

This Deleuzian Century

Art, Activism, Life

Edited by
Rosi Braidotti and Rick Dolphijn



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Fashion never is, but always becomes.
Georg Simmel¹

The folds in the soul resemble the pleats of matter.
Gilles Deleuze²

A Most Baroque Fold

Fashion, today, is all about creative performances, affective experiences and liquid identities. This raises the question of whether fashion can be understood in terms of representation and signification, which are the dominant terms within semiotic and sociological approaches in Fashion Studies today. This article advances the argument that fashion theory needs to be developed along new lines in order to address changes in contemporary fashion design. Rather than focus on image, sign or meaning, I will explore a different theoretical framework within cultural studies of fashion, by proposing to work with Gilles Deleuze's concept of the fold. For Deleuze the fold is a dynamic and creative force that opens the subject up to a process of infinite becoming. He uses the concept of the fold to undermine the idea that subjectivity consists of an opposition between interiority and exteriority.³ The fold can then be understood as an account of producing one's subjectivity by all kinds of foldings, such as the folding of the world into one's self. The fold functions as an interface between the inside and the outside, depth and surface, being and appearing, and as such demolishes binary oppositions. Deleuze claims that the fold is a concept to think of subjectivity as a process of becoming. Deleuze's concept of the Baroque fold has inspired me to unwrap the folds of modern fashion.

¹ Georg Simmel, 2011 (1895). 'Zur Psychologie der Mode. Sociologische Studie.' Zygmunt Bauman paraphrases Simmel's sentence in *Culture in a Liquid Modern World*. Oxford: Polity, p. 18. n.p., my translation. Retrieved from <<http://www.mode.theorie.de/Simmel-George.861.0.html>>, October 2013. As far as I know, this short article is not translated in English. The German original phrase reads: 'Sie [die Mode] ist nie, sondern wird immer'.

² Gilles Deleuze, 1988. *Le pli. Leibniz et le baroque*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, p. 132. In : Tom Conley (trans.), 1993. *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. The French original phrase reads : 'Les plis dans l'âme ressemblent aux replis de la matière'.

³ Simon O'Sullivan, 2005. Entry on 'Fold.' In: Adrian Parr (ed.), 2005. *The Deleuze Dictionary*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 103.

Nowhere is the constantly vibrating dynamic and creative force of the fold more visible and palpable than in the pleats, creases, draperies, furrows, bows and ribbons of fashion. I hope to show that re-reading fashion through the notion of the fold, allows for a move beyond a humanist exercise that limits fashion to representational meaning or to the confines of the human body. As avant-garde fashion often probes the limits of signification or of what a body can do, the notion of the fold helps to see how experimental designs set the body in-motion, liberating it from the dominant modes of identity and subjectivity in the consumerist world of fast fashion. In doing so, I will assess how the fold enables us to better understand the fluidity of the world of fashion: its materiality, affectivity and performativity. In order to appreciate how the fold works in fashion and how it relates to Deleuze's reading of the Baroque, I first explore early designs of the fold by fashion designers Mariano Fortuny, Madeleine Vionnet and Madame Grès in the first half of the twentieth century. I will then move on to relate the deleuzian concept of the fold to the avant-garde fashion of Japanese designers Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto, and the Dutch baroque fashion designs of Viktor & Rolf.

Mariano Fortuny was among the first to develop a special, patented, technology to create hundreds of pleats in silk – about 450 pleats in a strip of cloth of one meter. The pleats change colour in accordance with movement and the reflections of light. The fluid, flowing, flexible materials of silk in his famous 'Delphos' gown (dating from 1907) both hugged and liberated the body. The dress was considered highly sensual because it revealed the natural curves of the female body, releasing it from its tortuous corset.⁴ At the time it was known as 'the lingerie dress' as it made an obvious reference to underwear from ancient times and introduced a modern and body-conscious form, 'flowing effortlessly over the contours of female forms',⁵ which suggested at the time an almost indecent exposure of the female body. Initially it was therefore only worn as a gown at home.⁶ Adornment with glass beads, dazzling colours, and rich prints, made the dresses more lavish and the dress soon became an all-time favourite. The intense colours added to the luxury and sensuality of the popular dress, which was especially

⁴ Linda Watson, 2004. *20th Century Fashion*. New York: Firefly Books, p. 230.

⁵ Gillion Carrara, 2010. 'Entry on Mariano Fortuny.' In: Valerie Steele (ed.), *The Berg Companion to Fashion*. Oxford: Berg, p. 352.

