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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

Between Futurist Fashion and Avant-Garde Haute Couture: Relationships Between Body  
and Environment

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Art History

by

Lauren Lucie-Marie Tesoro

September 2021

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Johannes Endres, Chairperson

Dr. Aleca Le Blanc

Dr. Savannah Esquivel

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Lauren Lucie-Marie Tesoro  
September 2021

The Thesis of Lauren Lucie-Marie Tesoro is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Between Futurist Fashion and Avant-Garde Haute Couture: Relationships Between Body  
and Environment

by

Lauren Lucie-Marie Tesoro

Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Art History  
University of California, Riverside, September 2021  
Dr. Johannes Endres, Chairperson

This thesis looks at three case studies between 1910-2021 by exploring the role that clothing plays in identity. First by looking at the Italian futurist movement between 1910-1933, futurist fashion is used to create a new Italian identity for the future Italian Empire. Secondly, the conversations shift to Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica's parangolé, a performative garment which seeks to express the wearer's identity. And lastly, the Spring/Summer Haute couture collection Roots of Rebirth designed by Dutch designer Iris van Herpen, whose work looks to recreate human identity into a form that coevolves with nature. These three case studies explore similarities within garments as they form the wearer's identity. Garments become a visual representation of identity acting as an intermediary between body and environment. Changing styles, trends and necessities create clothing that reflects the needs of its intended audience.

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## Introduction

Clothing forms identity, serving as a physical barrier between our body and the environment. It is through our clothing that we are most often seen, and the styles and trends we take part in are directly linked to the aesthetic interests of our society and culture. Renaissance clothing was often a representation of one's social status. A specific type of lace pattern or dress color signified, in a single glance, the class and wealth of the wearer. The ability to have clothing made from luxurious materials, such as silk or animal hides, convey the type of activities a person participates in<sup>1</sup>. The advent of industrialization throughout Europe created a new market for clothing. Clothing was once seen as a useful object comparable to tools. Certain garments keep you safe but more importantly they keep you clean. Clothing needed to be used and reused constantly, but as textile production became easier with automated looms fashion was able to take hold. Fashion allowed for well-to-do people to show off to the world. The Paris arcades became a place to present oneself to the world through their stylistic choices.<sup>2</sup> Soon mass produced ready-to-wear clothing became widely available and clothing yet again was faced with another transformation. Although nothing compared with today's scale of mass production, ready-to-wear clothing became the catalyst for a new industry. The fashion industry finds its roots in 19<sup>th</sup> century France where manufacturing and commercialism and textile production was at an all-time high.<sup>3</sup> For France fashion

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<sup>1</sup> O'Malley, Michelle. "A Pair of Little Gilded Shoes: Commission, Cost, and Meaning in Renaissance Footwear." *Renaissance Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (2010): 45-83.

<sup>2</sup> Troy, Nancy J. "The Theatre of Fashion: Staging Haute Couture in Early 20th-Century France." *Theatre Journal* 53, no. 1 (2001): 1-32.



became an integral part of the nation's identity. On one hand it created a dazzling image of the nation, one where fashionable women walked among equally beautiful architecture. On the other hand, it was the foundation of the economy, creating a tourist industry that sold the image of French fashion off the rack. It is this form of fashion which so enthralled the Italian futurists that fashion became the core of their transformation of the Italian identity.

By 1910 Italy had begun their process of industrialization. They had recently become a unified nation and were looking to claim more power on the European stage.<sup>4</sup> The early futurist group looked toward a fully industrialized Italy full of speed, strength and technology. The futurists led by F.T. Marinetti busily published manifestos and articles in a variety of futurist run newspapers, *Le Figaro* in France, *Poesia* a magazine dedicated to Italian futurist poetry run by Marinetti and various exhibition catalogs were just a few places that they had their voices heard. In these papers they called for the use of war as a violent step toward a new future. Italy's past connection to the ancient Roman empire had to be destroyed so that a new futurist Italy could be built in its place. The predominantly male futurist group looked to redefine all of Italy to create a manufactured space that embodied all the changes needed to take place for their utopian vision to occur. This new Italy was full of technology, the citizens would be prosperous from the new industries that would produce everything from raw materials to children's toys. Through

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<sup>3</sup> Lehmann, Ulrich. "Markets for Modernity: Salons, Galleries and Fashion." In *Fashion and Materialism*, 103-28. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Pesando, Annalisa B., and Daniela N. Prina. "To Educate Taste with the Hand and the Mind. Design Reform in Post-Unification Italy (1884-1908)." *Journal of Design History* 25, no. 1 (2012): 32-54.

the redesign of the manufactured environment, the futurists intended on changing the bodies that lived in these spaces. These new bodies would become the perfect Italian citizen. Men would be strong, aggressive forces of change while women would become the embodiment of feminine fragility. The new identity of the futurist Italian was never fully achieved, but the design of this new person influenced what clothing meant within the futurist circle. Clothing was now an agent of change, able to impose a political and emotional state onto the wearer. For the Italian futurist, fashion was a form of control, forcing the wearer into a state where their opinion was secondary to the message of the garment.

For Hélio Oiticica, garments and textiles became an exploration into Brazil's neo-concrete movement and the non-object. Oiticica's parangolé or cape was a form of found object textiles and other materials stitched together to create an architectural garment. Influenced by his involvement with the Estação Primeira de Mangueira, in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, parangolé was a way for the wearer to experience art without mediation.<sup>5</sup> When worn the parangolé became the performative being. The wearer was encouraged to dance and move so that the parangolé can expose new temporal experiences around the body. The audience/performer relationship was integral to the parangolé. The wearer of the cape may have no intention of 'performing' for their audience. The wearer may be looking to simply stand with the parangolé, but it is this freedom of movement that creates the artistic experience. The individual's unique movements reveal hidden layers of the cape creating micro-moments of color, and sound. The wearer's freedom, as to

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<sup>5</sup> Oiticica began attending Estação Primeira de Mangueira, a well-known samba dance school, in 1964.

how they wear the parangolé and the energy involved in their movements creates an experience unique to the individual, the uniqueness of the experience became the work of art. Oiticica, who was considered a very good samba dancer, encouraged the wearers to lose themselves in their dance. This semi-meditative state of dance revealed an authentic expression of the wearer's identity. The audience then becomes a participant in the experience as the visual effects of the wearer's movements become a moment in time experienced by the viewer. The parangolé functions as clothing becoming an intermediary between body and space allowing for a form of pure self-expression to exist. Parangolé becomes a structure where depending on the person, they can either expose themselves as a free individual or shelter themselves from the world.

Much like the Italian futurists, contemporary Dutch designer Iris van Herpen uses fashion to redesign the human body. Her Spring/Summer 2021 collection titled *Roots of Rebirth* explores the relationship between humanity, nature and technology and seeks to define the process from separated to a fully-united being. Heavily influenced by the environment, Van Herpen combines nature and technology within her haute couture atelier. Incorporating unusual materials for textiles such as 3-D printed silicon, laser cut glass organza and magnets and electricity, Van Herpen has been on the forefront of contemporary design.<sup>6</sup> Often collaborating interdisciplinarily with architectural firm Benthem Crouwel, Professor and Architect Neri Oxman and environmental organization Parley for the Oceans, Van Herpen's work takes on a unique form. Through her process

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<sup>6</sup> Koek, Ariane. "Iris van Herpen on 10 years of pushing the boundaries of fashion and technology." <https://system-magazine.com/issue10/iris-van-herpen/> 2017

of collaboration Van Herpen creates the very system she attempts to display. Themes of universal creation (*Quaquaversal* 2015), variations on the concept of unity (*Holobiont* and *Henosis* dresses 2021), and biomimetic references exist throughout her designs. Van Herpen looks to transform the body through her garments. By wearing one of her designs the body ceases to be an individual and becomes a representation of humanity. The garment becomes part of the wearer often including accessories or large extensions which force the wearer to accommodate the garment. Her designs are often an environment of their own creating a space around the wearer that requires the ‘performer’ and ‘audience’ to move around the dress. These three case studies stand as an example of how garments work to redefine the body within the lived environment and the importance that garments play in defining identity.

## Italian Futurism:1910-1935

The Guggenheim's 2014 exhibition *Italian Futurism 1909-1944: Reconstructing the Universe* is the only comprehensive American exhibition focused on the Italian futurists and their broad range of artistic achievements.<sup>7</sup> The exhibition curated by Vivien Greene attempts to look at all mediums of Italian Futurist artwork, from better-known painting and sculpture to lesser-known decorative and poetic works. The show pays special attention to paintings and sculptures by the Futurists focusing on themes of speed and technology. The show includes lesser-known examples of futurist fashion, specifically futurist vests designed by Giacomo Balla between 1923-1925.<sup>8</sup> Giacomo Balla is considered the founder of futurist fashion but many members shared in various parts of the design process.<sup>9</sup> Futurist fashion is a significant portion of Futurist artwork as it is an object that fully represents the futurist interest in redefining their environment. Fashion is only briefly discussed within the exhibition catalog and in the accompanying lectures and publications. The full extent of Futurist Fashion within the Guggenheim's exhibition is limited to the display of six of Balla's futurist vests. The vests on display demonstrate the extent to which Futurists were interested in a "Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe" as outlined in their 1915 manifesto by the same name.<sup>10</sup> However, fashion

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<sup>7</sup> *Italian Futurism 1909-1944 Reconstructing the Universe*, Curated by Vivien Greene, The Guggenheim, New York. February - September 2014

<sup>8</sup> Crispolti, Enrico. *Il Futurismo e la Moda: Balla e gli Altri*. Venezia: Marsilio. 1986.

