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*Report delle attività
di ricerca*

BEYOND
ALL LIMITS

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON SUSTAINABILITY IN ARCHITECTURE,
PLANNING, AND DESIGN
11-12, 13 May_2022

*edited by
Claudio Gambardella*

V: Università
degli Studi
della Campania
Luigi Vanvitelli

*Dipartimento di Architettura e
Disegno Industriale*
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on Sustainability in Architecture,
Planning, and Design

edited by Claudio Gambardella

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degli Studi
della Campania
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Research activity report

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Proceedings of International Conference on Sustainability in Architecture, Planning, and Design

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CONTENTS

BAL 22 INTRODUCTIONS

- 17 *Foreword. Presentation of NEB - BEYOND ALL LIMITS*
Massimiliano Smeriglio_ Member of the European Parliament
- 19 *Introduction*
Ornella Zerlenga_ Italian President of the conference
- 21 *Preface*
Claudio Gambardella_ Italian Chair of the conference
- 23 *Design in/for complexity. Engendering a care-oriented society*
Ezio Manzini_ Keynote Speaker
- 27 *Perpetuum mobile. Identity and value landscapes of contemporary design*
Patrizia Ranzo_ Keynote Speaker

BAL 22 CONTRIBUTIONS

01 Survey and Representation as system of monitoring and action on the risk factors and conditions of the context

- 35 *Digital images for the knowledge of bell towers and their ornamental signs*
Ornella Zerlenga, Rosina Iaderosa, Margherita Cicala
- 40 *Naples, Leopardi, and the Artist/Inhabitant Project. Practices of aesthetic resistance*
Alessandra Cirafici, Caterina Cristina Fiorentino
- 46 *Representation of territorial identities of Panagia Paraportiani in Mykonos*
Gennaro Pio Lento, Rosa De Caro, Fabiana Guerriero
- 51 *Digital narratives for cultural heritage: new perspectives for accessibility and inclusion*
Alice Palmieri
- 56 *The identity drawing of places. Bell towers in sixteenth-century Naples by Antoine Lafréry*
Vincenzo Cirillo, Riccardo Miele
- 61 *New technologies for the city and the landscape. A versatile application example*
Valeria Marzocchella
- 66 *Knowledge and representation of the civic tower of Tora and Piccilli*
Rosa De Caro, Fabiana Guerriero, Gennaro Pio Lento

- 71 *The photogrammetric survey of the Tvrđalj Fortress in Hvar*
Luigi Corniello, Angelo De Cicco

02 History, resilience, and green transition

- 79 *The enhancement of Biocultural landscapes: history, heritage, and environment driving sustainable mobility in internal areas*
Elena Manzo, Marina D'Aprile, Antonella Violano
- 84 *Conceptual framework for adaptive reuse of cisterns to cope with climate change and global warming: case of Safranbolu*
Irem Kahyaoğlu, Timuçin Harputlugil
- 89 *Patrick Geddes in Naples. The beginning of his ecological thinking*
Chiara Ingrosso
- 93 *Klampenborg: between local identity and territorial development. An example for Campania's spas*
Monica Esposito
- 98 *Vlorë, the ancient city of Albania and its history in Giuseppe Rosaccio's travel diary*
Felicia Di Girolamo
- 103 *New culture of mobility between flow of people and flow of ideas. Two examples of Metro's transformation: Naples and Copenhagen*
Federica Fiorillo

03 Restoration: a sustainable answer to uncontrolled urbanization

- 111 *Restoration of the architectural heritage. The cemetery hill of Poggioreale in Naples*
Paolo Giordano
- 116 *Restoration as a sustainable resource for urban regeneration. The case of the Forte di Vigliena*
Corrado Castagnaro
- 121 *Recovery of the abandoned heritage towards new fruitive horizons: the case of S. Maria della Pace*
Domenico Crispino
- 126 *Harbour heritage protection: sustainable practices for the enhancement of the Balkan Coast*
Enrico Mirra, Adriana Trematerra
- 132 *Abandoned heritage between restoration and valorisation: Mirine Early Christian Basilica in Croatia*
Adriana Trematerra, Florian Nepravishta, Enrico Mirra

04 Urban transformations: projects, strategies, actions

- 141 *Learning from Covid 19. Sustainable strategies for the regeneration of peripheral areas*
Paolo Belardi, Valeria Menchetelli, Giovanna Ramaccini, Monica Battistoni, Camilla Sorignani

