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## How Do You Dress a Body Without Organs? Affective Fashion and Nonhuman Becoming

Stephen D. Seely

Alexander McQueen's final collection, *Plato's Atlantis*, of 2009, was an untimely meditation in the Nietzschean spirit, a rumination on what might come after the human (fig. 1). The collection's title signaled lost civilizations to pose the question of what happens when the human is no more, or what comes next in human evolution. And while human extinction has long been fodder for the dystopian, this collection offers one of the most stunning imaginings of such a future yet. Using fabrics printed with multiple animal patterns and aerial, celestial, and oceanic imagery and incorporating animal skins, plastics, and metals, McQueen's collection draws on aquatic and terrestrial animals, aliens, cyborgs, and ancient mythology in order to create a new, nonhuman "species." Neither fully animal nor human, alien nor mechanical, future nor past, the nonhumans in this show are beautiful reverberations of a people to come or, perhaps, a people long gone. Either way, they provide a remarkable example of the use of fashion to decenter the human, to imagine the future otherwise, and to transform the body in nonhuman or other-than-human ways.

In this essay, I seek to explore these very nonhuman registers of fashion, its use of affect in the provocation of becoming. Such an attunement to the affective dimensions of fashion requires a shift in the conceptualization of art and fashion from epistemological frameworks of signification, subjectivity, performance, and representation to an ontological framework of affect, sensation, and material transformation. Thus, the motivating queries of this project are not, What does this garment represent? What are the semiotics of fashion? What identity, idea or social position does it signify? But rather, What can fashion *do*? How does it actually transform bodies?

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Fig. 1. Alexander McQueen, Plato's Atlantis, 2009. FIRSTVIEW.COM

To approach these questions, I will examine what I call *affective fashion*, or fashion that seeks to harness the body's capacities for transformation and connection (i.e., affect), in order to force it to become otherwise, beyond the dominant modes of organizing and imagining bodies. An affective approach to fashion, moreover, involves an attention to its political implications, rather than reducing it to the wholly aesthetic, and brings out the value of fashion for feminist and queer theory and politics. Instead of dismissing fashion as a patriarchal tool for disciplining women's bodies, a greater consideration of its affective capacities foregrounds fashion's power to literally open the body *beyond*—and not just accentuate or subvert—its (hetero)normative, (re)productive and human functions, giving it access to a virtual field of potentiality. While this essay will focus on McQueen, Rei Kawakubo, Hussein Chalayan, and Gareth Pugh, these are by no means the only contemporary designers to produce this type

of affective fashion. Each of these designers employs features of machines and technology, as well as animal, extraterrestrial, and other nonhuman life forms in ways that facilitate the becoming-nonhuman of the wearer's body and problematize the privileged Western binaries of human/animal, organic/inorganic, real/artifice, and male/female. Through their use of affective fashion, these designers harness the transformative potential in both bodies and material objects in order to imagine a radically open future in which we become attuned to our bodies and to the world in entirely new ways.

### What Is Affective Fashion?

The garments in Rei Kawakubo's controversial 1997 collection for *Comme des Garçons* frustrate many of the conventional ways of seeing both clothing and bodies (fig. 2). They obfuscate the model's "natural" body, making it impossible to tell where her body ends and the dress begins. They do not demonstrate precise tailoring or craft; the dress pictured here seems as if it could be constructed simply by wrapping a single piece of fabric around the model's body. One cannot tell whether the "lumps" are defor-

