

RMIT DESIGN HUB

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# 1914 NOW: FOUR PERSPECTIVES ON FASHION CURATION

## WELCOME TO RMIT DESIGN HUB

Design Hub is a new kind of creative environment at RMIT University in Melbourne. It is a community of design researchers for collaborative, inter-disciplinary interaction and education, housed in a purpose-built, 10-storey building by Sean Godsell and Peddle Thorp, Architects. Design Hub is open to everyone. It houses spaces dedicated to researching, archiving, exhibiting, discussing and critiquing design in all its phases. Design Hub is also a place to do, learn and talk about design through our programs.

Over ten levels, Design Hub houses the Design Archives, a sound lab, a workshop, Multipurpose Room, Lecture Theatre, and four rooftop Pavilions. Open Warehouses run the length of the building. These are working zones for teams of RMIT and external researchers engaged in projects, many with industry, government and the community. Here they prototype, experiment, read, write, develop, discuss and assess their work. Long Rooms run in parallel, these are the exhibition and display zones for this research. Projects at all stages are presented here for consideration and debate, along with meetings, workshops and forums. More than 1700sqm of space at Design Hub is dedicated to exhibitions and display. In addition, an outdoor forecourt that links the Design Hub and the RMIT Design Archives is the home to creative programming.

**Kate Rhodes, Fleur Watson**  
Curators, RMIT Design Hub

*Fashion & Performance* and *1914 Now* are the outcome of a research exchange between RMIT Design Hub, London College of Fashion, and RMIT University's School of Fashion and Textiles.

## 1914 Now Four Perspectives on Fashion Curation

*1914 Now: Four Perspectives on Fashion Curation* is a response to the brief set by Rem Koolhaas for the national pavilions in the Giardini of the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale, *Absorbing Modernity: 1914 – 2014*. As the commissioners and curators of the pavilions in the parkland of Venice revealed multiple ideas surrounding the global impact of modernity

on architecture, in exhibitions that have represented curatorial cues from art history, this project reveals multiple perspectives on the same brief but from a fashion viewpoint. The respondents are internationally acclaimed curators with entirely distinctive approaches to their discipline. The Oxford English Dictionary definition of a curator is 'a keeper or custodian of a museum or other collection'. Today it is generally accepted that the meaning of the term has broadened. It now embraces not only artefact-based curators who collect, care for and interpret the collections within their temporary guardianship, but also practitioners whose approach to exhibition display and object interpretation sits within an artistic framework, and those who describe themselves as 'producers' of cultural interventions and as 'exhibition makers'. My own practice often involves commissioning new objects, rather than working with existing artefacts, and exploring new media outcomes. Multiple perspectives on the same brief have also long fascinated me, as new interpretations and conversations are revealed, and comparisons and juxtapositions generated.

*1914 Now* delves into various curatorial roles: an object-led curator; an exhibition maker; a designer and curator; and a museum director, operating an experimental space for the display of dress. Each has responded to the brief *Fashion and Modernity 1914*, and all, in their different ways, work with dress in three dimensions, be they historical or next season's samples. This project invited them to work with film to realise their expressions.

Amy de la Haye is a curator and dress historian whose approach to curatorship involves examining and 'reading' objects, to create multiple narratives that are embedded in historical accuracy and involve didactic communication with audiences. The narrative for her film *The Violet Hour* is drawn from a surviving tea gown housed in the costume collection at Brighton Museum. This garment reflects the cusp of modernity as the onset of war and its aftermath impacted so profoundly upon women's lives lived, their domestic (and public) spaces and the clothes they wore to negotiate them. Film director and animator Katerina Athanasopoulou filmed the tea gown and worked with contemporaneous

advertising her exhibitions; the choice of object and its placement within an exhibition or installation are inextricably intertwined. The interior architecture of buildings informs her exhibition design, and it is an exhibition maker's workshop that forms the backdrop to her film. The Futurist movement, and in particular the *Manifesto of Antineutral Dress* written by Giacomo Balla in 1914, inspires an exploration of contexts, display props and the Futurist elements of fashion. Working with film director James Norton, Clark applies the concepts of the manifesto to a hypothetical exhibition. The film's stark monochrome aesthetic, with its unexpected blurring and distortions, references not only the Futurists' own films but also the trials and errors, routes and returns, involved in the exhibition-making process. With its original Futurist music and optical trickery, the film is intended as a Futurist artefact from 1914, whilst looking to the future.

The avant-garde, Antwerp-based menswear fashion designer Walter Van Beirendonck communicates political and social issues of the day through his clothes. His archive not only documents the sartorial style of the day, but also the political and socioeconomic climate when they were created. For his Autumn/Winter 2014–15 collection *Crossed Crocodiles Growl*, Van Beirendonck appropriates the provocative headgear of war – a helmet from 1914 – to form commentary on the political landscape of today. Through the helmet hat, Van Beirendonck creates a new narrative for an iconic object, reinterpreting a symbol of warfare as a peaceful statement on current political issues. Working with film director Bart Hess, he presents a striking revolutionary army.

Kaat Debo is Director of ModeMuseum, Antwerp, an experimental venue for the display of dress. Exhibitions often focus on contemporary fashion, and material innovation and its impact upon the discourse of fashion. Debo's response to the brief was to commission a new object, informed by early twentieth-century Irish crochet from the collection at MoMu. The object is a dress designed by architect, artist and 3D-designer Tobias Klein and fashion designer Alexandra Verschueren, which has been 3D-printed by Materialise. This intriguing garment represents the tension between the desire for ornament and the search for the

modern, as the decorative nature of the Irish lace is propelled into 2014. The natural chemical growth of crystals on this 3D-printed dress, with surface design adapted from the floral motifs of the crochet, is for Klein a 'post-natural distortion that finds balance through technology and craftsmanship'.

The diverse, distinctive, incredibly powerful and altogether imaginative responses and voices that form part of this commission are united by the year 1914. They simultaneously reveal multiple fashion and dress-related perspectives on one fateful year and multiple perspectives on fashion curation.

In keeping with the spirit of this project and its original inspiration, architectural historians, practitioners and critics of the avant-garde have been invited to respond to the fashion curators' moment of modernity.

