

# “Hey Siri, Play Me Something I’d Like!” Ecophenomenology of Fashion in Spike Jonze’s Fashion Film

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## Abstract

Based on a theoretical framework that combines media studies, fashion studies and philosophy of mind, this contribution adopts an “enactive” perspective to analyse the relationship between audio-visual media and fashion. The application of the enactive approach highlights the centrality of the interaction between body, space and technology in the construction of the media experience intended as an extension of human physical and mental limits. The analysis of two recent fashion films by the American director Spike Jonze — *Kenzo World* for Kenzo and *Welcome Home* for Apple — will contribute to clarifying the ways in which the combination of dance, music, fashion, advertising and film narration can give life to enactive media experiences.

**Keywords:** Fashion Film; Spike Jonze; Media Ecology; Media Enaction; Embodied Cognition.

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## Introduction

I would like to start from a philosophical quote that traces in an ideal way the thread of the argument I will develop with respect to the intimate relationship between audiovisual media and fashion within an epistemological framework that crosses fashion studies, media studies, film studies and cognitive science. In the essay from which it is taken, Maurice Merleau-Ponty is writing about painting, but his words are of more general interest since they concern the phenomenology of the relationship between the body and the environment and can therefore also be useful for the purposes of this contribution:

Visible and mobile, my body is a thing *among* things; it is one of them. It is caught in the *fabric* of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it sees and moves itself, it holds things in a *circle around* itself. Things are an annex or *prolongation* of my body; they are incrustated in its flesh, they are part of its full definition; the world is made of the very *stuff* of the body.<sup>1</sup>

The idea I want to put forward is that the use of a vocabulary referable to the field of fashion can be more than simply suggestive. In fact, a first element of interest in this passage concerns the use of terms such as “fabric” and “stuff” (*étoffe* in the original French edition) to describe the “cohesion” that puts the body in a relationship of mutual implication with the world. Let me also anticipate a second fundamental aspect: as the site of subjective experience, the body is a living and sentient organism that is not a mere thing among things, but the fulcrum of the perceptual experience around which things are arranged, they become “encrusted” and in doing so they are an “annex” and a “prolongation.” As we will see through recovering the work of the pioneers of media ecology, the concept of medium as an extension of man’s physical and mental faculties becomes more relevant than ever in a scenario in which technologies markedly — yet increasingly often inadvertently — modulate our relationship with the world. Perhaps it is no coincidence that a neo-cognitivist (or even *post*-cognitive) approach that is gaining ground in cognitive science, and which is also of considerable importance in the study of the media experience, insists on the “extensional” nature of cognitive processes, or rather on the ability of some — both material and cultural — artifacts to delocalize and extend the physical and mental faculties of the individual. To describe this dynamic, I will refer to some fundamental assumptions of the so-called “enactive” theory of mind, importing them into the field of media experience through the analysis — partly comparative — of two fashion films recently designed and directed by US director Spike Jonze.

## Laser Beams and Dancing Houses

Spike Jonze is best known as the screenwriter and director of acclaimed feature films such as *Being John Malkovich* (1999), *Adaptation* (2002), *Where the Wild Things Are* (2009) and *Her* (2013). These are all works of great inventiveness, capable of triggering a fertile cultural and theoretical debate on narrative forms and on the impact of new technologies on the individual and social life. Less known is Jonze’s activity — beginning in the early 1990s — as an author and a director of music videos (for artists such as Sonic Youth, Beastie Boys, REM, Björk, Fatboy Slim and many others). The vocation for and experience in the music field also influenced Jonze — since 1995 — on a third audiovisual creative front, that of commercials (for Nike, Wrangler, Nissan, Sprite, Lee, Levi’s, IKEA, Adidas, GAP, Miller, SoftBank). Here, I will take into consideration and analyze two commercials that are characterized by a number of similarities and that can be also considered fashion films.

