

# MEMOS ON FASHION IN THIS MILLENNIUM

The scientific and the poetic attitude [...] coincide: both approaches involve research and planning, discovery and invention.

Italo Calvino, *La sfida al labirinto*, 1962

Apparatus. In *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, Michel Foucault defines a *dispositif* or apparatus as a set of heterogeneous elements that form a network of discourses, institutions, administrative measures, scientific statements and philosophical, moral, and philanthropic positions. An apparatus is a strategic concatenation that functions at a specific historical moment of urgency.

Warren Neidich, *Glossary of Cognitive Activism (For a Not So Distant Future)*, 2019

Thus, astride our bucket, we shall face the new millennium, without hoping to find anything more in it than what we ourselves are able to bring to it.

Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, 1988

*Memos. On Fashion in This Millennium* is a reflection on design, a reactivation of repetitions, a stratification of temporalities, a constellation of arguments and theses, an incomplete list, a series of notes, digressions and scribbles, a map of allusions and obstacles. An inventory of oversights. A work in progress. A notebook that takes the form of an exhibition, along with a book that is offered as a summary of attitudes and methods, of conversations, memories and researches that are still under way. The project stems from a recent reassessment of Italo Calvino stimulated by a general revival of interest in his work, and more precisely from an illuminating rereading of the *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, the series of lectures that the writer was supposed to give for the Charles Eliot Norton Poetry Lectures at Harvard University in the academic year 1985/86.<sup>1</sup> A reading that

1. The first Italian edition of the book, entitled *Lezioni americane*, was published by Garzanti in May 1988. It was given this title by his widow Esther (Calvino had thought only of the one in English), who based it on something Pietro Citati had said. In fact the latter, who often used to come to see Calvino during that last summer in which he was working on the *Memos*, would ask the writer every time he arrived: 'Come vanno le lezioni americane?' [How are the American lectures going?].

I shared, at the time, with Judith Clark, in a lengthy conversation that was carried out via telephone, email and messages and that marked the beginning of a close dialogue on the applications and perspectives that a study of the *Memos* suggested to us with regard to the fashion curating we teach in our respective universities.<sup>2</sup>

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Can in fact these lectures, devoted to ‘certain values, qualities or peculiarities’ of literary practice, serve, today, as a useful starting point for the investigation and connection of the creative practices, the processes, the techniques, the cultural, political and economic values that mould the language and models of production of fashion?

I am not systematic in my study and my work. I proceed by images and concepts that always take the form of notes. Words, maps, phrases that can become a project: for an exhibition or book. Or remain just an exercise or test. The approach Italo Calvino took to the *Memos* has suggested to me a method that I can apply to my own way of working. Annotations, outlines of ideas. Sketches that rapidly establish a theme but without defining its boundaries, exploring the web of relationships that they set in motion. Calvino had no intention of providing solutions, all he wanted to do was map out possible roads: values on which to reflect in order to investigate and comprehend the contemporary world. Marco Belpoliti has written: ‘The task that Calvino assigned literature was precisely “to stand amongst different languages, in order to keep alive the communication between them.”<sup>3</sup>

In the preface to the *Memos* Calvino declared: ‘We are in 1985, and barely fifteen years stand between us and a new millennium. [...] However, I’m not here to talk of futurology, but of literature. The millennium about to end has seen the birth and development of modern languages of the West, and of the literatures that have explored the expressive, cognitive, and imaginative possibilities of these languages. [...] Perhaps it is a sign of our millennium’s end that we frequently wonder what will happen to literature and

2. I teach Curatorial Practices in Fashion in the master’s degree course in Visual Arts and Fashion (IUAV University of Venice); Judith Clark is course leader for MA Fashion Curation at the London College of Fashion (University of the Arts London).

3. Marco Belpoliti, *L’occhio di Calvino*, new expanded edition (Turin: Einaudi, 2006), ix.

books in the so-called postindustrial era of technology.<sup>4</sup> The writer looks forward to the new millennium, offering a series of locations and literary figures to which the task of constructing the spaces of awareness and imagination is entrusted. Open zones, areas of transit, in which it is possible to derail those fragments, those thoughts, those sensations, those memories with which the involuntary memory is crammed. And, as I write, another passage from Calvino’s *Memos* resurfaces, one I had jotted down in one of my black notebooks, this time from the fifth of the lectures, significantly entitled ‘Multiplicity’: ‘Each life is an encyclopedia, a library, an inventory of objects, a series of styles, and everything can be constantly shuffled and reordered in every way conceivable.’<sup>5</sup> Thus each of us can configure a textual fabric of our own in which digressions and chance occurrences act to interrupt the flow, creating a discontinuity. Then the destruction of continuity obliges us to start over, to explore.