Architectural historian and writer Timothy Brittain-Catlin evocatively captures the Edwardian architectural landscape before its pending change, in response to de la Haye's film *The Violet Hour*. Art historian and leading critic of the Futurist movement Giovanni Lista illuminates the history of the Manifesto of Antineutral Dress and Balla's fascination with costume. Architect Tom Coward, inspired by Van Beirendonck's object of focus, the felt helmet hat, draws on the parallels in the technological change in warfare in World War I and the materials revolution in architecture that took place around the same time. Kurt Vanhoutte, Associate Professor of Performance Studies and Visual Arts Criticism at the University of Antwerp, explores the contexts of the newly commissioned dress within the framework of modernity.

As the discipline of fashion curation has evolved, and being an advocate for cross-disciplinary work, this is an apt moment to present a fashion response as a fringe event within the wider Venice Biennale context, and to mark a momentous year and its continued impact a century later.

**Alison Moloney**

Curator International Exhibitions Programme, London College of Fashion

## The Violet Hour

### Amy de la Haye Reflects on the Tea Gown

*'When the tea urn sings at five o'clock, we don these garments of poetical beauty.'*

Mrs Prichard, *The Cult of Chiffon*, 1902.

An 'arty' tea gown of violet-coloured silk, embellished with floral embroidery and lace, hangs in sterile, metal storage at Brighton Museum. Materially and structurally, it is more robust than many surviving tea gowns that were ruffled and draped using diaphanous layers of filmy silk chiffon and tulle. However, its status is fragile. It has never been accessioned, and its provenance is unknown (1). Seemingly anonymous, imprinted stains of wear render the garment intensely human. This intriguing tea gown – assigned temporary object number CTMP000281 (281) – motivated the narrative for *The Violet Hour*, made by Katerina Athanasopoulou.

The tea gown was introduced in the 1870s. It is a garment that – even by its nomenclature – appears alien today, and which has been subject to only scant critical scrutiny. It was a flowing, relatively comfortable garment, designed to provide respite betwixt the wearing of a corsetted afternoon dress and the strictures of a dinner dress and/or ball-gown. Social etiquette required a wealthy, modish woman to change her outfit – from head to toe – up to seven times a day, and fashion writers oft reported on 'the fashion of the hour'. It was deemed acceptable for a married woman to receive her female friends for tea thus attired.

The tea gown could be interpreted as the swansong of the pre-modern wardrobe, yet it might also be considered its precursor. Designed along Grecian and Empire lines, it was of a style championed by radical dress reformers who campaigned to liberate women from fashions that curtailed their bodies and lives. However, belying the silhouette, many tea gowns incorporate internal structure and boning: tea gown 281 has three bones on either side of the back internal waist. Further exploration reveals a long, concealed pocket in the back of the skirt – a feature, seemingly both practical and impractical, that was incorporated in men's coats dating from the early nineteenth century. The gown fastens

down the left front with chunky brass hooks and stitched semicircular eyes.

Stylistically, it is redolent of models sold by Liberty, and the fashion drawing in the film is extracted from a Liberty catalogue of 1912, housed at Westminster City Archives. Like a furnished interior, a wardrobe evolves. The film is set in 1914, but the garments are older. Tea gown 281 is of good quality, but the applied, ready-made embroidery belies the superlative craftsmanship of garments purveyed by the exclusive London department store. Liberty had separate departments dedicated to dress reform and to fashionable dress and was famous for selling arts and crafts objects and artefacts imported from 'the East'. The chinoiserie ceramic plates and aesthetic influences in the virtual drawing room also reference Liberty style. Visual research was underpinned by visits to Preston Manor (an Edwardian residence) and the Geffrye Museum. Katerina Athanasopoulou painstakingly constructed the domestic interior in order to navigate three dimensions and capture the moody effects of late afternoon light and shadow.

The film title is a phrase from T. S. Eliot's modernist poem *The Waste Land* (1922), which evokes poignantly the end of day, when dusk beckons and the sky turns violet. Eliot exploited disjointed prose to render all the more explicit his indictment of the impact of war upon the dislocation of post-war society. In *The Violet Hour*, Katerina Athanasopoulou has fractured a painted London city and skyline to suggest a wartime vorticist aesthetic. The film suggests a foreboding of impending war within the confines of domestic, feminine space. The clock shows the time is just before 5pm, and the solitary monochrome figure appears pensive.

The colour violet was widespread within pre-war fashion, and the flower was a popular decorative motif. Delicate and pervasive, the violet is imbued with symbolism within myth, legend and religion. Its heart-shaped petals have drawn associations with love; it has been revered for its talismanic and healing qualities, linked with modesty ('shrinking violet') and funerary rituals. When the Phrygian god of vegetation, Attis, mutilated himself upon his love being thwarted, it was believed that

the first violets sprung from his flowing blood. In Christianity, Mary's abject despair at the crucifixion of Jesus was believed to have turned all white violets (associated with innocence) deep purple.

It is customary for conservators and curators to 'transform' the garments in their care; to present them pristine 'as new' – and ideally, displayed on mannequins sculpted meticulously to echo the contours of the worn garments. All too often this is prohibitively labour-intensive and costly. As a result, a great many garments are destined to remain unseen, their stories untold. The tea gown in *The Violet Hour* hangs limp. It is creased and stained, exactly as first encountered and contemplated. I would argue that for this particular project, its meaning is rendered all the more eloquent...

My curatorial practices involve constructing stories using clothing – not always fashionable – as evidence, usually about women's lives lived. I am also interested in immateriality: the items that don't survive. And I am preoccupied with exploring strategies for exhibiting the unexhibitable – items usually deemed too delicate or too perished for display.

**Amy de la Haye**

1. In 2014, the Museum commissioned a collections review written by this author, working with Curator Martin Pel, in which such anomalies will be addressed.

### **A Little Glass Vase of Violets in the Home-Place Timothy Brittain-Catlin on Edwardian style**

Somewhere between the death of Queen Victoria and the outbreak of the First World War, the design of the small private house was perfected to the extent that everything that has happened since can be considered an experiment rather than an improvement. These things come in bursts: domestic architecture had rolled forward into a new blaze of perfection during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and Queen Anne, and in the first decade under Queen Victoria. But the Edwardian era is different because we know that everything from that period ends in tragedy, in mass slaughter. Its teleology has been its curse.

