

# Opening and Closure Body Space Expressed in the Fashion Art

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## ABSTRACT

*The objective of this study is to understand bodily extension and identity in contemporary fashion art through the analysis of 'the fashion acting on the body' among the fashion theory excluding body and the conspicuous works on the opening and covering images as a 'fashion art as a body-space'. This study also investigated identity problems where there are poles apart in opening and closure their bodies and body-space in which its clothing types were distorted by being de-bodilization out of the traditional and ideological expression method in contemporary fashion art from a opening and closure point of view.*

*Image of opening and closure among body-space in fashion art can be classified into opposing structure of opening and closure. Destroying the boundary between bodily opening and closure for a primary function of clothing and dismantling the role and boundary between body and clothing, opening body-space in appearance as a reemergence of body image or the border between inner and outer are being ambiguous because of transparent material. Being representative work of this study opening body-space was expressed as an opening space image using transparency.*

*On the contrary, closure body-space was isolated from external environment and confined in the certain space, which could limit or restraint body- action. Excluding boundary of body and clothing on the whole or in part, boundary of work becomes body-space. However, these were appeared to be a work inducing unlimited curiosity and meaning from the audience.*

*The interpretation of artistic and body-space in fashion art are indicating the role and function of the fashion art exceeding the suggestible dimensions in the every day life of fashion. The body-space of fashion art showing similar aspect of body art today could be understood that it is substituted into an metaphorical, critical space by seeing it as a symbol system connected with social space. Therefore, contemporary fashion art should be interpreted as an equivocal space looking at the body-space with open mind.*

**Key Words** : fashion art, body-space, opening, closure

## I . Introduction

As contemporary art tends to diverge from its

fixed genres and intends to appeal to the public, fashion comes to contribute to the contemporary art area, by playing an important part in the creation of artistic value of art work. Nowadays, it is not unusual to see fashion work shown in an art ex-

hibition parallel with art work, since some artists adopt costumes as the medium of their work in order to explore various means of expression.

The occurrence of philosophical, sociological theories concerning human body paralleled with the prevalence of the post-structuralist ideas and occurrence of various styles of artistic expressions of body encouraged active research and attracted social attention to body. With such background, fashion art was formed by a means of the integration of body and fashion in order to create extreme artistic expression. I intend to investigate a variety of trends in fashion art from the viewpoint of 'body-space'.

The objective of this study is to understand bodily extension and identity in contemporary fashion art through the analysis of 'the fashion acting on the body' among the fashion theory excluding body and the conspicuous works on the opening and covering images as a 'fashion art as a body-space'. This study also investigated identity problems where there are poles apart in opening and closure their bodies and body-space in which its clothing types were distorted by being de-bodilization out of the traditional and ideological expression method in contemporary fashion art from a opening and closure point of view.

Works of fashion art expressed by artist's desire in the form of clothing such as artistic costume, contemporary fashion design works which were exhibited at the art gallery because of its artistic perspective and types and meaning of clothing appeared in the painting work were chosen in the subject of this study. In particular, how it is expressed and how it is interpreted on the opening and closure images was the main concern.

As a result, social and cultural standpoint, the spirit of the times for the fashion art style on the

various opening and closure images may make clear and the identity and intrinsic value of contemporary fashion art may also be understood.

This study may be a standard reference to understand and evaluate different phenomena of modern fashion, and at the same time this may once again serve as a momentum to recognize design fashion art as a social communication system.

## II . Fashion Art and Body-space

### I. Fashion Art

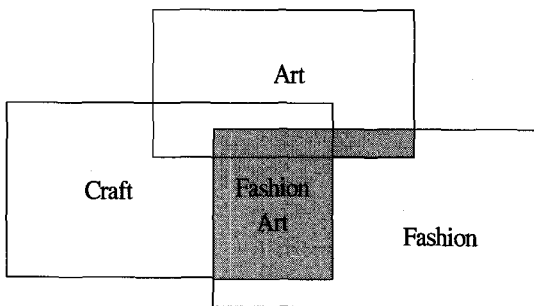
Fashion art as an artistic expression of clothing has been maintained, developed in close relation to the artistic mode. In modern society, many works on human body in the artistic field have been established as a main subject. Without any exception, fashion art expressed on the basis of human body were the subject and area expressing human's spiritual inside transcending biological meaning. Fashion art as a term originated in 'Art to Wear' started from 'Art to Wear Movement'<sup>1)</sup> developed among women textile artists centering around America in the latter half of 1960s.

