

Fashion Utopias: The Role of Fashion Exhibitions and Fashion Archives to Defining (and Stimulating) Possible Future Fashion Landscapes

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Abstract : Utopia is a term that, since its first appearance in 1516, in Tommaso Moro's work, has taken on different meanings and forms in various fields: social studies, politics, art, creativity, and design. The utopias, although of short duration and in their apparent impossibility, have been able to give a shape to the future, laying the foundations for our present and the future of the next generations. The Twentieth century was the historical period crossed by many changes, and it saw the most significant number of utopias not only social, political, and scientific but also artistic, architectural, in design, communication, and, last but not least, in fashion. Over the years, fashion has been able to interpret various utopistic impulses giving form to the most futuristic visions. From the Manifesto del Vestito by Giacomo Balla, through the functional experiments that led to the Tuta by Thayath and the Varst by Aleksandr Rodčenko and Varvara Stepanova, through the Space Age visions of Rudi Gernreich, Paco Rabanne and Pierre Cardin, and the Archizoom's political actions and their fashion project Vestirsi è facile. Experiments that have continued to the present days through the (sometimes) excessive visions of Hussein Chalayan, Alexander McQueen, and Gareth Pugh or those that are more anchored to the market (but no fewer innovative and visionaries) by Prada, Chanel, and Raf Simons. If, as Bauman states, it is true that we have entered in a phase of Retrotopia characterized by the inability to think about new forms of the future; it is necessary, more than ever, to redefine the role of history, of its narration and its mise en scène, within the contemporary creative process. A process that increasingly requires an in-depth knowledge of the past for the definition of a renewed discourse about design processes. A discourse in which words like archive, exhibition, curating, revival, vintage, and costume take on new meanings. The paper aims to investigate-through case studies, research, and professional projects-the renewed role of curating and preserving fashion artefacts. A renewed role that-in an era of Retrotopia-museums, exhibitions, and archives can (and must) assume, to contribute to the definition of new design paradigms, capable of overcoming the traditional categories of revival or costume in favour of a more contemporary "mash-up" approach. Mash-up in which past and present, craftsmanship and new technologies, revival and experimentation merge seamlessly. In this perspective, dresses (as well as fashion accessories) should be considered not only as finished products but as artefacts capable of talking about the past and of producing unpublished new stories at the same time. Archives, exhibitions (academic and not), and museums thus become powerful sources of inspiration for fashion: places and projects capable of generating innovation, becoming active protagonists of the contemporary fashion design processes.

Keywords : heritage, history, costume and fashion interface, performance, language, design research

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