- 146 *Historical city and urban voids as elements of cultural heritage: theory and projects for Aversa discontinuous city*
 Francesco Costanzo, Gaspare Oliva, Michele Pellino
- 152 *Architecture from rubble. To "rebuild the imaginary"*
 Raffaele Marone
- 158 *Sustainable Recovery and Urban Public Transformation of a Former Military Park*
 Luisa Collina, Laura Galluzzo, Claudia Mastrantoni, Elisa Cinelli
- 164 *The man who designed his city. The Matteotti village in Terni by Giancarlo De Carlo as a socially sustainable method.*
 Barbara Bonanno
- 169 *Rereading of the Process of an Idea Competition for Obtaining a Sustainable Urban Environment*
 Rabia Çiğdem Çavdar
- 173 *Urban environments regeneration. Technological issues for adaptive re-use*
 Caterina Frettoloso, Rossella Franchino, Paola Gallo
- 178 *A Scattered Courtyard: rediscovering the Historical Palimpsest of Xi'an for regenerating the urban texture along the City Wall*
 Maria Giulia Atzeni
- 184 *Second-hand Architecture. For a new theory of reuse. The case of the EX IDAC FOOD*
 Concetta Tavoletta
- 188 *Resonant void. Play and interaction in architecture*
 Marco Russo

05 Circular Technological Design for a carbon neutral approach

- 197 *How to pursue the Whole Life Carbon vision: a method to assess buildings' Embodied Carbon*
 Jacopo Andreotti, Roberto Giordano
- 203 *C2C as a reference framework for circular buildings. Implementation on an existing settlement in Rome*
 Serena Baiani, Paola Altamura
- 211 *Digital-green transition of knowledge buildings*
 Antonella Violano, Nicola Barbato, Monica Cannaviello, Souha Ferchichi, Imad Ibrik, Ines Khalifa, Jose Luis Molina, Antonella Trombadore
- 216 *University communities for the green/digital renovation of buildings*
 Antonella Trombadore, Gisella Calcagno, Giacomo Pierucci, Lucia Montoni, Juan Camilo Olano
- 222 *Metamorphosis_{vs} Transformation: innovating the process in the regeneration technological design of heritage-built environment*
 Antonella Violano, Antonio Maio
- 228 *Slow tourism and sustainable mobility: infrastructures for a smart use*
 Marica Merola, Chiara Tosato

06 Structural engineering

- 235 *Seismic vulnerability assessment of ten bell towers in Naples*
Corrado Chisari, Mattia Zizi, Daniela Cacace, Gianfranco De Matteis
- 241 *The role of the epistyle on the dynamic behavior of multi-drum columns*
Androniki Christodoulou, Olympia Panagouli, Athanasios Kozanitis
- 246 *Seismic Retrofit of Masonry Structures: the Lancellotti Palace in Casalnuovo di Napoli*
Claudia Cennamo, Concetta Cusano, Luigi Guerriero
- 250 *The CLT panels: a sustainable response for existing buildings*
Giorgio Frunzio, Mariateresa Guadagnuolo, Luigi Massaro, Luciana Di Gennaro
- 255 *Conservation state and structural issues of existing infrastructures: the case of stataal road bridges in Campania*
Gianfranco De Matteis, Pasquale Bencivenga, Angelo Lavino, Francesco Rosselli, Mattia Zizi
- 260 *Use of structural steel in cultural heritage and for the strengthening of existing structures*
Euripidis Mistakidis, Olympia Panagouli

07 Occupants and their interaction with the built environment related to Multisensorial and Indoor Environmental Quality

- 267 *Inclusive design and the multisensory interactions in public spaces for well-being of visually impaired people*
Samiha Boucherit, Luigi Maffei, Massimiliano Masullo
- 271 *Natural Ventilation Strategies in Buildings as Part of Indoor Air Quality and Healthy Environment*
Merve Coşar Güzel, Gülsu Ulukavak Harputlugil
- 276 *Compared spatial interpretations in the Edoardo Chiossone Museum of Oriental Art*
Alessandro Meloni
- 282 *Head Mounted Displays for lighting in Virtual Reality: Review on Measurements, Advances, and Limitations*
Ainoor Teimoorzadeh, Michelangelo Scorpio, Giovanni Ciampi, Sergio Sibilio
- 286 *The role of the subjective assessment in lighting research using virtual reality*
Michelangelo Scorpio, Davide Carleo, Martina Gargiulo, Pilar Chias Navarro, Yorgos Spanodimitriou, Parinaz Sabet, Giovanni Ciampi
- 292 *On the use of low-cost thermohygrometers for wearable application in the built environment*
Francesco Salamone, Giorgia Chinazzo, Ludovico Danza, Clayton Miller, Sergio Sibilio, Massimiliano Masullo