The first is a commercial commissioned by the French fashion house Kenzo to advertise *Kenzo World*, i.e. the perfume of the year 2016. The eponymous video, lasting about 4 minutes, was released on August 25, 2016 via the official Kenzo YouTube channel<sup>2</sup> and immediately registered an impressive number of views (2 million in a few days, and today more than 29 million), positively shaking up the advertising industry.

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” in *The Primary of Perception*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 163.
2. The video can be watched at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABz2moolmPg>.

The video consists in an interpretive modern dance piece performed by actress and model Margaret Qualley (the daughter of Andie MacDowell) playing the role of a young woman at a formal gala ceremony in a sumptuous theater (Fig. 1).

The woman walks away from the family table just as a man (perhaps her father) is giving an acceptance speech, and reaches the hall, where she performs a wild and visceral dance transported by the frenetic rhythm of an instrumental music song composed by Sam Spiegel (brother of Spike Jonze) and Ape Drums featuring Assassins. Not surprisingly, the song is entitled *Mutant brain*. The choreography is a work of Ryan Heffington, who is behind numerous acclaimed music video performances.<sup>3</sup> Wrapped in an elegant forest-green gown designed by Heidi Bivens, the woman walks thoughtfully and sighing down the foyer corridor, while the male voice can still be heard, now distorted, coming from the theatre. Framed frontally in the foreground, she stares straight at the camera; a smile appears on her face and suddenly she turns from a bored “dad’s daughter” to a wild rebel. In fact, as the song starts, the music seems literally to take possession of her body and to force her to a series of eye movements, blinking, grimacing and twitching that extend quickly from her face to the entire body. The camera also shows the woman from her side, from above and from below while she stretches her arms and legs uncontrollably, making the skirt of the dress flutter. The woman turns the corner and runs along the mirror wall interacting with her reflected image, until she reaches a bronze bust of an old man and desecrates it in a sort of cheeky gestural dialogue: she grabs it and mimics the act of licking its nose and forehead (Fig. 2). The song’s pace is increasingly insistent and the woman frantically climbs a staircase with mirrors that multiply her moving image (Fig. 3). Upstairs in the hall, among imposing crystal chandeliers, she comes across a man on his cell phone, behind a column. She engages with him in a fight, quickly defeats him and exults over her victory, showing her biceps, in a typically male pose. Now she walks down a new corridor with a decisive step, and laser beams radiate from her fingers destroying walls, ceilings and an ancient vase (Fig. 4).



Figure 1: *Kenzo World* (Spike Jonze, 2016)

Standing on a small table in front of a floral tapestry, she tries, in vain but amused, to hold back the spasms of one arm, bringing it down with the other. In the following shots, from the top of the gallery of the desert theater, the woman is shown at a distance in the center of the stage. The shot approaches her as she performs some classic dance steps, while piano notes sneak into the electronic body of the music piece announcing its ending. The woman approaches the edge of the stage and, in correspondence with a loud “beep,” she drops towards the stalls area, disappearing from view below the level of the stage floor.

3. The most famous is perhaps the performance of young dancer Maddie Ziegler for Australian songwriter Sia’s music video for the song *Chandelier*. The video can be watched at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vjPBrBU-TM>.



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

A moment later, she is opening the external doors of the theater, and with acrobatic jumps she reaches a giant eye — the symbol of the Kenzo brand — made up of flowers of different colors. Right at the end of the song, the woman, shown in slow-motion, jumps ahead and penetrates the iris of the big eye, and comes out on the other side amidst petals flying in all directions (Fig. 5).



Figure 5

The woman gets to her feet and, in the last act of her wild performance, she strikes her chest, like an orangutan, following the percussive rhythm of the song, and fixes her gaze towards the camera with a grin on her lips.

