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Resisting the gaze, exploring how clothes make us feel

In sociological and cultural studies the relationship we have with our clothes has been mostly analyzed in terms of fashion and identity, with a focus on the ways in which we use clothing to represent ourselves to and in the world. In this approach the emphasis is on the visual representation of women’s identity through clothes, which has long dominated semiotic and socio-cultural theories, underpinned by a dualist notion of mind and body as two separate entities. In this paper the dualism is rejected and the attention is focused instead on the feelings we experience about and in our clothes when we are wearing them. This perspective is inspired by the recent affective turn in the socio-cultural disciplines and in the renewed attention for the work of Gilles Deleuze on the body and on ways of becoming. In line with this approach, the paper focuses the attention on how women feel about their dressed body without (or often despite) the aid of a mirror-reflected image and postulates that this image could be seen as the first step of a process of alienation, typical of our culture, that transforms the sensorial body of women into the contemporary trope of the “body image”. On the contrary, the Deleuzian notion of body as a composition of forces, found in affect studies, affords ways of exploring the body-clothes assemblage that significantly broaden the visual perspective based on the body-image.

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Short bio

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