08 High Performance Components & Buildings

- 301 *Prefabricated movable modular building solutions exploiting renewable sources: energy systems review*
Luigi Maffei, Antonio Ciervo, Dorian Diodato, Antonio Rosato

- 307 *Second-skin façades and usage of textile materials in the building envelope: literature review, limitations, and future opportunities*
Niloufar Mokhtari, Giovanni Ciampi, Yorgos Spanodimitriou, Sergio Sibilio
- 314 *A research on thermal defects in building envelopes for mid-rise houses to develop retrofit strategies: a case study in Sivas/Turkey*
Ahmet Ethem Çulcuoğlu, Timuçin Harputlugil
- 320 *Review of 3D Printing in Architecture: applications, limitations, and future developments*
Giovanni Ciampi, Yorgos Spanodimitriou, Michelangelo Scorpio
- 329 *From climate change to the development of adaptive building envelope*
Evelyn Grillo
- 335 *Advanced manufacturing processes for emergent architectural systems*
Michela Musto

09 Public policies for inclusive and sustainable cities

- 343 *The environment: from limit to economic opportunity*
Scilla Vernile
- 346 *The role of sustainable disclosure and reporting in the public administration: the AdSP case of the western Ligurian sea*
Floriana Pollio
- 350 *The impact of COVID-19 on Piedmont Circular Economy policy roadmap*
Cecilia Padula, Silvia Barbero
- 355 *Urban regeneration through an integrated urban planning approach: towards a new paradigm. The Italian experience*
Laura Pergolizzi
- 359 *Brand urbanism and future scenario to promote sustainable buses public transport. A case study*
Benedetta Terenzi
- 366 *Common goods: an instrument for citizen inclusion and urban regeneration*
Marco Francesco Errico

10 Re-shaping planning approaches, tools and processes for a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient future

- 373 *Museum and the Community: a case of Participatory Intervention of an Old Community in Shanghai*
Penghan Wu, Yedian Cheng
- 378 *Improving learning capacity to enhance resilience: the community engagement process in the RI.P.RO.VA.RE. Project*
Adriana Galderisi, Giuseppe Guida, Giovanni Bello, Giada Limongi, Valentina Vittiglio
- 382 *To a sustainable redevelopment of illegal settlements*
Claudia de Biase, Salvatore Losco

- 387 *Spatial Planning and Energy Transition: The role of public participation*
Elisavet Thoidou, Miltiadis Toskas-Tasios
- 392 *Risk-connect: a secure and ecological path in the east side of the Vesuvius National Park*
Claudia Sorbo
- 397 *Cultural Heritage in Resilience Planning: Evidence from 100 Resilient Cities Database*
Deniz Altay-Kaya, Damla Yeşilbağ
- 401 *A framework for socio-ecological urban co-design: Lessons from two urban parks in the Atacama Desert*
Macarena Gaete Cruz, Aksel Ersoy, Darinka Czischke, Ellen Van Bueren
- 409 *Spas, new possible scenarios for human and city's well-being*
Adriana Figurato

11 Beautiful, sustainable, and inclusive places: the role of appraisal and evaluation

- 415 *Nomad Management of Urban Development: the complex value of temporary communities*
Maria Cerreta, Chiara Mazzarella, Hilde Remoy
- 419 *The value of change: towards social impact assessment in Scampia*
Luciano Lauda, Fabiana Forte
- 424 *Pays Aimables: visual storytelling and landscape values*
Adriana Ghersi, Silvia Pericu, Federica Delprino, Stefano Melli
- 429 *Evaluation issues of cultural heritage impact-led regeneration processes. The case of Italian inner areas*
Federica Cadamuro Morgante, Alessandra Oppio, Chiara Sumiraschi
- 433 *Con(temporary) urban regeneration processes and real estate market: evidence from the case of Milan*
Leopoldo Sdino, Francesca Torrieri, Marta Dell'Ovo, Marco Rossitti
- 438 *Turkey is the Leading Housing Producer in Europe with Dominating Equity Finance in Housing Transactions*
Ali Turel
- 442 *A Decision Aid and Social Impact Co-Assessment Approach for Urban Regeneration Processes*
Maria Cerreta, Ludovica La Rocca, Ezio Micelli
- 448 *Beauty as value: evaluation issues in the NEB perspective*
Fabiana Forte, Alessandra Oppio
- 451 *Creation of a Pseudo-Vernacular Architecture and the Unintentional Attainment of Sustainability: The Case of Akyaka Town Development*
Zeynep Çiğdem Uysal Ürey
- 457 *Using evaluation tools in urban regeneration processes*
Fabrizio Battisti, Giovanna Acampa, Mariolina Grasso