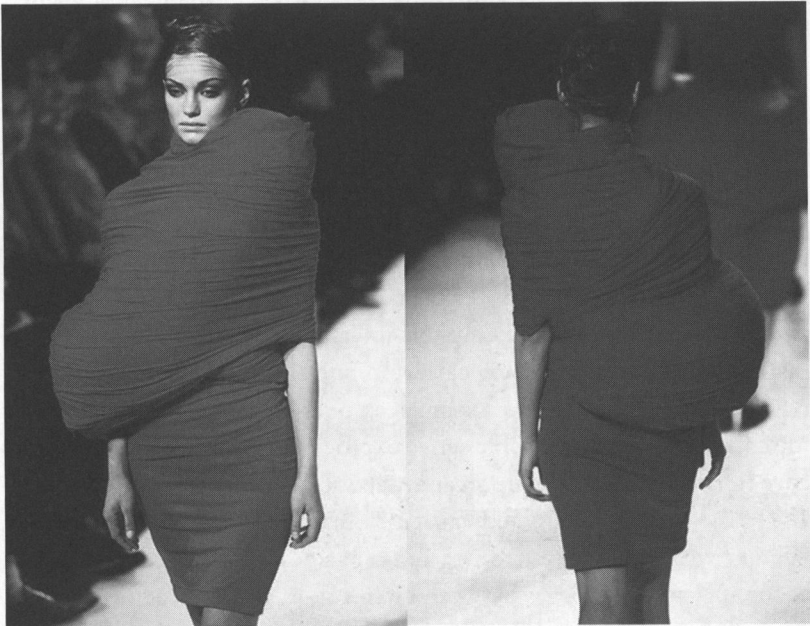


Fig. 2. *Comme des Garçons*, body becomes dress becomes body, and they are one, 1997. FIRSTVIEW.COM

mities on the model's body or thickly wrapped sections of cloth. The dress certainly seems to be form fitting, but what type of form is this? These garments, in fact, seem to point to the very limits of visibility as the primary way of relating to fashion: one cannot help but want to touch the dress, to imagine what it feels like to wear it. These uncertainties, though, are precisely the point; indeed, Kawakubo titled the collection "body becomes dress becomes body. and they are one." Kawakubo here provides an essential insight into what I'm calling affective fashion. Her work is not just about blending the boundaries between body and garment, nor can it be adequately described as a prosthetic "incorporation" of the object into the body. Both of these ways of reading understand the garment as a supplement added to a discrete and bounded body; rather, as Kawakubo's title suggests, the fashion engages the body in a mutual becoming in which their differentiation is no longer significant. One could certainly argue that underneath the dress there is simply a size zero model with a "perfect" body, but Kawakubo and the other designers I look at here seem to suggest that such an idea is only one way of seeing. Certainly, an emphasis on the haptic and the affective indicates that the body and the dress truly are one.

This understanding of what fashion does with a body requires an adjustment to the way we conceptualize bodies and things more generally. We often think of clothing and accessories as material objects, as "things," added to an organic body. In such an epistemology, as Jasbir Puar puts it, "the thing is assumed to be nonorganic, without any force of its own . . . [yet] the body is apparently not a thing at all" (2007, 193). This way of knowing bodies and things is untenable ontologically, or on the level of being, where living and nonliving matter and forces interact below or beyond the rigid distinctions we perceive between objects. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1987) famous concept of the assemblage is an attempt to describe precisely this interaction or connection between matter and force at the ontological level. For Deleuze and Guattari, all bodies, living and nonliving, are assemblages, or as Elizabeth Grosz phrases it, "discontinuous, nontotalizable series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances, incorporeal events, speeds, and durations" (1994, 164). The matter, forces, and capacities that produce bodies constantly connect with other matter, forces, and capacities in a perpetual process of becoming, as assemblages between bodies form and then deform to produce further assemblages. Thus, Kawakubo's claim that the dress and body become one is an ontological claim: the molecules, fibers, and textures of

the fabric endlessly fold in and out of the surfaces of the body, as skin and cloth, organic and nonorganic, body and thing become one.

These processes of mutual becoming, or the bodily transformations provoked by fashion, are what I am emphasizing as its affective dimensions. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza (2002) famously defines a “body” simply by its capacities to affect and to be affected by other bodies. For the Spinozist, affects are thus the constant transitions between states or capacities that all bodies are perpetually undergoing, and these affective capacities are always relational and moving. Affects, in other words, are the sine qua non of becoming: it is because bodies are in constant transition through encounters with other bodies (i.e., affects) that all bodies possess an inherent capacity for transformation (i.e., becoming). This affective capacity, then, is the mode through which human subjects confront the nonhuman forces that compose them and through which they locate and seize the “lines of becoming” that traverse them (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 169). Affective fashion, such as Kawakubo’s, then harnesses this capacity for transformation and provokes the body to become-otherwise. Indeed, it is this active harnessing of affective capacity that distinguishes affective fashion from “normal” clothing. All clothing, even in its most quotidian, transforms the wearer, producing assemblages with the body, and in this sense there is nothing particularly unique about haute couture or avant-garde designs. This capacity for bodily transformation is thus the affective dimension inherent in *all* fashion. What sets affective fashion apart, I argue, is that it seeks to capture this affective capacity and maximize it in order to locate the lines of nonhuman becoming inherent in all bodies.