<sup>9</sup> Canguillo often wore many of the designs, and Fortunato Depero had a role in drafting designs.

<sup>10</sup> "Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe" (Ricostruzione Futurista Dell'Universo), Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero, Milan, 1915 <http://exhibitions.guggenheim.org/futurism/manifestos/>

design was much more than just a passing interest for the futurists and signified a focal point for their theoretical practices. Fashion came into many of their other projects, including political performance, futurist cinema, theater, drawing, drafts, and writing projects. Futurist ideologies and political beliefs transformed fashion within the social-political era of their time. The futurists were interested in creating a perfected image of Italy and specifically the Italian citizen. Futurist fashion serves as a wearable manifestation of Futurist ideals for the Italian citizen and functions as a foundation for fashion theory that looks at the body as the source of national identity. The futurist movement used fashion to dress the body to fit seamlessly into the desired future nation. Clothing is used as a medium of conformance to the state, the means of production, and to comply with the socio-political climate of the time. Italian futurist fashion is a redesign of clothing as a reaction to political tension and industrialization throughout Italy. Urban space radically shifted, resulting in changes to borders, gender norms, and nationalist interests. The Futurists used clothing to create a body that would grow into the perfected Italian citizen needed to populate the new Italian empire.

### **First Wave Futurism: 1910-1914**

One of the many early futurist designs was men's suits. Various artists tried their hand at designing men's suits and accessories; Depero, Balla, Marinetti, and Carli all created vests, jackets, ties, hats, and full suits that adhered to futurist clothing aesthetics. These suits were reactionary and conveyed the wearer's political views concerning war, Italian nationalism, and cultural change. In May 1914, Giacomo Balla published *Futurist*

*Men's Clothing: A Manifesto*<sup>11</sup>, and the later slightly altered version in September 1914 titled *The Antineutral Suit: Futurist Manifesto*<sup>12</sup>, which laid out the definitions of what menswear should strive to become. Many suits were designed, but only one is known to have been stitched together by a Roman tailor, commissioned by F.T. Marinetti in December 1914. The suit was comprised of green, white, and red to resemble the Italian flag. The suit, perfectly fit Francesco Cangiullo, who then went with Marinetti and others to the University of Rome, where they began disrupting a lecture. As told by Marinetti, the futurist group caused a riot at the university, they were thrown out of the classroom, the riot continued outside and the suit was destroyed.<sup>13</sup> The suit did its job and riled up the crowd enticing them to act now. "We futurists want to liberate our race from every neutrality... We want to color Italy with Futurist audacity and risk."<sup>14</sup> The antineutral suit design by Marinetti achieved this exact sentiment. The design was colorful; the colors of the Italian flag incited a refreshing sense of nationalism. In 1914, Italy was in tension with an impending war with Austria-Hungary. The futurist and the soon-to-be fascist party backed the war, feeling that it was a way to regain Italian land. The neutrality Balla mentions is seen in the choice of color and the nationalist intention of the suit. The

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<sup>11</sup> Balla, Giacomo. *Futurist Men's Clothing: A Manifesto*. May 1914, in Lawrence Rainey, Poggi, Christine, and Wittman, Laura, eds. *Futurism : An Anthology*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

\*Unless otherwise mentioned all Futurist texts come from Rainey, Lawrence Poggi, Christine, and Wittman, Laura, eds. *Futurism : An Anthology*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Balla, Giacomo. *The Antineutral Suit: Futurist Manifesto*, in Emily Braun. "Futurist Fashion: Three Manifestoes." *Art Journal* 54, no. 1 (1995): 34-41.

<sup>13</sup> Berghaus, Günter. *Futurism and Politics : Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944*. Pg 76-7

<sup>14</sup> Braun. "Futurist Fashion: Three Manifestoes." *Art Journal* 54, no. 1 (1995) pg.39

futurists were interrupting a lecture given by a Roman professor known for his passivist or neutral attitude toward the war. The disruption of his class was intentional, as a way of ceasing what they felt was passivist, anti-Italian speech. The men claimed their position in the war and created clothing that represents action.

The 1914 manifesto defined fashion as antineutral, meaning that clothing had to take a stance and stand out against the blandness of everyday life. This interest in anti-neutrality had begun years earlier before the start of the First World War. In 1910, the futurists were speaking out against the passivism of the city of Venice, claiming that it had allowed foreigners and industry to step on them.

We repudiate the Venice of foreigners, a market for counterfeiting antiquarians, a magnet of snobbery and universal imbecility...the *cloaca maxima* of passéism... Instead, we want to reanimate and ennoble the Venetian people, fallen from their ancient grandeur drugged by the morphine of nauseating cowardice and debased by the habit of shady business. We want to prepare the birth of an industrial and military Venice that can dominate the Adriatic Sea, that great Italian lake.<sup>15</sup>

Landscape and history become the foundation for the Italian identity. The comparison of the ancient sewer of Italy became equal to passéism. The past is used as an insult within futurism, it felt like a cheap imitation rather than a true expression of power. Interest in creating new designs out of new materials was significant in that it avoided comparison to anything that came before. By creating new items, the futurists were using collective memory to their advantage. Italian identity up to this point had relied on the grandeur of memory of the Roman empire. The ruins scattered throughout the country are unifying factors central to the landscape. The reference to ancient Rome conjured thoughts of the

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<sup>15</sup> Marinetti, F.T. Et Al, *Against Passéist Venice*, April 1910, pg 67



past throughout Italy, but the futurist disinterest in the former empire forces their audience to think of the future. By disavowing the former empire, there is a need to create a new empire. Comparing Venice to the ancient sewers of Rome, they are at once bringing the obvious comparison to the sewer, but also to the need to recreate the city for a modern society to bloom. To the futurists, Venice as an economic hub was no longer viable as it allowed the city to become a servant to foreigners, instead, they looked for the expansion of Venice as a military harbor. The interest in war as a cleansing violence was formed in the early period and is reinforced through their interest in reclaiming cities as military bases. "Have you forgotten that first of all, you are Italians and that in the language of history this word means: *builders of the future?*".<sup>16</sup> The reality is that the futurists saw the land as something that could provide the Italian people with power, rebuilding Italy's military strength was an important step in bringing the country into the future. Through environmental control, the futurist could redefine what it meant to be Italian. If no longer part of an ancient empire, citizens would become a model for the future. Authority did not belong to the citizens themselves but in the products and objects that surrounded them.

The Italian suit became an agent of political exchange; the suit is what held the power of change. Futurists saw land as something that could provide the Italian people with power, which would help bring along the new Italian empire. The Italian suit became the bearer of the new reality; it held the power of change and Italian identity. The suit became a symbol of Italian nationalism, and it was only through this lens of national

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid

pride that the body could be seen. Within the early manifestos, the suit's wearer is purposely absent; the suit or garment is the agent of change. The body is only mentioned as the receiver of the action, never the giver. "Mans' body has always been saddened with black, or imprisoned with belts, or stifled with draperies... They [renaissance clothing] were expressions of melancholy, slavery, or terror."<sup>17</sup>

The Italian suit was a way to convey their nationalistic intentions, but it was just a single garment out of the many they designed. Suits, jackets, vests, and ties were all created during this time. In 1923 Fortunato Depero created a waistcoat which featured abstracted natural forms. The vest is an example of futurist aesthetics valuing abstraction and force-lines similar to their paintings from the same period. Unlike a typical waistcoat from the period, Depero's vest is visually appealing rather than useful. The bright orange, pink and greens would stand out against the dark colors popular throughout Italy. Depero's *futurist waistcoat* features grass-like forms in the center and sides separated by orange swirls signaling movement, as if the grass is moving in the wind. The upper portion of the vest is covered with orange curvilinear lines fanning out from the edge of the vest. The buttons are hidden creating a singular panel when closed. More often designed than made, the vest reflected the abstracted environmental forms as a way of representing futurist desires. "This has revealed to us an abstract landscape of cones, pyramids, polyhedrons, spirals of mountains, rivers, lights shades. In short, there is a deep analogy between the essential force lines of speed and the essential force lines of a

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<sup>17</sup> Balla, Giacomo. *Futurist Men's Clothing: A Manifesto*. May 1914

landscape."<sup>18</sup> Futurism looks to redesign the world by creating a futurist utopia through the futurist reconstruction of the universe. This reconstructed world is the new idealized version of Italy, where everything is connected to the state. The new world consisted of objects made with the new nation in mind, all objects had a purpose to promote the emergence of a powerful Italy.



