

# Cyborg Fashion: Redefining Modern Beauty

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**Abstract:** The world of fashion has inadvertently been backed by Technology & Science. Be it three-dimensional body, the second skin vis-à-vis wearable apparels or the interaction of body with spatial dynamics- technology has corroborated an upper hand. The fashion of 21st century is intensified with technological intervention where the body is treated like a superstructure composed of mechanical parts. Fashion has relocated to a new body consciousness where feminine beauty is negotiated with a 'Technologized Orientation'.

As technology instigates the future of fashion, it redefines the boundaries between clothing, body and machine leading to the emergence of Cyborg Fashion. The ethics and lifestyle that were traditionally designed by codes of dress are now replaced by modern, technology-driven aesthetics. Body's persistent interface with technology has degenerate the generic concept of beauty, & philosophy and lead to the emergence of what is called as Hyper-breed. This Hyper- breed is accustomed to be fashioned through surgical procedures, radical exercises or mechanically driven body parts and rates the acceptability preference of the Generation- Z or 'Digital Natives'. Movies like Tomb Raider portraying Lara Croft in adventurous, supermodel shaped body with ultra-masculine powers epitomized the concept of 'Sheroes'. Designers like Hussein Chalayan, Tristan Webber and Alexander McQueen have significantly contributed in pondering the technological identity of the 21st century fashion. This paper focuses on this conglomeration of Technology and Fashion and their role in redefining beauty and modern aesthetics.

**Keywords:** cyborg fashion, digital natives, hyper-breed, technologized orientation, ultra-modern technology

## 1. Introduction

The world of fashion is backed by technology in the postmodern era. The fashion industry constantly seeks new avenues to please its victims and provide innovative solution to art of wearable fashion. It goes without saying that there are 'fashions' and not just one 'fashion' that are followed by consumers today. Technology, hi-tech and digital are some of the keywords fused with fashion now that has effectively influence Generation Z. Wearable technology and gadgets have altered and elevated the definition of fashion today [1]. Digital generation has enabled our mediated body to interact with the technology driven clothing. There is a remarkable conglomeration between technology and fashion that is absolutely revolutionary [1]. Techno-fashion driven by technology is accessible to masses today. What appeared like 'futuristic' and 'science-fiction' once in the Hollywood Star Wars is reality now. Finally, its time when the 'future' has arrived dominated by technology driven solution to make our

lives comfortable and elevate it to a different level. Science and technology have reversed our sensibilities towards how we treat our own bodies today. Experimentation with body to alter its appearance and functionality is a widespread phenomenon. Various types of machines and gadgets are being fully integrated into our bodies as a part of wearable technology.

This combination of human-machine phenomena has given birth to what may be termed as 'cyborg'. The term cyborg was quoted by Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline in the article 'Cyborgs and Space' to illustrate human machine system that was self-regulated and adjusted itself to varied environments [2]. In the present-day hybrid environment where ergonomics has become such an important mandate, the appreciation for machine aesthetics has taken a lead over the natural version of beauty. As quoted by Nicole James, the technology of appearance has elevated to a level and takes a forefront with procedures like cosmetic surgery which has become a normal phenomenon undertaken to alter the natural appearance and achieve perfection in natural beauty. Thus, the line between reality and fantasy has blurred making it impossible to distinguish between real and attained beauty [3]. Thus, as we have landed in the future, the preference of machine over natural has taken a lead resulting in modification of the concepts of natural beauty altered by mechanical beauty.

### A. Body as a Superstructure

Society will always have high standards of beauty with respect to body. The body is the material basis of our existence as human being. The fantasy heroes of science fiction have extended outside the virtual world projecting a symbiotic relationship between human and machine becoming a reality [1]. The traditional expression of the body has diluted replaced by technology-oriented superstructure that perfectly fits the urban environment. The mediated human body has emerged as an ultramodern superstructure in the 21st century as an outcome of the technological revolution with dual perspectives- virtual and real. The human body has emerged as an ultramodern superstructure in the 21st century as a result of the technological revolution. Thus, the contemporary evolution of mediated body has dual perspectives- virtual and real. While the real body with flesh is a part of the physical biosphere, the virtual body is caught up in the cyber world with irreversible transformation with the conventional attributes of beauty. This body free from its flesh is projected in the virtual world as digital images in the form of holograms.

Thus, the materiality of the body is challenged by cyber

culture. The alliance between the projected body and technology gives birth to what we may call 'Superstructures'. This apparently fulfils the framed imagination of the real human who has always desired to look glorious with superhero abilities. The norms of conventional beauty are thus undergoing transformation as this virtual body is absolutely free from natural factors like disease, aging and death. Deleuze and Guattari coin the alliance between the body and machine as 'celibate machine' elaborated as the emergence of new breed of humanity with amalgamation of real and virtual human image projected as a unique entity [2]. The body is not only subjugated by the prevailing cyber - culture, but scientific and medical technology are parallelly developing fast to undertake biological changes in the natural being. The natural body is visualized as a mere material for exploration where possibility to alter natural body and conventional beauty is constantly experimented with. The man-machine combination is welcomed by human community - be it for altering beauty or improving the natural body functions. What was once visualised as a part of science -fiction or Sci-Fi has now become reality! The distinction between present and future has become volatile leading to mutation and giving rise to AI i.e. artificial intelligence. This mutation is such that man and machine are morphed into each other.