- 462 *Unesco heritage and spatial analysis in a GIS environment*
Fabiana Guerriero, Rosa De Caro, Gennaro Pio Lento

12 Design for Sustainable & Safe Communities

- 469 *Slowork, room with view. Behaviors, Heritage, Design for new lifestyles*
Francesca Castanò, Luigi Maffei, Raffaella Marzocchi, Maria Dolores Morelli
- 475 *Living Hub: setting up a living lab for Simulation based Design activities*
Niccolò Casiddu, Claudia Porfirione, Annapaola Vacanti, Francesco Burlando, Isabella Nevoso
- 481 *S.I.A.R.C. Sustainable Improvement for Aerial Rescue and Control*
Patrizia Ranzo, Nicola Corsetto, Francesco Fittipaldi
- 486 *Sustainable design in urban renewal: a case study of waterfront landscape shared infrastructure of Shanghai, China*
Xiaowen Wu, Claudio Gambardella
- 491 *Beyond current limits: building occupants and climate change*
Timuçin Harputlugil, Pieter De Wilde
- 496 *Design for sustainable behavior: strategies for understanding behavior change*
Wellington Minoru Kihara, Aguinaldo dos Santos, Ana Lucia Zandomeneghi, Alexandre de Oliveira
- 500 *Analyzing sustainability of green product certification systems using indicators of sustainable product*
Gülser Çelebi, Meron Belay
- 504 *Building Trust to Level 4 Autonomous Trucks for Environmental Sustainability and Road Safety*
Ayça Odabaşı Uyanık

13 For Nature / With Nature: new sustainable design scenarios

- 511 *Game Experience: A Fun Form of Cultural Sustainability*
Güniz Sağocak, Gülru Mutlu Tunca
- 518 *ADHEREND - Research and teaching design on the integration of old and new urban spaces*
Feifei Song
- 524 *Sustainability in the 3D printing of housing and settlements codesign processes*
Fabio Naselli, Anna Yunitsyna, Claudio Gambardella, Valentina Sapio
- 531 *A renewed poetic practice. Rethinking the role of packaging design to boost New Normality*
Chiara Lorenza Remondino
- 536 *Collaborative services as trigger for a sustainable culture: two case studies*
Claudia Morea, Sofia Collacchioni, Francesca Falli, Chiara Rutigliano
- 543 *Revived Vintage objects: Designing and Recycling as a bridge connecting Period Products to contemporary functions*
Giulio Giordano

- 548 *Nature-based design methods and practices for bathing activities sustainability*
Ivo Caruso, Vincenzo Cristallo
- 554 *Design for social innovation: a proposal for an holistic design approach*
Mario Bisson, Stefania Palmieri, Alessandro Ianniello, Luca Botta, Riccardo Palomba
- 558 *Beyond the XX century's object: 12 keywords from the international design scenery*
Francesca La Rocca
- 564 *Design for and with visual impairments through 3D printing: a case study from the covid-19 pandemic*
Alessia Romani, Federica Mattiuzzo, Marinella Levi
- 571 *Design and craftsmanship for urban regeneration*
Simona Ottieri