Fortunato Depero, *Depero's Futurist Waistcoat (Panciotto futurista do Depero)*, 1923. Pieced Wool on Cotton backing, approximately 52x45cm.

Futurist fashion was a design-based practice rather than a crafted work. The designs can be seen in various sketches throughout the early 1910s, but only a handful of designs were ever made. Physical examples were most often worn by Balla, Depero and other futurists who may have commissioned a tailor for the work.<sup>19</sup> This allowed the

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<sup>18</sup> Balla, Giacomo, Fortunato Depero. *Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe*. March 1915, pg 212

<sup>19</sup> Roundtable discussion: Italian Futurism 1909-1944 Reconstructing the Universe at the Guggenheim. August 28th, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KstZcqFftCU>

design process to exceed the technology of the time, as we will see later the use of unique material within fashion is something for the future. "We futurists, Balla and Depero, want to realize this complete fusion to reconstruct the universe, cheering it up, i.e., recreating it entirely. We shall find abstract equivalents for all forms and elements of the universe."<sup>20</sup> Futurist fashion looked to create a style of art and fashion that would ultimately define the identity of a perfected citizen within the Italian empire. Creating a futurist style that concerned itself with newness started the search for a new person who could fit this identity. If the current system was flawed, then the citizens must be as well, the fabric of the nation required a change, and so did its people. "With this, Futurism has decided on its Style, which will inevitably dominate many centuries of human sensibility."<sup>21</sup> The *Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe* created a new world that changed what it meant to live within Italy in the 20th century. Rapid development and industrialization coupled with an impending political shift created unease and resulted in a movement obsessed with creating a space where they could be included. If the people of Italy had to change to achieve greatness, then so be it. The nation would change through its commercial and aesthetic traditions, slowly infiltrating the household and forming the new Italian identity.

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<sup>20</sup> Balla, Giacomo, Fortunato Depero. *Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe*. March 1915, pg 212

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

## Manifestos on Women and Fashion: 1910-1920

Early futurism ignored women; it claimed they were too simple or too stupid to take on any real responsibility. Early futurism was rife with a masculine, feminine dynamic where masculinity represented military strength, violence, and change, while femininity equaled servility and weakness.

Signor Marinetti declares that above and beyond everything else, futurism looks forward to a machine-governed and womanless world- a world in which even humanity may be generated by mechanism and where everybody will be of masculine gender. But this, say the learned biologists, will be only a reversion to the very ancient past, of which futurism is the sworn foe. And if there is to be but one sex to carry on humanity, that sex, by its office, must be the female!<sup>22</sup>

Speaking as one of the few female futurist writers, Rosa Rosà brings attention to the futurist's disinterest with the past and their unwillingness to rely on collective memory.<sup>23</sup> However, she works to bring attention to that; in her opinion, the future is female. At this point, women had virtually no rights in Italy and will not have many for some time. As a result, female futurists were often ignored within the group. As time goes on, we begin to see waves of interest in feminism throughout the futurist circle.

A beautiful piece written in 1917 by Rosà signals a shift in female labor in Italy throughout the war. Italy's women became most of the workforce, taking over jobs for the husbands and sons sent to war. As the war began to end, there was a question stirring in the minds of Italian women, what happens after men return from war? Rosà discusses this point in her article, stating the supreme joy of receiving a loved one back from war and

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<sup>22</sup> Rosà, Rosa. *Women of the Near Future [1]* pg 244. June 1917.

<sup>23</sup> Born Edyth von Haynau; 1884–1978

saying that the men are coming back to work alongside women. "Nobody has thought to focus on her worldwide importance *after* the war. The war has shaken us as much as it has men. In the torrents of Italy, there are sleeping infinite forces which await the arm of those who will return to work alongside their *strong women*."<sup>24</sup> Women had tasted a sense of liberation during the war, allowed to run businesses and take out loans without the need for a male cosigner. This sense of freedom moved into a full-fledged women's rights movement which swept through the nation. Although women had proven themselves, they were still treated as inferior within futurism.

In 1917 Giovanni Fiorentino wrote an article titled "Variations of the theme of 'Woman'." He discusses the necessity to "save a woman from the low state to which earlier social practice had consigned her."<sup>25</sup> Fiorentino intended to encourage a feminist sense throughout Italy, claiming that women had proved themselves during the war. To resign women to this lowly position was to mistreat someone so worthy of admiration; but futurism disagreed. Published in *L'Italia futurista* newspaper in 1917, they argue that to save women would be the destruction of man. "To save woman? And how can that be done, when she is always seeking with every possible means, to place impediments in the way of man's action." The idea that women could contain any inkling of intelligence was too much for these futurist artists. "Woman, together with the frivolous and stupid nature with which she is born, will die. And any other notion is a utopian dream."<sup>26</sup> This

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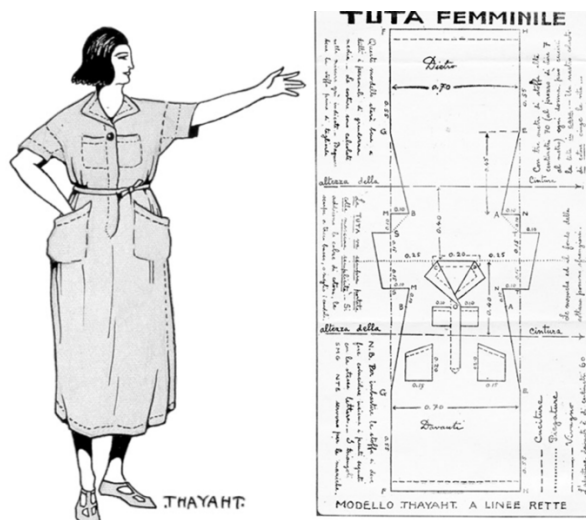
<sup>24</sup> Ibid 233-234

<sup>25</sup> Fiorentino, Giovanni. "Variations on the Theme of "Woman." To save woman?!!". August 1917 pg.240-241, 553

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

comment was far from reality; in Italy, the women's liberation movement was in full swing, women had the ability to make their voice heard but change was slow.

While women were working to secure their rights throughout the nation, the futurist movement was busy advertising fashion within newspapers to disseminate their nationalist message. Newspaper publications often consisted of manifestos defining the futurist beliefs in modern design, poetry, and fashion. Throughout the early 1910s, the futurists held a profoundly misogynistic view of women feeling that they were too simple to contribute to the advancement of Italy. On one hand, they dismissed women, but on the other, women became the sole audience for their futurist message. Women tended to be the main audience of freely published futurist newspapers and would have been responsible for the domestic products that the futurists were hoping to reimagine. The futurists were, in reality, advertising to the legions of Italian women who would have seen free sewing patterns in the newspaper and were most likely the only family members capable of creating their designs.



Ernesto Thayaht, *Female Jumpsuit model; Feminine Jumpsuit Cut* 1919

By 1919 a strong movement for women's rights had taken place, and the topic of the women's vote was on the table. Feminists felt that they had shown their skill throughout the war and had increasingly maintained control over their new responsibilities since. Futurist men felt that allowing women into the workforce emasculated them, and was a sign of subservience to female emotions. The binary between male and female, strength and delicacy, still existed and the futurists were still reluctant to relinquish any power. The author, Futurluce, poses a common argument against the vote, "How can women, whose minds are occupied with a thousand frivolities, worry themselves about political life and bear the heavy burden of annoyance which comes with it?"<sup>27</sup>. Quickly countering this argument he states that men are too afraid of having to compete with women within the workplace. "You are afraid that women will do better than you, will walk all over you in your cowardice."<sup>28</sup> Allowing the vote for women was a difficult choice for the futurists as it required them to keep their promise of creating a new empire different from the past. Their reluctance to accept change represents a disinterest in social change and satisfaction with the status quo. By the end of 1919 a lower chamber of Italian the parliament voted to pass women's right to vote. Before the bill could be viewed by the Senate the Italian government fell. Within two years Benito Mussolini would take over the country, and by 1925 had rendered the vote useless.

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<sup>27</sup> Futurluce. *The Vote For Women*. March 1919. Pg. 252

<sup>28</sup> Ibid



By 1920 the attitude toward women and fashion had changed drastically. The war was over and the Italian economy had greatly suffered. For the first time in years, the country could produce products with the advantages of new technology. The country had electricity, water and had taken on a new government. The interwar years brought a period of prosperity for Italy, and with it came compassion for all her citizens. In 1920 Volt wrote the *Futurist Manifesto of Women's Fashion* which discussed the strong futurist themes within women's fashion. "Women's fashion has always been more or less futurist. Fashion: the female equivalent of futurism. Speed, novelty, courageous creation...."<sup>29</sup> Volt argues that women's fashion, full of accessories, styles, and materials, is inherently futurist. The desire for luxurious items intended for their ephemerality rather than their usefulness was central to futurist thought, and women's fashion contained these traits all along. The overall futurist attitude toward women had shifted. Although specific members retained their misogynistic views, the group and the nation began to view women within a more equal light. The interwar period brought on a sense of comradery within the nation. The division between masculine strength and feminine weakness seems to take a backseat within futurist publications. Rather newspapers are concerned with maintaining a sense of national pride which incorporates all members of society.