### **Becoming-Woman, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Otherwise**

Affective fashion, however, does not merely help us in conceptualizing the transformative ontology of bodies in general, for bodies themselves are differentiated from one another along nearly countless axes. That bodies are always shifting in and out of assemblages does not mean that they are no longer distributed according to species, racial, and sexual difference (among others). For example, it is not insignificant that the Kawakubo design we have been looking at is from her women’s collection. The designs in this collection, often referred to as “Lumps and Bumps,” not only distort the areas of the female body that are typically emphasized or exaggerated in women’s fashion but also provide the body with lines and curves that

it does not “naturally” possess. While the female body is “supposed” to have certain “lumps and bumps,” Kawakubo’s dresses create entirely new ones that render the question of whether they are “real” or not inessential. If clothing has the power to sculpt the body in “unnatural” ways, why should this power be used only in accordance with patriarchal fantasies of femininity (i.e., by shrinking the waist, padding the buttocks, pushing up the bust)? To call Kawakubo’s silhouettes “disfigured” would, in a way, be entirely accurate: her designs de-stratify and rearticulate the very ideals and norms of the feminine body itself. Such a project is what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) would refer to as “becoming-woman,” which is not a progression *toward* the dominant constructions of womanhood but is, instead, the process of deterritorializing one’s body, mind, and desire from its capture and organization by a phallogocentric economy that dictates the terms of femininity in advance.

This type of process, moreover, is where the ontological becoming of bodies takes on a decisively political dimension in Deleuze and Guattari’s work in that human subjects can harness affective capacity in the process of de-stratification from dominant regimes of power that discipline bodies in particular ways. Effectively disentangling the philosophical concept of becoming from any teleology, Deleuze and Guattari argue that “becoming is involutory” (1987, 238). This theory of becoming is then a kind of Nietzschean transvaluation in which minoritarian subjects must not allow themselves to be defined simply by their exclusion from dominant social categories but must themselves *become-minoritarian* in order to “deterritorialize” themselves from the dominant modes of stratification and create their own affirmative values. Involuntary becoming, this is to say, is a becoming *out* of hegemonic stratifications. Considering the fashion industry’s role in the production and proliferation of exceedingly dangerous and masculinist ideals of femininity and female bodies, it might seem counter-intuitive for a feminist to suggest that fashion could actually be a particularly generative site of becoming-woman in the way Deleuze and Guattari describe. Kawakubo’s garments, however, do precisely this, as they effectively (or, rather, *affectively*) open the female body to a becoming in which asymmetrical, atypical contours are strikingly beautiful and desirable and through which the female body can be given its own values.

So far we remain in the realm of the human, albeit of radically reconfigured humans, but what of interactions with nonhuman animals? We have considered the ways in which inorganic materials (e.g., cloth) produce

assemblages with living bodies, but what happens when the human body encounters other animal bodies through fashion? For this, we must turn to Alexander McQueen. Like Deleuze and Guattari, McQueen seems virtually obsessed with animals in his work, and it is precisely animal forces and energies that he is interested in capturing: “Animals . . . fascinate me because you can find a force, an energy, a fear that also exists in sex” (qtd. in Bolton 2011, 156). Here McQueen alludes to the nonhuman forces inherent in sexuality, its affective dimensions that are also found in encounters with animals. Elizabeth Grosz (2008) has addressed this nexus of animality, sexuality, and art in her recent work, bringing Deleuze and Guattari in conversation with Charles Darwin. The nonhuman forces, energies, fears, and affects in both animals and sexuality have been captured by humans in the production of art, which seeks to extract these qualities and render them sensory. Art, including fashion, then has the capacity to bring the human into contact with these nonhuman elements in order to provoke what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call “becoming-animal.” For Deleuze and Guattari, becoming is not about imitation or identification, but rather is “a zone of indetermination, of indiscernibility, as if things, beasts, and persons . . . endlessly reach that point that immediately precedes their natural differentiation” (1994, 173). Becoming-animal, like the clothing-body assemblages described above, undoes the rigid stratifications between animals and humans by placing them in so close a proximity that their differentiation is no longer possible or simple.