I have an illustrated book of 1906 called *Country Cottages & Week-End Homes*, compiled by a writer called J. H. Elder-Duncan and published in London, Paris, New York and Melbourne by Cassell and Company. It was so successful that it was reprinted a single month after publication, and a new edition appeared the year before the War. It begins with a short introduction to the design of the small house, referring to the current craze for country cottages and making salient points about the healthy and practical siting of furniture. It discusses the planning of bedrooms and whether an inglenook fireplace is desirable in a small home. Most readers, however, will have skipped that to gaze longingly at the glossy photographs, plans and drawings of the cottages, at a range of prices, which follow. The following year they would have ordered themselves a copy of W. Shaw Sparrow's *Flats, Urban Houses and Cottage Homes*, a volume from Hodder & Stoughton in a similar format, which amongst much else records vanished ways of living: blocks of West End flats designed especially for single professional men, for example. The impression one gets is that the pre-war period is one of those golden ages when an astonishing number of individually designed homes were built.

Katerina Athanasopoulou's film *The Violet Hour* takes you straight into one of these comfortable, tailor-made houses; to use the homely phrase of one of the architects in Elder-Duncan's book, it takes you into the 'home-place', rooted in England by that view of

London and St Paul's reflected in the mirror. As it happens, he recommended similar panelling for a room such as this – the more artistic or better-off would have chosen oak, but those with less cash or fewer pretensions would have used stained deal. The reproduction eighteenth-century furniture we see in Katerina's film would have been at home in all of them; in fact it was a well-rehearsed Edwardian joke to place items from the grandest homes – some Chippendale chairs, some Queen Anne plasterwork – into a modest modern cottage. The floral wallpaper, Pugin- or Morris-derived, completes the scene, and the book of fashion plates that falls open on the table is just what one would expect to find here, the slim lines of the tea gown recalling the fashions of the Regency, alongside vases of flowers.

The Regency motif can be seen all over the place in my Edwardian books; it is suggested in the few costumes that are visible in them, but mostly in the elements of the architecture: everywhere there are bow windows, verandahs, French windows and white rendered walls. Some architects used these features to develop a style sometimes called 'Quality Street', after the 1901 play by J. M. Barrie about genteel young ladies and dashing subalterns. This was a solecistic hybrid of Regency and Queen Anne, as popular then for high-street banks and tea rooms as it was for cottages. It was a popular style because it was sentimental. And the Edwardian architect was – so unlike his Neo-Gothic or Modern equivalents – quite unafraid of being either sentimental or popular. In fact, what comes across most strongly from these Edwardian house books is that some homes are essentially presented as a series of romantic vignettes. There are views of sitting-halls, stair landings and gardens. They are comfortably and somewhat sentimentally furnished. The tables might be set for tea, and the pretty girls and handsome officers are easily imagined. It is clear that these images are aimed to appeal just as the popular novel appeals to the mass of readers. There is no curious battle going on between the ideas of the architect and the aspirations of the great majority of people who want a comfortable place to sit, in a comfortable way of dressing, in surroundings that somehow remind them of their favourite

places, full of vases of flowers. And it was achievable.

All of which makes the Armageddon that followed that much more awful. The dashing subalterns had gone out fighting. Margot Asquith, the prime minister's wife, was wearing her 'little grey & silver Ospovat Russian tea-gown' that her young son loved when she heard the news that Raymond, her husband's eldest child, had been killed at the Front (1).

She was in her new, pretty weekend cottage at the time. Everywhere, the sweet homes of the families back in England suddenly reeked of the filth of the trenches, almost as if all that sentimentality and the easy comfort of home life had somehow to be paid for in blood. And we know that many of those pretty details – the Victorian wallpaper, for example – were soon to vanish, as modernism kicked over the traces of what had come before it.

I am thinking too of those innocent little vases of flowers. In April 1915, after a month at war, Roland Leighton, the fiancé of my grandmother Vera Brittain, sent her not, of course, flowers from the Front, but a poem about them: *Violets from Plug Street Wood*. The middle verse runs like this:

*Violets from Plug Street Wood – Think what they have meant to me – Life and Hope and Love and You (And you did not see them grow, Where his mangled body lay, Hiding Horror from the day; Sweetest it was better so.)*

It was indeed better so. When we can detach Edwardian architecture, like Edwardian fashion and Edwardian art, from the smash and the catastrophe that followed them, we can start to appreciate the beauty of them as they really are.

### Timothy Brittain-Catlin

1. Brock, Michael and Eleanor, Margot Asquith's Great War Diary 1914–1916. OUP: 2014, p. 287.

### II Vestito Antineutrale Manifesto Judith Clark Imagines a Fashion Exhibition

1. *The Futurist Manifesto – Il Vestito Antineutrale (The Manifesto of Antineutral Dress)* was written by Giacomo Balla in September 1914, when Italy was no longer neutral.

2. There are moments in which revision becomes necessary, such as in 1999 on the verge of the millennium.

3. The manifesto wanted to abolish the elegant, the everyday and the tasteful in favour of the aggressive, transient and volatile. Manifestos can never be neutral.

4. Exhibitions need to resist the allure of neutrality.

5. Manifestos are like blueprints. Fashion is always a potential manifesto.

6. Dress in museums has traditionally been about extreme specialness or extreme ordinariness – fashion becomes instantly conventional. The new quickly becomes nostalgia.

7. If the attributes of fashion and Futurism have a lot in common, do they need to share props?

8. How do you exhibit the hauntings of fashion: sexuality, childhood, the clothes of the parents, the clothes of the times, the clothes of the past?

9. Exhibitions remember the movement associated with dress or building the exhibition.

10. The moment fashion is exhibited it is fixed.



Image (top-bottom): Still from *Il Vestito Antineutrale* by Judith Clark and James Norton;  
Still from *The Violet Hour* by Amy de la Haye and Katerina Athanasopoulou.



## II Vestito Antineutrale Giovanni Lista on Giacomo Balla

Giacomo Balla's manifesto was the culmination of a series of ideas announcing the creation of 'Futurist fashion'. In March 1910 in Florence, Arnaldo Ginna and Bruno Corra had already advocated more vivid colours in fashion. Mario Carli would walk down the darkest streets of Florence in a flaming red waistcoat. In July 1911, Gino Severini and Umberto Boccioni went to Paris and scandalised Picasso, Apollinaire and their friends by wearing unmatched brightly coloured socks. In June 1912, Balla put on his first Futurist outfit: asymmetrical with patterns of white stripes or small black squares. The following year he sported celluloid ties with rigid geometric forms and strongly contrasting colours.