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<sup>29</sup> Volt, *Futurist Manifesto of Women's Fashion*. 1920. pg 253

## Second-Wave Futurism: 1920-1933

Although women had a taste of freedom throughout the interwar period, by the time Mussolini took power, society began to fall back within its predesigned gender roles. In 1923 the futurists published "the Italian empire" a new manifesto detailing the importance of creating a new empire rather than rebuilding something from the past. "To your eyes, Italy has the shape and the power of a beautiful dreadnought accompanied by a little squadron of torpedo-boat islands," in this way Italy became a manifestation of the country's military power.<sup>30</sup> To the futurists, they had achieved the long sought-after Italian empire; all that was left was to define the identity of the Italian citizen. This new order under Mussolini was fascist and was incorporated within futurism easily. *The Italian empire* looks to define the nation's image which was a combination of fascist politics and futurist aesthetics. The only differing factor between the political state and the futurist movement was discussed in *Fascism and Futurism* printed in 1923 only months after the publication of the Italian empire. Giuseppe Prezolini described fascism as limited to Italy, as it is a political movement focused on the improvement of Italy above all other countries. Futurism differed in that it was at its core an art movement that could and should be adopted by others. "Futurism, instead, is a movement of an international nature. Marinetti himself admits that there are already Russian, American, Australian, or German futurists in every part of the globe."<sup>31</sup> Through this, Prezolini

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<sup>30</sup> Carli, Mario and Emilio Settimelli. "The Italian Empire (To Benito Mussolini – Head of the New Italy)". April 1923

<sup>31</sup> Prezolini, Giuseppe. *Fascism and Futurism*. July 1923. Pg 275

claims futurism to be an international endeavor. However, it also recognizes the contradictory nature of the movements that are closely aligned and yet attempting to be largely international. With the advent of new technologies after the First World War, the nation began experiencing a newly industrialized Italy which still focused on defining the visual elements of everyday life.

By 1927 the relationship between the futurists and fascism had been solidified.<sup>32</sup> However, even with all these meetings, Mussolini still held the futurists at arms distance. Although interested in the arts, Mussolini never declared futurism the state art practice and did little to favor futurist work. The divide between the two groups was enlarged by Mussolini's use of national and international collective memory. Mussolini created the revival of a new Roman empire, through the preservation of Roman landmarks, artwork and new architectural commissions that were influenced by ancient architecture. Although he personally did not care about art, Mussolini used the nation's pride in the ancient empire to promote his own. In February 1927, Marinetti wrote an open letter to Mussolini published in a futurist newspaper stating the debate between ancient architecture and new electric advertisements.

Alongside electric advertisements, the advertising art had taken hold of Fortunato Depero. In 1931 he recognized the opportunities available in advertising as art. "the art of the future will be largely advertising" he recognized that as production increased at the realities of speed and obsolescence, objects took hold that art would need to follow suit

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<sup>32</sup> Bowler, Anne. "Politics as Art: Italian Futurism and Fascism." *Theory and Society* 20, no. 6 (1991): 763-94.

and become just as quickly produced and widely available.<sup>33</sup> He questions the nature of 'traditional' arts stating that all art has tried to sell the audience something, be it the heroism of a warrior, the nobility of a monarch, or an emotional state. By 1933 new technology as an art medium was still central to futurist interests. *The Futurist Manifesto of the Italian Hat* imagined the new types of fashion that can be created with modern technology. In this manifesto Marinetti references an Italian hat which represents Italy's masculine strength and the importance of spreading this image throughout Europe. Marinetti argues that a "love of all foreign things and misunderstood hygiene" is what limits Italian fashion from reaching international popularity. A futurist redesign of headwear will create dynamic options to entice Italian men to "overcome this barbaric habit...". The hats are intended for specific activities and emotions, ranging from every day "speed hats" to therapeutic hats which would have a "screen that modulates the cosmic waves." The Italian hat is finally extended to non-Italians demonstrating the futurist interest in defining Italian identity to those outside of the nation. "Given that our beautiful peninsula is the byway for tourists of every nation-they even come to visit bareheaded, if that is their pleasure – we will welcome them with our customary gentility. But we will yank the new Italian hat over their heads."<sup>34</sup> One year after the publication Mussolini would create a state program to promote Italian fashion throughout Europe. The Ente Nazionale della Moda, began by documenting regional fashion throughout the

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<sup>33</sup> Depero, Fortunato. *Futurism and Advertising Art*. 1931. Pg 288

<sup>34</sup> Marinetti, F.T. *The Futurist Manifesto of the Italian Hat*. 1933 in Braun, "Futurist Fashion: Three Manifestos" 1995.

country, creating sketches and photographing female models in the clothing. As the ENM grew it sought to promote Italian industry abroad.<sup>35</sup> The ENM transformed over the years until it eventually dissolved at the end of World War II. But throughout its service Futurist fashion never seems to find its place within the organization. The ENM focused on creating a version of Italy that was commercially viable. This way they sold an image of the country that was full of tradition and beauty, while the futurists defined the standard of identity and forced compliance through their designs.

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<sup>35</sup> Paulicelli Eugenia. *Fashion under Fascism: Beyond the Black Shirt*. Oxford ; New York : Berg, 2004. P 24

### **Hélio Oiticica: Parangolé**

Active throughout the mid-1950's-1980, Hélio Oiticica's artwork reflected his passion for color and a deep interest in personal experience. An active member of the neo-concrete movement, Oiticica was influenced by fellow artists Lygia Clark and art critic Ferreira Gullar. The 1964 Brazilian Dictatorship was a turning point for Oiticica and many other Brazilian intellectuals, forcing strict censorship laws and creating a violent environment for those who spoke out against the government. Seeking physical and intellectual freedom from the government led Oiticica abroad, working throughout England, continental Europe, and the United States until he finally returned to Brazil in 1978. Throughout his travels, Oiticica was dedicated to his artwork, creating variations on the themes of color, space, and experience. Additionally, Oiticica produced numerous newspaper articles where he wrote on the topics of neo-concrete art and the relationship between audience/performer and experience. His non-object parangolé capes were a long-standing form of art Oiticica produced throughout his career.

Starting in 1964, parangolé was influenced by Oiticica's relationship with residents of the Mangueira favela in Rio de Janeiro. The deeply stratified nature of Brazil's social-economic structure created tension between Oiticica and his audience. His artwork often incorporated friends he had made while attending the Samba school in Mangueira. The incorporation of the predominately black Mangueira citizen was at the time faced with racial discrimination. Through the parangolé, Oiticica was searching for a pure form of expression. The wearer becomes the work of art through their free movement within the space of the parangolé. Oiticica's work demonstrates the material

importance of textiles as art, specifically wearable textiles, which gives the wearer a sense of security and allows them to reach a type of meditative state.<sup>36</sup> Parangolés rely on the body to bring the piece to life, but how the wearer chooses to use the variety of materials that make up the cape gives it meaning.<sup>37</sup> Oiticica was influenced by samba and how the dance style incorporated the body and spirit into a single movement. His passion for dance affected his thought on the body and environment, creating an intertwined relationship between the individual and space. Oiticica's passion for dance and his philosophical interest in defining the 'body of color' was based on a foundation of neo-concrete art.<sup>38</sup> Oiticica's parangolé is the embodiment of a garment, where once it is worn it takes on the agency of the body. The wearer's agency is transferred to the cape allowing a pure experience. This pure experience creates a moment of true identity experienced by the wearer and the audience, creating internal moments of authentic self-expression.