14 Next Consciousness. Fashion innovative scenarios, processes, and products

- 579 *Metamorphosis with(in) fashion: futuring through a new fashion design framework*
Elisabetta Cianfanelli, Margherita Tufarelli, Maria Claudia Coppola
- 584 *DENIM_DECONSTRUCTION. Industrial garments/random garments. Up-cycling processes*
Carlos Campos, Alessandra Cirafici
- 590 *New bio-based textiles productions increasing new circular economy models*
Maria Antonietta Sbordone, Carmela Ilenia Amato, Alessandra De Luca, Venere Merola
- 598 *Alginate Materials for Circular Fashion: from Consumptive to Regenerative Systems*
Sabrina Lucibello, Lorena Trebbi
- 603 *Smart jewels for inclusive fashion*
Patrizia Marti, Annamaria Recupero
- 609 *Platforms, algorithms, and new media in the prosumer era. The evolution of tailored production in Fashion and Cosmetic field*
Rosanna Veneziano, Michela Carlomagno
- 614 *Seven Bodies. Parametric design dialogues around the body*
Chiara Scarpitti, Flavio Galdi
- 621 *Linen Storylines in Procida. From memory to con“temporary” project, between diffusion of knowledge and sharing of practices*
Ornella Cirillo, Andrea Chiara Bonanno, Caterina Cristina Fiorentino, Roberto Liberti, Giulia Scalera
- 626 *New scenarios of conscious fashion system*
Valentina Alfieri
- 632 *Designing a Conscious Fashion Experiences: strategies for Generation Z*
Cristina Marino, Sara Bellini
- 638 *Futurable fashion state of mind. Sustainable projects and theories for new fashion system scenarios*
Maria D'Uonno

642 *Responsible Italian Fashion. An open brand for sustainability in fashion*
Giulia Scalera

648 *Collaborative sustainable innovation improving inclusiveness and value adding capabilities*
Dalia Gallico



BAL 22
ROUNDTABLE

659 *Introduction. The Future of Sustainable Fashion*
Aguinaldo dos Santos

660 *Positive impact of fashion: value system beyond consumption and improving design processes*
Anikò Gàl

662 *The future of Sustainable Fashion. Interview with Anna Pellizzari, Materially*
Emma Gambardella

664 *The future of work in fashion from the perspective of technologies: a prospective study*
Janice Accioly Ramos Rodrigues

666 *Fast to Slow. New visions for the future of conscious fashion system*
Valentina Alfieri, Silvestro Di Sarno



BAL 22
CONFERENCE

671 Universities

672 Patronages

673 Presidents, Conference Chairs

674 Sessions Chairs

675 Honorary Committee

676 Scientific Committee

680 DADI Organizing Committee

681 Venue

684 Services Companies

685 Program

14 Next Consciousness.

**Fashion innovative scenarios, processes,
and products**



Metamorphosis with(in) fashion: futuring through a new fashion design framework

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Abstract

Current global fragility calls for fashion design to embrace and take part in Transformation through Transition to more desirable futures with(in) both physical and digital dimensions of reality. The digital and sustainable transition are trampling these dimensions in a disruptive and mutual way, providing fashion design with a new research landscape. By conceiving a research framework for the advanced design culture in the Transformation Era, the contribution starts from the hypothesis of research of a human-decentered paradigm. Hence, the paper will explore ongoing contemporary transformations with(in) fashion design in both the physical and digital side of reality, discussing the new design parameters and approaches related to wearable products. The aim is to contribute to a broader debate to help develop fashion products able to promote the next consciousness of fashion through more-than human values.

Keywords

fashion design, sustainability, transition, transformation, human-decentered

579

1. Futuring through fashion

Today, the concept of *limitedness* sounds more familiar than ever: current social, environmental and economic crises, in their multiple manifestations, unveiled the structural fragility of our planet (Rockström et al., 2009). Among the plurality of human affairs, fashion embodies one of the most impactful ones, with its industry globally interwoven into the greater unsustainability of current paradigms (Niimaki et al., 2020). This scenario is getting even more faceted because of the challenges raised by digital transformation and sustainable transition. Here, fashion design is called to reconsider its traditional role towards society, markets and the environment, questioning the forced obsolescence paired with the unconscious production of its products (Cachon & Swinney, 2011) to focus on the next narratives that fashion might tell about its imagined future (McCorkill & Varadarajan, 2013).

Assuming fashion design as a world-making/mythopoetic practice leads us to urgent questions: whose world is going to be designed and who will it be delivered to? Fashion system's unsustainability develops as a layered issue, calling for a new research framework to be properly addressed. The digital and sustainable trajectories are trampling both physical and digital dimensions of reality, triggering mutual transformations. As a result, a new research landscape is emerging, spotted by several *coordinates* through which fashion design is currently reorienting its practice, experimenting new values and designing processes.