The *Memos* have turned out to be devices of an essentially strategic nature, which can be used to identify those points that possess the capacity for development. I trace this idea back to the view of Foucault evoked in one of the quotations at the beginning, through Giorgio Agamben’s reworking of it in *Che cos’è un dispositivo?*: ‘I shall call an apparatus literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions or discourses of living beings’; thus ‘the pen, writing, literature, philosophy’ are apparatuses too.<sup>6</sup>

So it is not so much that the concepts used as titles for the *Memos* (‘Lightness,’ ‘Quickness’ and so on) become points of application for our discipline as that the indication, the quotation, the wandering around in a continual play of cross-references suggest a web of narratives capable of bringing into focus the relationship between objects, time and space, which is the central question of the practices of fashion curating. The exhibition is a work of art in its own right, not an interpretation – the great Swiss curator

4. Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 1.

5. Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, 124.

6. Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos’è un dispositivo?* (Rome: nottetempo, 2006), 21–22. English trans. ‘What Is an Apparatus,’ in *What Is an Apparatus and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 14.

Harald Szeemann, shaman and guru of all curators, defined himself in this way: 'I am not a curator. I am an author.'<sup>7</sup> On this occasion it is a reconfiguration of the existing that has been put into effect in the dialogue with the project of the exhibition-maker Judith Clark, 'author' of a presentation that occupies the space, reformulating its perception.

It is the taste of the time that influences the way we see things and the choices we make. Avant-garde, universalism, progress and radicalism belong to the last century, while what pertains to ours are the present, experimentation, the relative, the fluid and geopolitics: the principles that act in the contemporary world and its forms. Every exhibition of fashion in our day becomes a means of marshalling and questioning the conventions related to the making of clothes and the time to which they belong. So if the selection of objects that make up an exhibition on the one hand recalls Calvino's magic objects, the ones at the pole of a magnetic field, on the other it expresses in a dialogical manner the always present tense of fashion. Objects activated by the gaze of the curator and his or her choice, solely at that precise moment. It is the intuition (and the ability to express it clearly) that between the design of the garment and the design of the body there is the visionary, revolutionary design of the imageries that are today more than ever at the centre of a conception of fashion which has regained possession of the network of ideas that has generated them and amplifies them.

In 2012 Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev wrote in the presentation of the *documenta* exhibition she curated: 'Due to the fact that there are many truths valid, one is constantly confronted with unsolvable questions: thus it has become a choice between not making a choice [...]; or, on the other hand, making a choice that one knows will also be partially and inevitably "wrong...".'<sup>8</sup>

Thus this exhibition seeks to clarify what it means to tackle a curatorial project and what relations curating has with the practices of design that shape contemporary fashion, in order to make it clear that it is not just the end result of an exhibition that

7. Harald Szeemann, in Cecilia Liveriero Lavelli and Franklin Sirmans, 'Harald Szeemann: Curator as Author; From Ljubljana to Lyon to Kwangju (interview),' *Flash Art*, 195 (Summer 1997), 90.

8. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "'The dance was very frenetic, lively, rattling, clanging, rolling, contorted, and lasted for a long time...'" in *Documenta (13): The Book of Books* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 37.

is important, but also (and perhaps above all) the process that has generated it. That is the dimension in which questions take shape, and in which the objects, display and texts are intertwined in the attempt to come up with some possible answers. Curating an exhibition is an act that today is closer than ever to the activity of the fashion designer and the creative director: I am reminded of Virgil Abloh's 'shortcuts,' Maria Grazia Chiuri's statements that become feminist banners or Alessandro Michele's 'fields of poetic reactivation.' For fashion (and this is something I have said many times) is not just a matter of clothes: above all it is a discipline that deals with the contemporary, that interrogates it, that defines it without enclosing it. And in doing so it speaks of us, of our being in our time.