Terminology concerning fashion art was different depending on the intention of fashion exhibition and researchers such as 'Art to Wear'<sup>2)</sup>, 'Art Wear', 'Art Wearables', 'Wearable Art'<sup>3)</sup>, 'Un-wearable Art', 'Art Fashion'<sup>4)</sup>, 'Clothing-Sculpted Dress'<sup>5)</sup>, 'Fashion Sculpture',<sup>6)</sup> 'Dress as Art'<sup>7)</sup>.

Pandora Tabatabai studied these clothing in a sculpture's viewpoint regarding it 'sculpted dress'<sup>8)</sup>. In the fashion terminology dictionary, fashion art defining it 'art mode' was named as 'art fashion'. Especially, it was defined in many ways such as 'various fashion by the motive of century's modern art', Reclams Mode-und Kostuemlexikon dictionary was defined 'a clothing planed and finished by ar-

tist<sup>9)</sup>. And the other hand, there are 'new expression mode combining art concept with clothing possibility'<sup>10)</sup>and 'materialized immaterial idea of inside through the subject of outside human body'<sup>11)</sup>.

The works of this tendency have a meaning of 'clothing as a pure art endowed artistic value'<sup>12)</sup>. These also emphasize artistic expression of artists' special and inherent style transcending expression form and content in traditional clothing.



<fig. 1> Boundary of Fashion Art

The Conception of fashion art shall be arranged as follows. Fashion art which is fitted to the above four elements are as follows : Firstly, fashion arts which express contemporary artistic philosophy. Secondly, fashion arts which utilize art as their design inspiration. Thirdly, fashion collection which are produced according to designer's artistic intention. Fourthly, Wearable arts which are produced by artists as an art work.<sup>13)</sup>

As shown <fig. 1>, fashion art includes artistic clothes in the range of fashion art and it does not restrict to the meaning of 'wearable art' emphasizing artistic expression. This means that fashion art cover a wide range of clothing including handcraft factor.

Through fashion art, artists can express their intentions and are not restricted by the conventional functions of clothes; that clothes should be worn

on the body. Therefore, fashion art enabled artists to create unlimited meanings brought about many changes to the contemporary fashion.

## 2. Body Space

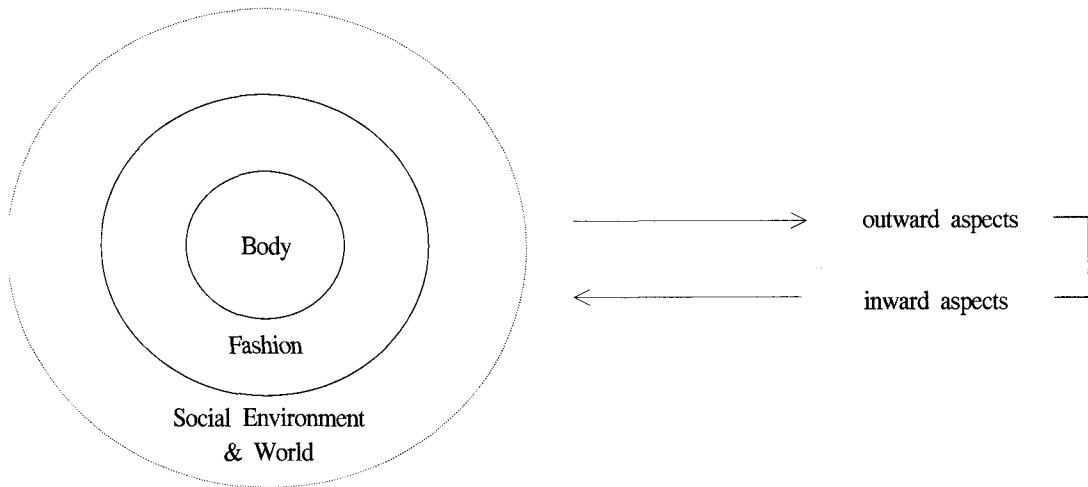
In all over the modern society, there was special interest in cognitive human body and there were many lively discussions on this subject.

