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Fashion Imagery in the Digital Age

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Abstract

In recent years, digital transformation has challenged fashion's association with materiality and touch. Clothing, traditionally associated with craftsmanship and materiality, is emerging in immaterial spaces composed of pixels and data. This shift raises the question: To what extent does digitally constructed clothing draw its meaning from traditional practices of dressing? Does it merely extend these established meanings into the digital realm, or does it generate an entirely different system, independent of its physical equivalent?

This paper critically explores digital fashion, not only as a technological development, but also as a cultural phenomenon that challenges conventional notions of the act of dressing and the aesthetics achieved by that act. To this end, it will draw on the theoretical framework of Jean Baudrillard's concept as a key theorist of simulation and hyperreality, as well as Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of fashion as a language that communicates through symbols, styles, and cultural codes. The paper explores whether digital clothing represents a new form and meaning of creative expression or merely reproduces established forms and meanings of traditional clothing. The research and demonstration rely on original digital fashion designs, which serve as tools for examining new meanings in digital fashion.

Keywords: digital fashion, simulation, hyperreality, sign system, democratization.

Introduction

Creativity is not just a matter of innate talent, according to Lawson (2014), and the genius of a fashion designer goes beyond the talent for illustrating ideas. It lies in the mastery of materials, composed of thread, construction, and shell formation, but also in the ability to conceptualize, innovate, and elevate ideas beyond the expected. In recent years, digital fashion has set new rules and challenges for designers (Gershak, 2022), significantly changing the processes of creation, presentation, and use of clothing. This way of designing fashion challenges traditional methods by existing solely as a visual representation consumed through a digital interface, rather than through physical fabrication. It is coded, simulated, and visualized, and exists only as pixels and data (Boughlala & Smelik, 2024).

If fashion, which changes from season to season, has always been about the latest transformations expressed through fabric, form, and identity, then digital fashion is a dramatic change (Boughlala & Smelik, 2024) that radically departs from its traditional foundations. In addition to the lack of materiality in clothing, the presentation of clothing itself is not necessarily represented on a human body, although it can be a body represented by an avatar, where the clothing is purely cosmetically adapted to the avatar (Boughlala & Smelik, 2024). The body itself can at some point represent a hybrid entity, a fluid intersection between the virtual and the real (Avelar, 2012). In some cases, the body is completely absent, and the clothing functions as an autonomous visual and symbolic entity separate from materiality. Thus, separated from the characteristics of materiality and use, it is investigated whether fashion as digital no longer invokes physicality, but functions in an autonomous visual and symbolic connotation.

To explore the question of interest in the study, the author draws on two critical perspectives: Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of fashion as a language and Jean Baudrillard's concepts of hyperreality and simulation. The first author, who deals with the language of fashion, and the second with the nature of images, signs, and their ability to replace or even nullify reality, are very important as perspectives that allow a deeper understanding of digital fashion.

By analyzing authorial digital fashion creations presented as images, it will be examined whether digital fashion is a new dimension of viewing fashion authorship, a new semiotic scene or just a reconfiguration of existing codes. We do not know whether we are on the threshold of a new era in fashion, in which textiles will no longer be necessary in the composition of design, where ownership will no longer

be physical, or the body itself will no longer be the traditional medium for representing and experiencing clothing.

Digital Fashion as a Language Without Limits

According to Roland Barthes, fashion is a system of signs organized in a semiotic language through which cultural meanings are conveyed. In addition to a person's appearance being a deliberately or unintentionally structured ensemble of clothing, it is also a code that expresses the way of representation in society, shapes identity, and expresses itself symbolically. In The Fashion System (1967), Barthes explains that signs in fashion function like words in a text, and the identification of these signs cannot be done only through visible characteristics, but also through cultural and linguistic frameworks.

The proliferation of digital fashion amps up Barthes's hypothesis. Considering that fashion, according to Barthes, is a sign system that depicts new meanings beyond its practical use, digital fashion is just ahead of the game in the semiotic system. Without any fabric, sewing, or wearability, garments are freed from their function, but go back to being mere signifiers. In a case when fashion is just technical and visual and is not worn or handled, it doesn't show as an item for use, but as a language to understand.

New media fashion is no longer necessarily connected to the human body, limited by fabric and the skills of the textile worker. Clothing that is digitally created is not tangible; it is images, simulations, and codes, although computer skills and design knowledge are needed to realize and curate those images. However, it still carries a message and can even communicate with someone. Can Barthes' semiotic theory help communicate the language of digital fashion, or is an entirely different system of articulation needed in the new environments?

New System of Signs Without Substance

In The Fashion System (1967), Barthes defined fashion as operating through three interconnected layers of meaning: the vestimentary code, the terminological code, and the rhetorical code.

