

The body as text: language and fashion¹

Patrizia Calefato*

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the relationship between fashion, language and the body. We refer to two theoretical starting points: Lotman's definition of language as a “primary modelling system”, and the relationship, identified by Barthes, between “real” and “written” fashion. The paper studies this relationship within four fields: the performative power of brands, the “playful” role of writing on T-shirts, the function of the written language in some examples of contemporary fashion, tattoos and permanent body modifications between writing and fashion practices.

Keywords: body, fashion, writing, tattoo, T-shirt

1. Introduction

What signs does memory use to establish its bustles and mark its voids? If life is a state of mind, what are the systems that enable us to establish connections between our individual states of mind, to deliver them in the future, or rescue them back from the past? Through what mechanisms do fashions, tastes, daily cultural objects and places remain in time and oppose their own decay, understood not only as physical wear but also semiotic?

The sciences of signs tell us that this role is fulfilled by what Russian semiotician Jurij Lotman identified as 'primary modelling systems' – the first of which is language. As a particular form of language, the specific writing has a vital role. Writing can be the fabric and the lived text of memory, of its strengths and shortcomings, of its repetitions and its creations. Lotman writes:

Along the entire course of cultural history, “unknown artifact of the past are constantly being found, discovered, or unearthed either from the ground or from the dust of a library (Lotman, 2019, p. 135)

¹ English translation from Italian by Alessandro Bucci

* **Patrizia Calefato**, Università degli studi di Bari Aldo Moro, Italy, E-mail: patrizia.calefato@uniba.it

In our epoch, objects, places and bodies are written surfaces - they are covered in texts, names and brands. These signs have developed an increasingly important role in the modes of production of our times. The function of writing is no longer that of marking objects with 'distinctive' features, namely, to detach them from and oppose them to other objects, for example, like a sign indicating the name of a road or a label indicating the content of a jar. Writing has developed a much more ambitious task: to embody a vision, a project, a tale. As the figure of writing, the name is 'the most intimate essence of language itself' (Benjamin, 1996, p. 55).

2. Between the name of God to the power of brands

The nineteenth-century Jewish mysticism scholar Gershom Scholem (Scholem, 1996) dedicated a central part of his research to the role of the name of God in Kabbalistic culture. This is an essential role if we accept the mystical hypothesis that the Torah, the sacred text of the Jewish tradition, might be – as Scholem explains – the expression of the infinite might of God, concentrated in his name. The power that monotheistic mysticism gives to the holy name can be a model for 'mundane' and secularised interpretations. The condition, of course, is that one should be able to find in the world something that can exist in the place of the name of God, namely, something with a similar ability to continuously create meaning from the incisive energy of a single sign. As the name of God in the text of the Torah, it should be a sign that can function as the central idea within the intricate fabric of culture. I suggest the hypothesis that today, this sign might be represented by a brand.

To explain this hypothesis and apply it to how fashion brands are used, I am going to refer again to Scholem's research. Doing so helps to sketch the existence, in the contemporary world, of a figure whose semiotic power is explained as a relationship based on the connection between text and body, understood both strictly as the human body and a social body. Scholem was the first scholar to consider the different handwritten versions of the *Book of Splendor* (Scholem, 1996) dating back to the mystic circles which predate thirteenth-century Kabbalah. In this treatise, he exposes the technique of wearing a divine name: God's secret names are written on a piece of parchment, that is then used to fabricate a jacket with no sleeves and a hat. The mystic wears these clothes and fasts for seven days, avoiding contact with any form of impurity. After this time, he must reach a water surface and 'shout the name'. If a green figure can be perceived above the water, then the penitent is still impure and must start the ritual of the seven days again, until the figure on the water is perceived as red.

The idea of wearing a name with an extraordinary power might not seem absurd today, in the plethora of names that surround us on clothes and accessories in the form of brands, griffes, logos and labels. These signs are 'engraved' by coming into direct contact with our bodies, as footprints that mark the entire reality and the idea of social corporeality – lived or imagined. In the contemporary world, these signs replace – so to speak – the divine name of Scholem's mystic rituals. A brand is, in fact, a sign whose special power bridges language, commodities and values. The function of brands is not only to give a product a name to

distinguish it from other products; it is also to embody a concept, a value, and emotion and a narrative.