### **Parangolé: 1964-65**

*P16 Parangolé Cape 12 "From Adversity We Live"* was initially made by Oiticica in 1965 and later recreated in 1992. The parangolé, held in the Museum of Modern Art, New York collection, contains hidden panels and messages. The deceptively large cape would have hung over the wearer's shoulder and down to their knee, but designed so that

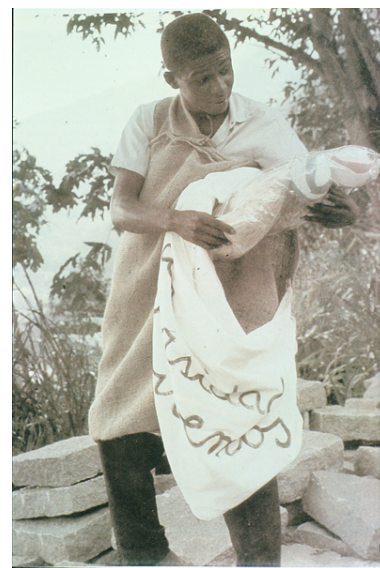
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<sup>36</sup> Posso, Karl. "An Ethics of Displaying Affection: Hélio Oiticica's Expressions of Joy and Togetherness." *Portuguese Studies* 29, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>37</sup> Brannigan, Erin. "Dance and the Gallery: Curation as Revision." *Dance Research Journal* 47, no. 1 (2015): 5-25

<sup>38</sup> Gullar, Ferreira. *Cor e estrutura-cor*. 1960.  
<https://icaa.mfah.org/s/en/item/1091219#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=1115%2C1578%2C604%2C479>

the wearer could choose how to hold the garment on the body. This piece consists of jute, fabric, wood shaving, and plastics. These found objects are placed together to create the parangolé giving the object weight, texture, and sound elements. If worn similarly to the image, the weight of the wood shavings would be free to move while the wearer falls deeper within their performative dance. The semi-hidden plastic bag between the light and dark fabrics would crinkle with movement, creating an auditory effect different from the surrounding soft cloth. A white banner is attached with the words "From Adversity We Live" written in black letters



Left: Hélio Oiticica, *P16 Parangolé Cape 12 "From Adversity We Live"*. 1965 (reconstructed 1992)

Right: Hélio Oiticica, *P16 Parangolé Cape 12 "From Adversity We Live"*. 1967, worn by Nildo of Mangueira.

The banner would become legible only momentarily as the performer moved. The parangolé creates a new experience full of ephemeral moments of sound, smell, and touch. Through this performance, the wearer becomes free from their daily movements and is encouraged to move in unique ways. The creation of space unique to the wearer



exposes a hidden form of self. The wearer creates a unique moment with their body through a performance only they can create which is forever limited to the temporal space.

Brazilian poet, art critic, and essayist Ferreira Gullar was an influential voice within the concrete and neo-concrete movements.<sup>39</sup> In March 1959, Gullar wrote *The Neo-Concrete Manifesto*, where he laid out the new movement and the significant artists who were currently working.<sup>40</sup> Referencing the work of Clark, Oiticica, and Aloísio Carvão, neo-concretism was moving away from the geometric rigidity of the earlier concrete movement. A significant difference within neo-concretism is what Gullar terms as 'form-color', or the "spatial sense of color."<sup>41</sup> For Oiticica, these early experiments into color took the form of painting and what he termed "spatial reliefs," which were a form of monochromatic objects in both two and three-dimensional spaces. His painted works titled *Metaesquema*, "contained only two or three strips of white that invited us to a silent and ascetic contemplation."<sup>42</sup> This continued interest in color reduction is seen in the *P16 parangolé*, where Oiticica uses only beige and white, creating space for contemplation. The beige and white of the cloth are subdued compared to brightly colored parangolé or spatial works of the same period. The large sections of neutral tones

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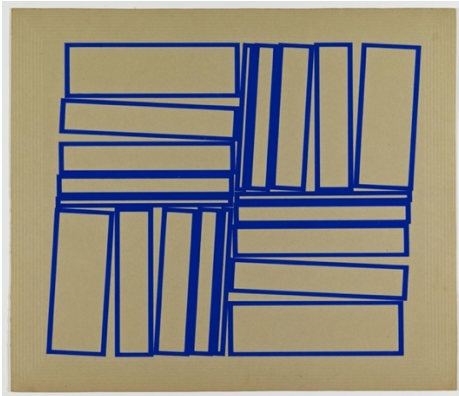
<sup>39</sup> Ferreira Gullar 1930-2016

<sup>40</sup> Gullar, Ferreira. *Manifesto Nonconcrete* 1959.  
<https://icaa.mfah.org/s/en/item/1110328#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-1050%2C-260%2C4620%2C3666>

<sup>41</sup> Lepecki, André. "The Non-time of Lived Experience: The Problem of Color in Hélio Oiticica's Early Works." *Representations*, no. 136 (2016): 77-95.

<sup>42</sup> Gullar, Ferreira. *Cor e estrutura-cor*. 1960.

are contrasted by the vibrant activity of the wearer but highlight the auditory and visual hidden features of the plastic bag and text.



Left: Hélio Oiticica. *Metaesquema*. 1958. Gouache on cardboard.  
Right: Hélio Oiticica, *Relevo Espacial (vermelho) REL 036*. Polyvinyl acetate resin on plywood<sup>43</sup>

Gullar's *Theory of the Non-Object*, written in December 1959, defines what a non-object is while creating a new framework for analyzing problems in contemporary art. He starts by discussing the death of painting looking at Monet and Mondrian's paintings which move away from representational art toward an impressionistic 'color-form.' Non-objective painting looks to strip away all elements of representational forms to achieve a new subject; that of space. "For the traditional painter, the white canvas was merely the material support on which he would sketch the suggestion of natural space. Subsequently, this suggested space, this metaphor of the world, would be surrounded by a frame that had as a fundamental function the positioning of the painting into the world. This frame was the mediator between fiction and reality, a bridge and barrier, protecting the picture, the fictitious space, while also facilitating its communication with the external, real,

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<sup>43</sup> *Metaesquema* and *Relevo Espacial* © Projeto Hélio Oiticica, photo © Tate, CC-BY-NC-ND  
<https://www.tate-images.com/preview.asp?image=T12418#>  
<https://www.tate-images.com/preview.asp?image=T12763>

space."<sup>44</sup> The non-object no longer needed the medium of its representation to convey its meaning. Oiticica is creating spatial reliefs and penetrables, which creates a physical space for reflection. The canvas or frame no longer mediated the artwork. Instead, the art object was communicating directly with the audience. The parangolé became a non-object because it enveloped its audience. The wearer of the parangolé is at once the audience and the creator of the artwork. They experience the parangolé by displaying it for others to see.

Oiticica used the term "body of color" to identify his artwork in conversation with Gullar's form-color.<sup>45</sup> The non-object comes from this thought, where the art 'object' is no longer the holder of the emotional or reflective quality of art, rather the non-object or, in this case, the parangolé becomes an object used to facilitate the creation of art. Oiticica was inspired by people he met in Brazil's favelas, often creating pieces in collaboration with people from these communities.<sup>46</sup> Sometimes specially made for people Oiticica knew from his samba school in Mangueira, the parangolés became a symbol of the new non-object and a representation of the body of color.

Oiticica took his definition of the non-object from Gullar and developed subcategories within this field. Most importantly, Oiticica viewed color as a significant element of the non-object. Starting to experiment in the late 1950s with his penetrable

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<sup>44</sup> Gullar, Ferreira. *Theory of the Non-Object*. December 1959. Translation by Michael Asbury

<sup>45</sup> Oiticica, Hélio. *A Transição da côr do Quadro para o espaço e o sentido de sonstrutividade*. 1962. <https://icaa.mfah.org/s/en/item/1110351#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-570%2C-83%2C3079%2C2444>

<sup>46</sup> Dezeuze, Anna. "Tactile Dematerialization, Sensory Politics: Hélio Oiticica's Parangolés." *Art Journal* 63, no. 2 (2004): 58-71.

and spatial reliefs, Oiticica explored how color was not simply a visual component to a work of art but that it was part of the environment. Oiticica found that color was an agent which contained aspects of time, light, and action. This parangolé, which is less colorful than other examples, still hides portions of color underneath and behind the banner. The color becomes a moment in time, where the duration of the experience is unknown. There is excitement seeing the parangolés in movement, in the moments where color will appear and disappear, becoming a waiting game for the next moment of a type of color light.

Unlike a costume, the parangolé is an expression of the individual. Costumes remove the wearer from the actions they perform. In a theater production, costumes are another part of the storytelling process, which creates an experience for the audience. Costumes represent a different person, while the parangolé is intended to free the wearer and allow them to experiment with their body and space to achieve a meditative form of self-expression. The freedom of self-expression is central to Oiticica's work, the statement "From Adversity We Live" is two-fold, it references the class structure in Brazil that leaves people living within the favela and the difficulties of living within a highly conservative dictatorship. In 1964 Brazil was taken over by a dictatorship which by 1965 had become deeply authoritarian imposing strict censorship.

The act of performing allowed the wearer to become free, free oneself from social restraints, and express genuine emotion. This performance also became a process for the audience. Unlike costumes, which hold a strict performer-audience dynamic, the parangolé turns audience members into performers. The lack of skill, the shyness of an

audience member becomes the most valuable part of a parangolé performance as it is not about showing off skill or agility when exploring the space of the cape, but rather the unknown movements of a novice where the parangolé truly takes its form.<sup>47</sup> The parangolé is not a costume that is designed to accentuate the wearer; instead, the wearer is simply the armature for the parangolé. Within the wearer's movements, the parangolé can take over and influence the body's movements beneath it. The body becomes secondary to the parangolé; the message inside increases in power as the once audience member fades away and the energy of the parangolé comes to life. Unlike how it is most commonly displayed today, the parangolé is meant to be worn. In the MoMA exhibition, the parangolé is hung on the wall or slung over a stand.