An exhibition project like *Memos* has chosen to take shape and act partly in relation to an expressive territory, one whose locations are pervaded by the power of a history that is also blended with the civil, political and aesthetic value of the events and of the actions of those who have inhabited or governed it. The arrangement of the artefacts, the atlas that they open out in relation to this precise place, the Poldi Pezzoli house-museum, and the reactivation-reproduction of a salient episode of the past like the exhibition *1922–1943: Vent'anni di moda italiana*,<sup>9</sup> thanks to the conceptual phantasmagorias of Judith Clark's display design,<sup>10</sup> are a mode of presenting documentary materials that is not intended to serve the critic's discourse, but respects the visual and allusive information they convey. Their efficacy over time permits a 'recognition' capable of revealing, of illuminating the relevance of that event.<sup>11</sup>

9. See Gabriele Monti's essay in the catalogue.

10. See her essay in the catalogue.

11. In December 2018 I was asked to sit on the commission set up to study public policies in support of Italian fashion by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities, chaired at the time by Alberto Bonisoli. The experience came to an end for me with my resignation, given the impossibility of it coming up with something concrete. I had proposed a project of promotion of the places where seminal experiences for the culture and the advancement of Italian fashion had occurred, starting out from the Museo Poldi Pezzoli in order to draw attention to the pioneering activity of Grazietta Butazzi and Alessandra Mottola Molino, in particular the exhibition *1922–1943: Vent'anni di moda italiana*, staged there in 1980: a wide-ranging and multifaceted project that was intended to further the idea of a national museum of fashion. It was then that I started to think about a project for the Museo Poldi Pezzoli that could be a reactivation of that exhibition and the significance that it had had in marking a stage in the forging of the identity of Italian fashion.

We could describe the *Memos* project in many ways: it is a place in the place; it is an operation that aims to explain the practice of staging exhibitions; it is a partial selection of objects, each of which evokes the influences of which it is the product or that it has sparked off; it is a strategy for presenting the different forms of fashion design; it is a series of objects of sentimental value that play a different role in the atlas of emotions they mobilize.

#### DISCONTINUOUS/INTERMITTENT \_NOTES IN LOOSE ORDER

In drawing on Calvino I have in reality been helped by a particular word, useful in bringing into focus one aspect of the way in which I have made my choices. It is the word that the writer put at the top of the pages of the lecture that he left in the form of a note (the last, the one he was going to write once he had arrived in the United States): 'Consistency.' 'We live in a world in which, increasingly often, we are incapable of determining the "value" of things, their consistency. A term, consistency, that appeared around the 15th century in its Latin form to indicate the foundation of something, what makes it solid and firm. Since then it has assumed the canonical meaning it still has today, that of a strength deriving from its own structure. Nor is that all: reliable dictionaries tells us that the term has within it the idea of accord, coherence in both the proper and the figurative sense and resolve.'<sup>12</sup>

Each aspect of the project has adhered to an idea of consistency, in order to take on meaning in relation to the values and processes that run through fashion today: from the choice of the Museo Poldi Pezzoli as a venue – for its relationship with the culture of fashion and for the significance that it assumes today, with respect to all the lost opportunities to promote the narrative of Italian fashion – to the materials on display. As regards the specific "consistency" of these, it is worth citing what George Kubler wrote in *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*: 'Every important work of art can be regarded both as a historical event and as a hard-won solution to some problem. It

12. Italo Calvino, in Marco Filoni, *Inciampi. Storie di libri, parole e scaffali* (Trieste-Rome: Italo Svevo, 2019), 31.

is irrelevant now whether the event was original or conventional, accidental or willed, awkward or skillful.'<sup>13</sup>

So it is a selection made up of exhibits of various kinds, not just artefacts of fashion in the strict sense but also all those materials that amplify and redefine the consistency of the authorial act. Like the photographic features selected by Stefano Tonchi, double-page spreads that cover the – more or less recent – history of fashion publishing and exemplify the imagery which generates and amplifies the power of fashion, and the desire it is able to trigger. Like again the catalogue of the exhibition *Disobedient Bodies*,<sup>14</sup> curated by the designer J.W. Anderson, who in order to express his point of view decided to take on the role of curator, just as artists like Francesco Vezzoli or directors like Wes Anderson have now done with success too. Or the catalogue of Romeo Gigli's Spring/Summer 1990 Collection,<sup>15</sup> an object poised between the Byzantine atmosphere of the mosaics of Ravenna and diaphanous female figures that recall the empress Theodora, a book that conveys better than any item of clothing the change which the designer has brought about. Or again, the pages of the latest-gen magazine *The Happy Reader* with the interview with Grace Wales Bonner, in which she expresses an alternative way of operating in the fashion industry. Wales Bonner's project redefines the rules of dress and identity for the male, and has also involved some curatorial ventures, like the exhibition staged at the Serpentine Sackler Gallery at the invitation of Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Time for New Dreams*, which imagines different possibilities and worlds in the interactions between the practices and languages of creativity (music, fashion, art, design).