In February–March 1914, Balla wrote the *Futurist Manifesto of Men's Clothing*. The manuscript was published in French and dated 20 May 1914, before the outbreak of war. Having distributed this manifesto in Paris, Marinetti readied the publication in Italian but was overtaken by events when, on 2 August 1914, France ordered the general mobilisation of the army for war. Marinetti then changed the text of the Italian edition into a propaganda document urging Italy's entry into the war. Thus the Italian edition was titled *The Antineutral Dress – Futurist Manifesto*, dated 11 September 1914, and trumpeted the need for Italy to declare war. Furthermore, Marinetti rearranged Balla's drawings to give the clothes the colours of the Italian and French flags, excluding the yellow and black of the House of Habsburg, which ruled over the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Unfortunately, Balla's manifesto has been reprinted ever since in the Italian version, which has a bellicose and aggressive meaning due to the changes made by Marinetti, leaving the French original almost unknown. Balla himself adhered to the ideas of the Risorgimento, which had brought political unity to Italy. He was older than the others and hailed from Piedmont, the birthplace of the Risorgimento. One of the central themes of the post-Risorgimento era was the creation of a new national culture for all Italians. Italy was famous for its regional costumes, and many nineteenth-century European paintings

by foreign artists depicted peasants in local folkloric attire. After the Risorgimento, an Italian national costume was mooted. Balla revived this idea, wanting to create the national costume for a Futurist modern Italy.

Futurism was an avant-garde movement based on the principles of art-action and total art. In rivalry with cubism, Boccioni evolved the idea of 'plastic dynamism' in painting, to create works with an exemplary new modern language. Instead of the traditional role of art in shaping society from the top down, Balla thought that the Futurist revolution should start from the bottom, changing every aspect of lifestyle: everyday objects, fashion and furniture.

He considered fashion an art, his position consistent with the ideas of Marinetti, who gave Futurism the task of creating transient and ephemeral art, bestowing joie de vivre and exalting vital impulses. In 1912–13, Balla designed fabrics and Futurist clothing, applying the formal, synthetic and dynamic elements exhibited in his painting: lines of velocity, noise-forms and interpenetrating volumes. There is, however, a difference between designing clothes, creating new shapes and colours, such as Balla had been doing, and launching a fully-fledged manifesto. The first exalts the freedom of the unique individual, the second urges social consistency. Although the manifesto included a great variety of colours and modificanti, the very idea of launching a fashion line according to Futurist taste meant conforming to the collective social group. Dress has a social function; it is not painting or sculpture. Balla's research was radical but consistent with other Futurist ideas. In the original French version of the manifesto, he revived Ginna and Corra's idea of colourful clothing, which would animate the city by decorating its streets, as a festive and ephemeral artwork in continuous motion. Futurist dress was designed for an urban setting, not as a function of the individual but to define a social climate. Dress became a manifesto itself, a business card, an item of Futurist faith.

Immediately after the publication of the manifesto in French, Marinetti presented it at the Doré Gallery in London, with a provocative discussion of the 'dynamic Futurist button'. The British press printed the manifesto,

whilst other Futurist clothing projects were published in American magazines. Balla's Futurist Manifesto contains two basic ideas: colourful asymmetrical dress, able to convey vital intensity and openness of communication; and functional dress, created from a single piece of fabric, which later inspired Thyahrt to create the Futurist TuTa jumpsuit. Balla reduced the human body to a Vitruvian silhouette, a series of triangles attached at the edges. The trunk of the body corresponded to the area where the triangles overlapped, the limbs expansions of the triangle points. On this basis, Balla conceived asymmetrical dresses with intersecting diagonal lines and semicircular structures. At the same moment, war broke out in Europe. The Florentine Futurists condemned the manifesto as a farce, yet Balla continued to design and wear Futurist clothes until the 1930s.

Balla announced that a Futurist Manifesto for Women's Dress would soon appear. The manifesto was not published, due to the war, but Balla never ignored women. He designed and made women's clothes that his daughters wore, as well as scarves, purses and embroidery patterns. In women's clothes Balla employed sinuous, gently curved lines, reminiscent of the hearts in playing cards. The interpenetration of two or three colours, crossed with inlays, produced the effect of movement. He usually employed flat backgrounds, but there were also patterns for scarves with softer colours and prismatic designs for sports clothes. Balla created asymmetrical designs for geometric patterns and symmetrical designs based on the natural world yet always remaining close to abstraction. In the 1920s and '30s, he used features then in vogue, such as low waists for women's clothing, but in a personal reinterpretation. At the end of the 1930s, the patterns lost their geometrical rigour in favour of abstract figures that sometimes evoked flowers or butterflies. He designed sweaters and golfing clothes in an Art Deco style but applying the dynamic lines and bright colours of Futurism. For the configuration of dress in its entirety, Balla played on the different relationships, with unorthodox placement of buttons and interaction with the apparent corporeal weight of the fabric. He thus created startling new arrangements of colour,

proportion and symmetry, and a dynamic of the body that made dress an expressive modern form of communication.

In Balla's many subsequent studies on Futurist dress for men and women, he developed two lines of research on the cut and the fabric, aiming to create the image of a new man, dynamic and integrated into the Futurist environment. From the point of view of design, he created unstructured, asymmetric cuts. If the right side had a vertical cut, the left side, to be buttoned, featured a daring triangulation with a single button or sometimes a more complex design with various buttons. The jacket could be collarless or with an asymmetrical collar, narrow on one side and wide on the other, its shape in dialogue with the shirt and trousers. The cut of the outfit was embellished with a succession of waves or triangles, with contrasts of blue and red, black and yellow, and so on. Becoming more sophisticated, he created dynamic compositions for ties, purses, embroidery and scarves, imagining patterns of cloudy skies with zebra-stripe lightning or abstract grids, thus creating an abstract liquid or airy universe, made of raindrops, plunging ravines and swirling waves. With an almost inexhaustible imagination, Balla used and combined floral, organic, liquid, geometrical or Lettrist motifs, based on the combination of letters of the alphabet, even breaking down the letters of his own name.

Balla's ideas of a Futurist fashion can subsequently be traced in the clothes of Biagiotti or Versace. In particular, the unstructured geometry of his Futurist clothes anticipated, by more than fifty years, the creations of Yohji Yamamoto and the general trends of 1980s fashion.

The Futurist Manifesto is an art form in itself, with its imperative rhetoric, utopian tension, imaginary momentum and epiphanies of desire, of revolt, of change. The Futurist Manifesto anticipated conceptual art, in the sense in which the philosopher Benedetto Croce said that art is intuition; where there is intuitive activity there is already art.

Now that everything is fashion, the idea of *modificanti* has a fundamental importance. The *modificante* was a sort of triangular or irregular cutout of differently coloured fabric.