In this study, 'body' is not the simple flesh but the body unified one with spirit. This means that we have to understand it in the viewpoint accepting physiological theory and social-cultural argument by modern physiologist. We also regard it a space that various expression modes of modern art are induced and new social-cultural theory are developed as the fashion art through the combination between body and clothing.

On the other hand, Rose Lee Goldberg explained performance art as a genre in modern physical art. She expressed this word in the viewpoint that structural form established on the body transforms physical line by widening and reducing personal body space in the artwork.<sup>14)</sup>

In this study, body-space is the space where social environment and universe are held in common through body and fashion shown in <fig 2>. body-space is the outward aspect turned outward to become visible space, and it is also inward aspect containing comprehensive meaning. Both inward and outward aspects have a role and function as a social interaction connecting self and others.

Body-fashion interaction lends expression to the unconscious experience of self, both internally as part of a "selfing" process, and externally by creating an identity to present to others.<sup>15)</sup>



<fig. 2> Boundary of the body-space

Clearly, whether or not we acknowledge the existence of an unconscious as a psychic entity, in our experience of the self we are influenced by something that operates at a level beyond our conscious awareness, and it is possible that we use both body and fashion to give this experience expression<sup>16)</sup>

In this standpoint, fashion art can be an expression mode manifested by unconscious experiences of body and fashion and it is performed as a space to express social concept according to the artist's intention.

Among the visual factors seen fashion art these days, they usually focused on the clothing and used material, artistic point of ornaments. However, this study is going to investigate work analysis and its inner meaning according to opening and closure forms of body-space putting more emphasis on the physical image.

Fashion art can be seen as expression media expressing bodily extension for concrete expression role of inner and outer body action. Body-space of fashion art can be said as an expression mode mixed with the visual viewpoint seeing clothing to

be main expression media and bodily containment viewpoint.

### III. Opening and closure body-space

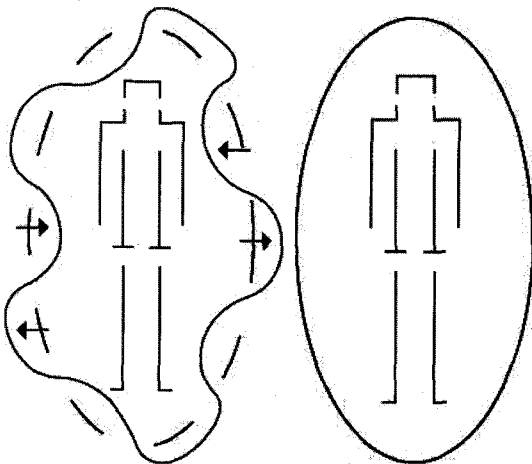
Image of opening and closure among body-space in fashion art can be classified into opposing structure of opening and closure. Destroying the boundary between bodily opening and closure for a primary function of clothing and dismantling the role and boundary between body and clothing, opening body-space in appearance as a reemergence of body image or the border between inner and outer are being ambiguous because of transparent material. Being representative work of this study opening body-space was expressed as an opening space image using transparency.<fig. 3>

The representative works titled <Fly the sky..... Walk on the sea....., 2001> are the creatures seeking the original meaning about clothes and body as covering of shame, showing the wealth and extending ego departed from an expression of an identity and class. Air Form fashion

works which made from the transparent poly-urethan and air-pumped PVC expressing the space, for pursuing of a conversion from the insensible things to the imaginable space using a minimum and plain materials, expressed as a language and symbol of a fantasy and reality showing a visual shape characterized as a fashion displayed an existing and not existing of costumes and the body simultaneously. In this work, the function of clothing substituted with transparent vinyl was ignored and body-space was opened to expose whole body.<sup>17)</sup> <fig. 5>

On the contrary, closure body-space was isolated from external environment and confined in the certain space, which could limit or restraint body-action.