The Vestimentary Code refers to the visible characteristics of clothing, or the fabric of the garment, the seams, and the material of the garment. This is the most significantly changed element in the transition to digital fashion. The physical cotton

T-shirt, as shown in Figure 1, represents this code with its materialization, while the digital T-shirt that is rendered without texture, although it looks the same, is only a simulation that uses several components to achieve the result. It is a visual file that does not allow it to be physically worn. From a visual point of view, the image constitutes all the basic characteristics of the cotton T-shirt, borrowing its shape, surface, and fiber organization to give the user an experience of the material used.

However, when I present both garments side by side, as in this document, a paradox emerges. Neither photograph, in this act of representation, carries the segment of tactility. Even the physical T-shirt, when *Abstract*ed into a photograph, loses its sensory reality and is dependent only on sight. If the photograph is of high resolution, one can conclude that it is cotton and classify it as a cotton T-shirt. The digital T-shirt explicitly emphasizes its immateriality. In order to capture the definition of the T-shirt and its materiality, one must consider all the factors that contribute to perceiving the object as a T-shirt. If the designer is exceptionally talented and fluent in using digital platforms, they will be able to present materiality hyperrealistically. This suggests that fashion, both in digital and physical form, when translated into photography, becomes a visual philosophy separated from the haptic experience of the body, while simultaneously becoming a challenge for technical fluency, whether through a camera or software. In this context, digital fashion does not create a separation from touch; it only radicalizes and makes visible a condition that already exists latently in contemporary fashion media.

The Terminological Code refers to the changes and the description of new clothes in the fashion sector by the use of editorials, catalogues, or media descriptions. Figure 2 in the middle defines a new textile technique (Trapunto), which means that traditional fashion still heavily relies on craft-centric vocabulary, and even more so with the integration of expressive elements that overlap the sensory dimension of the performance. Quite the opposite, from the figures that come from The Fabrikant's Instagram account, more specific descriptions are used, such as "digital identity," "elevate yourself," and "next level of being," which not only create a new terminological layer but also indicate a shift from dependence on textile knowledge to digital fluency and conceptual imagination.

Figure 1.

Comparison of a cotton T-shirt (physical garment) and a 3D rendered shirt (digital garment).



Figure 2.

Terminological Code: Left - Vogue editorial featuring trapunto technique; Right - Instagram caption in The Fabricant emphasizing digital identity.



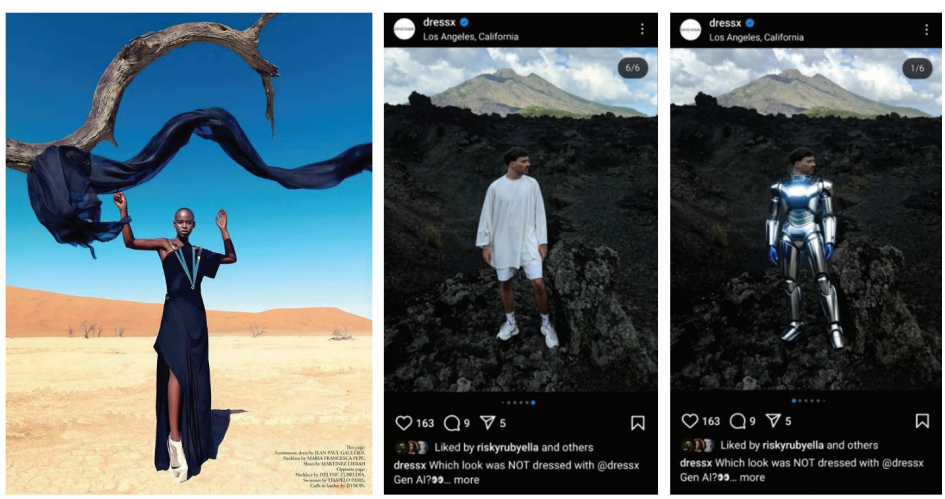
The Rhetorical Code is a pictorial depiction of the characteristics of the fashion, from the presentation of the fashion in the print media to the advertising, which are the most influential factors of the changes in the fashion. (Jobling, 2017) A photograph on the left in Figure 3 is the one that can be seen in the traditional fashion editorial, the exaggerated gesture, the styled and choreographed appearance,

and the chosen setting. The elements of the final product are, in fact, carefully selected. Two Instagram posts from a DressX account on the right side demonstrate the same concept as before, showing how different means of communication have changed the use of visual rhetoric. As one can see from the first photo, the head is wearing some sort of a mask that is very clearly made to look like a real landscape of the world, and the second is the same person in the same position but wearing some kind of holographic clothes, and at the same time, has been digitally "dressed" in AR clothing. These clothes are made for the sole purpose of being displayed in the image. In this case, the storyline is not dictated by the usage of garments but by the showcasing of your simulations for others to see and interact with.

Both images operate in the realm of visual persuasion. Identity is constructed through fabric and desert light; the other through simulation and screen. In both cases, the rhetorical code becomes a tool for constructing meaning around clothing, whether sewn or simulated.