\_The surface is the arena of dialogue between the idea of style, as an operation carried out on appearance, and the growing importance of the brand (and not only that of fashion) as a creative and all-embracing force. For many people choosing a

13. George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* [1962] (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2008), 30.

14. Andrew Bonacina (ed.), *Disobedient Bodies: JW Anderson at the Hepworth Wakefield* (London: In Other Words, 2017).

15. With photographs by Ilvio Gallo.

logo signifies declaring not just an aesthetic aspiration, but also a political and cultural one, turning them into walking manifestos of the imagery that each brand embodies. An emblem that stands out clearly in the immediate communication of Instagram.

A few months after Hillary Clinton's defeat in the US presidential elections, Demna Gvasalia transformed the logo of Balenciaga (one of fashion's most charismatic brands) with a take on the campaign logo of Bernie Sanders, Hillary's rival in the Democratic primaries, placing it on quilted jackets, sweatshirts, padded shawls and rubber shoes. Gvasalia declared that it was a reflection on the corporate culture that dominates fashion as well as politics. For the scholar Giuliana Bruno the surface is the place of material relations, the aesthetic root of modernity, a place where forms of memory and transformation can find concrete expression. In a world increasingly thronged with similar objects it is the use to which the surface is put that makes the difference. Thus the act of writing a name in big block capitals or stamping a brand on a bag or a T-shirt brings us back to the practices adopted by conceptual artists. In a sort of Duchampian ready-made, the aura and the value of that bag stem chiefly from the fact that it is of a particular brand.

The point obviously is the meaning of that gesture. Because while on the one hand it seems to negate the value of fashion, its creativity, on the other it acts in the realm of the questioning of a system and its values. It is not the death of fashion that is simplistically – and above all sensationally – asserted by Li Edelkoort, who continues to think in terms of a fashion system that ceased to exist some time ago. For today fashion has been transplanted onto heterogeneous terrains and deals with all available formats. As Alessandro Michele has done when he decided not to lose himself among the Gs: inventing constellations of meaning, or even including the obsessions of others. Challenging them, he acts by selection, through additions and multiplications. Michele has created an experimental laboratory of identity, accepting the comparison with tradition, but also making explicit the route that he takes between this and its various contexts. The logo today is serious and ironic, it is tradition that turns into pop, it is recognizability in the social media. It was for good reason that Riccardo Tisci, on his appointment as

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creative director of Burberry and while waiting to make his debut, shared on Instagram the house's new logo and new monogram, developed in collaboration with Peter Saville. Paul Andrew, on arrival at Ferragamo, also revived a historical attribute like the hook motif of the *gancino* and turned it into a pattern that immediately became the icon of the new course taken by the brand. A logo that is no longer just a monolithic element imposed from above, but above all an object undergoing continual change. No longer solely an emblem of recognizability, but a space of action that expresses the will of the figure who has the greatest influence over the global trajectories of contemporary culture: the creative director. Who can make choices like that of Maria Grazia Chiuri once she was placed in charge of Dior, that of combining on the elastic tape that defines the house's clothes and lingerie the name of its founder Christian Dior with 'J'Adore,' the motto of one of her predecessors, John Galiano, so as to create the short-circuit 'J'Adior' that clearly expresses the creative director's relative importance with respect to the permanence of the brand.

'I work from obscure abstract images to create a fresh concept of beauty.'<sup>16</sup> This is how Rei Kawakubo, the charismatic founder of Comme des Garçons, explained her shamanic process of creation in one of her very rare interviews, tracing her creativity back – as the Surrealists did – to a disorienting and automatic gesture that draws on the most hidden and therefore disruptive sources of creative energy.