In the more recent *Welcome Home* (2018),<sup>4</sup> in order to advertise the HomePod, a new Apple smart music play-back device, Jonze again chooses again a young, frustrated female character, this time played by the British singer-songwriter, musician and dancer FKA twigs. Exhausted after a hard day's work, the woman is shown squeezed in the subway crowd, walking in the pouring rain and finally in a crowded

4. The video is no longer available on Apple's official YouTube channel, but can be watched at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oP7-pkyP4Q>.

elevator, while returning home. As she enters her apartment, she addresses Siri with a vocal request: "Hey Siri, play me something I'd like." The voice assistant promptly obeys and launches the song *Til It's Over*, a single by the US rapper Anderson .Paak. The woman holds a glass of ice water, sits silently on the sofa and begins, as though playing, to tilt the glass, now resting on a table, on one side and then the other. Her shoulders begin to sway and she abandons herself to the song's rhythm. Something strange begins to happen... Suddenly the table follows the movement of her shoulders and literally elongates in space, as does the magazine on the table. The woman is amazed, and immediately realizes the possibility of interacting with the table: she leaves the glass and with her hand tries, successfully, to accompany the table towards a further extension (Fig. 6).



Figure 6: *Welcome Home* (Spike Jonze, 2018)

She gets up from the sofa, stands beside the table and begins to dance inviting it to follow her with her hands. The same happens with the window and a wall, which at first seems to resist, but then, after a short "conversation" is persuaded and begins to slide in three dimensions according to the woman's movements. The photographs, the sofa, the cushions, and the floor extend to the right, backwards, rotate to the rhythm of the music and dance, generating bundles of colored stripes (Fig. 7).



Figure 7

Suddenly — even in this case in spite of some initial resistance — a corridor opens up progressively, revealing a new part of the house. In this new environment, illuminated by neon lights and colored stripes, a liberating dance takes place (Fig. 8).



Figure 8

On the wall at the end of the corridor, a mirror reflects the woman's face. The music and dancing stop. She would prefer not to see herself and try to push the mirror away, but the latter immediately returns to its initial position. She convinces herself and, with a gesture of her hands, enlarges the surface of the mirror until it occupies almost the entire wall (Fig. 9).



Figure 9

The dance starts again, now with her double, but soon the movements of the dancers and their reflexes are misaligned and the mirror turns into a threshold of a further dimension that the woman crosses with no hesitation. In the penumbra beyond the threshold, two identical women perform a couple's dance, humming the song lyrics, smiling, embracing each other and then, as the music slows down, moving away with classical dance steps towards a theatre stage (just like in *Kenzo World* finale). The woman jumps on the couch and finds herself at the starting point, waking up from the trip into an imaginative life more carefree and colorful than the real one.

## Fashion is the Medium

It is time to return to Merleau-Ponty's suggestions and to the idea that the body is placed "between" things and, as a moving thing, is capable of keeping things "in a circle around itself": the philosopher uses prepositions and spatial adverbs to indicate the centrality of the body in a complex system of relationships. Things are referred to as an "annex" or a "prolongation" of the body, indicating the tendency of the latter to extend and inhabit the surrounding environment. As anticipated in the introduction, these suggestions recall the paradigm of media ecology, initiated by Neil Postman in the late 1960s.<sup>5</sup> In this context, the word "ecology" is used in reference to a new conception of the cultural and social environments of everyday life, where environment is "a complex message system which imposes on human beings certain ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving."<sup>6</sup> Far from being a mass of circuits, simple mechanical or electronic devices, or mere communication channels, the media "are environments ... within which we discover, fashion, and express humanity in particular ways."<sup>7</sup> The systemic nature of these environments (and of the method that studies them) is aimed at bringing into mutual dependence all the elements involved — bodies, technologies, cultures, spaces, etc. — and studying the dynamics of achieving and maintaining the overall balance, just like in the life of a biological ecosystem that needs a pyramidal cycle in order to survive, in which the state of one level fatally impacts all the others.