⁶ Akiko Fukai, 2002. *et al., Fashion. A History from the 18th to the 20th Century. The Collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute*. Köln etc.: Taschen. Vol. II., pp. 370-383.

embraced by dancers and actresses like Elenora Duse, Isadora Duncan, and Dorothy and Lillian Gish.⁷ The sensuous appeal of the dress, which opened up like a harmonica or a fan by the movements of the body, was also picked up in literature; Marcel Proust referred to Fortuny and the dress many times in his *À la recherche du temps perdu*.⁸

The Delphos dress was advocated by artist and reform movements such as *The Aesthetic Movement* and the *Artistic Dress Movement*, because it created a modern silhouette that did not require the restrictive corset (De Osma, 1994, p.88). In its very simplicity, based on the Greek *chiton*, the dress was quite different from the voluminous fashion that preceded it, or the neo-baroque that we recognize in the sculptural folds of the Goddess dress by Madeleine Vionnet at the same time. Fortuny's designs are considered 'timeless and modern in the truest sense of the word' (Watson, 2004, p.230). In my view, the modern appeal lies in the way that the pleated gowns dressed but also *undressed* the body, thus producing a body that could move freely rather than just covering it up. As such, Fortuny's designs questioned fashion as a moral practice of dressing; what psychoanalyst John Flügel has called the negative impulse of modesty.⁹ For Flügel, modesty is an inhibitory impulse directed against the sexual display of the naked body. The body-hugging pleats of the Fortuny's designs change or at least play upon the social prohibition that the body be covered for the sake of modesty. The dresses open up the all too obvious link between fashion and decency, allowing for a greater freedom of the body to move and for a greater ambivalence in the play of showing off the contours of the body while still covering the flesh.

Madeleine Vionnet was equally famous for her dresses, which, like Fortuny's, referred to Greek drapery. Through particular application of the bias cut she tried 'to achieve maximum fluidity, enhancing movement and

⁷ Guillermo de Osma, 1994. *Fortuny. The Life and Work of Mariano Fortuny*. London: Aurum Press.

⁸ Many sources on Internet refer to Marcel Proust in this respect. One of the best entries on Fortuny is Judith Davidsen, jdavidsen.wordpress.com, May 2, 2013. She claims Proust refers to Fortuny or his dresses sixteen times in *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Source: < <http://jdavidsen.wordpress.com/tag/delphos-gown/> > Retrieved 30-10-2013.

⁹ J.C. Flügel, 1950. *The Psychology of Clothes*. London: The Hogarth Press, p. 54.

flexibility'¹⁰ and to 'rethink the relationship between fabric and flesh' (Arnold, 2010, p.712). In the 1930s another couturier, Madame Grès, also created a hallmark for her 'Grecian' gowns. In Vionnet's and Grès' draped dresses we can recognize the 'dialectic of cloth and body [that] is the secret of Greek art',¹¹ which Anne Hollander explains as the perfect balance of 'natural observation and skillful abstraction' (Hollander, 1988, p.9) never privileging either the body or the drapery. Vionnet's designs created 'a seamless construct [...] where body and clothing become one – the woman's body is not concealed or revealed by the cloth but is both at the same time'.¹² Yet, whilst for Gen Doy, Vionnet's draped dresses are an example of a classicist mingling of body and cloth in a modern rendition, there are certain – famous – photographs that suggest to me a more dramatic use of draped fabric that is fluttering and billowing in the wind. A picture of 'Model in Goddess dress by Vionnet'¹³ shows the typical posing of a model while the wind is blowing from a machine, simulating the impression of granting movement to the clothes, in a position that reminds us of Greek or Roman reliefs with dancing nymphs or goddesses. The image is reminiscent of the Running Niobid of Greek times (early third century B.C.). For Hollander this sculpture is an example of Greek idealism, because the body is still visible under the draped cloth, and hence is an amalgam of body and drapery (Hollander, 1988, p.9)¹⁴. In the fashion picture, too, the dress conceals the body as we see no naked flesh, but also reveals it by hugging its contours. While the dress may point to Greek drapery, the folds of the dress and scarf in this particular picture are not that far removed from the high baroque sculptures of Bernini, especially his famous ecstasy of the holy Teresa d'Avila¹⁵. Equally, the dramatic designs of Madame Grès were almost sculpted, 'often consisting of puffed, molded, and three-dimensionally

¹⁰ Rebecca Arnold, 2010. 'Entry on Madeleine Vionnet.' In: Valerie Steele (ed.), *The Berg Companion to Fashion*. Oxford: Berg, p. 711.

¹¹ Anne Hollander, 1988 (1975). *Seeing Through Clothes*. London & New York: Penguin, p. 5.

¹² Gen Doy, 2002. *Drapery. Classicism and Barbarism in Visual Culture*. London: I.B. Tauris, p. 88.

¹³ Photographer George Hoyningen-Huene, c. 1931. Black and white photograph 'Model in Goddess dress by Vionnet.'

¹⁴ The page also contains a picture of the Niobid.

¹⁵ Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1647-1652. 'The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa', Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome.

shaped elements that billowed and fell away from the body'.¹⁶ Such sensuous fashion designs, then, make a use of the fold that allows the wearer to constantly open up to the world.