Figure 3.

Rhetorical Code - Left: Image from fashion editorial - Right: Instagram post on DressX profile with AR try-on.

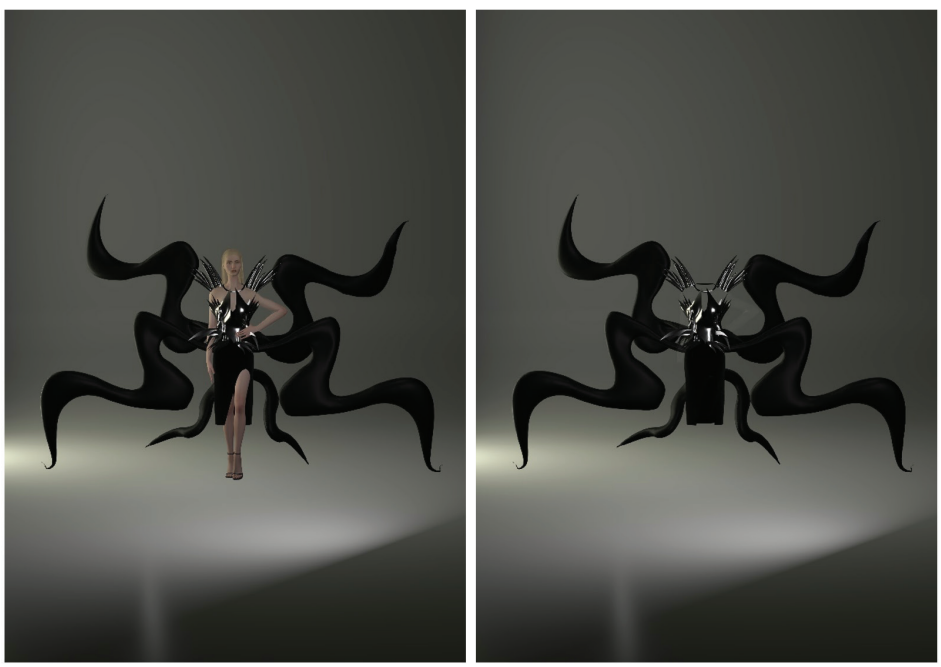


In the digital realm, clothing is no longer tied to fabric, seams, or the body itself. If a digital dress is never sewn, then, according to Barthes' grammar, it is articulated. Rather than being worn, it is imposed as a photograph (Elin, 2015). The absence of a body further complicates the relationship of digital fashion to traditional fashion. As shown in Figure 4, digital clothing can exist independently of the

entire body, unlike physical clothing that loses its form in the absence of a body. In some cases, digital clothing is visualized on avatars or hybrid entities; in others, it floats autonomously in virtual environments. These garments are not worn but projected, deprived of physical contact, and yet contain symbolic resonance. They still participate in social exchange, aesthetic discourse, and cultural identity (Entwistle, 2023).

Figure 4.

Image of a dressed body vs dress with no body.



This situation raises a very interesting perspective on the concept of mimesis in the context of digital fashion. Traditionally, mimesis refers to the imitation of reality, where clothing is perceived through its relationship to the body. (Yang & Kwon, 2009) However, in the digital realm, our cognitive ability to recognize form and shape allows us to "see" and understand clothing even in the absence of a physical body. This is because our understanding of the body is culturally and cognitively constructed, because we have an internal imaginary model of the human body and how clothing should be placed on it. In other words, photography or digital design can "curate" clothing in the form of a body without that body actually existing, because the viewer automatically maps the shape of the known human body.

In this regard, Norris and Cantoni (2022) suggest that digital transformation does not abolish the semiotic logic of fashion. We will examine how it extends it into new media and cultural frameworks, which requires greater cultural sensitivity and attention to the different interpretations of fashion in a global context. Digital fashion may still be a big change, but its semiotic code still operates under the same rules as that of the physical/virtual wearables that human beings would always use to interact with their environment.

The Sign Swallows the Object

In his analysis of the language of fashion, Barthes suggests that the meaning of clothing always goes beyond the material form itself. Take, for example, the "black dress" which is almost never seen as a simple dress, but rather comes with a certain connotation of power, enigma or grace. Words alone are not enough to convey the nature of the form, so the language of signified meaning is invoked, which relies on the fabric, silhouette and other characteristics of the garment to construct its cultural and symbolic value. In the virtual world, this mechanism is intensified.

The Fabricant is a prime example of this shift, where clothing is made only visually. The objects they create are simultaneously imagined, advertised, and sold without any physical manifestation. Here, digital fashion is the beginning and end of the concept, and the endpoint lies at the heart of Roland Barthes' concept of fashion as language. This autonomy of digital fashion raises essential questions. One of these questions is: If fashion is a communication system, then digital fashion can be understood as an *Abstract*ed version of traditional fashion, but if it is a multisensory experience, especially considering the relationship between the body and the material, then the crucial opportunity for digital fashion to completely separate itself from traditional fashion and become a new paradigm of expression is lost.