Attached to the clothing with a stud, this accessory was used to indicate to others the mood of the wearer. In a sense, it anticipated the pins and badges of today. The fashion of the era called for one dress in the morning, one during the daytime and another in the evening. Within these categories, Balla even imagined the possibility to further mark the most fleeting aspects of life, from social behaviour to the interior of the psyche. All Futurist art was built on the theme of energy. The modifier communicated the changing psychic energy of the subject: his mood or her momentary disposition towards others, life and the world. In addition to the textile modifier, Balla wore polychrome ties made of plastic and celluloid, or of wood and cork, sometimes equipped with lightbulbs that lit up to order at key moments of conversation.

The idea of the modifier can be compared with the Japanese *tokonoma* and the theory of the added element, formulated by Kazimir Malevich in 1919–20. The *tokonoma* is a kind of altar in which a different object or image is placed each day. The host thus communicates his current thoughts and mood to visiting guests. Malevich asserted that, in a finished composition, the simple act of adding one more element structures the whole meaning of the work in a different way. In this sense, the prosthesis is an added feature that disintegrates and rebuilds a whole composition at the same time.

In several photographs Balla appeared dressed in Futurist clothes. Accounts by other Futurists confirm that he dressed eccentrically. The Futurists refused harmonious composition, which is synonymous with balance and quiet, and therefore the extinction of vital energy, preferring oblique lines and diagonals, intersections and contrasts of colours, the elliptical lines of progression, the clash of forms, which stimulate the sensitivities of the viewers, get them moving, make them open to the dynamism of the continuous evolution of the world. After studying the speed lines of cars, in 1913–14 Balla addressed the theme of celestial rotation, painting a series of works abolishing the horizon and rendering the transparency of bodies without depth, placing the image in a sidereal vacuum and suggesting dynamism with various kinetic arabesques, whose dynamic morphology, with arched circle motifs, was also

present in some modifiers of Futurist clothing. Balla was no longer concerned with the mechanical speed of the terrestrial world, but with the cosmic speed of the spheres. His most significant work on cosmic movement was the scenic design for *Feu d'artifice* by Stravinsky, created in Rome in 1917, which David Hockney reprised in 1995 as *Snails Space with Vari-Lites: Painting as Performance* at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

### Giovanni Lista

Essay translated from original Dutch by Chris Gemerchak.



Image: Still from *Il Vestito Antineutrale* by Judith Clark and James Norton.

**Crossed Crocodiles Growl**  
**Walter Van Beirendonck on A/W 14**

When I am starting up working on my collections, it is always important for me to tell a story and to evoke the right emotions. Also, it is very important to reflect the moment I'm living in, and what my actual impressions and reactions on the world are.

This time I was struck by the racism, aggression, demonstrations and wars in the world. Worse than ever before, the world is getting less and less tolerant. People go on the streets to demonstrate, slogans in the air, to tell what they are not happy about, and they are asking for change. Also, the new and tough anti-gay laws from Russia (and some other countries in the world) are totally not understandable.

A BIG step backwards.

I decided to work around these topics, using the slogan STOP RACISM in English, Arabic and Russian as the styling of the collection (feather hats as pamphlets, messages shaved in the hair of the models).

CROSSED CROCODILES GROWL is the name of this collection. The crossed crocodile symbol in Africa is a symbol of democracy and freedom, and I found it the right moment to let them

GROWL!

When I started to sketch, and when I was deciding on my drawings to complete the look for the show, I was thinking intuitively of a felt helmet hat to underline the militant and demonstration feeling I wanted to express.

While working with Stephen Jones on the hats, we talked a lot about the actual connotation of the helmet and, as we didn't want to give the wrong message, we tried to work on a hat referring to a UNIVERSAL helmet feeling. It had to have a UN feeling (colours), but also a 1914–18 World War feeling, and also had to refer to a nowadays demonstration soldier.

Also the decision to make it with a small leather bow on the chin, a small female touch, was important to give it the necessary irony.

I was really happy that, when clothes and hats were coming together at the fitting and later

on in the show, the felt helmet hat created the right tension and feeling, and it underlined perfectly my initial idea.

In the film, I would like to express this tension and emotion, but always connected to this collection and fashion.



Image: Still from *Crossed Crocodiles Growl* by Walter Van Beirendonck and Bart Hess.

## Helmets and Homes

### Tom Coward on architectural changes in 1914

Design for the masses, rather than the elite, often steps out of historical focus. With reference to Van Beirendonck's politicised felt helmet, in his collection *Crossed Crocodiles Growl*, I wanted to track the evolution of two very modern types of protection/shelter – the mass-produced military helmet and the mass-produced family home. To me, these objects resonate with ideas of the twentieth-century nation-state – of political audacity and at times political edification. By tracing this trajectory, I want to see if 150 years of industrial innovation can get close to democratising the quality and craft possible for the very few in the pre-modern era.

At the start of the First World War, soldiers of most nations went into battle wearing cloth caps that offered no protection from modern weapons. The three helmets of the Great War, the original French Adrian, the British Brodie and the German Stahlhelm, were all rapidly tested in 1915, as the best available reactions to the new forms of projectile attack and trench warfare.

The modern military helmet (derived from medieval precedent) has been reshaped in four significant phases over the last 100 years, the first two of which occurred during the World Wars (1914–18 and 1939–45), followed by a materials revolution at the end of the twentieth century and a digitalisation of warfare in the early twenty-first century. Initially, this was ultimately about mass production – in a war of attrition, who could put on the most tin hats first? Next came comfort and fit, with straps and padding to improve individual adjustment needs. Then came the continuous optimisation of performance – weight versus ability to resist ballistic attack, much improved with non-metal layered materials. Recent challenges relate to needs for greater universal operative flexibility and augmentation, with better ergonomics and digital interfaces.

Technical performance has essentially determined the converging forms of the helmet for an almost-universal soldier, but mirroring modern nation development – allegiances determine the form of a nation's helmet, and

those with less means make do with old tin hats. The forms of helmets quickly became iconic and symbolic of state – Hitler reputedly refused a performative improvement of the Stahlhelm because it did not look German enough (1), and when the US developed its first Kevlar PASGT helmet in the 1980s it was nicknamed 'Fritz' due to its shape resembling the original Stahlhelm (2).