In fashion the fold is engaged in a game of concealing and revealing the body in-motion; it is a play of eros. In art history, however, the fold is traditionally connected to the expression of e-motion; it is a play of pathos. Already in 1436 Alberti described in his short treatise *On Painting* how the folds of drapery, gowns and dresses indicate not only movement and the display of mastery over the materiality of paint, wood or marble, but also that the folds, pleats and drapes create a sphere of agitation, drama, sensation and the expression of pure emotion. Alberti also notices the erotic effects of the clinging cloth to the body in the wind, 'showing the nude under the draperies'.¹⁷ The play of pathos is most prominently put forward in the quintessence of Baroque art: Bernini's sculptures. His sculpted draperies were typical of the Baroque and indeed helped shaping the Baroque, creating an illusion of violent movement. Where in the Renaissance the body under the cloth is often more important than the folds of the dress, here the body is no longer visible under the 'vibrating cataracts of drapery', as Rudolf Wittkower put it.¹⁸ The folds have a life of their own, quite independent of the human figure that they cover. As Anne Hollander wryly remarks: 'It had become a potential manifestation more similar to unusual turbulence in the heavens than to household linen [...]' (Hollander, 1988, p.42). A significant number of previous art historians have puritanically opposed the sensual delights and violent emotions of cloth in art of the high Baroque.¹⁹ And indeed, looking at Bernini's Saint Teresa, Vionnet's Goddess dress, or Madame Grès' Grecian evening dress, there is not only a sensual delight in the pleats and creases of the cloth, but the abundant, rising and falling folds seem to flow with deep intensity. Of course, in the sculpture Teresa's body is

¹⁶ Patricia Mears, 2010. 'Entry on Mme. Grès.' In: Valerie Steele (ed.), *The Berg Companion to Fashion*. Oxford: Berg, p. 379.

¹⁷ Leon Battista Alberti (translated and introduced by John Spencer), 1966 (1435-6). *On Painting (Della pittura)*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 81. See on the movements on the soul expressed by movements of the body or of inanimate objects, pp. 78-9.

¹⁸ Rudolf Wittkower, 1997 4th ed. (1955). *Gian Lorenzo Bernini. The Sculptor of the Roman Baroque*. London: Phaidon Press, p. 56.

¹⁹ For example: John Ruskin fiercely condemned 'bad drapery' for not conforming to prevailing standards of what is natural or ideal; see Hollander, p. 75.

hidden under a mass of drapery, whereas the dresses a few centuries later reveal as much as they conceal the body of the female model. My point here is that we see the beginning of a new form of fashion in modern times, where the folds of the cloth seem to take on a life and intensity of their own.

In the case of Bernini's sculpture, the drapery is an adequate embodiment of the essence of Teresa's experience: her religious visions. In this overt play of pathos there are also erotic overtones in the expression of her face and the carefully arranged chaos of her nun's habit. This more hidden eroticism is quite different from the sensuality of Fortuny's Delphos dress, Vionnet's Goddess dress, or Madame Grès' Grecian evening dress that are suggestive of the curves of the female body underneath the clothing. Lacan famously took Bernini's sculpture of Teresa as an example of female pleasure: 'You only have to go and look at Bernini's statue in Rome to understand immediately that she's coming, there is no doubt about it'.²⁰ *'Elle jouit'*, says Lacan, claiming that this instance of the mystic's *jouissance* is typical of a female pleasure that knows not where it comes from and – significantly within Lacanian psychoanalysis – that cannot speak (Lacan, 1985, p.147). Whereas Lacan locates Teresa's pleasure in the expression of her swooning face, Deleuze takes an altogether different take on the statue. He emphasizes Teresa's, no less intense, spiritual experience: '[...] it is Bernini who endows [the folds of clothing] with sublime form in sculpture, when marble seizes and bears to infinity folds that cannot be explained by the body, but by a spiritual adventure that can set the body ablaze' (TF, 121-122).

Interestingly, Deleuze looks at the folds of the clothing (and not at Teresa's face) to come up with a different reading of Bernini's art work in the context of the Baroque. For Deleuze the Baroque is a world where 'everything folds, unfolds, refolds'²¹. The typical mannerism of the Baroque can be identified not only in painting or sculpture, but also in its own style of dress:

The fold can be recognized first of all in the textile model of the kind implied by garments: fabric or clothing has to free its own folds from its usual subordination

²⁰ Jacques Lacan (Edited by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, translated by J. Rose), 1985. *Feminine Sexuality. Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*. New York: W.W. Norton, p. 147. The quote is from Lacan's *Seminar XX, Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*.