Like Martin Margiela, she adopts a critical attitude toward the system fashion, despite being an integral part of it. In some respects both are reminiscent of the subcultures of the 1970s that put themselves forward as an alternative to the mainstream in a continual battle that seemed to make sense and to be possible only if fought from within. Figures who acted in that area which went under the name of Radical Fashion,<sup>17</sup> and who continue to be a source of inspiration today.

But radical is a description that can also be applied to the

16. Rei Kawakubo in *The Face* (March 1987), quoted in Andrew Bolton, *Rei Kawakubo Comme des Garçons: Art of the In-Between*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 4 May–4 September 2017 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2017), 220.

17. See Claire Wilcox (ed.), *Radical Fashion*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, October 2001–January 2002 (London: V&A, 2001).

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acrobatic exercises in couture in Pierpaolo Piccioli's work for Valentino, which lay claim, in each collection, to the relevance and unique quality of this form of fashion. It is a form that becomes an arena for experimentation, invention and reflection on the most extravagant possibilities of design. And on materials that are symbolic of an Italian history of couture: thus lace, emblem of the brand, becomes a grating, at once extremely soft and sculptural, that redefines the female figure and image.

Many fashion brands have chosen to explore the contents of their archives and use them as a means of preserving the identity of the brand and as a source of stimuli for the imagination. In the same way they have grasped the importance of sharing those contents, as is reflected in the growing number of foundations, galleries, museums and exhibitions that, by bringing poetics and narratives back into circulation, reveal the extent to which some fashion designers of the second half of the last century are still points of reference.

The words of Anna Piaggi in a text she wrote for the show of Prada's Autumn/Winter Collection 1994–95, 'Notes of Miuccia on the collection (with Pina Bausch in mind),' focus on the immaterial design of one of the figures who have had the greatest influence not just on the new generations of designers but also on the course taken by fashion and art. It was Germano Celant, theorist of *Arte Povera* and curator of the *Fondazione Prada*, who made clear the extent to which the crucial relationship between fashion and art has evolved in their practices: '[...] the fact that clothing belongs to the realm of art is no longer a revelation but a necessity, considering that since 1950 fashion has become a global project of democratization and aestheticization of people's appearance. What was considered futile and frivolous, decorative and eccentric, has become a quest for identity where the things that count are originality and continual change. The difference between art and fashion is tending to vanish, as if the cut that defined their outlines had succeeded, through the subsequent process of collage, in superimposing and uniting them.'<sup>18</sup> Today it

18. Germano Celant, 'Tagliare è pensare,' in *Il Tempo e la Moda. Biennale di Firenze*, catalogue of the exhibition in Florence, 21 September 1996–12 January 1997, ed. Germano Celant, Luigi Settembrini and Ingrid Sischy (Milan: Skira, 1996), 36.

is more evident than ever that the latest generations of designers were moulded in a culture in which fashion was closely connected with the other arts.

\_ Francesco Risso, the creative director of Marni, with a past at Prada, offers one of the most interesting contemporary Italian perspectives on the design of the body, and the clothed body, through his continual questioning of the classic forms of the wardrobe, and in his revisiting of its constituent elements, which appear to be continually contradicted, which are never what they seem at first glance. Risso says: 'It's a world full of censors. There's never been such an incredible time for freedom of being whatever gender or sexuality you feel. I just want to send the message of the beauty and joy of eroticism.'<sup>19</sup>

\_ In the depths of contemporary fashion lies the word *genderless*, which owes a great deal to Giorgio Armani's 'radical gender' revolution. It is the one that best describes the new forms inhabited by the imageries, clothes and objects designed, affirming the fact that the desire to reconsider and restructure oneself is something felt indistinctly by male and female: no longer two genders that represent different physicalities, mentalities and roles, but two attitudes toward dressing unconstrained by the division between the sexes which mix the characteristics of both. Stefano Pilati, one of the most incisive talents on the contemporary fashion scene, gave the name *Random Identities* to the collection that emerged about two years ago out of his desire to assemble a hybrid, malleable wardrobe: 'Every morning, when we choose what to wear and how to wear it, we basically define a new public identity for ourselves. These identities are based on intuition, need, taste, but the shape they take is totally random. Hence the name: I basically want to convey this idea of daily restart through our look.'<sup>20</sup> It is the recognition of a culture of appearance shared by women and men, probably one of

19. Francesco Risso, in Laura Rysman, 'In Milan, a Look Into Marni's Color-Filled World,' *T: The New York Times Style Magazine* (23 February 2019): <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/23/t-magazine/marni-francesco-risso.html>.