Rather than reaching a conclusion yet, a new semiotic field of research has been opened. Table 1 below presents the questions that arise from the confrontation between Barthes's theory and the digital paradigm, and also indicates their interdependence.

Jenss and Hofmann (2013) state that fashion must be understood as a lived experience. It plays an intimate material game that defines appearance through the way the body feels, moves, and presents itself. Materiality evokes affective dimensions through the body, such as the excitement of novelty, comfort or discomfort, and often anxiety about the social evaluation of appearance. Therefore, clothing, as an object of material culture, is "closest" to the body (Lehnert & Mentges, 2013).

Digital fashion interrupts the intimate material play. When clothing exists only as a code or visualization, the tactile encounter disappears and is replaced by pure visuality. The body ceases to feel the clothing because it becomes only a photograph. What Barthes defined as the sign function is here separated from any material referent. The question remains: can digital fashion compensate for the loss of material intimacy with new forms of affect, spectacle, surprise, or the desire to possess tokens, needs that are born in virtual space?

Table 1

Transformation of Barthes' Fashion System in the Digital Era

Barthes' Code	Traditional Fashion	Digital Fashion	Questions Raised
Vestimentary Code	Physical garment (fabric, cut, seams, worn on the body)	Virtual garment (pixelated, rendered, imposed on images or avatars)	Can clothing exist without touch, wear, or weight?
Terminological Code	Fashion writing: editorials, descriptions in magazines	Metadata, hashtags, product captions, algorithmic tagging	Who constructs meaning? Editors, consumers, or algorithmic platforms?
Rhetorical Code	Fashion photography, advertisements	AR filters, social media images, NFTs, metaverse representations	Are we seeing fashion narratives or performing it for a platform's algorithmic gaze?
Function of the Sign	Signifies identity, class, taste, ideology	Signals digital capital, aesthetics, collectibility, and social presence	Does visuality replace material presence in defining status and self?
Material Reference Point	Always tied back to the body, even in *Abstract*ion	Body can be absent or hybrid (avatars, digital mannequins)	Is fashion still about dressing, or about being seen wearing?

This table outlines how Barthes' semiotic framework applies to digital fashion

The table presented here represents the change of the fashion language as considered by Barthes. The vestimentary code, which has been traditionally heavily reliant on physical clothing, goes digital, and thus it loses its material basis. The body and fabric are replaced by avatars and pixels. Understanding this, people might think that fashion that is neither worn nor is it only seen is called fashion, and ask if this semiotic analysis can be applied to it.

When it comes to the terminology, the difference is in the narrative authorship, which was traditionally dominated by fashion critics and journalists, but now is controlled by algorithms, hashtags, and descriptive titles.

The third aspect of the rhetorical code is the trend of associating with performativity. Thus, digital fashion is created for the algorithmic review that is different from the audience of traditional fashion photography, where the meaning was formed through the edited shots and the narrator's voice. In digital fashion, the audience can engage with the fashion by liking, sharing, or virtually trying on the pieces, which is the reason why the clothing is "performed" for such an audience.

The table looks at the sign once more, but this time, the sign, which was earlier used to indicate a certain level, an identity, or a cultural background through its physical properties, is portrayed as a part of an *Abstract* visual economy where the notoriety, the presence, and the collector's value of the digital goods give it meaning.

Even though Barthes' investigation into digital fashion has thrown up perplexing, unconventional questions, it is an untrodden path for semiotic analysis, where the sign doesn't diminish in power, but instead, it gains additional characteristics in a new medium.

When Clothing Becomes Code

Fashion has constantly been one of the most elusive sectors (Koohnavard, 2015) and the most perceptually manipulative because it uses a variety of materials and aesthetic components. Fashion examples that are on the edge of the human mind and material, such as Alexander McQueen's "Voss", Iris Van Herpen's "Hipnosis" or Hussein Chalayan's "Airmail Dress", are part of the same phenomenon that finds fashion on the border of matter and performance. But no matter how *Abstract* they are in their concepts, they still give off the vibe of being signs that are part of the physical world.

Jean Baudrillard, in his seminal work "Simulacra and Simulation" (1981), describes a world where signs no longer refer to reality, but are representations that are not reflections but substitutes. They are simulations that evoke the replacement of the real with an endless cycle of meaning, without any connection to the source or referent. In this context, if fashion has been freed from its material aspect, does it still retain the same cultural and social significance that it had as a physical object?