3. The T-shirt

In the early 1990s, Claude Gandelman (1992), a scholar of visual semiotics, considered God's name – as was discussed within Scholem's study – as a sign which is worn on the body through clothes. Gandelman observes that the penitent acknowledges wearing and shouting God's real name only when the surface of the water returns a confirmation by functioning as a mirror. Gandelman uses the evocative image of God's indirect vision contained in Saint Paul's *Letters to the Corinthians*, thus also suggesting its relationship with Scholem's ancient Jewish ritual: 'God can be approached only *per speculum in aenigmate*'. Thus, water's power of reflection turns the name into a text: the visible becomes legible. Gandelman then considered the Jewish Tefillin, which contains God's name. For example, a phylactery of this kind is depicted in *Dénier de Cèsar*, by the seventeenth-century Flemish painter Philippe de Champaigne.

Wrapping ourselves in language and writing turns our bodies into texts. During modernity, fashion has constantly reinterpreted these textual and visual archetypes of the 'written body' by operating in a tight relationship with art. This connection can be found in the way in which the early twentieth-century avant-garde movements used text on clothes, for example, as Sonia Delaunay's 1923 *Robe-poème* - a dress which displayed verses from Tristan Tzara's poem *Le ventilateur tourne dans le coeur*.

For decades, written texts have filled not only the shelves of libraries, but also our wardrobes, full of T-shirts with writings which resembles in their substance the Jewish tefillin or the Dadaistic dress-poem. The t-shirt is intended to recall writing, considering that its name recalls a capital T, which its shape reveals when it is lying down. For this reason, the t-shirt is an exemplary symbol of the close relationship between garment and text. The inspiration behind the T-shirt is artistic: pop art from the second half of the twentieth century, urban graffiti, 'street' culture and styles inspired the practice to reproduce writing on this casual and unisex garment. The origins of the t-shirt are also connected to the (mainly North American) tradition to write on a top the name or the symbol of one's campus or one's favourite football, rugby or baseball team. Lastly, the T-shirt also has 'European' origins, which are specifically connected to the fact that the brand of the T-shirt is no longer printed solely on the internal label, but it is also stylised as a logo on the outside of a garment. From these two currents originates the trend to write on T-shirts the name of singers or cult musical bands, or more or less banal sentences such as 'Love Paris', 'Peace', 'Love', 'French Kiss', or 'Italians do it better'.

The Punk movement deconstructed t-shirts by tearing them apart, staining them, and covering them in aggressive writing, such as Vivienne Westwood's famous 1977 'Destroy' t-shirt. The mass popularity of written t-shirts came at the beginning of the 1980s with the possibility to make the clothed body a page for writing– even literary writing. More or less famous poems, lyrics, puns, political slogans: everything contributed to making the T-shirt a centrepiece of elegance and style. In the 1980s and 1990s, the French artist Ben Vautier, known

as 'Ben', created written t-shirts with his distinct trait, thus relaunching a sort of late-twentieth century' lettrism'.

Katharine Hamnett's slogan t-shirts were also the product of this period. Dating back to 1983, the first one displayed the catchphrase 'Choose life'. Hamnett's mottos expressed ideas of freedom and the desire to shout them to the world. The words that appear on these famous T-shirts have often 'detached' themselves from the garment and have been copied or re-used in other contexts, from wall graffiti to the pages of many exercise books. Doing so engendered a reversal of the trajectory that had initially transposed writing from the context of street art to the body. The trajectory from 'the catwalk to the street to society' had fully generated the 'mundanity' of fashion, its ability to become 'mass-fashion' (Calefato 1996, 2007), a form of popular culture which can have as its slogan the message 'No more fashion victims', found on one of Hamnett's famous t-shirts.

Special logics and aesthetics regulate the forms in which fashion uses fashion. According to Nadine Gelas (1992) there are three specific logics. One based on *distinction*, which is produced especially when the brand appears on a T-shirt, perhaps by simulating handwriting and when the brand's message communicates that t-shirt is dissimilar to other t-shirts. One is based on *recreation*, which underlies the possibility to transgress conventions, mock the world, and radicalise the meaning of words. The last dimension is that of *seduction*, which transforms the written body of the t-shirt in a desirable body because of its legibility.

