The history of fashion through the last few decades illustrates fashion’s brush with art, culture, and architecture that propelled it to a height of importance, both globally and locally, where it would come to rest for the coming decades. From being a purely aesthetic medium of expression it was transformed into one that is an expression of political beliefs, social agendas and personal identities thus making it versatile as a design discourse. What is interesting through this history of tumultuous change in concept and practice, is fashion’s discrediting of the ‘new’ for an adoption of the values of ‘decay’, ‘melancholy’ and of life itself, inspired by Japan’s rich dialogue with design (1). A parallel can be made to contemporary discussions on ‘fashion’ as an adjective - what is ‘in’ today will be discarded tomorrow. In a nutshell, fashion has placed itself neatly as an ephemeral ghost of sorts, temporarily occupying our daily lives through the decisions we make, the way we choose to lead our lives, and the ideas we learn of and assimilate with. What can be dismissed as mere ‘capitalist merchandise’ is actually fashion pretending to be numbed by the powerful practice of consumption, when in reality contemporary fashion is more than that; it is a medium of the masses, representative of life and culture, in constant transition bridging the worlds of possibility and imagination. Almost as a blessing in disguise, fashion can be said to create opportunities that merge wonder with optimism through sensual experience.

It is only in the recent past that fashion has been seen to expand itself out to embrace the possibilities of technology and science, thus displaying itself as a platform for artists, designers, architects, technologists, and scientists to converge and collaborate. At the crossroads of this meeting, concepts such as Sabine Seymour’s ‘fashionable technology’ (2), Bradley Quinn’s ‘electronic textiles’ (3) and Ana Viseu’s ‘hybrid actors’ (4) have expanded our understanding of the possibilities of this realm. In a world that is increasingly technocratic, these concepts fashion the way we relate to textiles as fibers and as surfaces. How can fashion come to mediate the contemporary atmosphere? Can it challenge stereotypes? Can it create better lifestyles? Can it mystify and bring wonder to human experience? Suzanne Lee’s stint with science and fashion culminating in her project ‘Bio Couture’ and Hussein Chalayan’s Airplane Dress from his 2000 spring/summer collection illustrate the breadth of this emerging discipline. From assessing the work that companies such as Bare Conductive and Loop.ph do, to the individual visions of designers such as Mette Ramsgard Thomsen, Thecla Schiporst and Nick Cave, there is rich diversity in the skill set and knowledge of these media designers, architects, fashion designers and interface technologists.

As fashion carries the identities we are entitled to and determined to have, it also becomes an extension of us. It is commonly referred to as a second skin of sorts, and infused with technology it creates new
avenues for thought, performance, exploration and social change.