Thus, by conceiving a research framework for the advanced design culture in the Transformation Era, the contribution discusses recent experimentations in fashion design aimed at pushing *Transformation through Transition* in both physical and digital dimensions of reality (Pozniak, 2019; Vaccari & Vanni, 2020), which, in turn, affect traditional fashion design paradigms. For instance, *futuring through fashion design* stems from the hypothesis of research of a *human-decentered paradigm*. This is highly relevant

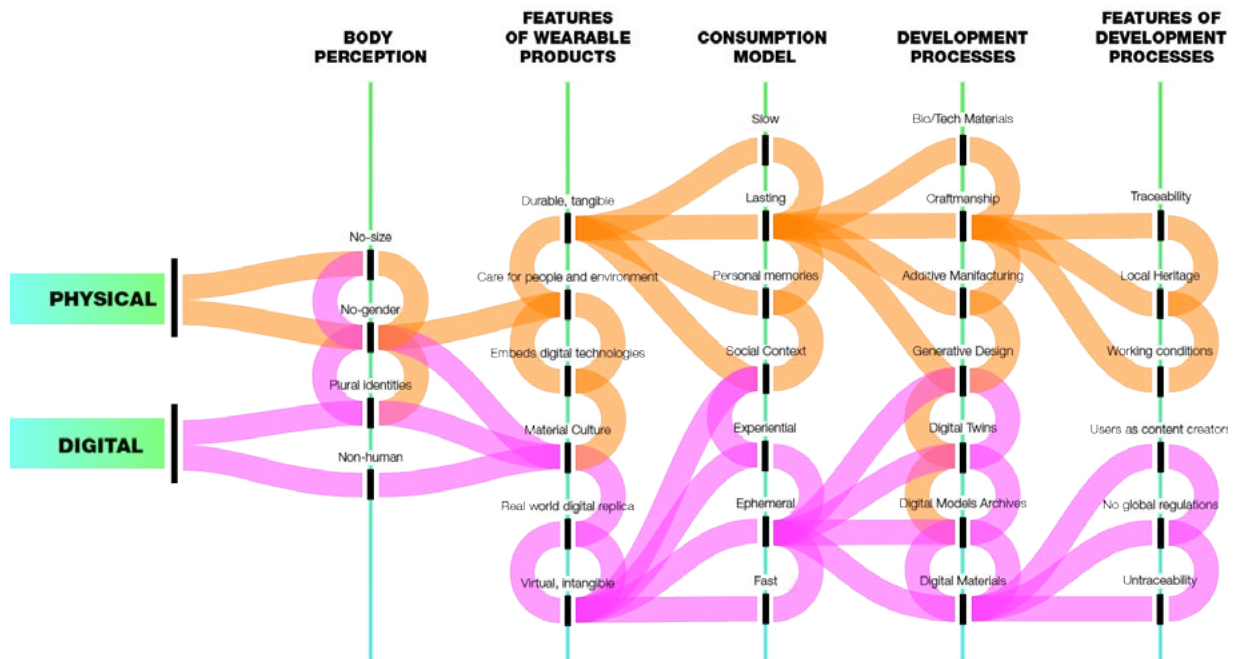


Fig 1. Preliminary framework for the advanced design culture in the Transformation Era.

since it is generating new insights with(in) the design of wearable products. Hence, the paper will highlight how these values will soon affect fashion's production, distribution and consumption models, as well as reshape the modes of representation by and through it. In these new dimensions, fashion can address new narratives by investigating the role of non-human-factors through more-than-human design approaches. The aim is to contribute to a broader debate that helps to develop the next designing direction for fashion aiming at conceiving products able to trigger a new culture and consciousness of fashion by interpreting contemporary transformations.

2. Fashion between physical and digital side of reality

The research framework provides fashion design with new coordinates – identified as *futureing through fashion design* –, which have been experimented and tested through design. At a first glance, the framework relies on a radical shift in focus compared to the approaches traditionally related to them. In fact, it seems that fashion design practice is undergoing a sort of "relational turning point" by not assuming the centrality of the human in the design processes, but focusing on the complexity that surrounds human beings and things (Smelik, 2021). A plurality of interdependent relationships emerge, resulting in tangled lines influencing each other mutually. In this sense, the very concept of "humanity" as we know it falters, with its profile appearing far more blurred than expected.