In his essay, Gandelman cites an example of this third dimension: an ad by DKNY, which was published in the June 1991 *Vogue* issue, where a model wears a t-shirt showing a newspaper advertisement of a young woman from Manhattan looking for company: 'Manhattan beauty. Complex woman with modern tastes [...] seeks [...] passionate NY man 50sh [...] Must wear DKNY' (Gandelman 1992, p. 89). Reading the text on somebody else's t-shirt enables a 'licit' hesitation of the gaze on their body. Reading and allowing others to read thus become moves of an almost imperceptible erotic game. Peter Greenaway has described the special erotic 'perversion' of writing - and letting others write - on the body - in the film *The Pillow Book*. In fact, those who read the text on others, and those who wear written texts through t-shirts, flirt with values, literary, musical and cinema tastes, styles and subcultures, remixing past and present, holy and profane, legibility, visibility and wearability.

4. The stolen letter

In *The Fashion System*, Barthes wrote that written fashion offers readers something that human languages do not offer the linguist, namely, 'a pure synchrony' (Barthes 1990, p. 78). The object of Barthes's famous treatise are garments, analysed not as a language; but rather as something whose existence relies on language. The French semiotician understands the entire fashion system as the opportunity to translate a garment in a language made of the captions, titles, and texts of fashion magazines which are able to create an imaginary world corresponding to the 'real' world in which fashion lives as social discourse. This form of textuality enables the body to exist in what is described by the fashion caption, in the rhetorical system within which the world forms itself performatively. The body of the *Fashion System* is a woman's body, and it is also the body of the 'reader' of the magazine, the recipient of the meaning and the ideology

of written fashion. This body lives in relation to the letter, as Barthes observes in a 1982 essay dedicate to Erté's alphabet:

Hence it is something of an illusion to suppose that Fashion is obsessed by the body. Fashion is obsessed by that other thing which Erté has discovered with the artist's final lucidity, and which is the Letter, the body's inscription in a systematic space of signs (Barthes 1991, 38)

The Fashion body as the body of Erté's women-letters demands to be 'read', and in doing so – Barthes explains in the same essay – it becomes a fetish and a message.

Fashion, in its most classic and mainstream form, bears testimony to this 'letteral dimension' of the body is undoubtedly the cover of *Vogue's* August 1940 issue, which implicitly pays homage to Erté. However, unlike Erté's letters, where the dress is emphasised and is an essential part of the silhouette of the body-letter with its movements, decorations and hats, in *Vogue's* cover the body is reduced to its essential components. Models wear sports clothes, including shorts, a tank top and dance shoes, and while Erté's woman is drawn in static poses, in the magazine's photographs, the body folds in gymnastic poses.

In the 1930s, both *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* worked in collaboration with the Italian artist Fortunato Depero, who designed two covers by stylising the letters of each publication. Especially of *Vanity Fair*, the artist reprised some of the stylistic features of his previous advertisements, for example, Campari's famous ad. In these words, it is not the physical body of the model, but rather the social body of fashion that turns into language through the name of magazine that works as synecdoches for the entire institution of fashion.

The encounter between body and word has been the object of Stephen Willats's project *Multiple Clothing*, which started in the second half of the 1960s and continues to this day with live performances. Dresses are covered in letters and words that can be transformed both by those who wear them and those who interact with the performers. The spectators are encouraged to situate on the body of the models letters or entire words written on labels; alternatively, they can write on the models' clothes by using felt pens. Garments thus become the repository of collective linguistic memory, made of concepts that describe the human condition.

Viktor & Rolf have also included words in their collections. They followed two semiotic strategies. The first consists of the insertion of text on the garment, thus producing the estranging transformation of dress into words. This is the case, for example, of the coat which was deformed at chest height to compose the word 'DREAM', or the fur cape, torn on the chest by the word 'WOW'. The second strategy consists of a more traditional use of words on garments, as they are used on t-shirts, accompanied by the duplication of the text on the body, for example, the word 'NO', which was reproduced both on a jumper and on the eyes of the model wearing it.

In this 'symbolic economy' of 'nomination' exceptions and infractions are important too, like those proposed by Maison Margiela. They, in fact, never use the designer's name, 'Martin'. Instead, they use the collective name 'Maison', which on the one hand refers to the classic and institutional lexicon of fashion, and on the other hand clarifies that behind a garment or a collection there is the work of a large number of people, who cannot be individualised in a

single 'author'. For this reason, Maison Margiela's garments have a blank label, stitched inside the garment at the four corners. Sometimes, the label displays a series of numbers, which indicate different uses or different ways in which individual garments were made. For example, '0' means 'garments remodelled by hand for women'; 1 indicates 'the collection for women', and 14 stands for 'a wardrobe for men'.