According to the classical view, the function of mimesis was to represent the ideal rather than the object itself (Halliwell, 2009). Here, fashion still appeared as an element of the tangible world. It was still merely a reflection of reality, something that could be worn, touched, and used, despite the fact that it was primarily related to people's social status or individuality. As "Images of Excellence: Plato's Critique of Art" deals with, Plato feared that art distances us from the truth of ideals by being not only a copy of the real but also a copy of a copy, seducing us with representations yet keeping us away from forms. Baudrillard pushed this question to its extreme. In his work "Simulac and Simulation," he completely dismantles the Platonic idea of mimesis. He argues that in the postmodern world, the original truth no longer exists for any imitator. Can we still say that fashion is a reflection of the physical or ideal world, or is it already separating, no longer based on the body, textiles, or even the concept of dressing? If digital clothing is not intended to be a copy of the original, but a sign without an origin, then what do we see when we look at fashion?

Fashion Without a Body

In the postmodern era, images are not just representations of the truth, they are the truth itself. What we call "the real" is only a simulation composed of different elements that work together so seamlessly that we forget that it is a copy (Baudrillard, 1981). In DressX's world, as we learned from the previous pictorial example, the characters in the story don't wear clothes. They only have them on. If no one sees a laptop with a digital jacket, then the jacket does not exist. A virtual shoe lacks weight, function, or material; the shoe exists only in the mind of the one who sees it.

Traditionally, the styles of the tailoring houses, the fall of the dress, the sound of satin on the skin, were just some of the ways in which fashion spoke through clothing. Just as conceptually, even the most scandalous designs would be about the human body. However, digital fashion takes a completely different approach. It

requires no weight, no movement, no physical presence. In the Metaverse, fashion is no different than a piece of skin placed on one's avatar, an image of one's digital self (Bennett-Heim & Hildegard, 2022). In such a world, there would be no need for fabric. No need for cutting. No need for physical.

So, can the digital fashion we put on our bodies really be called clothing, if its form is identified with the body, or is it just a visual representation of something that refers to clothing? If clothing is just an image, then who is wearing it: the human user behind the avatar, the avatar itself, or some hybrid of the two?

The Future of the Sign

Baudrillard's skepticism about the idea of definitive answers and truth shaped his idea that our world is merely a construction of signs that are constantly intertwined with each other and that it is therefore very difficult to see the true facts beneath the piles of signs. With this understanding, Baudrillard believed in the infinite play of signs, in the unfolding of one meaning after another in an endless series of simulations (Baudrillard, 1981). Following this logic, if fashion in the digital space is reduced to nothing more than simulation, the answer may lie in observing how these simulations shape the future of signs.

Baudrillard did not offer predictions of how things will unfold; on the contrary, his analysis can be interpreted as a diagnosis of contemporary society. According to this analysis, the representation of things surpasses reality, and images, too, lose their referents and become an endless chain of signs. As a result, fashion ceases to reflect clothing in digital representations and instead begins to signify itself in an endless game. In this case, a critical question arises: Is this the end of fashion as we know it, or merely a transformation of its essence?

Following this concept, we will visualize in a table the application of Baudrillardian thought in the era of digital fashion. The second table illustrates how digital fashion no longer refers to physical reality, but exists as a simulacrum - a simulation without an original, where signs signify themselves.

Table 2

Traditional Fashion vs. Digital Fashion: Semiotic Perspective on Baudrillard's idea

Aspect	Traditional Fashion	Digital Fashion (Baudrillard's view)
Function	Protects, warms, and dresses the body	Communicates, signals presence
Material Presence	Fabric, stitching, craftsmanship	Pixels, light, color, data simulations
Relation to reality	Rooted in the real, physical world	Exists in hyperreality, detached from real
Representation	Represents clothing and identity	Represents idea of fashion, self-referential
User Interaction	Worn physically by the body	Applied visually to avatars/ images
Purpose	Utility + Symbolic meaning	Pure sign, visual currency

From Table 2, we can see that traditional fashion is a type of fashion that operates in an environment where signs are still connected to a referent in the physical world, for example, the body, clothing, or environment. It is a combination of function and meaning, function and culture. In contrast, digital fashion separates these signs from any physical referent. What remains is a simulacrum, that is, fashion that refers to itself, and the one who is seen replaces the one who uses it. Now, instead of being a medium between the body and society, it is a medium between the self and the image. Digital fashion is freed from the force of gravity, from material limitation, and from physical wear and tear in the digital world. This change is not the end of fashion, but a reversal of its ontology. Answering some questions about the future of fashion in a hyperreal world is vital for the existence of digital fashion.

Analysis Through the Author's Digital Collection "Reflections"

In the next section, the author's digital fashion collection titled "Reflections", shown at the BH Fashion Weekend Sarajevo, 2024, will be presented and analyzed through 3 looks from the collection. The initial inspiration was a series of embroidered motifs derived from the folklore of North Macedonia and Bosnia. These motifs were digitized and processed into three-dimensional objects using Blender.