McQueen’s work creates these zones of proximity through the incorporation of animal and other natural features into his garments. According to Deleuze and Guattari, becoming always involves a “third term,” a “something else” that opens the individual up to the normally imperceptible process of becoming and generates the proximity between two entities required for their mutual becoming (1987, 274). A great deal of McQueen’s designs integrate shells, feathers, antlers, animal skins, and even entire taxidermed animals in order to bring the wearer into a “molecular proximity” with the animal that transforms the body in a decidedly nonhuman fashion (see Bolton 2011, 150–72). In one particularly dramatic piece from 2001’s *Voss*, the becoming-animal appears to be in process on the runway itself: the birds seem to have swarmed the model, either ripping her silk dress off or carrying her away with them (or both), as her lower half undergoes an avian becoming (fig. 3). Either way, she is no longer simply or clearly a human model wearing a feathered dress,





Fig. 3. Alexander McQueen, Voss, 2001. FIRSTVIEW.COM

but has been captured in the birds' swarm; the model and the birds are becoming-indiscernible. Moreover, here, as in many of his garments, McQueen seeks to induce an animality in the model's movements, demonstrating that the "something else" need not be a material element but can be anything that allows aspects of one being (even a particular manner of movement) to enter into a zone of proximity with that of another. In this garment, then, the incorporeal speeds and movements, along with the corporeal substances—feathers, skin, hair, silk—produce an assemblage that is not quite human or bird but is a becoming-otherwise.

### Technological Encounters of the Fashionable Kind

If Alexander McQueen has most effectively used fashion to engineer zones of proximity with nonhuman animals, it is certainly Hussein Chalayan who has done so with technology and machines. Chalayan turns the atelier into a laboratory for radical experimentation with the transformative possibilities of science and technology, playfully exploring what Donna Haraway has called "the potent and taboo fusions made inevitable by science and technology" (1991, 173). If, as Haraway argued over two decades ago, communication and biotechnologies are already recrafting human bodies,

Chalayan attempts to appropriate this power in order to rearticulate the field of possible bodies and socialities in ways not in line with dominant systems of control. For instance, Chalayan's work has shown that there are encounters between machines and female bodies that exceed or elude male fantasies of technological domination. In his 2007 collection *One Hundred and Eleven*, Chalayan showed several garments equipped with robotic components that enabled complete transformations in style, bustline, and length: long dresses became short, short dresses became gowns, and the finale featured a hat that seemed to suck the model's dress inside it, leaving her completely nude except for the hat. While at a cursory glance, these garments might be viewed as precisely the culmination of male fantasies that would allow women's clothing to be removed from a distance, in each instance there is a complexity in the relationship between the garment and the model that troubles such a simplistic reading. For example, a dress that becomes longer in length also features a bustline that becomes more revealing and pushes up the breasts, while a gown that transforms itself into a shorter dress also zips up its own neckline, and thus, the robotics cannot be said to "undress" the models in any straightforward way. These garments, then, seem to demonstrate the difficulty in any attempt to map out the field of relations between humans and technology in advance through automatic associations of masculinity, technology, and control. What we have instead is an example of the type of erotics of technology, of the pleasurable encounters between life and machine, that Haraway calls for. Indeed, even the dress that effectively removes itself disappears into the (smiling) model's hat, suggesting that perhaps it is the *wearer* who is undressing herself with her mind, rather than the male designer or observer who is undressing her (fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Hussein Chalayan, *One Hundred and Eleven*, 2007. FIRSTVIEW.COM