Thus, language and fashion cross each other constantly, in ways which appear most evident in the current epoch. Even some branches of ethical fashion find in the use of letters a semiotic and an aesthetic foundation, and produce, for example, bags and other accessories by recycling old newspaper pages, tailors' measuring tapes and old school assignments. This is a way to establish a relationship between fashion, language, memory and time. But it is also a way to produce a 'slow' fashion that questions its origins and communication procedures.

5. Forms of writing of the clothed body: the tattoo

The Māori Portraits: Gottfried Lindauer's New Zealand is the title of an exhibition which took place at Auckland Art Gallery between October 2016 and February 2017. The exhibition was devoted to the work of Bohemian painter Gottfried Lindauer, who lived in New Zealand between 1874 and 1926. During those years, the artist depicted famous Maoris by using a realistic technique based on the reproduction of their photographic portraits. Through the accuracy of the artist's hand in depicting the features of their faces and clothes, as well as of the objects, scenarios and landscape that operate as a background to human activities, these portraits seem more detailed than the photographs. In particular, facial tattoos (*tā moko*) emerge with extraordinary precision, on both men and women. It is clear that the gaze of the European artist was captured by the dignity and the social prestige given by the tattoo to the subjects of those paintings. Lindauer does not objectivate their bodies. On the contrary, they are portrayed in all their authoritative, in a way that is significantly different from how photography has often been used by Europeans in a colonial sense. And it is absolutely relevant that this, so to speak, 'postcolonial' cultural operation is produced through the pictorial reproduction of an 'original' who is defined not by a person, in flesh and blood, but rather by its photographic *analogon*. The photographic reproducibility, in this case, was only the starting point. The tattoo is thus drawn manually twice: the first time, on the skin and the second time on the portrait.

By studying New Zealand's Maori Society, Claude Lévi-Strauss acknowledged the highly elaborated social and educational function of tattoos. Among the Maoris of New Zealand – who tattoo their faces – and the Caduveo of Brasil – who paint their faces in a permanent way – those who do not have tattoos are considered 'stupid' or as outsiders to the group's tradition and culture (Lévi-Strauss 1966). Lindauer's portraits emphasise this spiritual role of the tattoo and the 'history' that it inscribes on faces. I have already touched upon the essential role of clothes and accessories in defining the dignity of the Maori's portrayed by Lindauer: drapes made of kiwi feathers, the feathering on the head, jewellery, and objects that complete the dress; these are signs which define the public dignity of subjects unequivocally. Therefore, in this sense, it is the entire clothed body that works as a social body. The clothed body is thus not merely the external image that each of us presents to others; it is primarily a cultural text that comprises garments, accessories, jewellery, hairstyle, make-up, tattoos and decorations. These signs

underlie social meanings, tales and senses, which forge the social significance of the body in the world.

The term 'tattoo' is derived from the Tahitian noun 'tatau', an onomatopoeic word which reproduces the sound of the tools used to make a tattoo. The term was introduced to Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century by the English Captain James Cook. On his way back from the Pacific in 1774, he took to London a young Tahitian man called Omai – whose skin was covered in signs – to show him, almost like a circus attraction, to his 'civilised' world. Before Cook, at the end of the seventeenth century, William Dampier brought a Philippine slave to England. Jelly – whose body was entirely tattooed – was nicknamed the 'painted prince', and he too was 'displayed' in London's public spectacles. During the colonial era, tattooing was a practice used by sailors who reached far harbours and imitated the local inhabitants in a sort of 'creolisation' of the language of the body. Between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, the practice of the tattoo reached Europe's eccentric aristocrats, who, at times, travelled to Japan – where the masters of this art form used to live – to get a tattoo.

However, this is only the recent history of the tattoo. Or rather, it is only the history of Europe's encounter with this ancient practice. The Similaun man – the Neolithic hunter, found in the Alps in 1991, demonstrates just this, with his body tattooed on the shoulders and the legs, and preserved for millennia by the cold temperatures. Ice Maiden, too, the woman found in 1993 on the Altai mountains in Siberia – where she remained for 2500 years – whose tattoos include stylised drawings of wild animals. Among the various hypotheses on this woman, who was buried with great solemnity, the most likely theory is that she was a storyteller of the nomadic tribe of Pazyryk. They did not possess writing, and thus, they used the visual language of the tattoo and the orality of story-tellers to preserve and pass on their knowledge.