Similarly, Modern architecture has attempted to reconcile the principles underlying architectural design with rapid technological advancement and the modernisation of society. Art Nouveau gave way to Art Deco and then the International Style – expensive stylised trappings from the Old World giving way to more streamlined and (cheaper) rectilinear forms more related to industrial mass production. As Le Corbusier declared in his *Mass-Produced Buildings of 1924*, 'Mass production demands a search for standards ... Standards lead to perfection.' (3)

By 1926, Le Corbusier was creating one modern vision for the future, at Pessac – more than 100 'machines for living in', intended to truly revolutionise the notion of dwelling (4). Upon completion, however, no one would move in. Despite its spatially generous aesthetic, offering the best of amenity and technology, a failure to consider the importance of domestic memories and associations with the way in which people recognise and construct homes was a major flaw.

With an increase in the need for helmets, there is a reciprocal need for housing back on the home front. A third of all London homes suffered from bombing during the two World Wars, and 'homes for heroes' captured government sentiment around improving housing standards as part of broader social reform. Today, the UK suffers from a depressed level of home creation not witnessed since after the First World War. The problem then required government intervention to resolve a huge laissez-faire private housing market, replacing slums and bombsites with social housing.

A push for completions, democratic standards and economies, and a reliance on advanced building technology have left us with a legacy of often vast modernist housing estates, sometimes failing technically, and more likely

proving difficult to centrally manage. Too many are now subject to wide-scale renewal only 40–50 years after their initial investment. The subsequent ambition for private home ownership, the ‘right to buy’, led to the removal of the obligation of housing from the government’s ledger. Next came regeneration, where complex ‘brownfield’ sites in cities, ripe for housing many people, were developed for both private and social housing, with the former theoretically funding the latter. On a smaller scale, the ‘buy-to-let’ market led to a whole raft of small-scale developers upcycling the crumbling Victorian housing stock.

Joseph Hudnut wrote, in his 1945 essay *The Post-Modern House* (5), of an American soldier writing home: ‘He would like all the newest gadgets but would like these seasoned with that picture, sentiment and symbol which ... seem to be of equal importance ... In the hearts of the people at least they are relevant to something very far beyond science and the uses of science.’ The UK Government’s *Code for Sustainable Homes* (2006) (6) seeks to standardise such ‘science’, but without leading to a technological style or determinism of form, as visible in the UK’s first *Autonomous House*, by Robert and Brenda Vale (1993) (7).

But in the digital age, where smartphone apps can control a house’s performance remotely,(8) what does this mean for a home’s physical reality? ‘Lifetime homes’ (9) are a good response to changing individual needs, but in terms of twenty-first-century modern aspiration, is Custom Build a good step forward for the masses? It includes everything from DIY self-build, through commissioning an architect and builder, to buying a serviced plot and developing options with a contractor/enabler. ‘Custom Build housing brings many benefits, providing affordable bespoke-designed market housing, promoting design quality, environmental sustainability, driving innovation in building techniques and entrepreneurialism.’ (10)

New UK housing is in the majority built by repetitive volume house builders, who have been building only one third of the number of homes now required each year until 2031 (11). It is suggested that again government intervention is necessary to halt the unprecedented rising

prices of and reduced access to housing, and to increase the availability of land for development, through changes to planning control.(12) The Localism Act 2011 does allow for communities to determine what new developments are required in their areas, with checkered levels of success, but there is the possibility for communities to control the nationwide pressure for new housing and to develop satisfactory responses, through structures such as community land trusts and with Custom Build enabling individual input (13).

This is a world away from the generic housing delivered to standard specifications and percentile tenure mixes, for anonymous communities with often absentee homeowners, which comprise the current new-build housing market. It may not be craft, but affordable, democratic, low-impact housing for all seems like a technological challenge worth investing in for the ongoing modern era; it might lead to less need for warfare and tin hats...

#### Tom Coward

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## Engineering the Ornament

### Kaat Debo and Kurt Vanhoutte on 3D Printing

London College of Fashion's invitation to respond from the perspective of fashion to Rem Koolhaas's brief *Absorbing Modernity: 1914 – 2014*, offered an ideal opportunity to bring together a multidisciplinary team: a fashion curator (Kaat Debo, ModeMuseum Antwerp), a fashion designer (Alexandra Verschueren), an architect and artist/ 3D-designer (Tobias Klein), a 3D-printing manufacturer (Materialise, under the supervision of Joris Debo), an academic (Prof. Kurt Vanhoutte, University of Antwerp) and a director (Marie Schuller for SHOWstudio). The Fashion Museum houses a collection of 25,000 objects. Together with an historical collection, with modernity as its centre of gravity, since the late 1990s it has focused on contemporary, particularly Belgian fashion. The inherently fast pace of the fashion business leaves little time for historicising. New pieces must be purchased immediately after the show-rooms have closed, meaning that decisions about relevant collection articles must be taken quickly and on the spot. Furthermore, textiles are amongst the most fragile and thus most difficult materials to preserve. Particular to fashion, moreover, is that it is made to be worn by a body, and it is precisely this body that is excluded in the museum context. These three characteristics – fast pace, fragility and materiality – constitute the paradoxes and challenges that a curator of a fashion museum must deal with. *Incunabula* embodies all of these paradoxes and simultaneously raises them to a higher level.

Whoever visits the MoMu Fashion Museum by train disembarks underneath a platform roof that is nearly seventy metres across and fifty metres high. The steel and glass construction is a showpiece of innovative architecture from the late nineteenth century. On the way to the Antwerp Station central concourse, the visitor then passes by an enormous clock, the pre-eminent symbol of the accelerated pace of modern life. But the dial is enshrined in excessive ornaments from a much earlier time, in stone and gold leaf. The central concourse furthermore turns out to be a gigantic dome modelled on the Roman Pantheon. Antwerpians call their station the 'railway cathedral'. This curious contradiction of new and old typifies

modernity. In effect, the will to progress, technological innovation and rationality come into conflict with the desire for escapism, intoxication and ornament. Walter Benjamin, chronicler of modernity, recognised in this the quintessence of his era. He termed it 'dialectics at a standstill': the tension of an era that, under pressure from new technologies, does not arrive at a new synthesis and thus remains suspended in midair. In the early nineteenth century, innovation first and foremost harked back to tradition. 'These architects design supports resembling Pompeian columns, and factories that imitate residential houses, just as later the first railroad stations will be modelled on chalets', states Benjamin in *Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century* (1935) (1). The avant-garde would counter this contradiction with radical manifestos. They turned the contradiction into their battleground, by pushing the extremes further apart, or at least by making each other ignite and burn. Functionalism would make art serve the purposefulness of the design. But here as well, there was no mediation of the extremes.