Through sculpting tools, the static motifs were manipulated and reshaped to fit the contours of the female body, resulting in complex and volumetric forms that evolve directly from the cultural model.

Figure 5.

Digital fashion collection presented at BiH fashion show in Sarajevo - part of the project "Ties that bind: BiH and MK dimensions of fashion" supported by UNESCO.

The designs were not pre-drawn and planned due to the intuitive and experimental nature of the sculpting process. After the artists had finished their 3D creations, Style3D software was used for the virtual fitting of the garments on the interactive digital mannequins. Besides highlighting the cyber and future aesthetic of the collection, the application of the chrome-silver reflective texture also serves as a metaphor of a reflective surface that mirrors the past via new media technologies.

Look 1

In the previous discussion, we saw that in the fashion system, Barthes identifies three codes through which fashion functions, namely the vestimentary, terminological, and rhetorical codes. In this design, the vestimentary code is deconstructed, starting with fabric and motif, but in the design process, function and materiality are removed. Therefore, the vestimentary code will be analyzed the most, since it could most directly contribute to the answer to the question in the thesis.

The original motif is from Skopska Blatija, an area represented in most of the Skopje Valley, North Macedonia. This embroidery is located on the sleeve of a traditional

white women's chemise called "provesliya". As shown in the image below, it is rich in color, symmetry and symbolism. Traditionally, this would have had both aesthetic and social meaning, physically worn and associated with ritual or regional affiliation. In the traditional procedure, embroidery threads were prepared from sheep fleece, from which threads were spun. This wool was dyed at home or by professional dyers in the bazaars. At home, they most often dyed black, using walnut shells, leaves, and root, with the addition of "karaboja (black color)" and ash. The red, due to its delicacy, was obtained from professional dyers. At home, they could obtain it with purchased dyes and alum, sometimes from burdock roots (Krsteva, 1975).

Figure 6.

White chemise called "provesliya", and traditional embroidery motif from Skopska Blatija.



The original embroidery motifs were obtained by outlining and filling the embroidery. The outlining was done with black woolen threads in a technique called "obloz", and the filling was done with oblique stitches "polnezh" (Krsteva, 1975). These techniques are just a glimpse into the rich vocabulary and labor-intensive processes of traditional Macedonian embroidery, which includes a wide array of stitches, materials, and symbolic codes that contribute to its vivid chromatic expression. By contrast, the motifs in the digital collection were not created through

such gradual, tactile procedures. Instead, they were appropriated and transformed, i.e., outlined, digitized, and reimagined in 3D software, ultimately modified to a point of near-unrecognizability. This development of techniques from hand to machine, or from textile to code, signifies not only a change in method, but also in meaning, as the motif moves away from its cultural and material origins and enters a new visual and symbolic register.

In the digital version, the embroidery is transformed into a fluid, metallic sculpture where there is no textile, no stitch, and no utilitarian function. The motif is transformed into a visual entity that exists independently of traditional materiality or utilitarian function. According to Barthes, this removes the dress from the material code of "clothing" and inserts it fully into the rhetorical code, which is a system of representation that circulates through the images. This digital dress, translated through Barthes's dictionary, would be a pure sign, not a dress in the traditional sense, but a visual articulation of a heritage that is transmuted through digital aesthetics. It is a visual text, not a wearable object.

If we discuss design from Baudrillard's perspective, is it actually a third-order simulacrum, a copy without an original, or more precisely, formulated through the example, a copy of a cultural memory that no longer depends on its material source?

The motif of embroidery is deeply *Abstract*ed in the 3D process, which no longer reflects the function or craft of embroidery. It simulates its aesthetic memory, not textile reality. The chromatic surface, mirrored, cold, reflective, embodies hyperreality, and the garment reflects itself and its digital environment. What was once tied to ritual and utility becomes a spectacle, existing only for the screen. In continuation, further we will look at a table that explains the lines that Baudrillard discusses in his work. But we will first continue with the analysis of the other two motives.

Figure 7.

Digital representation of the first look, the object, the object on the avatar, the object and the avatar in digital created surrounding.



Look 2

The second view in the "Reflections" collection presents an embroidery found on the lower part of a traditional women's shirt from Kumanovo, North Macedonia. They were known as "sareni koshuli" (colorful chemises) (Krsteva, 1975). In its original form, this representation of embroidery is made of threads. However,

digitally it undergoes a radical transformation. Its surface is extruded and twisted through a sculptural process of distortion. The original embroidery becomes barely recognizable. The pixelated fragments with sharp edges appear as simulacrums of the "code" of the embroidery, but they no longer refer to the fabric, nor to its original function.

Figure 8.