One of the landmark examples is Professor Kevin Warwick (Professor of Cybernetics at the University of Reading, England) who got a silicon chip transponder implanted in his forearm in the year 1998. This transponder is capable of carrying information pertaining to National Insurance number, blood type, medical records etc and perform other functions like operate doors, heaters, computers without any physical labour [4]. The conventional definition of beauty is the characteristic of a person, animal, place, object, or idea that provides a perceptual experience of pleasure or satisfaction. The point to be emphasized is the "perceptual experience of pleasure and satisfaction" that provides meaning to the definition of "beauty". Thus, the tiny chip inserted in the body not only served as a biological mutation but also provided inner pleasure and satisfaction. The fact that an artificial unit is united with natural body brings it to a level of superstructure.

With the everyday improvement in science and technology, the gap between real and virtual, man and machine has almost contracted. The real experience of pleasure and satisfaction of the generation- Z today lies in gadgets, gizmos and improvising them to make these an intrinsic, non -separable part of their lives. This improvisation may be completely by choice or the need of the time. As per the dictionary definition, it is an external or implanted mechanical device that supplements a missing or defective part of a body [5].

Prosthesis may be considered as medical procedure but it has definitely let human as a community to morph with machines. The prosthetic devices morphed with the body and almost robotic in appearance. However, the metaphysical emotion attained through prosthesis is truncation and not amputation the facilitates superior mobility. These devices not only elevate

super hero like mobility but also invite seductive invitation in visual culture by morphing the boundary between human and machine.

Prosthetic technology equips the body with wearable mechanisms that facilitates protection and adaptation. We have crossed yet another step where human-machine could be perceived as single entity. The ergonomically perfect machine syncs accurately with the human functions and overpowers the natural body to evolve into superhuman.

### B. Wearable technology

Technology around us has become a part of who we are. We put together technologies to make it better and this is what we may call as 'wearable technology'. In today's fast-growing world, we as human beings are keen to define our bodies and extend ourselves. Thus, various wearable technologies have been designed to integrate the digital into physical. It has the potentials to work with technology better and create a symbiotic relation with humans. We are ultimately getting into the concept of hybrid human beings or hyper -breed where technology has corroborated an upper hand. With digital skins being talked about in challenging projects like 'The Creator Project' it is believed that a whole kind of singularity movement is generating fast pace in the technology front. These wearable technologies give our body a superhuman power. As technology becomes more radical, the union between man and machine has started developing cyborg like feeling among challenged humans.

This may be referred in the case of Neil Harvey - color blind artist who becomes world's first 'eyeborg' by having antenna implanted inside his skull so he can 'hear' colors [6]. According to Harvey, he feels himself like a cyborg as he was able to perceive colors better than his fellows due to the antenna implanted in his skull. This antenna has a camera attached to his skull that enables him to 'hear' colors as he was born color blind [7]. Thus, the union between technology and human has enhanced the natural body in no way than we have ever been thinking about. Today, technology has given us the freedom to enhance the thing that we want to enhance and with a choice of when to enhance. Its time when people select to use technology inside their bodies as overall technology is helping them to evolve as hyper-breeds. What's exciting about reconfiguring the human body with technology is - "you evolve as better human-beings". Through wearable technology, we are trying to supplement the weaknesses that we have always been trying to improve upon.

The concept of beauty is thus raising to a different level where the body with 'Technologized orientation' is highly preferred over natural body. This orientation is not only supplementing the weaknesses but provides additional abilities. The interface between the body and technology is the most remarkable phenomenon added to the metaphors of our culture as it absolutely unimaginable to sustain without these advanced devices whether worn external or implanted internal. This could imply technophilia, a fetishistic desire of the body with

technology with the aim of perfecting it.

Thus, cyborg that was once a sci-fi terminology is a reality today with people widely accepting the adapting the art of wearing technology and evolve as extended human species.

### C. Cyborg fashion

The world of fashion has been strongly dominated by technology. Modern technology has not only become a part of our lives but it has also become the concept for manipulation for the fashion designers. Society's obsession with technology explores avenues for a stylish future that consists of a man-machine integration. The boundaries between body, clothing and machine has become volatile leading to the emergence of what may be called 'cyborg fashion'. The ethics and lifestyle that were traditionally designed by codes of dress are getting replaced by-modern, technology-driven aesthetics. Body's persistent interface with technology has degenerate the generic concept of beauty, & philosophy and lead to the emergence of what is called as Hyper- breed. This Hyper- breed is accustomed to be fashioned through surgical procedures, radical exercises or mechanically driven body parts and rates the acceptability preference of the Generation- Z or 'Digital Natives'.