According to Rem Koolhaas, modernisation is still our strongest drug. Ever since *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (1978), he has analysed the dynamic of modernity that continues unabated. He does so, at once with passion, then with provocation. 'The city is no longer, we can leave the theatre now ...' he concludes in *S, M, L, XL* (2). Life in 'the generic city' is like life at an airport. We inhabit a transit zone, an abstraction removed from time, and with our only function being always to consume the same products. With *Absorbing Modernity: 1914 – 2014*, Koolhaas has organised a genealogy of this condition for the Biennale. 'We didn't necessarily mean "absorbing" as a happy thing,' he clarifies in an interview with *The Guardian*, 'it is more like the way a boxer absorbs a blow from his enemy' (3). The exhibition shows how each country absorbs and processes this attack. In the central pavilion, Koolhaas himself reduces the many contradictions to a single pointed statement. His Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) has a clearly visible false ceiling, mounted underneath the decorative Venetian dome of yore. The cool neon and the industrial superstructure of tubes and pipes

form an unsettling contrast with the iconic baroque decorations and symbolic scenes above them. The intervention is programmatic because it makes the fundamental conflict, which is the motor of modernity, intrusively visible. The result is simultaneously provocative and melancholic.

Koolhaas's intervention resolutely visualises the contradiction between art and engineering. The project by Tobias Klein and Alexandra Verschueren is consistent with this intention. It is no coincidence that their creation straddles the boundary between architecture and fashion. Both disciplines reached maturity in the nineteenth century, to the rhythm of capitalist expansion. Industrial production and new technology and merchandising regimes first enabled fashion as a product. From the very start, the cultural elite waged its battle concerning the definition of the urbane in the architectural arena. Furthermore, fashion, as well as architecture, was torn between pragmatism and aesthetics, practical demands and artistic choices. Against the background of that debate, the hybrid design by Verschueren and Klein once again poses the question about the relationship between art and technology. Their combination of revolutionary 3D-printing techniques using living crystals materialises the poetics of modernity. At the same time, their creation is an index for the contemporary manifestation of the modern. Silhouette, choice of material and production not only constitute an intellectual allegory, a work that makes one think, but the dress is above all a living organism with its own afterlife. It sets time in motion.

At first glance, the silhouette is distinctively modernist. The avant-garde liberated women from the straitjackets of hoop skirt and corset, by no longer pinching the middle in order to emphasise the bust and hips. The new, modern silhouette places greater emphasis on the shoulders as a structuring element and prefers a rather formless silhouette, which offers the female body unprecedented freedom of movement. This change was in line with the functionalist pursuit of simplicity and abstraction. But at the same time, people also became inspired by the exotic Orient. For instance, near the turn of the twentieth century, Paul Poiret found in the Japanese

kimono the model for his evening dresses. Accordingly, Eastern techniques were also an important source of inspiration for Alexandra Verschueren. A year after graduating from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, she won the top prize at the International Festival for Fashion and Photography, in Hyères, with a collection that originated in origami and the technique of folding. Layering continued to be a central technique in her subsequent collections. She intensively searched for a balance between innovative technologies and traditional crafts, with her objective being a line that made use of folded, wearable and washable textiles that keep their shape. She collaborated with a Japanese pleating company that created handmade paper moulds for steam ovens, in order to produce the desired shapes in thin polyester. The collaboration resulted in Shift, a collection that, in her own words, expressed 'the constant shifting and changing from one thing into another, sometimes resulting in an overlap and ultimately in transformation'. Even though the pleats looked high-tech, they were still the result of a very artisanal and manual process. Verschueren wanted to transform the idea of a flower, something very organic, into an abstract and geometric pattern. Given her fascination with the interaction between nature and artifice, it should not be surprising that the designer eventually found her way to 3D-printing techniques. It is here that the collaboration with Hong Kong- and London-based architect, artist and 3D-designer Tobias Klein, and Materialise, a pioneering 3D-printing company based in Leuven, Belgium, began.

3D-printing technology originated nearly 30 years ago and was initially used for prototyping purposes. The technology was also used systematically for industrial and medical applications. Starting in the early 2000s, the technology made inroads into art, design and architecture; in the latter field, it was first used mainly for creating models and 3D visualisations. Consumer applications are very recent and are still in the development phase. In recent years, the technology has shifted from prototyping to additive manufacturing, in which the focus is on building up materials layer by layer, and the emphasis is on the most efficient possible use of raw materials. Whereas 30 years ago it was only possible to

print in epoxy resin, today the most diverse materials, such as ceramics, glass and metals, are eligible for 3D printing. In the fashion world, the technology was a hit with the collection of digitally printed clothes by Dutch fashion designer Iris Van Herpen and London architect Daniel Widrig. Whereas the first applications were mainly conceptual, the use of materials such as highly flexible polyurethane makes more recent creations much more wearable. It quickly became clear that the process would recalibrate the relationship between art and engineering. 3D printing has developed into the prototypical technology of the future. The technique promises unbridled creativity and, even more, a new democratisation of the artistic process. The products, which initially ranged from jewellery to tech accessories, can be personalised with choices of material, style, colour, text and images. At the time of writing, in China, the first homes made of cement and waste are being rolled out of a gigantic printer, at a pace of ten per day. Stated otherwise, 3D printing is for the twenty-first century what steel and glass were for modernity.

In the nineteenth century, steel and glass held out the prospect of a utopia of transparency, sustainability and bearing-capacity. In reality, however, the new materials brought about a deep schism in the nature of art. At that time, the emancipation of the artist did not happen. In his *Arcades Project*, Benjamin noted that the artist was too heavily addicted to pre-modern gold fever in the pursuit of eternal values in art. Still, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a movement such as Art Nouveau resisted progress by forging steel into floral ornaments and vegetal symbols. The new was reduced, as it were, to eternal nature. In spite of this, a radical formalism developed an aversion to ornament. People wanted to put an end to tradition, by placing art in the service of social purpose. The social housing projects of the later Bauhaus or Das Neue Frankfurt appeared convinced that techniques developed under capitalism were not contradictory to the reasonableness that they had in mind: a social system based on equality and homogeneity. Ornament versus engineering – Benjamin already seemed to see both extremes as inadequate ways of dealing with the new. Whereas Art Nouveau lingered

in the past, the ‘technical absolutism that is fundamental to iron construction’ (4) all too quickly committed a character assassination on art. Benjamin pointed out that the schism had already institutionalised itself at the start of the eighteenth century in the conflict between L’École des Beaux-Arts and L’École Polytechnique. The latter educated engineers for the construction of military and industrial complexes; the former resolutely refused any form of functionalism in favour of subjective aesthetic intuition. That which went together seamlessly in the Baroque split up, and the architect ended up in a dilemma between art and engineering.