Reference is made to what Laura Forlano (2017) discusses as the emergence of "the hybrid figure of the posthuman – and related concepts, such as the non-human, the multispecies, the more-than-human, the transhuman and the decentering of the human – [which] greatly expands our understandings of the multiple agencies, dependencies, entanglements, and relations that make up our world". The blurring of the human concept actually reflects a much wider extension, which embraces the entire perception of reality, both in its physical and digital component. Hence, the paper will explore these two dimensions considering, however, that they cross, overlap and influence each other seamlessly.

As for the physical world, digital fashion designers deal with new cultures, environments, social narratives, as well as new tools and materials. For instance, no-gender and no-size are a distinctive element of dresses as interpreters of Gen Z's society, in which gender identity is no longer related to consolidated profiles (Akdemir, 2018). Further sources of transformation can be found in environmental



Fig 3. Anouk Wipprecht, Spider Dress (Jason Perry photo, 2015); Tony Maticewski and The Fabricant, The Animation Overcoat (The Fabricant, 2021).

catastrophes and increasingly exasperated living conditions - global warming, air pollution, pandemics - which have slowly marked common imagination with the need to intervene on the fragility of one's own body, in order to feel safe in the intimacy of one's own identity. This encouraged a series of experimentations which frame fashion design as the activity to conceive and develop *wearable products tout court* (Hrga, 2019), taking advantage of the latest technological advancements: in this sense new fashion products are not only sewn, but also 3D printed, assembled, welded (Bolton, 2016; Smelik, 2018). The work from Anouk Wipprecht (Cass, 2016) will be taken as a reference to present a series of projects that, in the same wake, combine robotics and nano-electronics, making fashion an experience that transcends mere appearances through products that augment the human body. In fact, the resulting garments gain the ability to facilitate and augment the interactions we have with ourselves and our surroundings, suggesting the challenging contribution of fashion in designing more-than-human proximity. Other than handheld devices, such experiences reshape the individual dimension and its spaces of expression through fashion, triggering new ways to interact with the world around us.

Moreover, the theme of fragility extends even beyond the individual sphere. As explained above, the social and environmental impact linked to current industrial and economic models underlying fashion products has exposed the planet to an endemic fragility. This calls for a change of direction, so that fashion products should result from design processes paired with models of production, distribution and consumption that embody a sense of care while choosing and processing raw materials, ensuring the well-being of workers and the protection of the environment (Fletcher, 2017). Therefore, a "conscious wave" in fashion seems to grow, nurtured also by the change in consumers' perspectives and behaviours, who are looking for more durable garments and transparent processes (Amed et al., 2020). However, the latest developments in the digital world are also contributing to this, laying the foundations for new virtual markets (Pozniak, 2019; Heim & Hopper, 2021).

The development of digital media – ranging from virtual and augmented reality for cutting-edge customer experiences to virtual avatars to enter virtual social spaces – inspired new design approaches, as well as new production and consumption models that are easily encountered in the growing concept of *digital couture* – exemplified by the work from virtual maisons like Tribute Band and The Fabricant (Särmäkari,

2021). Recent experimentations with NFTs, *skins* and digital garments highlight the new opportunities offered by virtual commodities for digital spaces like *Animal Crossing*, *Roblox* or even *Zoom* (Gibson, 2021). Since digital media are means for the individual to imagine, construct and convey a highly personal value, they enable new forms of fashion practice, which is now strewn with nonhuman avatars and clothing that defies gravity. Gucci and Burberry models with alien features on the one hand and the impossible geometries of The Fabricant's clothing on the other, make it increasingly evident that the metaverse is becoming the space for unconstrained experimentation with(in) fashion. Here, fashion develops new aesthetic languages to portray a dis-embodied humanity: the power of the digital turn in fashion can be found in the possibility to design a whole world of preference in which one's own image and narration can be designed and experienced as *digitally materialized*.