Excluding boundary of body and clothing on the whole or in part, boundary of work becomes body-space. However, these were appeared to be a work inducing unlimited curiosity and meaning from the audience.<fig. 4>



<fig. 3> Opening of body-space

<fig. 4> Closure of body-space

As a representative work, <Final preparation, 1999> of Viktor & Rolf showed covered body-

space in the form of cape coat. A series of work influenced by Russian folk doll showed continuously changing process of body-space by fashion art through nine times disguise. At the last completion stage, dome type clothing conceals the form and action of body-space except head part.<sup>18)</sup> <fig. 9>

## 1. Opening

The vagueness concept of postmodernism making body and clothing boundary vague are appearing as the opening space of fashion art. Chastity theory for a social custom to conceal body and fashion characteristics of dualism to expose two-side vale can be a conspicuous expression in modern fashion art.

<Electric Dress, 1956> of Atsuko Tanaka expressed it using illumination to be looked well as a material of clothing in the exhibition and fashion show. This work tried to be outstanding by illumination which opened the presence of body than illuminating lamps out of existing way of thinking in concealing body with clothing. In this way body was shown more openly by light.<sup>19)</sup>

<Web dress, 1986> of Caroline Broadhead presented new perspective in the method perceiving clothing and body. Clothing creates three-dimensional form piled up one on another weaved with basic structural lines and it is assumed that clothing is metaphorically expressed one of human existence value condensing them with several lines. Challenging existing concepts that human body should be covered with two-dimensional surface of cloth, body-space was opened by surfaces simplified with lines.<fig. 6>.

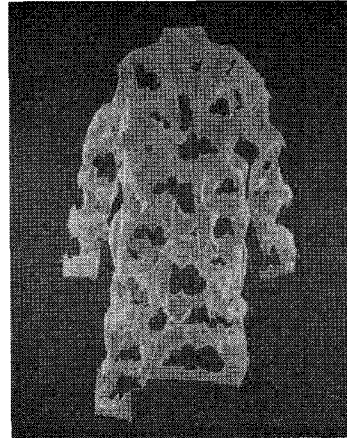
Lesley Dill was said in the <White Hinged Poem Dress, 1992>, "Sometimes I feel skinless. And I go looking for a covering. For me, words are an

intervening armor between ourselves and the world. I'm particularly drawn to using the words of Emily Dickinson in my work for their embodiment of psychological states of despair and euphoria." . . . . . In each of the sculptures, the poem is knitted into the emotional metaphor of their being. This dress is made so the poem can only be read if the dress is open . . . . . Perhaps in this era of AIDS and a shrinking world, an empty, not brimful, dress best represents our sense of presence and absence existing concurrently.<sup>20)</sup><fig. 7>

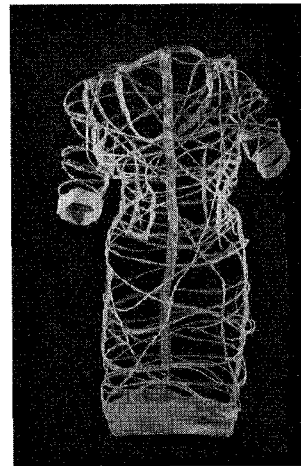
As an example appeared in the work for the image of body and clothing, Costantino's beautifully crafted costumes, <Human Furrier, 1996> series, are made of being silicon which imitates human or animal skin. Worn by elegant mannequins, their softness and fleshy color evoke feminine sexuality. This illusion of real skin arouses the desire to caress and touch. But like gazing at sensual super models on cat walks, it must remain a visual seduction. On closer inspection, we are astonished to find that the flesh, which appears so real, is fake. Moulded on the delicate surface are a series of nipples, navels and anuses, along with human hair.<sup>21)</sup> This showed the vagueness of the relationships between body and skin, fur and clothing. This is also typical work showing body and clothing as a realistic medium in the artistic clothing.<fig. 8>

Although the clothing looks like a real second skin, this work expressed its revealing image of naked body. Together with popularity of eroticism, the questions about the role of clothing are proposed. This is the paradoxical expression because of the trend of the times exposing natural women's body.