This tense relationship constitutes an explicit reference in the work of Studio Tobias Klein. An earlier work, *Immersive Ornament*, is a direct response to the influential manifesto by Viennese architect and functionalist Adolf Loos. His *Ornament and Crime* from 1913 was a crystal clear plea for the eradication of the ornamental. The elimination of all things decorative would purify aesthetics of its ‘immorality’ (Loos) and save art from its own decline by extracting it from the history of ever-changing styles. Tobias Klein put this universalistic claim into perspective by creating a self-referential, three-dimensional folded space that mimics lush ornaments from Alhambra in photo-etched brass, with no function and, in a certain sense, incomplete because it has no context. He operationalised the ornament in the context of new technologies. It is a fine example of how Studio Tobias Klein achieves a repositioning of the understanding of modern relationships in what he calls ‘the field of narrated embodied space’. This approach reached a new pinnacle in his work with living crystals. In *Still Life*, Klein created a contemporary vanitas scene by filling a 3D-scanned capture of a floral bouquet with live, grown crystals, decaying over a period of 16 days. Probably not coincidentally, with this he continued a genre from before the great divide, namely, vanitas, an allegorical work of art from the Baroque period. The promise of functionalist technology finds its counterpoint in a timeless image of withering nature. comparable logic is intrinsic to the dress by Verschueren and Klein.

Alexandra Verschueren starts her fashion design with the use of lace. Lace is traditionally considered as a symbol of the rich and delicate, seductive feminine. But first, in the course of the nineteenth century, it would undergo a crucial transformation from a manufacturing to a textile product. Along the way, it obtained all the contradictory characteristics of modernity. Verschueren was particularly inspired by the practice of Irish lace (Irish crochet lace) – a variety that applies extremely detailed floral motifs using one needle. They seem to grow on top of the fabric. This craft is known because of its social dimension: during the famine of 1840, it appeared to be the best way for women to support their families at home. But even more notorious are the analyses by Karl Marx, who found in the emerging lace industry his first case of boundless exploitation of the working class. The changing relationship between the artist/designer and craftsman/maker is part of this analysis. In 1884, Brennan and Cole, in the *Catalogue of Antique Laces* at the Cork School of Art, emphasised the strict separation between designer and producer. An intimate dialogue between them is necessary, but then specifically from a clearly delineated profile: ‘The two skills are by no means coincidental and “lace-makers are not as a body specially fitted to be trained into designers of ornament any more than bricklayers are peculiarly destined to become architects”.’<sup>(5)</sup> The outbreak of the First World War placed great pressure on the lace market. This, and the subsequent war, further provided an impetus for the production of new techniques and machines. In other words, 1914 marked the end of one development and the beginning of a new era. Since then, the dichotomy between ornament and functionality establishes the guiding standard. The multidisciplinary approach of *Incunabula* observes this standard.

In the design of Verschueren and Klein, the lace-like pattern serves as a breeding ground for the crystals that are placed on the 3D silhouette and which reinforce the effect of the Irish lace. When fluid is removed during the course of the working process, the crystal growth stops, and the dress retains this lace-like texture. The longest crystal work preserved is said to be three years old. However, the creation will not stay like this

forever. The material will eventually deteriorate. In 2014, the recording of the installation by Marie Schuller adds yet another layer to this multiplicity. The film technology preserves the aura of the work, but in doing so is obliged to bring it to a temporal standstill. Living crystal is an ephemeral medium. The filmed hybrid dress of printed high-tech and living crystal, engineering and ornament, again sets modern time in motion. The duration is not a function of the installation, but is inherent to the design. It will remain an amalgamation of eternally smooth and timely decay, mediating the categorical distinctions of modernity.

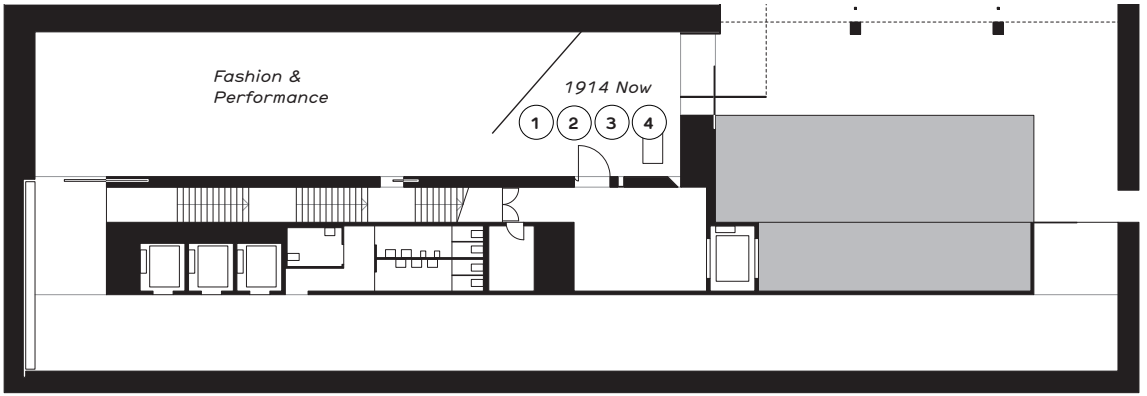
### Kaat Debo and Kurt Vanhoutte

Essay translated from the original Dutch by Chris Gemerchak.

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  1. (Printing, Lithography & Bookbinding) any book printed before 1501
  2. the infancy or earliest stages of something; beginningsFrom Latin, originally: swaddling clothes, hence beginnings, from in -2+cunabula cradle’



Image: Still from *Il Vestito Antineutrale* by Judith Clark and James Norton.



Project Rooms 1 & 2, Level 2, Floorplan

- ① ***The Violet Hour***  
 2014  
 Curator: Amy de la Haye  
 Director and Animator:  
 Katerina Athanasopoulou
- ② ***Il Vestito Antineutrale***  
 2014  
 Curator: Judith Clark  
 Producer and Director: James Norton
- ③ ***Crossed Crocodiles Growl***  
 2014  
 Curator/Designer:  
 Walter Van Beirendonck  
 Assistant Designer: Joost Jansen  
  
 Director: Bart Hess  
 Producer: Frank Verkade
- ④ ***Incunabula***  
 2014  
 Curator: Kaat Debo  
 Director: Marie Schuller

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