

My Second Skin Essay
Dart 339
March 11, 2012

Sandra Chirico

Skin, as we know it, acts as a barrier between the environment and our internal organs. It is also a stretchy, self-repairing tissue that transmits information on our daily routines by way of marks and folds. Markings from our garments, dents from our jewelry and small scars from injuries allow our skin to carry ephemeral stories. When examining the patterns on our skin at the end of a day there can be a story to be told. What does it say about us? What story does it tell? Where does the skin end and the second skin begin? These marks that are left by textiles or second skin are ephemeral and intimate yet say so much about our daily lives. Our clothing provides extra protection and the textile it is made out of become our second skin. This extra layer is necessary to protect as our given skin has certain sensitivities that react to climate and environmental damages.

My second skin is has all of the mentioned uses but in addition it acts as a form self expression and identity. This 2nd outer layer can be associated with gender, class and social and sometimes political associations. This second skin becomes a powerful tool for either demanding uniformity or idealizing uniqueness. I use this layer to adorn and reflect my personal ideas and adorn myself accordingly. Functionality is a large part of this second skin. Textiles that move with the body providing comfort and form that help with the body's movements. What we wear

addresses how we move throughout our day taking account our environment, climate and lifestyle. This protective barrier shields us from potential damage a layer in which allows our skin to stay safe and unharmed. Skin is sensitive and fragile and can only protect us in moderate atmospheres which is why the second skin is used to cover us and cover the inhibitions for the first layer may fail us.

What we choose as a second skin depends on what and how we need it to function. The type of textile and the content of it will serve different environmental purposes. Wool is warm and is best suited for colder climates, cotton and linen is airy and light best suited for warmer climates. The use of the second skin can also determine the type of fabric a jersey knit for sportswear or a tweed blazer for an office work environment. Each type of textile was created with a functional purpose and we choose them accordingly. With functionality also come cultural and social structures that are also embedded within certain textiles.

We allow textiles on our skin above all other materials for it's unique properties of sensitivity, softness and protection. Tactility is an important part of what we put next to our skin. Softness is a big part of what we find comfortable against our skin. Textiles have become increasingly comfortable and breathable with the use of research and technology to create new methods of developing better and

softer textiles. It seems we are trying to find textiles in which we will feel less and less on our skin or if we do we want to feel good in them.

My second skin is one part function, one part comfort two part climate control and one part personal identity. It is what assists in my every day functions it is what protects from the elements and allows the most efficient mobility. It allows me to conform to social norms and assesses my uniqueness. My second skin is part of what I present to the world and is attached to my persona of what they perceive of me. It is both esthetic and social but also performs on a functional level. It is also the most common, useful and yet least regarded part of our daily rituals.

Which is why my second skin is a great way to discover function and design or artistic ways to reinterpret them.