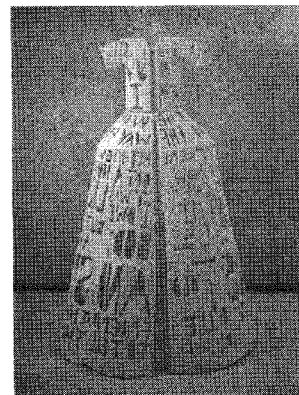
<Christine B, porte un robe de la collection, 1993> of Jean Paul Gaultier is the work planned



<fig. 5> Huh Jung Sun, 「Fly the sky . . . . . Walk on the sea . . . . .」, 2000



<fig. 6> Caroline Broadhead, 「Web」, 1989



<fig. 7> Lesley Dill, 「White Hinged Poem Dress」, 1992

to reveal the existence and absence of fashion, that of the body as the designer's one-piece dress. That is, secret part to be concealed comes to the surface, wears the dress like the second skin depicted so real as to be confused with the skin color, but shows the image of baring image designed to expressing naked image. With the relief of eroticism, it is the dress appearing in the time background of naturally exposing women's body.

Furthermore the target of fashion art is not the clothing exposed outside. It became body itself and images of body were consumed. In this way, it could be understood that social consciousness about nude changed rapidly.

## 2. Closure

The opposite image on the bodily opening is closure, which ignores body's outline and are expressed as a form confining body at a certain structure and type concealing silhouettes of body.

Maria Blaisse, <Ruimvel, 2000>, worked in collaboration with textile designer Karen Marseille. She has developed knitted and felted sculptural forms which can be used in various ways on the body. There are seven basic shapes, inspired by seaweed forms. These are made either as open pieces or as closed tubes, which can be slit open to frills, due to the excess folds of knitting. The conceptual body pieces shown here are created from positioning all the knitted forms- one tube on each limb, the body and the head. There are many possible variations.<sup>22</sup><fig. 10>

In the <Revival of 70s, 1996> of Kim Hong Seok, the artist put some famous brand clothes supported by the designer in an oceanarium whose bottom was covered with moss and the author shut the clothes up in the closed place of the oceanarium. The artist placed the clothes of expensive

and famous brand without the existence of the human being and he puts them into an oceanarium or freezes them or hung them or packs them under vacuum, which present the fixed concept that clothes should be put on a new problem. The mass produced clothes were transformed from the traditional favorite goods into artistic works by his hands, from the ones put on by human beings to the ones shown by them, from the ones used to the ones to be stored.<fig. 11>

Hussein Chalayan talked about cultural custom of wearing clothing in Arab by the changed form of chador. Originally chador suppressed complete body line but the changed chador of Hussein Chalayan exposed the outlines of face and breast consciously and selectively according to artist's intention. This work expressed the contradiction of paradoxical dichotomous thinking on the formation of shame according to woman / man, wearing clothing / not wearing, closure / exposure etc. by using chador as a motif put on until now. Using chador representing traditional woman, the artist showed inappropriate relationship between body and clothing revealing the to-be-hid part, which make the boundary of opening and closure a reverse turn.

As an example of concealment the body-space part, <Between, 1988> of Chalayan stands for physical concept of anonymous modern society by putting head inside the pea form manufactured with wood. By the space for the arms being disappeared, the covered space restricting physical body were made, which symbolized the suppression of women body confined their action.<fig. 12>

The contrast between opacity of wood material and transparency of red shiffon are vitalizing the work. <The Difference is Clear, 1998> of Mike Thomas showed closed work where physical part were absorbed as outside environment of body-



<fig. 8> Nicola Costantino,  
「Human Furrier」, 1995-1999



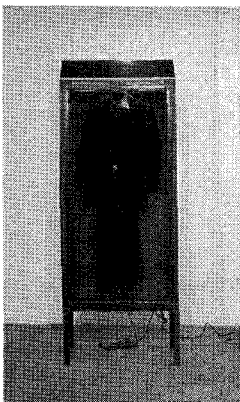
<fig. 13> Mike Thomas,  
「The Difference is Clear」, 1998