Embroidery from the lower part of the chemise



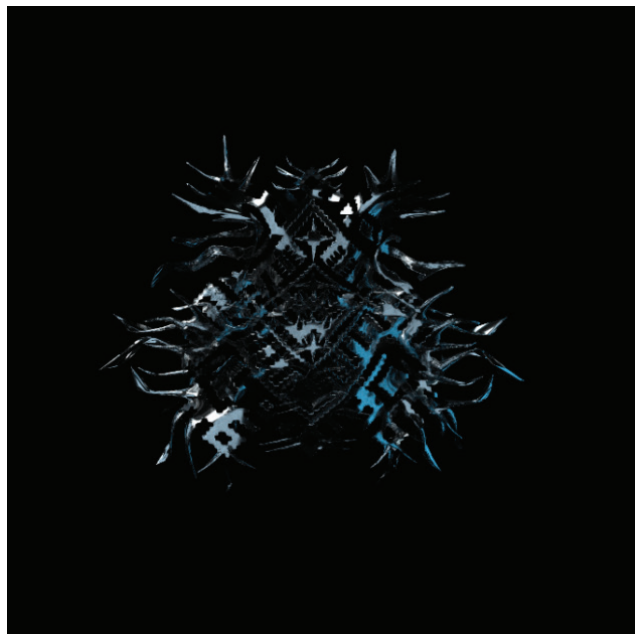
Barthes's written clothing and Baudrillard's hyperreality converge here. The motif, once part of a physical system of signs bound to the body, is now visualized through a chrome sheath, worn without touching, seen without handling. In a Barthesian sense, it no longer belongs to the vestimentary code but to the rhetorical one, circulating in the digital ether as an image-clothing. Its only reality is that which it visually signifies.

When we adapt the design of this digital garment to Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, we obtain a multilayered system of meaning.

The signifier becomes the form itself, which is an aggressive, spiky, chrome silhouette. It is visually striking, metallic, and reflective. It evokes neither the softness of textiles nor the familiarity of traditional clothing, but rather suggests a futuristic armor, alien and decorative.

Figure 9.

Clothing as a signifier



The signified functions on a more *Abstract* plane. It evokes notions of protection, sacredness, and even resistance, but not through some utilitarian function, but through the cultural echoes embedded in the distorted motif of the embroidery from which it emerges. It is not heritage as it was worn, but heritage reinterpreted and displaced from its origins, creating new affective and symbolic associations.

Figure 10.

The signified: the digitally sculpted garment in relation to the avatar's body, where cultural memory is Abstracted into symbolic, affective form.



The function of this garment, then, is not to be worn in the physical sense but to be seen, circulated, and communicated visually through augmented reality, Instagram posts, or digital showrooms in metaverse environments. It does not touch the skin but provokes the eye. Its power lies not in physical presence but in symbolic performance. Meaning is no longer rooted in craft, process, or physical labor, but in concept, context, and visual execution. In this new visual economy, heritage is not preserved, but rather aestheticized. It is fluid, transformed into fluid, manipulable data that can be endlessly rendered, replicated, or reshaped for the screen. The embroidery that once spoke through thread now speaks through light and pixels, a hyperreal echo of a culture designed for speculative futures.

Figure 11.

Digital clothing in a hyperreal environment that is unrelated to anything close to the initial inspiration. The object on the body is not functioning as clothing but as an object that floats around the body and adds to the aesthetic value of the whole picture.

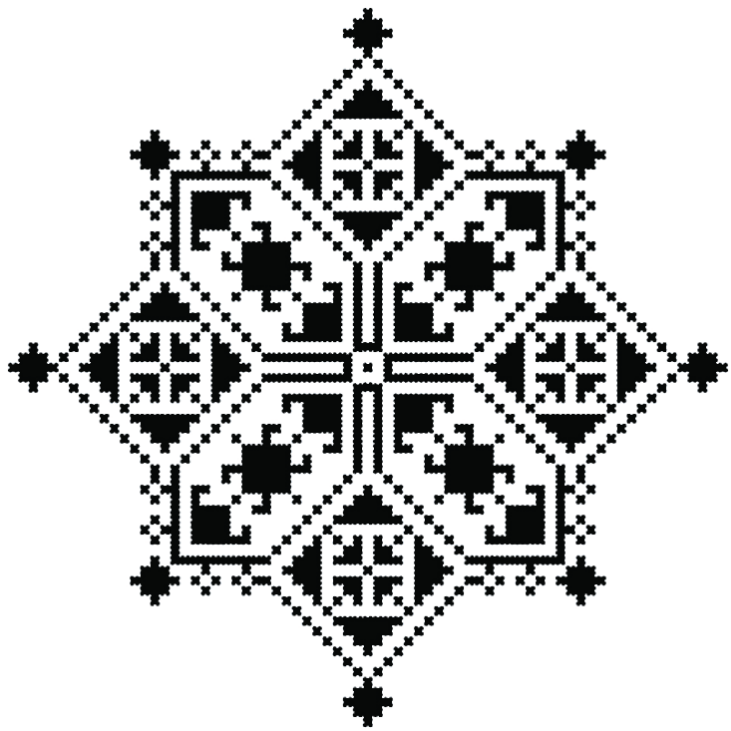


Look 3

The third look from the "Reflections" collection is built on the intricate geometry of "Zmijanski Embroidery," a traditional Bosnian cross-stitch embroidery recognized by UNESCO as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Historically used to decorate women's clothing and household textiles, this embroidery technique has a deep emotional meaning, especially among displaced populations, evoking values of continuity, nonverbal communication, and respect for cultural differences.