²¹ Tom Conley, 2005. 'Folds and Folding.' In: C. Stivale (ed.), *Gilles Deleuze. Key Concepts*. London: Acumen, p. 170.

to the finite body it covers. If there is an inherently Baroque costume, it is broad, in descending waves, billowing and flaring, surrounding the body with its independent folds, ever-multiplying, never betraying those of the body beneath: a system like *rhingrave-canons* – ample breeches bedecked with ribbons – but also vested doublets, flowing cloaks, enormous flaps, overflowing shirts, everything that forms the great Baroque contribution to clothing of the seventeenth century. (TF, 121)

Taking my lead from Deleuze's book on *The Fold*, I want to claim that in fashion the fold is engaged in a game of concealing and revealing the body in-motion; thus moving in-between pathos and eros. While the folds of fabric may reveal the body far better than nudity (TF, 122), as Deleuze writes, it is certainly also the case that the folds of fashion express new ways of affect and intensity:

The folds of clothing acquire an autonomy and a fullness that are not simply decorative effects. They convey the intensity of a spiritual force exerted on the body, either to turn it upside down or to stand or raise it up over and again, but in every event to turn it inside out and to mold its inner surfaces. (TF, 122)

Deleuze thus suggests that clothing surrounds the body and that consequently the fold is autonomous and no longer submitted to the human body that it covers. There is thus a double movement of liberation: the fold is freed from the body, just as the body is freed from the restrictions of material clothing. As I will argue later in this article, it is this gap that allows the subject – the person who wears the clothes – to open up to a process of becoming.

In using the concept of Deleuze's fold, I move away from the representational interpretations of drapery in art history or in fashion studies. The concept of representation is not the most useful to explain the logistics of a kind of movement – folding, unfolding, refolding – that defies the hierarchies of its aesthetics as well as a traditional view of subjectivity. Rather than following the classical interpretation of drapery in art history or fashion theory as expressing emotion, I want to argue in the second half of this article that much of contemporary avant-garde fashion creates a constantly opening up of the body – its affects and virtual becoming – to the world. Throughout his book on *The Fold*, Deleuze relates the fold to modalities of subjectivity; in the words of Simon O'Sullivan: '[...] from the fold of our material selves, our bodies, to the folding of time, or simply memory. Indeed, subjectivity might be understood as precisely a topology of

these different kinds of folds' (O'Sullivan, p.103). In discussing avant-garde, 'high', fashion, I deliberately look for designs that experiment with form and matter and call for a different relation to the human body. In the next part of this article I will explore how avant-garde fashion can 'free its own folds from its usual subordination to the finite body it covers' (TF, 121), stipulating the production of new kinds of subjectivity.

Unfolding – Defolding – Enfolding – Refolding

Fortuny, Vionnet and Grès shared a fascination for Asian wrapping techniques, taking note 'of Eastern cultures' aversion to the cutting of textiles' (Mears, p.378). In contemporary fashion, the technique of folding textile is indeed first and foremost explored by Japanese designers. In the 1970s, Issey Miyake and Kenzo Tadaka challenged Western traditions of tailoring by using techniques of layering, wrapping, and folding. Miyake developed his concept of A Piece-of-Cloth, (A-POC); the flat piece of cloth design based on the Japanese concept of putting together garments out of a single piece of cloth that covers the body without machine-sewn seams.²² As Giuliana Bruno puts it: 'It is the very simplicity of the fold that entails its remarkable complexity'.²³ But Miyake is best known for his intricately pleated garments that are created by carefully folding a length of cloth, twisting it tightly, and treating it with heat, not unlike Fortuny did with his Delphos dress. However, Miyake first cuts and assembles a garment, which he then folds, irons, sews, and places in a press 'from which it emerge[s] with permanent pleats'.²⁴ By the use of the characteristics of polyester this technology combines shape and function organically, giving birth to a new type of clothing that Bradley Quinn typifies as 'techno fashion' (Quinn, 2002). The vividly coloured, highly innovative designs are so successful that a commercial diffusion line, 'Pleats Please', has been devised since 1993. Folding garments is achieved by old and new methods, which are both used by the Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto. Old methods include using asymmetry or twisting and rolling cloth, while new methods involve the

²² Bradley Quinn, 2002. *Techno Fashion*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 152-3.

²³ Giuliana Bruno, 2010. 'Pleats of Matter, Folds of the Soul.' In: David Rodowick (ed.), *Afterimages of Gilles Deleuze's Film Philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 213-233 (p. 222).

