through the *dérive*, or urban praxis (Coverley, 2010). That is, to see the language and codes of fashion in the city as a unifying and empowering resource. It is in this context, of deepening an understanding of the social and political dimensions of sculptural thinking in fashion, and its relationship to the public realm that may lead to new knowledge of how fashion may play a positive role within civic and plural societies.

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Notes

¹ Theodor Lipps, 1851–1914 was a German philosopher on art and aesthetics.

² Johann Gottfried Herder, 1744-1803 was a German philosopher, theologian, poet and literary critic,

³ Madame Gres, 1903-1993 was a French couturier.

⁴ Andrea Zittel, born 1965 is a American sculptor, installation artist and fashion designer.

⁵ ‘Madame Gres’ *Musee Bourdelle, Paris*, 30 March – 24 July 2011.

⁶ Antoine Bourdelle, 1861-1829 was an influential French sculptor, painter, and teacher. His studio became the Musée Bourdelle, a museum dedicated to his work; located in the 15th arrondissement, Paris, France.

⁷ Jean-Paul Gaultier, ‘Pain Couture,’ *Fondation Cartier pour l'art Contemporain, Paris*, 6 June – 10 October 2004.

⁸ Rei Kawakubo, born 1942 is a Japanese fashion designer, founder of Comme Des Garçons.

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⁹ Hussein Chalayan, born 1970 is a British/Turkish Cypriot fashion designer.

¹⁰ Jean Piaget, 1896-1980 was a Swiss development psychologist and philosopher. His theory of cognitive development and epistemological view are together called ‘Genetic Epistemology’.

¹¹ Arno Böhler is a contemporary Vienna-based philosopher.

¹² Böhler, A. *On Touching*. The quote is taken from a transcription of a video lecture by Böhler entitled ‘On Touching’, at Tanzquartier, Vienna. April 21st 2010.

¹³ Tom Rockmore, 2010. *Kant and Phenomenology*, University of Chicago Press: traces interprets Kant’s phenomenological approach back to the second edition of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, (1788).

¹⁴ Arno Böhler, A. *On Touching*. Ibid. April 21st 2010.

¹⁵ Theodor Lipps, ‘Ästhetik: Psychologie des Schönen und der Kunst: Grundlegung der Ästhetik, Erster Teil’. Hamburg, Germany, Quoted in (Eds) Reynolds, D; Reason, M. *Kinesthetic Empathy in*

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¹⁶ Joe Kincheloe and Kathleen Berry, *Rigour and Complexity in Educational Research: Conceptualising the Bricolage*, Open University Press, 2004.

¹⁷ The Sartorialist: <http://www.thesartorialist.com>

¹⁸ Patricia Black, born 1984, is an Italian artist who works in cloth.

¹⁹ Robert Kushner, born 1949, is an American painter who is known for his involvement in pattern and decoration.

²⁰ Claude Montana, born 1949, is a French fashion designer.

²¹ Madeleine Vionnet, 1876-1975, is a French couturier, known as an architect for her use of the bias cut.

²² Pierre Cardin, born 1922, is a French fashion designer, known for his geometric shapes and space age designs.

²³ Cristobel Balenciaga, 1895-1972, is a French couturier.

²⁴ Charles James, 1906-1978, British born fashion designer.

²⁵ Jean Muir, 1928-1995, British born fashion designer.

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²⁶ ‘Clover Leaf,’ *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, accessed 8 May 2014. <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/81678>.

²⁷ Issey Miyake, born 1938, is a Japanese fashion designer.

²⁸ Yohji Yamamoto, born 1943, is a Japanese fashion designer.

²⁹ Iris Van Herpen, born 1930, is a Dutch fashion designer.

³⁰ Phoebe Philo, born 1973, is a British fashion designer.

³¹ Boudicca, are a London, UK based design duo of Zowie Broach and Brian Kirkby.

³² Mary Katrantzou, born 1983, is a Greek fashion designer who works in London.

³³ Gareth Pugh, born 1981, is an English fashion designer.

³⁴ Vivienne Westwood, born 1941, is a British fashion designer.

³⁵ Aitor Throup, born 1980, works in innovative methods of design and construction.

³⁶ For Gareth Pugh see: <http://www.vogue.co.uk/fashion/autumn-winter-2015/ready-to-wear/gareth-pugh>

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³⁷ Moulage is a French term meaning casting or molding. In fashion it is used as a term for draping fabric on a dress stand in order to create a design.

³⁸ Roland Barthes, (2006) *The Language of Fashion*, Berg Publishers, Oxford and

³⁹ Fred Davies, (1994) *Fashion Culture and Identity*, University of Chicago Press