Installation view of the exhibition “Sur moderno: Journeys of Abstraction: The Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Gift” October 2019- September 2020

As a result, the parangolé becomes a lifeless object, denoting only its possible size and weight. While hung on the wall, it looks no more than its base materials of burlap, cotton,

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<sup>47</sup> Oiticica, Hélio. *O Objeto: Instâncias do Problema do Objeto*. 1968.  
<https://icaa.mfah.org/s/en/item/1110629#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-403%2C-1%2C2079%2C1650>

and scrap fabric. The parangolé only truly comes to life within an active space where it can be danced with and worn. The movement of the color becomes a movement in time. The parangolé takes on a new life as it is free from the wall while on the wearer's body.

### **H.O: 1979**

In 1979 filmmaker Ivan Cardoso created a film titled *H.O.* documenting Oiticica's work thus far and the experience of a penetrable space. The film is an expression of Oiticica's work at the time and a necessary example of the visual experience needed to experience parangolé without being in person. The film starts with a fear-inducing siren that rings loud, as red and green flashes across the screen. Images alternate between Oiticica and his *bóviles*, parangolés, red, green and blue flashes. The intense opening scene abruptly concludes and is immediately countered with calm Bossa nova music and a close-up view of a hand squishing wet, puddled mud.<sup>48</sup> The scene plays a vital role in creating a visceral experience that elicits a physical reaction. The audience's senses are thrown off guard, and we are left with a visceral experience. The textures that jump off the screen work similarly to Oiticica's uses of texture within the parangolé. It is the unexpected nature of their appearance which makes the textures of the cape exciting. One knows that it exists, but it is only when the item is taken out of context that we can truly experience the raw emotion of the moment. The initial texture of the mud leads our mind to a space concerned with texture. The film continues featuring Oiticica moving through the parangolé, creating a new identity as he moves with and is moved by the parangolé.

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<sup>48</sup> Cardoso, Ivan. *H.O.*, 1979, Galeria Paralelo, <https://vimeo.com/100591883>

Structure, color, space, and time become inseparable within the parangolé and become the defining factors of the work.

The parangolés in the film take various shapes, colors, and forms. Often, they are of soft materials easily pliable and flowing in the wind as the body moves. Some are rough or stiff and create an architecture around the body. In some cases, as the wearer dances, the parangolé is rigid as if it is a wall around the body, hiding it from the audience. In other cases, the parangolé reacts like an article of clothing to become an extension of the body. Many of the materials used in parangolé were found objects assembled just enough so that they could be worn. The variety in materials created unique pieces that, at times, were made with a person in mind. The capes became an extension of the body using items from one surrounding environment, representing a more authentic version of the wearer. The experience of wearing the piece becomes a work of art. The variety in shape, color, and texture creates an experience that is unique and ephemeral.

Specific colors held specific meaning to Oiticica; the emotional relationship between color and space was significant. Oiticica viewed color in terms of its opacity. “White is the ideal light-synthesis of all colors. It is the most static, thus favoring silent, dense, metaphysical duration.”<sup>49</sup> Oiticica experimented with color-light within his penetrable series, creating structures with colored plastic film; the density and quality of the color affected the space. The red, green and blue flashes at the start of the film are

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<sup>49</sup> Oiticica, Hélio Côr, *Tempo e Estrutura*. 1960.  
<https://icaa.mfah.org/s/en/item/1110353#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-1563%2C0%2C6425%2C5099>

examples of Oiticica's interest in color. The flashes of color start the film at a point of intensity, red, green and blue are opaque colors to Oiticica conveying a "cavernous, serious, dense light sense."<sup>50</sup>

The second to last scene in the film elicits an emotional response from the viewer. The screen features a green card reading "Parangol' Helium" the next approximately three minutes of the film are done in a single shot. First, Oiticica appears, out of the dark background. He wears green and pink samba pants, the colors of the Mangueira school, and only a clear bag-shaped parangolé as a top.



Ivan Cardoso, *H.O. Parangol' Helium* Film Still, 1979

Dissonant music plays over Oiticica's performance which radiates an uneasy feeling. Oiticica's performance is intended to stick with its audience. The dissonance between the music and the setting combined with an energetic Samba dancer represents a moment of free expression. Oiticica is at once free to move, but the parangolé appears as a restrictive presence. It is only as the camera moves closer that the audience begins to inhabit

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid



Oiticica's personal space. The emptiness of the space and the clarity of the parangolé draw us into the performance but we are kept at an arm's distance by Oiticica's movements.

### **Iris van Herpen: *Roots of Rebirth***

This analysis looks at how Van Herpen redesigns the body in an attempt to create a new human identity for the future. Her design house, started in the Netherlands in 2007, explores natural elements intertwined with the human form to understand the changes involved in the development of the modern world. “Trained in classical ballet, Iris van Herpen contemplates movement as a metamorphic force which is a duet with fashion, can extend the forms of the human body. Pioneering techniques and materials evolve into liquescent shapes and intricately layered textures, sculpting graceful silhouettes that reflect a woman's myriad of movements.”<sup>51</sup> Van Herpen uses her designs to blur the lines between the body, identity, and the environment; the body that she chooses to focus on tends to be a generalized female form. Van Herpen's designs are defined by how they define the new human identity through a reimagination of the body; her creations are defined by how she views the body within its environment. The way that Van Herpen's work is most often viewed, through reproduced sources, alters her designs which are often translucent and are greatly affected by light and movement. Iris van Herpen's work looks toward a future where humanity and the environment are one. The spring/summer 2021 collection titled *Roots of Rebirth* details a journey of human evolution that affects the relationship with the environment and spirituality.<sup>52</sup> Van Herpen's use of titles she names the steps along the path to the advanced human form. Her titles act as the foundation of her garments referencing the philosophy, science and nature which inspire

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<sup>51</sup> <https://www.irisvanherpen.com/about/the-maison>

<sup>52</sup> Merrell, Roxy. “A Deep Dive With Transformative Fashion Designer Iris van Herpen”. The September Issue: #4: Futurism, May 2020. <https://www.theseptemberissues.com/iris-van-herpen/>

the designs. Her runway shows transform the predominantly female models' bodies through designs that feature experimental materials which transform the body's shape into something at once human and non-human. *Roots of Rebirth* draws inspiration from the core elements of the earth, fungi, and venation patterns. Due to social distancing requirements during the Covid-19 pandemic, Van Herpen's show was only available virtually through her YouTube channel and other social media outlets. The designs are never seen in person, limiting the images of the collection to the photographs distributed by Van Herpen's marketing department. In a typical runway show, hundreds of photographers take photos; the show's narrative existed within a panopticon where alternate images and designs could easily be found. In this case, there is no alternate vision; the only view of the show is the one that is fed to the waiting audience. Natural themes intertwine with the human body with natural life, representing a new type of human movement. Like many of Van Herpen's past shows, this collection was created in collaboration with artists Casey Curran and Eichi Matsunaga and her staff, who handsewn most of the designs. This show stands as another example of Van Herpen's interest in creating a new identity for the human body within a technologically focused society. Her inspiration for the collections comes from biologist Merlin Sheldrake's book "An Entangled Life," (2020) which details fungi's foundational role in "changing our minds and shaping our futures." The fungi theme is seen throughout the show. We are starting with the runway space, which is both physical and distant. The models are walking on solid ground, but the space around them fades into blackness. This is a subtle reference to the cosmos as the other beyond space that controls much of our world in an

unseen way. The model's walk out from the blackness, and as the show proceeds, they begin to kick up a cloud of animated dust representing the mycelium that lies beneath all our feet.

## **Ekstasis**

Rather than denoting a form of intimate pleasure, ekstasis looks to reference an inner reflection that requires a person to "be outside of or to stand outside of one's self."<sup>53</sup> The action of standing outside of oneself has sacred associations, often as a form of meditative removal in order to achieve a semi-enlightened state. The body within an ekstasis state is removed from worldly limitations and has stepped into a state of being that can exist separate from the ordinary person. The show opens with the 'Ekstasis dress' representing the start of Van Herpen's journey in creating a new human throughout the show's entirety. The ekstastic dress questions the role of the body wearing the garment. Is the body capable of reaching an ekstastic state? If it achieves this, what is the result? Possibly, Van Herpen opens the show with this dress to identify the first step in self-reflection required to achieve a new human identity. This new identity will need to be able to fit within a world that, according to Van Herpen, will need to live in harmony with nature. This self-reflection takes the form of Heidegger's analysis of ekstasis and the division of man from they/self to the authentic self. In his book titled "Being and Time,"

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<sup>53</sup> Barnes, Hazel E. "Katharsis in the Enneades of Plotinus." Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association 73 (1942): 358-8

Heidegger dives into what he defines as *dasein*, the lived experience of man.<sup>54</sup> *Dasein* is concerned with defining the self with man's spirituality and finding the true self within human existence. This dissociation between they/self and the authentic self is the limiting factor between the standard and ekstastic or self-reflective state.