²⁴ Yuniya Kawamura, 2010. 'Entry on Issey Miyake.' In: Valerie Steele (ed.), *The Berg Companion to Fashion*. Oxford: Berg, p. 515.

experimentation with innovative fabrics, for example by inserting wires or weaving plastic tubes into synthetic fabrics. Junya Watanabe, protégé of Rei Kawakubo, also experimented with complex pattern-cutting of hi-tech fabrics, superlight, water-resistant microfibers and synthetic polyesters, into origami folds and honeycomb weaves (Quinn, p.160).²⁵

Deconstructing sartorial conventions, Japanese designers like Miyake and Kenzo, later joined by Rei Kawakubo (of *Comme des Garçons*) and Yamamoto, shocked the audience in Paris with their post-nuclear chic in the early 1980s. Their conceptual designs do not only advance fashion technology or demand a new understanding of fashion aesthetics, but also require a different relation to the body. The Japanese designers created an innovative aesthetic that has often been labelled as ‘deconstructionist’ (e.g. Quinn, p.141),²⁶ yet a reading through Deleuze’s notion of the fold may advance an affirmative understanding of such designs beyond a negative aesthetics of deconstruction. In my view, the asymmetrical and multi-layered wrappings and foldings point to a deleuzian state of flux where everything flows. Matter is a texture (TF, 47), writes Deleuze, a fabric (TF, 49), and all matter ‘generally always tends to unfold its pleats at great length’ (TF, 123). Looking at any of the Japanese designs one can see how the fold is dynamic, with a dispersion of a central line, opening up to a multiplicity of lines, notches, gaps, holes and fissures. These kinds of garments are fluid and constantly in flux; it is almost as if we see here the ‘vibrating cataracts of drapery’ (Wittkower, p.56) in its modern or postmodern attire. Deleuze’s ‘rhapsody of folds and foldings’ (Conley, p.172), unravels the two sides of a single surface: an inside and an outside. For instance, in his later work at the end of the 1990s Yamamoto was inspired by the crinoline to experiment with space. Rather than playing with the hooped skirts as surface decoration, they turned into secret pockets carrying different accessories for different occasions, connecting the ‘hidden intimacies of the fashioned body’ (Quinn, p.149) to the folds of the skirt. According to Caroline Evans, Yamamoto thus

²⁵ See also Fukai, 2002. *et al.*, *Fashion. A History from the 18th to the 20th Century*. Vol. 2, pp. 692-3.

²⁶ Alison Gill argues that this kind of anti-fashion portrays ‘images of decay, poverty, and disaffection’ in her lucid article ‘Deconstruction Fashion: The Making of Unfinished, Decomposing and Re-assembled Clothes.’ In: 1998. *Fashion Theory*. Vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 25-49.

imagined new uses for historical costume.²⁷ The ingenuity of the uses of the inside and outside of the folds in fashion, lies in connecting the body in new ways to the space that surrounds it. At the same time Yamamoto achieves a different relation to historical time by folding historical references into one another; ‘my dream is to draw time’, says Yamamoto in Wim Wender’s documentary on him.²⁸ Indeed, Ulrich Lehmann argues (with Walter Benjamin) that fashion as a modern phenomenon is well equipped for folding together past and present.²⁹ Reading the Japanese designs through the delezian notion of the fold helps to see the openness that is inherent in them; it makes us aware of the sense that a fold always already contains other folds, potential flows, and a different approach to time and space.

The folds of Japanese fashion designs create surprising folding-ins and folding-outs. The fold doubles the outside as much as it doubles the inside; inside-out becomes outside-in and the other way around. What is in? What is out? What is in-between? The folds clearly do not present a total or frontal view, but create intervals of small differences in curvature, diminishing any ‘clear demarcations between the inside and outside of a garment’.³⁰ Garments fold in both inward and outward directions, or as Deleuze puts it, the fold moves between the outside and the inside, expanding on either side: ‘the fold is divided into folds, which are tucked inside and which spill onto the outside’ (TF, 35). There is thus always an exteriority on the outside, and an interiority on the inside, which can swap places in the folds of fashion. It is in this eternal process of moving in-between inside and outside that the fold expresses its unlimited freedom. The fold is a way of thinking space and time as the same thing, or rather as a relation, folded upon one another. By understanding space as a fold, there is no longer an absolute inside or outside: the infinite fold has ‘[...] an exterior always on the outside, an interior always

²⁷ Caroline Evans, 2003. *Fashion at the Edge. Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 276.

²⁸ Quoted in Barbara Vinken, 2005. *Fashion Zeitgeist. Trends and Cycles in the Fashion System*. Oxford: Berg, p. 110. Wim Wender’s documentary on Yohji Yamamoto (1989) is entitled *Notebook on Cities and Clothes*.

²⁹ Ulrich Lehmann, 2000. *Tigersprung. Fashion in Modernity*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, p. 268.