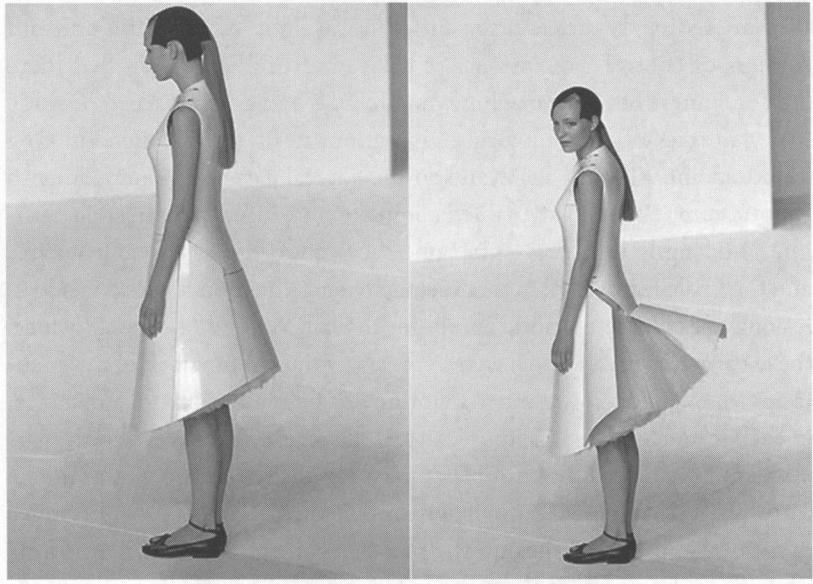


Fig. 5. Hussein Chalayan, *Before Minus Now*, 2000. FIRSTVIEW.COM

An even more direct commentary on the ambivalences of technological mediation can be observed in Chalayan's *Remote Control Dress* from his 2001 collection *Before Minus Now* (fig. 5). The announcement for the show featured images of a young boy with a remote control trying to operate both a commercial airplane flying overhead and a live swan in a pond. During the show, the same boy came onto the stage with the remote control and attempted to manipulate the model, causing the back "flap" of her hard-resin dress to open, suggestively revealing pink tulle underneath. Again here, Chalayan complicates any straightforward reading of the garment as the realization of the boy's fantasy of controlling everything (including women) with his remote control, as the presentation seems to demonstrate that even while it is only through the technologically assisted fantasy of domination (i.e., the remote control) that machines, animals, and humans are able to be linked in the boy's mind, each of these resists his control in its own way. The dress, moreover, was designed to demonstrate the increasing impact of incorporeal forces on living bodies. As Chalayan describes it, "The dress expressed the body's relationship to a lot of invisible and intangible things—gravity, weather, flight, radio waves, speed, etc.

Part of it is to make the invisible tangible, showing that the invisible can transform something" (Quinn 2002, 50–51). Finally, as if to address feminist concerns about the implications of robotically controlled clothing, Chalayan's 2011 show, *Kaikoku*, featured a dress remotely controlled by the model wearing it, enabling her to maneuver the dress herself.

Since his earliest shows, Chalayan has sought to integrate technological materials into his garments in order to problematize the boundaries of the organic and the inorganic, the tangible and the invisible, the material and the informatic. Indeed, virtually all of Chalayan's collections feature at least one centerpiece that experiments in this way: 2007's *Airborne* featured a dress that appears to display informatic readouts on the body's surface, as well as several pieces with built-in, remote-controllable facial screens to protect from airborne contagion; 2008's *Inertia* included garments playing with the laws of Newtonian physics by moving at a different velocity from that of the model; and 2008's *Readings* showcased entire outfits constructed from the play and capture of built-in lasers being refracted off of crystals on the garments' surfaces. With the *Aeroplane* dress from his 1999 *Echoform* collection, Chalayan was interested in "ergonomically amplifying the body's own speed and movement. I saw speed as something created by technological means to enhance the body's natural capacity to move quickly" (Quinn 2002, 50). If we follow Spinoza in defining a body as its capacities, and think of body and fashion as an assemblage, then Chalayan's project of technologically enhancing the body through fashion alters (i.e., *affects*) these capacities in such a way that makes any clear distinction between the body and the technology unnecessary and untenable.