20. Stefano Pilati, in Angelo Flaccavento, 'Stefano Pilati's Next Move,' *BOF The Business of Fashion* (30 April 2019): <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/professional/outside-the-system>.

those complex areas of understanding that recent feminism has metabolized and passed on to us and of which fashion has made itself the manifesto and megaphone.

‘Can fashion serve as a means of resistance?’ writes Giovanni Attili, professor of urban planning and author of the texts that accompany the collections of his partner Alessandro Michele, a designer who in turn has always insisted on the importance of the word, or rather of new words, in the explanation of his approach to design. ‘Fashion has another function instead: to hint at fields of possibility, suggest clues and openings, cultivate promises of beauty. To make any idea of diversity sacred [...]. It is only in this way that fashion can be constitutionally resistant, allowing each of us to reconstruct creatively his or her own place in the world [...]. A space of poetic self-affirmation in which to make the desire of self stand out [...].’

‘There are all these shortcuts that you can take:’ this is the advice that Virgil Abloh would like to have been given at the start of his career as a designer and the one that he gave to the students of the Harvard University Graduate School of Design during a lecture in 2018.<sup>21</sup> Abloh suggested finding shortcuts in the search for a ‘personal design language.’ Talking of his sweatshirts, T-shirts and sneakers, he explained his rule: you don’t need to change more than 3% of an article to make it new and original. Thus the lecture became the manifesto of a new language of design that is permeating contemporary fashion: the shortcut is symbolic not so much of a ‘quicker,’ or more ‘wily,’ way of doing things as of a less institutional approach – made up of notes and intuitions – that subverts customs. It is the acceptance of new aesthetic paradigms which reflect the awareness that today, when dealing with fashion, or at any rate with styles, the short-circuit between cultural values and practices of production, marketing and communication is spreading fast.

‘Fashion that speaks of fashion. A phenomenon in a way analogous to the ‘description of the description’ of which Giorgio Manganelli wrote in the afterword to one of the Italian editions of the *Six*

21. The text of the lecture, given the name ‘Insert Complicated Title Here,’ and published in the Sternberg Press series *The Incidents* with the graphic design of Abäke, is a bountiful reflection on the world of the designer and DJ, founder of the Off-White brand and creative director of Louis Vuitton’s menswear.

*Memos for the Next Millennium*: ‘There may be something that can accommodate games and enigmas, illusions and clarity, inventiveness and silence even better than the smooth surface of the mirror: and it is a mirror placed in front of another mirror. In this second mirror will be found all the lucid intangibility of the first, but another game as well, the enigma that responds to the enigma, the description of the description.’<sup>22</sup> Thus I chose to ask the writer Chiara Valerio and the film director Roberta Torre to intervene in the exhibition with texts that would not be captions or interpretations but descriptions of some of the objects: following the promptings of their imagination, they alluded to the critical act of ekphrasis, in an exercise, or a *dérive*, that might have no end.

‘For can we not compare to the curatorial practice of restaging seminal exhibitions of the past – as Germano Celant has done with Harald Szeemann’s *When Attitudes Become Form*<sup>23</sup> – the exact replica of one of Gianni Versace’s most spectacular inventions, the metal mesh worn by Jerry Hall and Gia Carangi in the Autumn/Winter 1982–83 campaign photographed by Avedon, that Donatella Versace produced in 2017 (twenty years after her brother’s death) and sent out onto the catwalk for the Spring/Summer 2018 show on those top models – Cindy Crawford, Carla Bruni, Naomi Campbell, Claudia Schiffer and Helena Christensen – that Gianni had ‘invented,’ for himself at the beginning of the 1990s and who had helped to define his style? Forms of re-enactment that make things relevant to the present and go beyond the idea of citation because, by bringing designs and ideas back into circulation, they offer a reflection, which may also be critical, on today. When, for the Dior Autumn/Winter 2019–20 Couture Collection, Maria Grazia Chiuri sent Ruth Bell out onto the catwalk in a tunic on which the question ‘Are Clothes Modern?’ – provocative title of Bernard Rudofsky’s fundamental exhibition at the MoMA in 1944 – was embroidered in exactly the same lettering as had been utilized for the catalogue published

22. Giorgio Manganelli, ‘Postfazione,’ in Italo Calvino, *Lezioni americane. Sei proposte per il prossimo millennio* (Milan: Mondadori, 2016), 146.