Figure 12.

Motif from Bosnian embroidery - "Zmijanje embroidery".



In this digital reinterpretation, the motif is translated into a sculptural chrome form. The embroidery is no longer sewn into fabric, but modeled in three-dimensional components, arranged around the digital body like a fragmented memory recomposed through light and reflection. This transformation is not just aesthetic; it is rather conceptual.

Figure 13.

Bosnian motif as an object that represents a dress.



Figure 14.

Digital representation of the object, the object on the avatar, the object and the avatar in digital created surrounding.



This simulation opens up new possibilities. It demonstrates how digital fashion can be a platform for cultural collaboration, allowing traditional symbols to be reimagined, hybridized, and shared across borders. Zmijanski's motif is no longer tied to his local materials, nor to his original techniques. Instead, it is elevated to a new form of expression, one that speaks through code, light, and gesture. This is not just a fusion of styles, but a gesture of mutual respect, shared narrative, and future-oriented creativity.

This piece, which reinterprets Zmijanski's embroidery through Blender and Style3D, exists not to be worn but to communicate. It does not preserve the utilitarian legacy of embroidery (warmth, modesty, ritual use) but rather amplifies its symbolic charge through transformation into form, reflection, and presence in digital realms.

This simulation opens up new creative and cultural possibilities. It reveals how digital fashion can serve as a platform for cultural collaboration, where traditional symbols are not only preserved but also reimagined, hybridized, and shared across borders. In this context, the motif of the Snake Embroidery is no longer tied to its material origins or the physical techniques of cross-stitching. Instead, it is transformed into a visual language expressed in code, light, and movement. Through this process, the motif enters what Jean Baudrillard would describe as the third and fourth orders of simulacra, in which the sign no longer refers to a stable origin but becomes self-referential, a pure simulation. Digital clothing does not imitate physical clothing, but creates its own logic, separate from utility or tradition, while still evoking cultural memory. As such, simulation becomes a new kind of fashion expression, symbolic and experiential. Tradition becomes fluid and transcultural. Following Baudrillard, one could say that these digital pieces no longer hide reality but generate a new one. A world in which fashion, as a sign, circulates freely in the hyperreal, opening up dimensions that are aesthetic, emotional, and intercultural.

Key Insights from the Analysis

Through the analysis of the three looks, it was shown how traditional signs of fashion, such as material, form, and body, are transformed into digital signifiers that exist only in the visual sphere. Each creation functions as a different level of simulation, developing from a traditional motif to a fully autonomous digital sign. Thus, the research showed that digital fashion does not deny tradition but translates it into a new medium, where the body, fabric, and meaning are reinterpreted through code, light, and reflection.

Having considered the way in which the language of fashion functions in Barthes and the process of simulation in Baudrillard, we can move on to a final conclusion, where digital fashion positions itself between tradition, technology, and the future of meaning.

Conclusion

We have seen that digital fashion represents a point of intersection between tradition and the future, between the body and the screen, the material and the virtual. Through it, fabric and texture are transformed into code, and craft into an algorithm. However, the essence of fashion as a form of expression remains present to create meaning, to represent identity, or, in this case, to maintain a cultural dialogue.

In the spirit of Roland Barthes, it can be said that digital fashion radicalizes the language of fashion by freeing clothing from its utilitarian function and transforming it into a pure signifier.

According to Baudrillard's levels, where he defines the order of signs, fashion no longer reflects reality but creates it. Traditional embroidery becomes a hologram, authenticity is replaced by a virtual replica, and cultural memory is recreated as a visual code. Digital fashion does not deny the original; rather, it continues its meaning in another space, the hyperreal.

If we look back far enough from Aristotle's perspective, this phenomenon can be understood as a new kind of μίμησις (mimesis). Not copying nature, but creating a new reality that expands human creativity.

Contemporary theorists, such as Anneke Smelick, see fashion as an affective and political space. In this context, digital fashion is not an escape from the material but a new place where traditional techniques, such as embroidery, are translated into digital memory, thus becoming visible to a global audience, conveying global messages.

However, digital fashion is neither a break with tradition nor a futurist fantasy without foundation. It is a new form of cultural communication, which turns fashion into an experimental space for dialogue between past and future, matter and image, original and simulation. It raises the question not of whether fashion will survive as such, but of how it will continue to mean in a world where the real and the digital are inextricably intertwined.

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