6. Rites, fashions, imagery

The example of Ice Maiden, along with other pieces of evidence, which in some cases date back to ancient Egypt, testifies to the cultural and sacred level that somebody with tattoos had. However, common sense has often been projected on the tattoos fears of contamination, ideas of primordiality associated with despicable and criminal practices.

In the nineteenth century, Lombroso focused on the tattoo as a part of his studies on the psychic and somatic features of criminals. In the West, the tattoo carried further the connotations of suspect and disgust which in turn contained preconceived ideas based on the contrast between 'civilised' and 'savage', or between 'normal' and 'deviant'. In Nazi concentration camps, particularly at Auschwitz, prisoners were tattooed with a number of their arm, despite the prohibition that comes from the Leviticus. All 'freaks' – the so-called 'monsters', who performed in circuses, were tattooed too. To them, the director Tod Browning has dedicated an excellent film, which highlighted that real monstrosity resided in the evil spirit of so-called 'normal beings' rather than in the spirit of the performers.

The origin of the discriminating function which the tattoo has had in Christian and Jewish culture is probably a biblical prescription contained in the Leviticus, where any sign on the skin, cuts and scars are forbidden. Tattoos also appear on Egyptian mummies from 2000 B.C. and by looking at the world and its history from a broader and less Eurocentric perspective, we would

probably realise that those do not have a tattoo a probably a minority. If then Lévi-Strauss's thesis on the affinity between tattoos and face paint is accepted, tattooing becomes the anthropological root of ancient and modern make-up. Like make-up, tattooing echoes the notion of a mask perceived as something which creates the face, rather than limiting to cover it, and which donates it its social being, human dignity and spiritual meaning. In other words, the same generative sense that a mask as for an actor who personifies a character.

However, while in the West the mask developed specific roles – be it as a theatrical mask or as a carnivalesque disguise – the tattoo was instead considered as despicable, starting from the Roman habit to tattoo slaves and criminals, and continuing with the tattoo as a sign for defectors, social deviants and sailors – namely, those subjects who have somehow been 'contaminated' – and the already mentioned tattoos of numbers on the arms of prisoners of Nazi concentration camps. From a European point of view, the tattoo has always been a distinctive sign for groups 'outside' so-called 'civilisation', alleged 'inferiors' and those who inhabit worlds that were once seen as impossible to communicate with. Another element of the logic of disgust is the fact that tattooing has often been seen as the cause of disease and the vehicle for the transmission of disease and contamination. And it is probably true that there is a risk of cultural and sensual contamination in those liminal territories, covered with mystery and with the charm of seaport crime, where epidermal landscapes are drawn.

After centuries during which the tattoo was seen as the distinctive sign of well-defined social groups, over the past decades tattoo became part of practices which might be perceived as eccentric, but which have been 'accepted' and became a trend, especially among the young. It would be inaccurate to speak of *fashion*, because by definition fashion tends towards constant change, while the tattoo is the sign on the skin which cannot change: like a scar or a mole, it becomes part of our existence in the world.

Tattoos can also become acts of resistance to forms of commodified body homologation which demand us to be smooth, thin, and 'healthy'. While the quarrel contained within the expression 'the fashion of the tattoos' re-emerges with the strident contrast between these terms, it feels impossible not to define a 'fashion' the mass diffusion of this practice in the contemporary epoch and the global world.

All civilisations have developed practices for the permanent modification of the body: tattoos, skin cuts, holes, deformations of parts of the body such as the nose, the neck, ears, feet, and even modern so-called 'aesthetic' surgery. These practices are relatively painful in relation to what is socially acceptable. In essence, their pain and physical damage become secondary to the sense of acceptance by a group, to the function of initiation or auto-representation that some of these practices have.

After all, even those who, for example, are on a diet, be it for aesthetic or health reasons, try to intervene on their bodies to regulate in a permanent or lasting way its functioning, in keeping with a model which we, our group, see as 'normal'. This is what all forms of non-ephemeral intervention on the body have in common, namely those that are not linked to a single occasion – such as the use of shoulder straps, or the hip padding by nineteenth-century women, or contemporary coloured contact lenses which enable the pigmentation of our eyes to look like it has changed. Each permanent or 'deforming' intervention on the body creates the illusion that they correspond to life choices which are equally permanent and irrevocable. If in some societies, tattoos or scars are rites of initiation which enable the subject to be part of a

specific social group, and to distinguish its social level from the rest of the group, similarly, diets or aesthetic surgeries enable us to access the real, imaginary or even utopian universe, where each of us can feel at ease or accepted.