Heidegger's concept of the authentic-self helps us to better understand Van Herpen's application of ekstasis. The dress is a representation of a journey to define humanity's identity in the future. This process of self-reflection and taking ourselves out of our space allows an ekstastic experience where society can form into something other. The ekstasis theme is one of the few titles that is seen again throughout the show. The ninth look is titled '*Ekstasis' asymmetric dress*. Unlike the first ekstasis dress, the ninth look differs in asymmetrical cut and long flowing sleeves, which float over the ground as the model/wearer moves. The first dress is structured with large pouffy shoulders and sleeves and a tight skirt that extends just above the knee.. The wearer defines the ninth look and can be viewed as nature flowing around the body; the wearer is on the verge of ekstastic discovery. The flowing blue tones of the dresses resemble water, the lifeforce of the world. As the water flows around the body, we are asked to question our connection with water and the earth's reliance on natural bodies of water. Much like the earth, the body is a form made up of natural materials outside of the body, space, and time. Water is integral to humanity's existence and required for all life on earth. Van Herpen uses natural references to draw attention to the essential aspects of nature, without which there

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<sup>54</sup> Krell, David Farrell. "History, Natality, Ecstasy: Derrida's First Seminar on Heidegger, 1964–1965." *Research in Phenomenology* 46, no. 1 (2016): 3-34.

would be nothing. By paying attention to water, Van Herpen questions our relationship to it as humans and reminds us that water does not exist solely for our benefit but that we are a product of nature and a product of water. Without it, humanity does not exist, at least not in our current state.



Iris van Herpen, '*Ekstasis*' dress, 2021



'*Ekstasis*' asymmetric dress, 2021

Without fungi, water, plants, and animals, the environment as we know it would cease to exist. By creating a visual evolution of the human experience, we are called upon as audience members to rethink our position in the world and our relationship with our environment. The show represents the they-self, a representation of human nature and the base forms of human experience. The collection questions the audience's relationship with their environment and encourages them to participate in ekstasis self-reflection. It is this self-reflection that is necessary for us to have a better understanding of our world.

Unique to Van Herpen's designs is the incorporation of modern technology and innovation. Van Herpen recognizes that the world we live within is not 'natural' but rather a combination of human-made creations. Her gowns often incorporate unconventional materials and accessories to demonstrate the saturation of technology in our everyday lives, accompanying several of the designs in the show. Both ekstasis dresses have fingernail accessories designed by visual artists Eichi Matsunaga. These 'claws' alter the human body in a subtle way that recognizes the show's incorporation of technology into the human body. These technological adaptations are exaggerations of the technology that we often find at our fingertips. Our understanding of the technological world is so often through a keyboard, computer, or smartphone that Van Herpen draws this connection between people's fingertips and the proximity of technology.



Eichi Matsunaga, Fingernail Accessories, 2021

The combination of genuinely natural and human-made objects comes together to form our world. So even in our highly removed places within homes and cities, we are still a

product of our environment, and it is in this self-reflection that allows us to remove ourselves from the space and move toward a higher state of being.

This higher state comes from bettering our use of natural resources and respecting the environment. This is a common theme in her work, which mostly looks to explore the beauty of natural systems through visually biomimetic designs. In *Roots of Rebirth*, she takes this one step further by partnering with the oceans rights group, Parley for the Oceans. This foundation, founded in 2012 focuses on removing plastics from the ocean. Sea plastics are a main factor in ocean pollution finding their way into plant and animal food chains.<sup>55</sup> Parley for the Oceans collects the sea plastic, and in this case, Van Herpen used this material to make the ‘holobiont’ gown also in this collection. “Nature is very intelligent; it is full of interconnected systems where nothing is wasted and everything is perpetually renewed. I am interested in how we can mimic some of these processes as we design systems. How can we transform fashion into a closed-circle economy, where materials are continually recycled? This is the way that nature works.”<sup>56</sup> This is an attempt to move toward a more sustainable industry, and shares themes with Van Herpen’s sixth look in the show titled *Holobiont*. Referencing an organism with a highly diverse microbiome, the holobiont dress is made up of recycled ocean plastic that has been printed onto a sheet and then laser cut. The holobiont dress recognizes that living

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<sup>55</sup> "Plastic Trash Altering Ocean Habitats." *The Science Teacher* 79, no. 5 (2012): 22-24.

<sup>56</sup> Segran, Elizabeth. “Iris van Herpen has always been fascinated with the natural world and now she wants to save it.” March 2021. <https://www.fastcompany.com/90609023/iris-van-herpen-has-always-been-fascinated-with-the-natural-world-now-she-wants-to-save-it?partner=rss>



and growing by oneself is impossible and that to live, we are reliant on millions of living beings within our microbiome.

The ekstasis dress becomes a representation of its form of creation, much like the model, wearing a reference to her foundational makeup; the dresses resemble their root of creation, the ocean. Both dresses fade from a deep blue down to soft pastel shades of blue and mauve. The first look resembles a landscape fading from a deep twilight sky to a desert landscape and finally ending at the model's feet with chanterelle mushroom-inspired heels. The ninth look fades from dark to light blue and flows around the model like a deep ocean current. The dresses transform the models creating a new silhouette that blurs the line between a garment and a model being hidden by the dynamic clothing.

The environmental impact of the clothing industry has been a recent topic of conversation. Chemicals used in the production of raw materials have decimated soil and people's health for decades.<sup>57</sup> Dangers in the finishing process from machinery and dye runoff have destroyed the water-based ecology throughout Asia.<sup>58</sup> The fashion industry has become a significant contributor to climate change. Much of this is due to the nature of fast fashion. Like what the futurists had hoped to achieve less than 100 years earlier, modern commercial culture has created a high demand for trendy clothing which is mass-produced and designed based on seasonal trends rather than practicality or utility. The reality for many is that clothing has become an expensive investment when looking for

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<sup>57</sup> Alexander, M. "Microorganisms and Chemical Pollution." *BioScience* 23, no. 9 (1973): 509-15.

<sup>58</sup> Scott, Mike. "Out of Fashion- The Hidden cost of clothing is a water pollution crisis". September 2020. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mikescott/2020/09/19/out-of-fashionthe-hidden-cost-of-clothing-is-a-water-pollution-crisis/?sh=73919b7c589c>

quality items. Van Herpen feels that avoiding ready-to-wear collections that can be bought off the rack and made en masse is not sustainable and prefers to limit her design house to the haute couture calendar, which only requires two shows a year. From these shows, she will then take commissions to create bespoke garments for her clients. In this way, she feels less waste; by only creating a single product for a customer, there is less waste. The process of making her designs looks to think about the world as a singular being, where nature and man do not exist separately but looks at the world as a combination of beings who form together creating something new.

### **Apotheosis**

Apotheosis within art often represents the elevation of something to a god-like level. This is most commonly seen in ancient Egyptian artwork and is a popular theme throughout 19<sup>th</sup> century painting.<sup>59</sup> Van Herpen represents the elevation of the new being taking on a god-like form. However, who is god for Van Herpen? Is it man, nature, or some new being she is searching to define? The subject is unclear, but the elevation of her thirteenth gown is significant as it represents an attempt to identify the future of humanity. This gown at once elevates the human body and nature, elevating it toward a god-like position. The gown conjures images of the internal human body through its texture and color. The dress's texture and its material create an effect while it is moving, like blood pumping through muscle, the dress stretches and contracts while the torso of

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<sup>59</sup> Greenhalgh, Adam. "'Not a Man but a God': The Apotheosis of Gilbert Stuart's Athenaeum Portrait of George Washington." *Winterthur Portfolio* 41, no. 4 (2007): 269-304.

the gown forms muscle fibers or roots. The general circulatory nature of the dress reflects the delicate architecture of the human body, something that is the very core of our being, but if we are lucky will never see the light of day.



Iris van Herpen, 'Apotheosis' Gown, 2021

By naming her thirteenth look, the *Apotheosis gown* Van Herpen calls attention to the elevation of humankind while also incorporating highly binary terms regarding gender and traditional fashion norms. Van Herpen claims to be interested in promoting female design houses. This practice creates a gown that is defined by the human form and by female collaboration. Her designs, which are most popular throughout Europe and the US, are limited by focusing on a singular style of garment mainly worn by women. Van Herpen claims to be gender-neutral but continues to create clothing of a gendered history while only hiring female models. The apotheosis gown elevates the human body,

specifically the female body, emphasizing a gender binary that is deep within Van Herpen's work.