What I would like to emphasize is the idea that fashion and the media are mutually and deeply implicated: fashion itself can be considered as a perceptual medium, for a piece of clothing not only covers, protects or shows the body, but also extends it. As Marshall McLuhan — the best known among media ecologists — wrote in the chapter on clothing in his *Understanding Media*, "Clothing, as an extension of the skin, can be seen both as a heat-control mechanism and as a means of defining the self socially,"<sup>8</sup> and as such is therefore itself a biological, cognitive and social medium. As emerges in a famous interview in the magazine *Harper's Bazaar* — and to paraphrase the most known of McLuhan's mottos — "Fashion is the medium."<sup>9</sup>

In many ways, both of Jonze's videos rely on the idea of fashion as a biological and cultural medium (although the second focuses on technology as a trendy product, instead of clothing). As anticipated, the two videos do not belong to a specific genre and are intrinsically multimedia since they can be referred to a plurality of media forms: advertising (they are commercials), music (they are video clips), dance (they show choreographic performances), and cinema (they are short films that tell stories). Especially in *Welcome Home*, the viewer perceives a sense of textile plasticity, so to speak, thanks to the iconographic references to the world of fashion. The long-colored stripes generated by the elongation of surfaces create a saturated chromatism that is clearly in contrast with the dark photography of the opening, where the faded colors of the everyday life routine prevail, and recalls Missoni's rainbow inlays or Paul Smith's thin striped patterns. But they also make implicit references to art, in particular to abstract painter Ian Davenport's *Pured Lines*, or optical art-aesthetics. Or, finally, to cinema, for example to the tesseract sequence in Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014), in which the coexistence of temporal states is rendered through the multidimensional multiplication of long bundles of colored matter. Giuliana Bruno has already linked the materiality of the image surface to the semantic and somatic world of fashion in terms of a textural and haptic aesthetic: the screen is a dressed surface<sup>10</sup> and *Welcome Home* fully realizes this aesthetic even it does not advertise a piece of clothing. The restless fluttering of the skirt worn by the dancer in *Kenzo World* also refers to the original connection between cinema, fashion and dance, by recalling the so-called "serpentine dances" of Annabelle Withford (for Edison) or Loïe Fuller (for the

5. See Neil Postman, "The Reformed English Curriculum," in *High school 1980: The Shape of the Future in American Secondary Education*, ed. Alvin C. Eurich (New York: Pitman, 1970), 160-8.
6. Postman, 161.
7. Neil Postman, "Teaching as a Conserving Activity," *Instructor* vol. 89, n. 4 (1979).
8. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Mc Graw-Hill, 1964), 119.
9. See "McLuhan Looks at Fashion: The Mirror Is the Message," *Harper's Bazaar*, 3077 (April 1968).
10. See Giuliana Bruno, *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media* (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

Lumière brothers). As Bruno reminds us, this cinematic *danse serpentine* exploits precisely the attractiveness of the movement (which is the specific technical innovation of the cinema) of the female dress in order to activate the viewer's synesthetic perception.<sup>11</sup>

Another interesting aspect is the affinity between the material nature of the advertised products — an essence in the case of Kenzo, and the sound of music in the case of Apple — and the atmospheric quality of contemporary media. Insofar as they are naturally atmospheric and totally environmentalized, media disappear into the environment, permeating it and offering that escape from reality into fantasy that extends the real world and physical spaces into imaginary places where the media are completely "transparent." Furthermore, perfume and sound are expressive environmental substances that spread in the air and involve smelling and hearing, thus enriching the perceptual experience with non-visual, multisensory stimuli.