In fact, that Chalayan rejects any clear bifurcation of technology and living body shows the limitations of thinking fashion in terms of a "cyborgian" fusion of human and machine. Since the publication of her path-breaking "Cyborg Manifesto" in 1985, Donna Haraway's cyborg has come to serve as something of the ur-figure for a boundary-blurring, technologically mediated existence. Haraway's cyborg, however, has come under criticism in recent years for upholding a logic of prosthesis or supplementarity in which there is some identity to both the organism and the machine that preexists their integration (Currier 2003). For example, while affirming Haraway's project of seeking new and positive relationships to technology, Dianne Currier uses a Deleuzian understanding of assemblage to challenge the way the encounter between bodies and technologies is conceptualized in the cyborg: "Technology does not *meet* a body. Instead,

the matters, flows, forces and intensities of the corporeal link and connect with other flows and the forces and materials of the technological and different bodily and technological multiplicities are elaborated" (2003, 331). It seems, then, that Haraway does not completely heed her own question "Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?" (1991, 178).

Yet if Haraway's cyborg does not quite adequately capture the ontological transformations that occur between "bodies" and "things," Chalayan's work does so by producing assemblages that effectively destabilize the logics of identity and addition. In this formulation, clothes are not *added* to a body that preexists; rather, the materials and forces that produce the body (flesh, skin, limbs, movements, speeds, flows, capacities) and the materials and forces that produce the garment (plastics, fabrics, robotics, informatics, movements, speeds, flows) connect to produce an entirely new assemblage composed of its own unique arrangement of forces and materiality. Such affective fashion is thus concerned not with identity (of the garment or the wearer) but rather with the kinds of assemblages and becomings that can be produced together. Chalayan's work, among that of other conceptual designers, seems incessantly preoccupied with the classic Spinozist (and Deleuzean) question, What can a body (now conceived as an assemblage of wearer and garment) do? How, as Kawakubo put it, can the dress and body become one? And what can they do together? What kind of connections and capacities are enabled in a particular body-fashion assemblage? Affective fashion becomes a project not only of *challenging* the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman (although it does this) but also of *producing* "machinic assemblages" composed of connections between forces, materials, substances, and flows, none of which end at the skin.

### **How Do You Dress a Body Without Organs?**

Of all art forms, fashion is perhaps the most bound to a normative image of the human body. Indeed many would argue that the fashion industry is one of the primary sites for the establishment of these very normative images themselves. Affective fashion of the type I have been looking at here, however, rejects all associations with the traditional imaginary of what constitutes a human body. The young designer Gareth Pugh's work is a particularly extreme example of such a rejection. In his 2007 collection,

Pugh sent a bizarre set of creatures down the runway: lacking (human) faces and featuring odd proportions, geometric limbs, and the absence of all organic bodily surfaces such as skin, fur, or feathers (fig. 6). According to its reviews, the show itself was quite a spectacle, as the models were required to maneuver in garments that restricted the body's "natural" mobility, sight, and other sensory capacities (Jones). These designs disrupt all the usual modes of seeing, relating to, and desiring bodies and assist in thinking through Deleuze and Guattari's infamous "body without organs (BwO)." Borrowing from Antonin Artaud, Deleuze and Guattari define the BwO as a body without signification, without subjectivity, and without organization in the form of an "organism" (1987, 159). Such a formulation, as well as Pugh's designs, might suggest a nihilistic evacuation of bodies: indeed Pugh's use of cold geometric shapes, minimalist color



**Fig. 6.** Gareth Pugh, Spring/Summer Collection, 2007. FIRSTVIEW.COM

palate, and synthetic textures could certainly seem forbidding and cynical. The BwO, however, is actually the positive attempt to restore the body's access to its inherent virtual reserves by wresting it from its hierarchical organization. Phallocentrism and capitalism require human bodies to be configured in specific ways that allow for their (re)productive capacities to be exploited and all other generative potentialities to be denied, suppressed, or cut off. Each human subject, however, must learn to understand and experience his or her body in this stratified and hierarchical way through the psychic internalization of the normative body image. Such a process is famously described by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan in his account of the "mirror stage" in which a psychical image of one's body as a coherent (yet always unstable) whole is produced from the infantile *corps morcelé* ("body in pieces") (2002). The BwO then, without image and organization, functions in Deleuze and Guattari's overall "anti-Oedipal" project as an attempt to revive the virtual potential that is repressed (and yet remains) in the teleological progression from fragmentation to totalization, or when the body-in-pieces becomes the Body.