The final form of human evolution within this dress refers to the human technologies that make many of the designs possible. Van Herpen has historically used 3-D printed materials like silicon, plastic, and glass to create her designs. The collaboration with Parley for the Oceans elevates man's ability to harness the materials in our environment and create something new. Van Herpen's form of innovation looks to intertwine handwork with technology. Part of her inspiration for this collection was the world wide web and the similarities between the web of internet/virtual space and the underground root systems which encircle the earth. The apotheosis gown references the significant innovations that humanity has made with technology. These innovations push us toward our future, creating a more connected global community. The interwoven torso of the gown is like a modified form of futurist speed lines connecting us with every corner of the world. The gown features flowing sleeves that connect the wrists and shoulders, coming together to form an arch from the shoulder to the base of the head and then flowing back down into a cuff around the neck. The head is supported by the gown creating an exciting dynamic between the sensitive neck and the tight collar. The human form moves this gown; it is the driving force behind its movement and its only source of support. However, the most natural forms of the gown's sleeves control the most sensitive part of the human body. The gown appears to support humanity's head and, ultimately, its mind.

Like octopus tentacles or flowing sea plants, the sleeves and décolletage of the apotheosis gown elevates nature to a god-like level. Similar to look eleven titled *Entangled Life*, the gown is split into two parts, a human element that is flat, rippled, and moves in a muscular motion, and the other is the upper half which resembles nature elements. Both designs are biomimetic, a common theme within Van Herpen's work. "Fashion is an instrument of change, to shift us emotionally. Through biomimicry, I look at the forces behind the forms in nature; these patterns and natural cycles are my guides to explore new forms of femininity for a more conscious and sustainable fashion for the future."<sup>60</sup> Biomimicry comes from author Janine Benyus, who argues that humans should consciously recreate nature within design.<sup>61</sup> Van Herpen attempts to replicate nature through human technology. The similarities between nature are taken as inspiration and a way to define the new human identity as something that can be intertwined with. In this case, the gown elevates nature to a point where it supports humanity; nature is reliant on man to sustain it, but man is held in a weak position by the forces of nature.

The sequence of Van Herpen's collection is significant as each design represents another step on the path toward the new human identity. As climate change continues to threaten the quality of our existence on earth, there becomes an increasingly more significant need for humanity to adapt and evolve to something suited to live on the future earth. This new person becomes the new human archetype, the new standard of a global human identity. The show starts with ekstasis, or the need to step outside our self

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<sup>60</sup> <https://www.irisvanherpen.com/about/the-maison>

<sup>61</sup> Lawson, Michelle. *The American Biology Teacher* 60, no. 5 (1998): 392.

to understand the authentic self. This enlightened authentic self can begin a journey upon an increased spiritual path that mid-way through humanity within and apotheosis form. Next, the body is elevated, but it is no longer the singular human form but a combination of humanity and nature. Although still separate, each party comes together to create a new body that is elevated to the point of being the creator. This results in the final step of the journey where body and nature become something new.

### **Henosis**

The henosis dress is the final look in Van Herpen's show, the title is chosen accordingly as the dress is titled after the unity of all beings into one. Henosis is the presentation of the singular unified being. As if the show was a journey through a possible future of human evolution, the henosis dress appears as the final stage. Emerging from the cloud of spores that create the runway, the model wears an almost-living crown. Designed in collaboration with artist Casey Curran, the kinetic crown contains a series of small motors which move an almost invisible thread causing the mantis-like feathers to wave in an S-pattern.



Casey Curran, *Henosis Crown*, Iris van Herpen, *Henosis Dress*, 2021

The capitalocene, looks to define the current era by the market and capitalism.<sup>62</sup> Often brought up in conversations concerning the anthropocene, the capitalocene takes it one step further, recognizing that man is now the primary agent of geological change on the planet, claiming that this change is done through capitalism.<sup>63</sup> Van Herpen's work, in many ways, conforms to this theory. As her work looks to understand modern man's relationship with nature, she too looks at the future of humanity while existing within a capitalist space, Van Herpen creates designs that reflect our current relationship and where we are headed. Is it possible that the next era of human existence will require us to move past the capitalocene into a more unified identity? The capitalocene connects us

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<sup>62</sup> Altvater, Elmar, and Birgit Mahnkopf. "The Capitalocene: Permanent Capitalist Counter-Revolution." In *The World Turned Upside Down?: Socialist Register 2019*, edited by Panitch Leo and Albo Greg, 79-99. London: NYU Press, 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Moore, Jason W. "Nature and the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism." *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 26, no. 2 (2003): 97-172.

through the global economy. However, the capitalocene is a separating force, creating new class structures that limit forms of social mobility. The concept of the monad or henosis solidifies Van Herpen's theory of humankind that we need to become something more, an evolution past our current state to become the best version of humanity. This combination is outside of capital and culture and begins to head toward a theory of a global one.

For many, the transition out of the capitalocene may seem impossible. It would be a complete restructuring of our understanding of the world. Part of the henosis idea is that we are no longer singular but a whole. This meant becoming one with god. The spiritual element does not leave Van Herpen's thinking here; instead, it emphasizes her point, there is a need for a shift in our understanding of ourselves and the others around us before we can become a unified One. The theory of global identity looks at the essential environmental impact that we can create when we begin to think of ourselves as a human species rather than culturally separate groups.<sup>64</sup> Global identity feels that by emphasizing and making people aware of our relationship with people around the world, humanity will become more empathetic and, therefore, more willing to make changes that benefit the world. This theory has flaws, often ignoring that most wealthy nations cause the most pollution and that often it is the waste of wealthy nations that pollute lesser developed countries. Studies on global identity can theoretically improve one's choice as it helps to

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<sup>64</sup> Cornelius, Marilyn. "Global Identity and Environmental Sustainability-Related Attitudes and Actions". 2012



unite humanity under a single group. However, it is not the full henosis that Van Herpen is striving toward.

The henosis dress looks to represent a sense of unity through the number of collaborators working on the dress. Like with many of her designs, Van Herpen has worked with other artists to complete the garment. Casey Curran designs the crown; an artist who looks to create art that resembles life "it is possible to create something out of nothing".<sup>65</sup> This piece is a combination of human technology and biomimetic features. The slow weaving of the mantis arms makes the crown feel as if it is a living, breathing being—environmental awareness and action. The craftsmanship involved in the lace assemblage and the addition of the mantis fingers on the dress skirt all require a community effort to be created. In the henosis dress, the fingertips have been left off because the models' hands must fit behind the waving hemispheres of the dress.

The sense of unity within the henosis dress comes from the visual similarities that Van Herpen works with. The mantis arms, as she describes, are a biomimetic reference and a reference to the spiritual nature of the environment. Hence, the serendipity of everything created, including our own. Unlike the apotheosis dress, the henosis dress is not held to the same level of elevation; it seems that mid-way through our evolution, man became prideful to compare himself with god, and henosis recognizes that there is no hierarchy; rather, man and nature are one within the monad. This can be attributed to the theory of symbiogenesis or that everything evolves together. Even in our final heroic form, the new human identity is still rooted in the fungi and mycelium of the unseen

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<sup>65</sup> <https://www.irisvanherpen.com/collections/roots-of-rebirth>

underground. The new human form still relies on nature just as before, but now man, nature, and fungi are unified. In this scenario, we can hope that the henois human form is in an equal relationship with the environment, and the evolution of humanity has ceased, at least for now.

The dress features a boat neckline revealing the model's neck and upper shoulders. The detail of the dress resembles a bone-like pattern with thin radiating lines that resemble birds' wings. The main body of the dress mirrors this pattern with undulating shapes, all using the thin lines resembling anatomical structures. The floating arms move independently while the model walks, thus creating sections that move together and others that move separately. The movement within the dress creates moments of tension and relief as parts crash and intertwine, and eventually release from each other.

### **Conclusion**

Van Herpen's view on nature attempts to create a new identity where man and nature are intertwined. Her designs image what humanity would look like if mixed with energy, plants, and animals. However, Van Herpen's interpretation of the body firmly separates the human form and nature. By claiming that the body needs to be combined, Van Herpen reinforces the idea that man is separate from nature. Van Herpen's designs attempt to expand past a human/ nature interaction into a new form that is made equally of both, but the human body limits her the gives her designs life.

Oiticica's work uses the body as the interpreter for his designs. *Parangolé* relies on the audience's perception and participation in the event/ artwork for the piece to be fully experienced. It is the necessity of the body within Oiticica's work that makes his designs anthropocentric. *Parangolé* is commenting on the state of Brazil's government and the social conditions at the time and uses the body as the format for this conversation. The audience's participation defines the environment; without human interaction, Oiticica's installation work is nothing more than objects in space. It is the human element that unifies his creation into a meaningful statement on Brazilian life.

Italian Futurism used fashion and the body as an extension of their political beliefs. Balla and Thyra created garments to clothing a new perfected version of the Fascist Italian state. Their interest in clothing in Italy was often limited to theoretical texts and designs, but the few garments they did produce aligned with their nationalistic interests. Clothing became an essential focus for the Futurists as it provided a design practice that could transcend the transformation of private space. Fashion transformed the individual into a walking billboard for the Futurists movement and Fascist ideology. Futurist fashion was intended to create a new standard image for the average Italian person that was similar to the level of control Mussolini's Dictatorship held over the Italian environment.

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