It might be added, especially in regard to *Welcome Home*, that the extension of objects, furniture and walls takes place according to the intensity and direction of the movements of the body, but without any physical contact. The elongation of the surfaces is achieved through the transformation of individual points of matter into horizontal lines. The effect is that of a digital editing of space: the viewer has the impression that the transformation of the environment is not an elastic elongation of spaces and objects, but their virtual processing, or an extrusion obtained by a digital manipulation of the images. However, as can be clearly learned watching the making-of video,<sup>12</sup> the transformation of the set is not carried out on the computer in post-production, but thanks to an ingenious craftsmanship and mechanical work of joints and slides activated by a system of hidden levers or manual thrusts (Fig. 10).

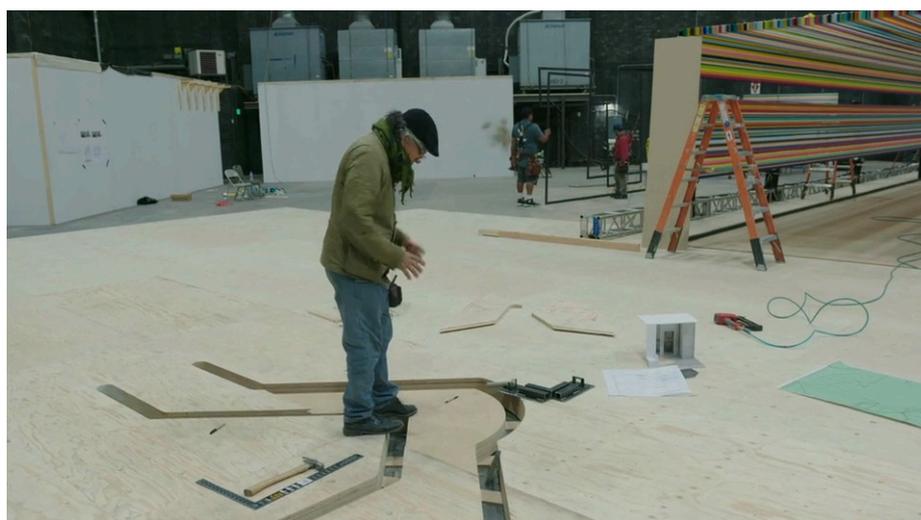


Figure 10: *Making of of Welcome Home*

The digital effect obtained through completely physical methods is another indication of the contemporary pervasiveness of digital media. Even the gesture that the woman performs to enlarge the mirror, transforming it into a passage that she will then go through to dance with her "non-reflective double," is similar to what we typically do when we interact with the display of touch devices to enlarge the size of the visual surface.

The general reflections on the mediatization offered by the two videos could be further developed, but we must pause here to delve into to the continuity between the media ecology and some trends in contemporary cognitive theory, and into the analysis of the two videos in the light of the insights that these excursions will afford.

11. Bruno, *Surface*, 36. On this topic, see also Marie-Aude Baronian, "The dress is the screen: Dancing fashion, dancing media," *NECSUS. European Journal of Media Studies* (Autumn 2017), <https://necsus-ejms.org/dressing-the-surface/>.