³⁰ Patricia Mears, 2010. ‘Entry on Yohji Yamamoto.’ In: Valerie Steele (ed.), *The Berg Companion to Fashion*. Oxford: Berg, p. 745.

on the inside', writes Deleuze (TF, 35). This allows for a deterritorialization of space.³¹

Let me further unwrap the spatial elements of the fold in the work of Rei Kawakubo of *Comme des Garçons*, who shocked the Parisian fashion world with her so-called Hiroshima chic of the 1980s, turning clothes inside out, strewn with small holes, shredding sweaters and patch-working them together, with rough stitching or careless seaming.³² I concentrate here on her famous dresses from the Spring-Summer collection of 1997, entitled 'Body Becomes Dress, Dress Becomes Body', alternatively named the 'Lumps', 'Lumps and Bumps' or 'Quasimodo' collection, and a favoured collector's item for museums (Quinn, p.143; Evans, p.269). The dresses – like other designs of Kawakubo in the 1990s – are made of hi-tech synthetics such as stretch nylon-urethane fabric, stretch polyester or polyurethane mix fabrics, which are padded with cushions in strange places. The outfits have pads sewn inside, creating irregular folds and mounds on the surface of the clothes, along the shoulder, down the back, or across the hip, expressing 'the dissonance between the body and the form of the outfit' (Fukai, p.645). The garments monstrously deform the body and re-contour the body shape, shaking up standardized concepts that people have of their own bodies. The stiff pleats of Miyake or the padding with cushions by Kawakubo offer a different kind of folding than we have seen with the fluid folds of Fortuny, Vionnet or Grès. Where the flexible fold can be understood as positioning the body differently in time through movement, the stiff fold of sculptured forms through high-tech fabrics and padded cushions can be said to radically deterritorialize the body by turning inside out and outside in. These garments were designed to be, in Kawakubo's own words, 'Not what has been seen before, not what has been repeated; instead, new discoveries that look towards the future, that are liberated and lively' (Fukai, p.648).

In this as well as in other collections of the 1990s, Kawakubo tried to liberate the clothes from their enslavement to the body (Fukai, p.648). Similar radical attempts of discovering new shapes can be found in the pleated dresses by Miyake, the crinoline designs of Yamamoto, or the techno-couture of Watanabe. What happens in these designs is a replacement of the Western dialectic of concealing and revealing the body that we saw

³¹ See G. Bruno (2010) for an interesting interweaving of space in cinema, architecture and fashion.

³² Claire Wilcox, 2010. 'Entry on Comme des Garçons.' In: Valerie Steele (ed.), *The Berg Companion to Fashion*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 162-5.

before in the dresses of Fortuny, Vionnet and Grès, which are all playing on well-known conventions of erotics. From the Japanese designs emerges a different sensuality, in the words of Barbara Vinken, ‘a sensuality of changing silhouettes, layered in the depths of the fabric’ (Vinken, p.103). The Japanese designers deterritorialize the human – mostly the female – body into strange and alien shapes. In doing so, they seem to almost literally embody Deleuze’s remark that ‘fabric or clothing has to free its own folds from its usual subordination to the finite body it covers.’ (TF, 121) These designs come across as futuristic, morphing new silhouettes, inviting the wearer to inhabit the freedom of co-creating the body into new shapes. The deterritorialization of the human body through the manifold, multi-layered, and asymmetrical drapes, pleats, and folds, invites a reflection on new ways of embodiment and even new ways of subjectivity. The designs of Miyake, Yamamoto, Kawakubo and Watanabe have been understood in fashion studies as deconstructionist because they no longer merely reproduce the finite body, but it is much more important, and affirmative, to understand their designs as an unfolding of new opportunities of becoming. In the context of my discussion of the Japanese designers, it is interesting that Deleuze himself refers to the Oriental line as ‘the full and the void in a reciprocal becoming’ (TF, 36). In the final part of this article I will further expand on the notion of the fold of fashion as becoming.

Viktor & Rolf: spiralling up with bows and ribbons

When Deleuze argues that the fold expresses an infinite process of moving in-between an exteriority and an interiority, it should not be understood as a divisive process, but rather as a continuous movement of folding, unfolding, defolding, enfolding, and refolding. An understanding of the fold in garments as a continuous, and hence, unfinished, process, implies a different concept of the body. The fold allows for an opening up of the body in new ways. It points to a continuous becoming for the subject who is wearing the designs, or at least, it points to the possibility of such a becoming. I propose to discuss the issue of becoming through the baroque fashion designs of the Dutch duo Viktor & Rolf.³³

³³ Of course, Viktor & Rolf are by no means the only baroque designers; other baroque designers are punk designers like Jean-Paul Gaultier and Vivienne Westwood; theatrical designers like Alexander McQueen, John Galliano, and Gareth Pugh; or more conceptual and technological designers like Hussein Chalayan and Iris