Pugh's designs seem oriented toward a similar goal of deconstructing the normative body image by experimenting with bodily capacities, flows, energies, sensations, affects, and connections that cannot be organized, subjectivized, or signified. Indeed one cannot help but feel disoriented in looking at the creatures walking down the runway in his show: What, exactly, is one looking at? Who is the subject of such an assemblage? What is the meaning of geometrical limbs and faces? Of synthetic skins? Can such assemblages be called "organisms," given that the materiality of these assemblages challenges the living body as organic? Of what completely different movements, sensations, affects, and connections are these bodies capable? How would one interact with one of these creatures? What does it feel like to wear one of these garments? If these designs seem coldly nihilistic, it is because they do not seek to signify to us a coherent organization or a human subject. This is not, however, to say that they do or mean "nothing." What Pugh does to the faces of these models is telling and even more aligns his work with Deleuze and Guattari's. Closely linked to their elaboration of the BwO is Deleuze and Guattari's critique of facialization as the process by which bodies (and heads) are constantly overcoded with faces that enable signification and subjectivation (1987, 170). We see faces everywhere, in other words, as a way of making sense of the world; but like the Body, the Face maps affective capacities according to specific coordi-

nates. Plugging into a process of “defacialization,” however enables one to “break through the walls of significance, pour out the holes of subjectivity, fell trees in favor of veritable rhizomes, and steer the flows down lines of positive deterritorialization or creative flight” (1987, 190). Freeing the body from its capture by the Face, that is, enables “strange new becomings” that deterritorialize the dominant cartographies of affect, energies, sensations, and flows. Perhaps even more than his reconfiguration of the body, then, this seems to be the success in Pugh’s designs. By defacializing the body, he untethers fashion from normative images of beauty, bodies, gender, and humanity, allowing it to be used instead for the creative production of entirely new assemblages.

While Deleuze and Guattari never explicitly answer their question “How do you make yourself a body without organs?” it seems that certain fashion designers have sought to answer precisely such a question. Affective fashion thus reformulates the relation between fashion and the organization, meaning and subjectivity of human bodies. These designers seem to ask, How might we dress bodies without organs or faces? How can fashion be used to open the body to the reserve of latent potentiality that patriarchy and capitalism foreclose? What can fashion do if it is not tethered to a normative image of the human body? How can fashion help to map affective potentiality in new ways or reconfigure the diagram of power that stratifies the living body in particular ways? By asking such questions, affective fashion opens up the body to the becomings of which it is always already capable, but whose capacities have hitherto been suppressed.

### **Conclusion: The Affective Politics of Fashion**

While designer fashion is often associated with the height of commodity culture and seen as an elite status symbol, I want to argue that affective fashion actually has the power to resist a complete capture by capitalism. A typical response to the type of designs that McQueen, Kawakubo, Chalayan, and Pugh produce is that “real” people could never afford them and *would* never wear them if they could. Yet all these designers have insisted that they are more concerned with the artistic and conceptual functions of their designs than with their sales, and many of their most creative pieces are not for sale at all (Quinn 2002). Thus this is another way in which what I’ve been specifically calling affective fashion differs from “everyday” fashion (even though both have affective dimensions). If, as Deleuze and



Guattari argue, art is the mode of thought concerned with extracting and intensifying affect and sensation, then the work of affective fashion designers, for whom this is precisely the goal, should be seen primarily as art, rather than commodity. In the case of mass-produced clothing, on the contrary, whatever affective capacities are produced are only a side product of the primary goal of sales. But, moreover, perhaps there is a counter-intuitive anticapitalist logic in the notion that “real” people could never wear these designers’ garments. To be sure, the clothes that are produced for quotidian wear and mass consumption are designed in tandem with the demands of capitalism (i.e., a productive body that is able to work in what it wears) and able-bodied, patriarchal heterosexuality (i.e., a body in line with the dominant ideals of femininity and masculinity). Affective fashion that seeks to displace these very requirements through the creation of clothing that “distorts” the body or reformulates its capacities and organization can have a radical potential to disrupt the necessities of a heteronormative capitalist culture.