12. The video can be watched at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=go6Hpal8fUA>.

## Embodied Action

Media ecology can today be renewed by an emerging paradigm in the field of cognitive theory that insists precisely on the crucial nature of the ecosystemic relationship between the subject, the environment and technologies. Developed beginning in the 1990s, the so-called “enactive” approach to the human experience began to change the attitude of some researchers in the field of the cognitive psychology and neuropsychology, and today is also penetrating social sciences and the humanities. According to the enactive paradigm (from the word “enact,” or to put into action), cognition emerges from the dynamic interaction between the organism and its environment. The organism is the fulcrum of conscious experience as linked to its bodily nature and its sensorimotor skills. The environment is intended as a biological, psychological, cultural and social context in which the experience takes place.<sup>13</sup> Our perception and experience of the world emerges (and yet it is not determined or predetermined) precisely from the interaction between the subject and the world. This interaction is a perceptual act that takes place in the form of an “embodied action,” for perception and action are conceived, chiasmatically, as inseparable.<sup>14</sup> According to the enactive approach, perceiving *is* acting since any act performed by the senses is rooted in the body of the subject and consists of a — explicit or sensorial — motor exploration of the world (even in the case in which, for example in the cinema, we remain relatively still on a seat). The existentialist phenomenological philosophical root of this embodied conception of cognition is evident. The same excerpt from Merleau-Ponty quoted in the introduction underlines precisely the “mobile” nature of the body in the landscape of “things” and therefore establishes the constitutive centrality of the body situated in mutual interaction with the environment as an essential epistemological element. An externalist (in some ways radical) declination of the enactivist theory insists on the delocalized nature of cognitive processes. The so-called Extended Mind Theory asserts that cognitive processes are determined by the reciprocal interaction between brain, body, and world, implicating structures external to the organism that allow the mind to extend itself beyond the confines of its cranial container. As Andy Clark and David Chalmers wonder in their seminal work on this topic, “Where does the mind stop and the rest of the world begin? ... We advocate ... an *active externalism*, based on the active role of the environment in driving cognitive processes.”<sup>15</sup> This perspective maintains that cognition makes use of elements that are external to the brain and the body such as the natural environment, or “cultural” extensions such as language or technological artifacts (e.g. urban or domestic space, fashion, and media). Accordingly, these elements should be considered part of the cognitive process. Think, for example, of the extension of our memory or the delegation of computation operations to computers (perhaps with the result, theorized by McLuhan, of “numbing” the original process and “auto-amputating” the part of the body that has been extended<sup>16</sup>). Or even to the glasses on our nose. A technological medium has extended the boundaries of our body and moved forward the perimeter of our mental activities. The person who uses a computer or wears glasses will end up forgetting the use of these media; and such a “transparency” is nothing more than the result of a silent and natural *incorporation*<sup>17</sup> of the technological medium. Fashion — in particular clothing — is a medium that perfectly realizes this dynamic, given that, in continuity with the body, it extends us both physically and, above all, socially through a process of expression of our identity. The material and symbolic consistency of fashion is in fact an elective terrain for realizing the dynamics of body extension and medial incorporation.

Starting from this theoretical framework, I will now return to the case studies to highlight how the latter both focus on some of the aspects of media enaction and activate an enactive experience themselves.

13. The main reference for this approach is Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991).

14. On this topic, see Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA-London: The MIT Press, 2004).

15. Andy Clark, David J. Chalmers, “The Extended Mind,” *Analysis*, vol. 58, n. 1 (January 1998): 7-19. On the radical enactivist stance, see *Radicalizing Enactivism: Basic Minds without Content*, ed. Daniel D. Hutto, Erick Myin (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013).

16. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 41-7.

17. On this topic, see Francesco Parisi, *La tecnologia che siamo* (Torino: Codice, 2019).

## Audiovisual Domotics

What suggests and justifies the relevancy of the enactive approach is the interaction between the dancing body and the physical environment as the basic characteristic of the two video clips. While in *Kenzo World* the physical space basically acts as a passive setting for the dancer's performance (or is even destroyed during the performance, as in the laser beams scene), in *Welcome Home* there is a transfer of vitality, through physical movement, from the woman's organic body to the house's inorganic body. The latter literally comes to life in the materialization of a dreamlike fantasy that will soon take the form of a double couple's dance (first with the house itself, then with the "other" dancer). At the beginning it seems to be the house that "invites" its occupant to dance. But it is a typically human interaction that initiates the synchronization of movements and a sort of "domestic choreography": the woman establishes an intimate relationship with the house, whispering a reassurance and an invitation to the living room wall, stares at "her," gives her the rhythm counting with the fingers. Once mutual trust has been established, a play of progressive discovery of new opportunities for interaction takes place.