7. Permanent modifications of the body

A stylus is a pointed instrument used to write on waxen tablets. In the Latin language, the term ‘stylus’ - from which ‘style’ derives – was a metaphor to indicate a way of writing and composing. Writing depends on the style/stylus, namely on the ability to carve a page, a waxen tablet, a sheet of paper or a body, and the stylus marks a page deeply, to the point that it sometimes pieces it. A famous Indian erotic text, the Gita Govinda, written by the twelfth-century Bengalese poet Jayadeva, describes the carved body:

There are shard, red scratch-marks upon your dark body. It appears as if a certificate of victory in lovemaking has been written in golden ink upon a dark emerald. (Jayadeva, 2009, 329).

In her famous observations, Marguerite Yourcenar observes that this poem focuses again on the Hindu myth of Krishna amongst shepherdesses, and notes that it is not possible to interpret the sensual and corporeal images of this text in the light of the ‘utilitarian and tribal’ meaning of the myth of fertility. Instead, it is essential to point out that this myth ‘is about our very senses and pleasures’ (Yourcenar 1982, p. 182, translation *mine*). In this case, then, the incisions, the scratches which originate on the body during the erotic ecstasy, bring to the surface a deep and mighty sensuality. This form of ‘writing’ – the writing made with nails and blood – enables the body to look like a manuscript, and it is an essential part of this sensuality.

The Indian erotic myth and the notion of writing can be interweaved to interpret both the tattoo and the contemporary practice produced through the technique known as piercing. We are talking about a fashion practice which many would not relate to the senses and to writing, but solely with a fascination with those special jewels that earrings are. However, we could ask for what reasons women and men of all ages voluntarily decide to undergo a form of torture which might be relatively painless on the lobes, ears, nose or eyebrows and other body parts including the genitalia, which eagerly display jewels, precious stones, golden and metal circles in purpose-made holes. Pleasure is undoubtedly a sensual component of this fashion. And the lovers of piercing would be the first to say that, particularly in specific areas of the body, the act of piercing produces surges of masochistic pleasure, which are then virtually repeated in a permanent way when the hole is filled with jewels.

Similarly to the tattoo, piercings have an initiatic character in many cultures, where a stone or a jewel on the face or on the body correspond to specific narratives about somebody's social standing, age, and their role in the community. In reality, the initiation to piercing is a rite also within the society of fashion. Of course, we pierce our ears only for the fascination with wearing specific jewels. However, the sensual component of pain cannot be left undiscussed: it might be minimal in the case of ear or navel piercings or go to the limits of beyond masochism in other cases.

Tattoos and piercing are thus forms of writing of the body. The often maniacal and meticulous accumulation of those permanent signs which are periodically and ritualistically carved on the body, follow logics which can be defined through the term 'bricolage', which Lévi-Strauss (Lévi-Strauss, 1966) used to define those practices where an ensemble of signs acquires its own unique sense, independently from functional, practical or aesthetic reasons. The 'bricolage' of body perforations is the ensemble of rules dictated by the individual, a sort of syntax which each of us constructs freely, but rigorously. The body thus turns into a thing, a writing page. At the same time, this page develops a new life by means of the writing on it, in turn taking it beyond the limits of the body. Every permanent modification is destined to remain forever as the memory of an experience, the transformations, and metamorphoses from which it is impossible to come back. It is like a scar, which remains after an operation or as the result of the wound caused by an incident. However, unlike these, the individual can choose it freely and is free to select among a vast selection of signs in the tattoo studio or among the accessories that can be mounted on the body. However, scars, like wrinkles and the signs of time highlight the resilience of the body and its autonomy from to the will of the subject to whom they belong. The body falls, gets sick and wounded; it dies when it reaches its limits. It is through these 'accidents' that the body becomes perpetually exposed to the power that it exercises on the subject who 'inhabits' it.

Fashion enables the body to interpret these limits, to go beyond the categories of gender, identity and even species. We are humans, but we can go beyond humanness through grotesque disguises and the styles and the writings of fashion.

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