<fig. 9> Viktor & Rolf, 「Final  
preparation」, 1999-2000



<fig. 10>  
Maria Blaisse  
「Ruimvel」, 2000



<fig. 11> Kim Hong  
Seok, 「Revival of 70s」,  
1996



<fig. 12>  
Hussein  
Chalayan,  
「Between」, 1998

space using computer graphic. He is speaking for the modern people influenced by emptiness of city life and materialism by expressing disappeared body as a building structure of general form of city. <fig. 13>

The women's images shown at the closure body-space are appearing as an expression method, which cannot move freely. The expressed arms and legs restrained in the form of restraint and suppression are representing controlled modern people from simple clothing covering their body. Rather than the functional role in the existing clothing as a delivery instrument for social critical message it expresses body and makes the audience possible to analogize.

#### IV. Interpretation about opening and closure body-space

##### 1. Interpretation of opening body-space

Opening body-space of fashion art are breaking



the fixed idea, and abolishing the boundary of opening and closure body-space for a primary function of clothing, role and border of body and clothing out of dichotomy of body/clothing, opening/closure. As a result of analysis on the example works, opening body-space opens its part or whole and it is manufacturing the inner part of body to be exposed outside.

There are many works that induce to read the contained meaning of it by transforming open space to a certain image or writing. There were expression methods that the physical body line and form using illumination were made to be conspicuous and the surface of clothing was depicted same as body surface to expose body part.

Especially opening body-space has a characteristics to exclude the problem of fixed women identity in close relation to women body. By opening women bodies, the fixed standpoint or idealized body viewpoint such as body protection and chastity could be broken. This is interpreted as a standpoint abolishing patriarchal society itself producing fixed femininity by refusing basic femininity viewpoint in the context of post-modern feminism. As a result, the subject of femininity is raising sexual identity such as homosexuality and AIDS, transgender, sadism, masochism, lesbianism, bisexual / hybrid / sexlessness which are known to have a lot of influence on the clothing and fashion.

Out of traditional clothing value that conceals physical body, the boundary of outside and inside being vague by pursuing trans-clothing where the boundary of body and clothing is doubtful, new body concept and clothing value are offered. Although opening body-space looks like a real second skin, exposed image with real body that are concealed are to be seen as long as being naked are to be expressed. Being the secret part that is to be

concealed, expressed, together with the society where eroticism acknowledges the background of current circumstance are combining with fashion art.

Opening body-space is developing experimental and challenging mind to find new clothing language and to dismantle traditional prejudice such as functioning, keeping warm, identity symbol such as sex, and T.P.O. concept. By dismantlement and overthrowing the conflict of inner meanings contained in the clothing with physical problem and contrasting with clothing, not as a functional instrument for clothing, but as a language and medium doing meaningful action in the social critics it may appear in various visual forms.

## 2. Interpretation of closure body-space

There were many works suggesting body-space as a form of clothing where the roles and functions of clothing were excluded in the exposed mode of the closure body-space of fashion art.

Part of body-space and the form of clothing are covered and the expression method was shown in which the way is to figure the structure out of guess. Body perversion and transformation in fashion art is the representative expression form controlling and suppressing women body. This was due to the existing broken ideal of femininity and the dismantled traditional expression; such factors are being expressed as a exaggerated expression form of unexpected body part.

Under the thinking of modernism the clothing completed by reproducing on the one to one basis is giving notice in advance by reinterpreting the structure of physical body. Differentiated body into part on the basis of correlation between clothing and body disappeared and the concept of beauty formed new artistic body-space by exaggeration and distortion perfect ideal type into part. Furthermore,

the concept and role of sex explained with clothing were refused to be a simple and total regulated socially and are appearing as vague clothing which has no classification on the sex.

The introspection of modern society on the distorted, disabled, malformed body losing the whole and organic composition are met with fashion art and this is making new artistic clothing form transformed by distortion and exaggeration. There were some works trying to cover the face by extending clothing upward using wood and metal.

It seems that other identity existing somewhere else are referred and filtered each other, which can be translated into that the anonymity of the characteristics of modern society are reflected here. Along with the development of electric communication technology it is possible to reveal his thinking and opinion metaphorically without revealing his identity about materialistic modern society.