Also in this sense, technology plays a remarkable yet transparent role. There is in fact another character, female as well, who intervened at the beginning of the story and that then disappears: after launching the playback of the music, the vocal assistant Siri leaves the scene, or perhaps — and here is one of the "subliminal" messages of the commercial — becomes the whole house, continuing to manage *domotically* its intelligent relationships with its inhabitant. The extension of cognitive faculties made possible by the media materializes in an intelligent pseudo-subject with whom one can even talk and dance. It is not then just a cognitive extension, but a relationship between two extensions that interact with each other.

It is certainly true that this extension is above all physical, given that the main aspect of *Welcome Home* is the transformative effect of the movements and gestures of the body on objects and spaces: the animation of inanimate entities actually consists of an extensional modification of the environment. This occurs based on the intensity and direction of the movements, but without any physical contact. The "magic," so to speak, of this "environmental choreography" is precisely the contactless coupling between the body and the world. The protagonist's agency transfers to the house, transforming it into a body, or at least into a living and intelligent entity with which it is possible to interact. But what the commercial shows is a metaphorical externalization, the mental imagery of the subject is materialized in the pictures, thanks to which also the spectators can see and live the protagonist's desire to escape the wretched limitations of everyday life. Thanks to the music diffused by the HomePod (a transparent, or at least discreet yet pervasive medium and technology), the house becomes an imaginary and illusory place, whose spatial coordinates are dynamically shaped by the need to be transported to a space and a time ideally (and aesthetically) far from everyday worries. Obviously, this is the basic message of this and all non-referential advertising, but the genius and success of Jonze's work lie in representing the mental extension in the imagination through a physical and literal extension. The house itself is a physical and mental projection of the woman.

In *Kenzo World* as well, the protagonist lives a moment apart both physically (leaving the ceremony room and venturing into the various spaces of the theater) and cognitively: this time it is not a dream parenthesis, but a sort of delirium and a phase of lack of control. The way the dance expresses the loss of consciousness and the journey into imagination is, however, radically different, if not opposite, in the two videos. In *Kenzo World* the dancer is literally "played" by the music; she is possessed by the syncopated rhythm that triggers her uncontrollable facial grimaces and body spasms. Conversely, in *Welcome Home* the direction of the effect is reversed. Here it seems to be the body that, almost like a musical instrument, produces sound and literally gives body to the music, so that different gestures correspond to different instruments and timbres. While in *Kenzo World* the music and the timbre of different instruments distorts and moves the body in space wildly and uncontrollably, in *Welcome Home* the movements and gestures transform space. In the former, the relationship between the body and the environment is a sort of a fight; in the latter, it is a harmonious and complicit game in which — as Merleau-Ponty's quote suggests — things arrange "in a circle around" the subject. In both cases, the expressive characteristics of the musical piece (rhythm, timbre, speed, intensity, etc.) are of fundamental

importance, given that the choreographic performances are clearly synchronized to the song: in one direction or another, the music gives body or takes shape precisely by virtue of the relationship with the dancers' movements and gestures.

A full analysis of Jonze's two videos should also include a culturalist interpretation. Both videos represent the relationship between the female body and contemporary society critically, as advertising on fashion is not always able to do. The possessed dance of *Kenzo World's* protagonist symbolizes the revenge of the woman on patriarchal power, as it is evident from the scenes in which she mocks the statue and fights a man. Although there are clear differences of class and race, in both the commercials the "imperative" of social emancipation or of identity affirmation is carried out through a physical performance that embodies and expresses clearly the desires and deepest impulses of liberation and redemption. In the most psychoanalytic scene of *Welcome Home*, initially the girl does not seem to accept herself and pushes away the mirror; only after a few moments, the mirror enlarges until it turns into a passage beyond which the Self becomes an Other with whom one can interact in a — both metaphorical and spatial — pursuit of identity. From the house as an extension of the Self to the projection of Self as an Other.