3. Designing with(in) more-than-human materialities

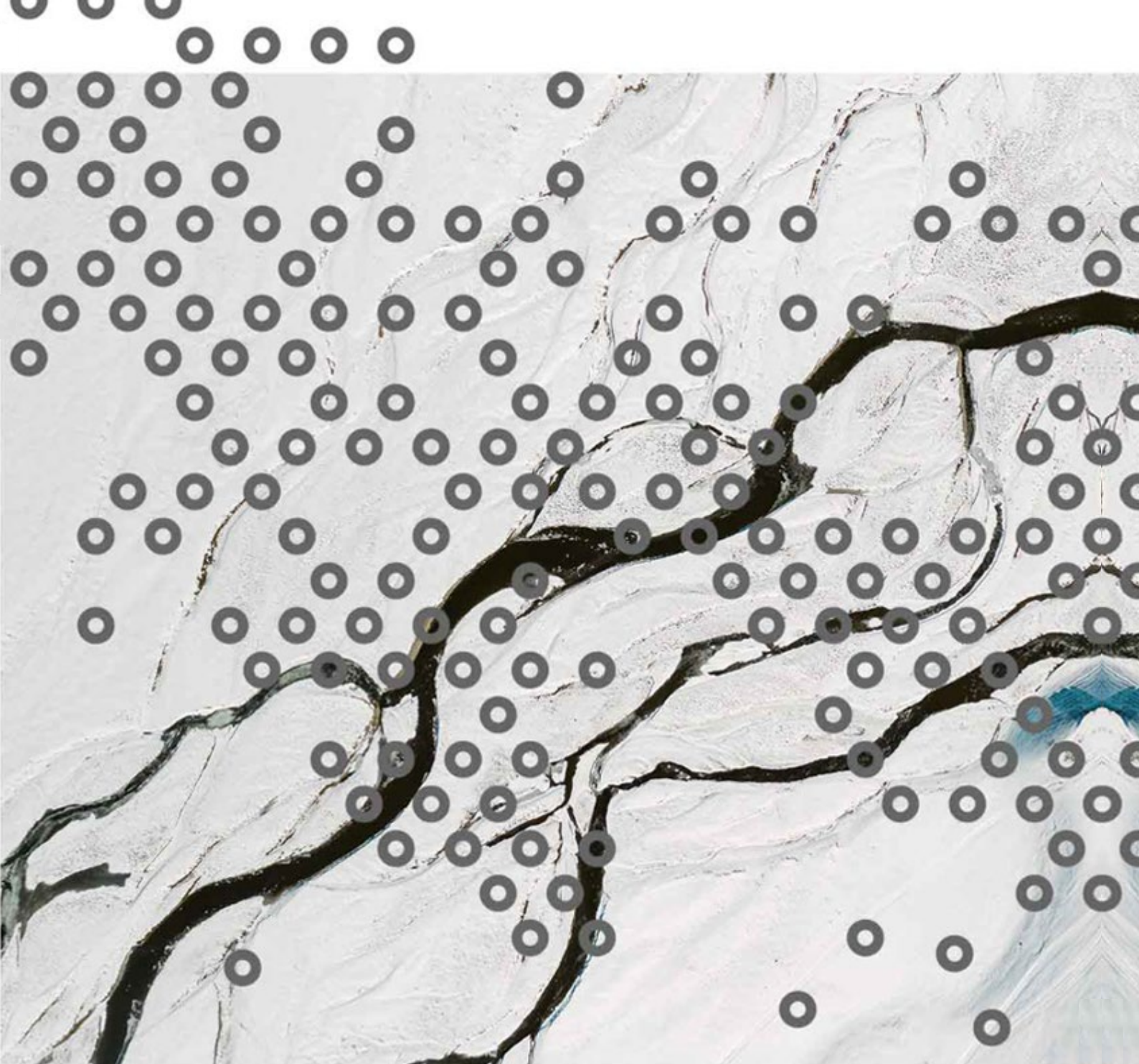
The trajectories discussed so far portray the layers of the ongoing Transformation Era, experienced through a change of perspective from different points of view, faceted as fashion itself: *Design and Production, Communication and Marketing, Culture and Society*. The digital and sustainable transition have been shaping these three dimensions in a disruptive way, so that fashion designers have new roles to play in the designing process, relying on a wide variety of digital tools which can be used and managed simultaneously. In this sense, designers are beginning to handle more-than-human materialities. From raw materials like cotton to smart materials like digital films and materials made of chains of biological elements, from the intangibility of digital fabrics to the tactility of advanced textiles: handling more-than-human materialities requires a dynamic concept of life in which human bodies, fibers, fabrics, garments and technologies are inextricably entangled. Designers have historically been asked to conceive the "new material asset of society" and today, by thinking with/through/by more-than human materials, they are encountering new design parameters and approaches related to wearable products, provoking a metamorphosis that could be read as the foundations of a next consciousness for fashion and the new meanings of dress.

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