Known for ‘their exaggerated silhouettes and noteworthy runway performances’,³⁴ Viktor & Rolf’s haute couture designs often centre on provocation and the carnivalesque. Take for example the potentially deterritorializing function of the collection ‘Atomic Bomb’ (Fall/Winter 1998-99), which photographers Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin helped cast and style. Viktor & Rolf stuffed the garments with large balloons or padding, resembling the mushroom cloud shape of a nuclear bomb. They showed the colourful clothes twice, once with the balloons or paddings, and once without them, the ‘anticlimax’ as they dubbed the designs, now hanging loosely in large folds around the body and festively enhanced with garlands. The designs thus integrated the elements of festivity and war, indicating the confusion whether people would ‘either be partying or become victims of weapons of mass destruction’³⁵ in the approaching millennium. Clearly, the collection echoes Kawakubo’s ‘Dress Becomes Body’ collection as it is similarly characterised by the deformation of the body’s shape.³⁶ As I have argued elsewhere, the collection is an exploration of the potential function of clothes to deterritorialize the familiar form of the body, and especially of the idealized body shape circulating in contemporary consumer culture.³⁷ Deforming the body through padding is a recurrent element in Viktor & Rolf designs, which is important in understanding how ‘the process [of becoming] also has the power to deterritorialize bodies from certain dominant modes of stratification’.³⁸ This kind of fashion pushes the limits of what a body can do and what it can become. Deterritorialization is a logistical precondition for a process of becoming, which unsettles the familiar territory of demarcated

van Herpen. I take the example of Viktor & Rolf here because they are the most famous contemporary Dutch designers.

³⁴ Angel Chang, 2010. ‘Entry on Viktor & Rolf.’ In: Valerie Steele (ed.), *The Berg Companion to Fashion*. Oxford: Berg, p. 710.

³⁵ Amy Spindler and D.J. Siersema, 2000. *Viktor & Rolf Haute Couture Book*. Groningen: Groninger Museum, p. 26.

³⁶ Caroline Evans and Susannah Frankel, 2008. *The House of Viktor & Rolf*. London, New York: Merrell, p. 64.

³⁷ Anneke Smelik, 2007. ‘Het intermediale sprookje van de modeshow.’ In: Oosterling, Slager and van der Vall (eds.), *Intermediale Reflectie*. Rotterdam: DAF-cahiers, pp. 64-72. In this Dutch article I argue for a performative and materialist approach to the fashion designs of Viktor & Rolf.

³⁸ Stephen D. Seely, 2013. ‘How Do You Dress a Body Without Organs? Affective Fashion and Nonhuman Becoming.’ In: *Women’s Studies Quarterly*. No. 41, pp. 247-265 (p. 263).

wholes or fixed frameworks of the world of fashion (MP, 508-509). I suggest understanding the fold as such a movement of deterritorialization by which one leaves the familiar terrain of idealized body shapes, unified wholes or fixed structures.

For Deleuze, the fold, or the process of folding, is a practice of becoming. In so far as matter can fold, it is capable of becoming, because it involves a process of opening out to the world, or conversely, of folding the world into the self (TF, 37) (see also O'Sullivan, pp.102-4). Let me turn to another collection by Viktor & Rolf; the 'Flowerbomb' collection (Spring/Summer 2005), to further explore this. Again, the fashion show works on the principle of showing the clothes twice. In the extravagant show of the 'Flowerbomb' collection, the models are first donned with black motor helmets and show clothes entirely in black. After the spectacular launch of Viktor & Rolf's first perfume, also called Flowerbomb, the models return with their faces made up in pink and dressed in the same designs but now in exuberant colours. The dresses are constructed out of giant bows and ribbons, which have since become another trademark of Viktor & Rolf.³⁹ Bows, knots, ribbons, frills, ruffles and all such trimmings are variations on the fold. Interestingly, watching the models walk down the catwalk one can see the bows and ribbons bob up and down, flowing and billowing around the body. As Ulrich Lehmann writes, 'the drapes, pleats, and folds move with man, but they are not an actual part of his body' (Lehmann, *Tigersprung*, p.212). In my view, it is that gap between body and folds that allows for opening up a freedom of movement. Compare how Deleuze writes that the fold is 'movement, then, [that] cannot be stopped' (TF, 12). He is adamant that the matter of the body is in constant flux, which works by 'communication and propagation of movement' (TF, 97).

The multi-layered garments thus become pure movement, from which the body can free itself. The very movement of Viktor & Rolf's billowing designs show how the body is involved in a continuous process of 'folding, unfolding and refolding' (TF, 137). Importantly, then, Viktor & Rolf's avant-garde fashion shows that 'all bodies are traversed by this capacity of becoming' as Stephen Seely puts it (Seely, p.262).

The motion of the clothes gives an idea of the body as incorporeal, a body of passions, affect and intensity. Giuliana Bruno has pointed to the quality of motion as emotion in clothes: 'Home of the fold, fashion resides with the

³⁹ Another example of bows worked into a dress is the wedding gown that Viktor & Rolf designed for Dutch Royal Princess Mabel van Oranje-Nassau (2004).