## A Group Dance

The two commercials not only thematize extension and the body-environment interaction. They also offer their spectator an enactive experience. Music and dance on video are expressive tools that potentially can produce a particularly effective engagement, given the immediacy by which they can "move" and involve the viewer starting from a basic physical synchronization. The audiovisual mediation of a choreographic performance has a series of complex implications that cannot be fully discussed here, but that is fundamental for a full understanding of the potential of the enactive paradigm for media experience.

In the field of performance studies, recent literature on *screendance* is of great interest and relevance in this analysis.<sup>18</sup> Such a relevance is mainly due to the focus on the concept of "kinesthetic empathy." Watching the performance of a dancer on a screen elicits in the spectator the tendency to move and evokes the sensation of movement on the base of neural mirroring mechanisms that support the internal simulation of the observed movements, as well as on proprioception and activation of other non-audiovisual sensory dimensions. In the late 1930s, U.S. critic John Martin argued that "through kinaesthetic response — that is engagement with the medium of dance rather than its representational content — the spectator could "mimic" the dancer's movement and experience similar emotions."<sup>19</sup> As Ivar Hagendoorn has more recently argued, the viewer can perceive the speed, stress and the change of the bodily configuration of the dancer, as if s/he were performing the same movement.<sup>20</sup> In a volume focusing on the concept of kinesthetic empathy in the arts and creative and cultural practices, Dee Reynolds explains that

Spectators' embodied, affective responses to the *dance's* body are grounded in the responses to the *dancer's* body, which generates kinaesthetic energies ... Through vision I locate the dancer(s) out/up there on the stage, and kinaesthetic response occurs if I also internalise the movement and sense its processes in my own body.<sup>21</sup>

The mere viewing of a dancing body on the screen can therefore activate a kind of participation that also involves the viewer's physicality and the sensoriality by virtue of a motor and affective resonance.

18. For an overview, see *The Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies*, ed. Douglas Rosenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

19. John Martin, "Introduction to the Dance," in *Dance Horizon* (New York 1965 [1939]): 47.

20. Ivar Hagendoorn, "Some Speculative Hypothesis about the Nature and Perception of Dance and Choreography," *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol. 11, n. 3-4 (2004): 79-110.

21. Dee Reynolds, "Kineasthetic Empathy and the Dance's Body: From Emotion to Affect," in *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices*, ed. Dee Reynolds, Matthew Reason (Bristol-Chicago: Intellect, 2012), 124.

This is particularly effective in the case of dance, but it is valid for any observation (even for those mediated by a screen and a narrative construction) of an action carried out or an emotion expressed by someone else. In the classic filmological literature, the ability of the audiovisual medium to generate empathic responses both at the motor and emotional level was already described by the Belgian psychologist Albert Michotte in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>22</sup> Studies on empathy, on embodied simulation and on the neural substrate of these dynamics have extensively developed over the last fifteen years and provide valid tools to support the analysis of aesthetic and spectatorial experience.<sup>23</sup> The audiovisual representation of dance therefore seems to be a particularly effective case of empathic engagement of the spectator and both *Kenzo World* and *Welcome Home* are valid demonstrations of this, thanks also to the adoption of *interpretative modern dance* performance, a dance genre that translates emotions, conditions and human fantasies into dramatic movements and expressions without following a canon. The unpredictability, freedom, creativity and (apparent) naturalness of the performances created by the protagonists (and the choreographer) are elements that not only captivate and intrigue the spectators, but also invite them to participate in the dance empathetically.

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22. Albert Michotte, "The Emotional Involvement of the Spectator in the Action Represented in a Film: Toward a Theory," in *Michotte's Experimental Phenomenology of Perception*, ed. Georges Thinès, Alan Costall and George Butterworth (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1991 [1953]), 209-17.

23. For an overview, see Jane Stadler, "Empathy and Film," in *Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Empathy*, ed. Heidi L. Maibom (New York: Routledge, 2016), 317-26; Adriano D'Aloia, "Cinematic Empathies. Spectator Involvement in the Film Experience," in *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices*, 91-108.

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