

Entanglements of the Body and Fungi in Experimental Fashion

Alia Parker

University of New South Wales Art & Design, Australia

alia.parker@unsw.edu.au

Abstract

Dressing and being dressed is a daily negotiation between the fleshy body and the semi-permeable material of clothing as they inform, frame and shape one another. It is my contention that the phenomenon of fast fashion — i.e. mass-produced clothing — produces a lack of enduring care between bodies and clothes, resulting in large-scale textile waste. Clothing that has the capacity to affect and to be affected may shift our ethical and ecological relations to our clothes.

While natural and synthetic clothing already contains a multitude of micro-organisms, both absorbed from contact with the body and from the external environment, this paper argues that clothing made in collaboration with living organisms such as fungi generates a unique set of affective relations. I argue that the expressivity of mycelium as a form of living matter — a growing, vibrant organism — can be brought into an assemblage with the human body, and that this assemblage has the potential for dyadic relations that better embody the entanglement of matter and life. There is a growing field of research into emergent biomaterials for application in clothing production, offering up potentially transformative and disruptive modes of manufacture, use and disposal. Equally, recent theoretical enquiries into new materialism, affect and the non-human open up critical pathways for considering the symbiotic co-existence of human bodies and non-human organisms.

This ongoing practice-based research uses experimental fashion design in collaboration with fungi to make a series of material assemblages that aim to challenge sensorial modes of dress. This paper calls upon affective and new materialist perspectives in Deleuzian philosophy through Grosz and DeLanda to consider and frame the design process. The broader implications of this research are to make a critical and valuable contribution to the field of experimental fashion practice as we move towards more sustainable ways of designing, wearing and thinking about our clothing.

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