reversible continuity that, rather than separating, provides a breathing membrane – a skin – to the world. Sensorially speaking, clothes come alive in (e)motion’ (Bruno, 2010, p.225). Take for example Viktor & Rolf’s collection ‘Bedtime Story’ (Fall/Winter 2006-07), where the garments are enwrapped in or as duvets and cushions: satin pillows with broderie anglaise become gargantuan collars; bed sheets become sumptuous gowns; duvets become quilted coats; and ruffled sheets become cascading gowns of folds. The bedroom theme creates warmth and intimacy, where the many folds of the sculptural clothes present opportunities for the body of the subject to become in the world. This kind of ‘affective fashion’ as Seely calls it, reveals the transformative power of avant-garde fashion; in its exaggeration and excess Viktor & Rolf’s designs defy the commodification of the female body. For instance, for the collection ‘Upside Down’ (Spring/Summer 2006) Viktor & Rolf have created everything upside down: the dresses made of giant bows, can be worn both bottom up or bottom down, and they were presented on the catwalk first one way and then the other. Here, as in many of the other designs by Viktor & Rolf – the exaggerated ruffles of ‘Blacklight’ (S/S 1999),⁴⁰ the blown-up pleats of ‘One Woman Show’ (F/W 2003), the extreme layering of nine dresses on top of each other in ‘Russian Doll’ (F/W 1999), the giant letters on the collars of ‘No’ (F/W 2008), the violins in the collars of ‘Harlequin’ (S/S 2008), and the gigantic skirts and collars of the gowns in ‘Shirt Symphony’ (S/S 2011) – contain variations of the fold that are reminiscent of the Baroque, which, in the words of Deleuze: ‘[...] radiates everywhere, at all times, in the thousand folds of garments that tend to become one with their respective wearers, to exceed their attitudes, to overcome their bodily contradictions, and to make their heads look like those of swimmers bobbing in the waves’ (TF, 121).

If the fold is a concept to think of subjectivity as a process of becoming, and functions as an interface between the inside and the outside, depth and surface, being and appearing, then we can understand Viktor & Rolf’s experimental designs as an invitation to engage the wearer in the creative process of becoming, by transforming the body, and perhaps reinventing the self. In creating fold after fold, crease after wrinkle, bow after ribbon, Viktor & Rolf’s designs open up to an understanding of the body as an infinite play of becoming.

⁴⁰ I abbreviate Spring/Summer as S/S, and Fall/Winter as F/W, as is customary in fashion studies.

They themselves refer to the importance of transformation in their work in an interview with the Dutch *Vogue* on the occasion of their twentieth anniversary in November 2013, when the magazine launched a special anniversary issue for them including a separate supplement with overview of their work and a long interview. In the interview Rolf says: ‘We are fascinated by transformations. The promise of transformation – that is something magical. That something can change beyond recognition, but still come from the same source. It is the power of imagination.’⁴¹ Imagination is an important term here, because high fashion is a peculiar phenomenon that I want to describe as ‘in-between’. In the examples that I have discussed in this article, I have primarily looked at avant-garde fashion designs worn by models on the catwalk or in artistic photo shoots. The question then is where the creative process of becoming can be located in this kind of fashion that is closer to art than to commercial commodity. I want to suggest that the process of becoming can move beyond the model on the catwalk or in the picture, onto the viewer or consumer, in that she imagines wearing the designs. Fashion functions in-between, because the potential consumer moves in-between looking at a design and imagining wearing it. Through that moment of identification the viewer becomes the model who is wearing the avant-garde design. While consumers may never wear actual designs with lumps on the back, a pillow on the head, bows billowing in the air, or ruffles and pleats that surround the body, they can, however, imagine the endless potentialities of the fold. They may see how such dress design potentially frees the body from the territorialized understanding of its matter; liberating the materiality of the body into something continuously changing, mobile, and fluid. Or, to put it differently, fashion designers create conditions to actualize multiple becomings.

In this article I have read avant-garde high fashion through and alongside the deleuzian notion of the fold, thus moving beyond a representational meaning of garments and also moving beyond the familiar contours of the human body. As avant-garde fashion often probes the limits of what a body can do or what it can become, the notion of the fold helps to see how such experimental clothes set the body in-motion, perhaps even liberating it from the world by transforming normative images of human bodies. In the conceptual dresses by the Japanese designers or by Viktor & Rolf we can understand the fold, as Tom Conley put it, as ‘[...] the expression of a

⁴¹ Dutch *Vogue*, November 2013. Supplement ‘special anniversary issue’, p. 48. Interview by Daniël van der Meer, my translation.

continuous and vital force of being and of becoming' (Conley, p.180). As we have seen, the fold is dynamic, constantly vibrating. As a curvature of space and a non-hierarchical framing of time, the fold is just light, colour, depth, surface, shape. The folds and pleats of the Japanese designers and Viktor & Rolf's bows and ribbons are in the words of Deleuze 'at once continuous, mobile, and fluttering' (TF, 124). The deterritorializing line of those folds indicates an expansive movement, a line of flight, which opens the subject up to a spiralling process of creative becoming. The fold of fashion then is a dynamic process of becoming multiple, of searching for a new place of the human being in the world. Fashioning the fold can help to envisage a process of becoming, where the subject never tires of 'folding, unfolding, refolding'—in the very last words of Deleuze's book on *The Fold* (TF, 137).

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