23. Germano Celant (ed.), *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Fondazione Prada, Ca’ Corner della Regina, Venice, 2013 (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2013).

in 1947,<sup>24</sup> the designer was provocatively questioning the sense of dress and the rules of high fashion today, from within a *maison* that is automatically associated in the collective imagination with fashion, with its unreasonable ‘whims’ (as Rudofsky himself would have defined them) and with the construction of the feminine. Thereby reminding haute couture and its protagonists of the importance of questioning the definition of the female universe, before setting out to dress it.

—Mature fashion that acts on different planes. Historical event and at the same time hard-won solution to a certain problem – to borrow the words of Kubler quoted earlier on. Conceptual paradox. Challenging of practices. Transformation, change, rupture that comes not from below but is imposed from above. Unexpected act, and therefore revolutionary. Which uses the rules to transform them, break them or follow them, revealing their relevance to the present.

As does Giambattista Valli, an Italian member of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture* in Paris, who follows the rules of couture as laid down in 1945: his wedding gown, created to fit exactly the body of Charlotte Dellal in 2010, evoking in the midst of the English countryside the Claudia Cardinale of *The Leopard*, became perfect publicity that went viral on Instagram. Attesting to the way that the aura of fashion and the desire for it today pass through the cult of socialites and celebrities that has been refined on the social networks.

*Memos* is a mark of the desire to convey a complexity. An outgrowing of the idea of the poetic gesture for its own sake, of the idea of creators as shamans (which they are, but that’s not all). A choreography of curiosity. A cosmogony of aptitudes that holds together the transformation of bodies, of heads, and thus the transformation of the ways of dressing those bodies and those heads. That ‘we are all different’ asserted by the feminist theologian and nun Teresa Forcades. The figure of a multiplicity understood as permanent questioning, open-mindedness, creation, invention. Not just clothing, therefore, but design strategies that restore value to those bodies and the minds that inhabit them.

This open project raises questions without worrying about coming up with answers. It is first of all a dialogue with Judith Clark, with

24. Bernard Rudofsky, *Are Clothes Modern? An Essay on Contemporary Apparel* (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1947).

whom I have been sharing projects and ideas on the directions in which curating is moving for some time. Questions that are the framework of the courses we teach at our respective universities and that have transformed and continue to transform our work. And that today are making us doubt the validity of the label of curator. Clark, who is an architect, describes herself as an ‘exhibition-maker,’ a formula that alludes to a more multifaceted and comprehensive approach.

It is a dialogue with Stefano Tonchi, with whom I have been working for decades on things like the magazine *Westuff*, as well as exhibitions and books. And with whom, once again, it has been fundamental to reflect on fashion photography: those images that give voice and form to the changes in attitude in every generation. It is a dialogue with Gabriele Monti, who has shared with me the materials of the research he carried out into the exhibition *1922–1943: Vent’anni di moda italiana* at Poldi Pezzoli and thus made me reflect on the difficult relations between fashion and the institution of the museum in Italy.

It is a dialogue with Marta Franceschini, an outstanding student of mine with whom I have begun to exchange views on the ideas behind the unpredictable paths taken by fashion in our time.

It is a dialogue with Coppi Barbieri, who have photographed the materials on display in the Museo Poldi Pezzoli, succeeding in capturing the silent aura of each object.

It is a dialogue with Chiara Valerio and Roberta Torre, who have described some of the objects in the exhibition in narrative form, showing how each of them can echo in a series of cross-references thanks to an informed gaze and the quality of its translation into words.

It is a fundamental dialogue with the director of the Museo Poldi Pezzoli Annalisa Zanni, with whom the exchange of ideas – as well as with the staff of the museum – has been crucial in determining many steps in the planning of *Memos*. It is a dialogue with Carlo Capasa, president of the Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana, who carries out perfectly the role that the institutions of fashion in Italy must play more than ever today, that of being the gathering point for the different, and sometimes conflicting aspirations that permeate a fashion system undergoing continual transformation.