The mass-produced clothing of commodity culture also gives rise to the fantasy of purchasing individual identity through the market while simultaneously resulting in large populations that effectively look identical because thousands of people can own the exact same clothing designs. This being like “everybody else” that is such a hallmark of consumer culture, however, has been reworked by Deleuze and Guattari through their notion of “becoming-imperceptible.” For them, the “immanent end” of becoming is becoming-imperceptible, which in a sense means “becoming like everybody (*tout le monde*)” because one has become indiscernible from the world itself (1987, 279). This is to say, one has gained access to not only “molecular” femininity or animality (through becoming-woman or becoming-animal) but also the molecules of the cosmos that exist inside every body. This becoming is the ultimate form of indiscernibility and impersonality in that one has become *everything* “because one has *made* a necessarily communicating world, because one has suppressed in oneself everything that prevents us from slipping between things and growing in the midst of things” (280). One cannot, of course, persist in such a state, because becoming can never be converted into being, but all bodies are traversed by this capacity of becoming, a becoming that affective fashion attempts to seize. These designers certainly create clothes that are not for “everyone” but instead that seek to produce a “communicating world” out of the body and the materials, that allow the wearers to

slip and grow in between things without capture by dominant modes of meaning, organization, or subjectivity. Such a becoming points toward a rethinking of politics itself, which Elizabeth Grosz has offered as a “politics of imperceptibility” that “acknowledge[s] the pre-personal forces at work in the activities of sexed bodies, institutions and social practices. . . . Bodies do not so much require recognition and validation as activity and action” (2004, 195). Affective fashion does precisely this task in that it produces garments directed not toward the validation of identities and institutions but rather toward the enabling of new forms of action and bodily transformation.

This is why it is important to remember that becoming is not only an ontological process of transformation within a living being; the process also has the power to deterritorialize bodies from certain dominant modes of stratification. Becomings, in other words, are the excavation and actualization of the body’s own virtual capacities that have been foreclosed by a patriarchal, capitalist, humanist society. Through becoming-woman, both men and women can create alternative modes of being, acting, and living that are neglected in an Oedipalized culture that organizes itself around a reproductive and phallogocentric heterosexuality. Through becoming-animal, humans can recover what is foreclosed in the establishment of a hierarchy that erects an absolute boundary between humans and animals. And through becoming-imperceptible, we might locate forms and practices that are not captured by signification or subjectivity or driven toward recognition and intelligibility. Thus, in some ways, any becoming-otherwise is always a feminist and queer process insofar as it would have to involve the body’s escape, however ephemeral, from the hegemonic modalities of patriarchal heteronormativity.

Sewing this notion of becoming to an affective understanding of fashion could then lead to a greater awareness of the transformative forces inherent in fashion and art. Fashion need not be seen only as that through which we make ourselves more attractive, adorn, or enhance ourselves. It need not be seen as (only) that which creates and sustains ideals of feminine beauty. Rather, fashion can be that “something else” that leads to our own becoming-otherwise, that actualizes the virtual capacities that we were not even aware of, that puts us in touch with what is *least* human in us, that opens our bodies to a virtual field of limitless creativity, intensity, sensation, and transformation. As such, the designers whose work I have looked at here seem to exemplify Donna Haraway’s suggestion that “we

can learn from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man” (1991, 173).

Becomings can never be undone, even if they can never last, and thus affective fashion has the power to configure bodies otherwise, even if the new forms of embodiment it engenders are not permanent. This fashion can show us different ways of arranging bodies, new modes of bodily being and becoming, and new ways of producing connections and assemblages between bodies and materials that offer a glimpse into the future so as to transform the present. As Elizabeth Grosz formulates Deleuze and Guattari’s account of the sensory becomings produced by art, “sensation sets out . . . the possible becomings of peoples and universes to come. It is the possibility . . . of the creation of new worlds and new peoples to live and experience them” (2008, 79). All the designers I have looked at here have used fashion as just such a mode of producing peoples to come, of seeking to actualize the future nonhuman becomings of humanity. Of all these designers, it is once again Alexander McQueen who perhaps best articulates this power of fashion to create new peoples and universes, as we think back to his final collection, Plato’s Atlantis. It is fitting, then, to let McQueen have the last word as he describes this collection, using words that I would argue characterize the transformative potential in all affective fashion: “There’s no way back for me now. I’m going to take you on journeys you never dreamed were possible.”

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