Fashion art of metaphorical image not revealing women and men's body shows the fact that body is never exposed as a consistent identity in modern society. Not being positive or not being negative on the reality, they only look like an existence as itself individually. As a result the expression will for the acceptance of new sex started from feminism are suggesting problems from natural to cultural sex transcending physiological uniform interpretation according to the male, female, and idealistic beauty of human body may acknowledge the alienated beauty which was not accepted during that time.

### 3. Establishment of identity in fashion art

Historically clothing is very familiar part in formative art. In the formal and descriptive perspective clothing functions as an attachment of human body, and indicates class, social status. Even

this century fashion has played very important role in futurism, constructivism, and surrealism thorough long-term investigation of abstract concept. However, it seems that clothing is slowly getting out of the traditional usage as an attachment of body. In addition, artists are searching identity problem by expressing clothing as a separated one from our body and such a modern attitude differs from the past.

Among the conspicuous differences between the fixed genre trends of modern art and body art, fashion designers are trying to extend fashion art field by borrowing ideas form art works, developing collective work with artist, using materials from establishment art and sculpture for the body substituting clothing.

These phenomena of fashion art are partly the result of postmodernism but this means that this is understood as a social space expressing the spirit of the times, in addition a expression space expanding discussions on body not as a simple media of the work for the human body has been overlooked until now. These kinds of expansion of territory in fashion art are to be attributed to the result of mutual communication of media and discussion of the field related to the modern art based upon the body.

It is possible to interpret differently these concepts and phenomena of fashion art. The ambivalence or abundant materials of the fashion is acting as a sign that is possible to be reiterated to various meaning of social-cultural dimension out of existing fixed function of clothing. The tendency of diversity and polycentrism seen at clothing based on the stylized characteristics and interpretation with postmodernism and de-constructivism becomes to expose into plural meaning in the interpretation of fashion art because of complexity of modern so-

ciety and social members.

The fashion art out of massiveness and homogeneity of the current fashion could acquire aura of artwork in the point that is the unique objet. This point shows various shape of the body that cannot be representative of certain body type and this appears as an original and creative body image expressed in a recreated artistic image.

## V. Conclusion

Fashion is not for the simple human chastity and body protection and it is simply not reflect natural body, that is, given identity. As commonly used materials to give general meaning of body, fashion decorates body and it is not exaggerating that body cannot exist without fashion.

In these days, fashion cannot be understood without mentioning body and fashion art shown in modern art cannot be interpreted or analyzed without body. Therefore the objective of this study was to expose body according to the physical theory that has been discussed in the flow of recent post-structuralism argument but it was to investigate opening and closure 'body-space' of both sides appeared in the fashion art and the intention or containing aim was to reveal such appearance of body-space.

In this study it was found that 'opening and closure' body-space appeared as a closure type to exclude bodily boundary by expressing the other space out of traditional clothing form and as a opening trends to make the boundary of inside and outside of body vague.

The opening and closure body-space of fashion art can be brought to the fore in the characteristics of women's identity problem expressed in experimentally used clothing through closure and opening

space image as a role of body art showing body power which have been concealed, alienated, and oppressed. Namely, it is not finished by evocation of human's desire, death, gender, identity, and sexual pleasure etc. These materialistic civilization and mass production society, standardization, fragmentation of cultural situation, unpredictable future had been tried to express in various expression mode and pluralistic allusion.

On the other hand, these experimental attitude in the fashion art make remind of the fact that these should approach in a space dimension where diverse experience and aspect are happening in the modern society and, therefore, it should not be approached in simple materialistic and visible dimension. Fashion is not simply remained at the clothing dimension but it functions like a barometer reflecting current situation of this time.

The interpretation of artistic and body-space in fashion art are indicating the role and function of the fashion art exceeding the suggestible dimensions in the every day life of fashion. The body-space of fashion art showing similar aspect of body-art today could be understood that it is substituted into an metaphorical, critical space by seeing it as a symbol system connected with social space. Therefore, contemporary fashion art should be interpreted as an equivocal space looking at the body-space with open mind.

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