The technology interface with the body can be enhance in four categories (Quinn Bradley,2002): restorative that replace lost functions, limbs or failed organs, normalising, creating a generic aesthetic while integrating technologized bodies, reconfiguring that equips bodies with additional limbs or communication system or enhancing by facilitating increase vision, mobility hearing etc. However, in the case of cyborg fashion, it is the phenomenon of reconfiguring and enhancing that elevates the human interaction with technology driven devises like eyewear, mobile phone, palm pilots that not only provides comfort but also brings confidence of being fashionable [1].

In the light of technology, there is a techno-sexualisation of the body [1]. This could be viewed as a unification of man and machine, referring to a body which is technologically liberated, digitally sound and admires techno -fashion. This gives rise to natives who highly appreciate the beauty of fashioned body integrated with technology not only as a part of their body but also as garments. All humans who are a part of digital world, operate different equipment and exist in the virtual world are cyborgs. The nervous system of these humans extends to reciprocate with the artificial intelligence of the machine making them cyborgs in a way [1].

Fashion designers have played a major role in framing the cyborg fashion that includes inter-disciplinary approaches. Designers like Hussein Chalayan, Tristian Webber and Alexander McQueen have significantly contributed in pondering the technological identity of the 21st century fashion. In their designs, the interface between design, hi-tech and body clearly indicates that the beauty concepts have evolved. Earlier, where beauty was only about body decoration and aesthetically appealing clothing, today it has evolved leading to beauty

within experience, stimulation of senses and move towards a technologically profound world. To justify the same, the solar powered garment created by Pauline Van Dongen may be considered. The designer believes that technology has to be naturalized as the human habits reveal a techno morphed structure that can no longer be concealed behind the natural world [8]. Her project showcases an interactive garment where the body is augmented with solar cells to embody enough electrical power to become a real source of energy [9]

In a similar power generated design, Lady Gaga wore "Volantis" (April 2014) marking the beginning of the first flying dress designed by Studio XO offering vision to a new era for human flight. Volantis is remote controlled and flies using 12 battery-powered propellers [10]. This project formulates an aesthetic of technology through the mean of a dress that could rise above the ground and provides the wearer with stimulation of senses. Thus, projects like this have defined beauty concepts in a futuristic manner.

### D. Movies and cyborg

In tandem with technological advances such as advanced prosthesis, genetic engineering, cloning and plastic surgery, the imagined field of cyborg has expanded in popular culture as well as movies. Movies like Terminator, Robocop, Transformer, Avengers had a great impact on the so called 'Digital Natives' of the 21st century who are obsessed with technology. The emerging definition of cyborg from 1960s onwards became rooted with the release of various Sci -fi and cyborgian movies like Star - Trek, Terminator, Robocop etc.

Similar level of popularity was observed when movie titled - 'Ra-one' starring Bollywood superstar Shahrukh Khan was released in the year 2011 [11]. The story revolves around the character G-one created from electricity who comes to the real world from digital world for the demise of the evil character 'Ra-one'. The movie was an overnight hit and became popular among the youngsters and the kids who became so much obsessed with the cyborgian character that computer game was released on the same concept with same character in 2011.

As illustrated by Vrilio, this advent of technology driven body marks the beginning of 'third wave' of modernity where the body is colonized by the impact of futuristic technology [12].

In all the movies, the idea of cyborg has been projected as a hybrid native capable of superhuman abilities. These hybrid natives projected in movies has eventually emerged as fantasy figure in the popular cultures. Obsession of the human agency with cyborgs points towards the interaction between technological changes that has become an important part of human lives. In the overall interface between technology and human agency, a significant alteration has occurred with the concept of beauty and aesthetics. Thus, the natural beauty, either inner or outer, has undergone transformation in its overall concept.

Earlier, beauty was about the natural body, now it's about the possibilities provided by technology to structure the body in a

hybridized manner. The complex assemblage between man and machine is highly favored to obtain physical bodies. The outcome is a desired body alteration that possesses qualities formerly impossible among the human genres. For instance, movie like Tomb Raider starring Angelina Jolie as Lara Croft epitomizes the concept of Sheroes. It is a term that may be explained as 'she - heroes' or simply Sheroes. Thus, the supernatural body capable of combating every challenge and still managing to appear ultra-feminine with masculine. powers urge many to adapt processes like radical surgeries, liposuction, radical changed, extreme exercise and dietary supplement.

## 2. Conclusion

Thus, it could be concluded that our lives are permeated by a technologically textured world. The aesthetics of technology is widely acceptable among the digital natives. Body as a superstructure and advanced wearable technology has redefined the beauty concepts. It's no more about the natural beauty as the world is evolving and so is the philosophy of aesthetics and beauty. The conglomeration hi-tech environment with cyborgs in popular culture and reality have compelled human to redefine modern beauty. Human, machine and technology has seamlessly morphed into each other to create the cyborg that is widely acceptable in the natural environment. Therefore, the conventional norms of beauty are compromised to epitomize

the technology driven, mechanical and artificial beauty that has been made to evolve as the need of the hour.

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