

WEARABLE ART INSPIRED BY THE EFFECTS OF INFORMATION
TECHNOLOGY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

by

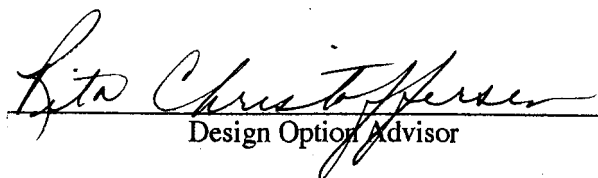
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A Design Option Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
With a Major in

Home Economics

Approved: 6 Semester Credits



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July, 2000

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ABSTRACT

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WEARABLE ART INSPIRED BY THE EFFECTS OF INFORMATION			
(Title)	TECHNOLOGY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY		
Home Economics	Dr. Rita Christoffersen	July, 2000	56
(Graduate Major)	(Research Advisor)	(Month/Year)	(No. of Pages)
Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (4 th Ed.)			
(Name of Style Manual Used in this Study)			

The goal of this study was to design wearable art inspired by the effects of information technology on people at the beginning of the twenty-first century. These effects included the psychological, sociological, and physiological aspects related to the Information Age. The specific phenomena focused on were information overload, isolation, and touch deprivation.

The review of literature included the way in which fashion and art reflect history to show that they are indicators of a cultural climate, the history and purpose of wearable art, the changing society of today, and the symptoms being brought about by technology. These symptoms include tendencies toward information overload, isolation, and touch deprivation.

Study of the gathered information, led to the design of three units of wearable art, utilizing numerous contemporary fabrics and non-traditional materials and techniques. Each unit reflected the interpretation of the

phenomena, which included the tendency toward “overload”, the tendency toward “isolation”, and the tendency toward “touch deprivation”. The opening night reception of the installation featured live models wearing the garments; each model performed movements pertaining to each of the garment’s symptoms. The installation was open for public viewing for one week with garments displayed on mannequins at the Menomonie Theater Guild Studio.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. Psalms 121: 1-2 (KJV)

This paper was completed one-day-at-a-time with the Lord Jesus by my side and with the promise of His Eternal Love in my heart!

The author would like to offer a heartfelt thank you to her advisor, Dr. Rita Christoffersen for her constant help, guidance, and support. Also, many thanks go to the other committee members, Dr. Donna Albrecht, who has given that extra push of support when it was needed and Ron Verdon, a kindred spirit who supplied the artistic guidance and sincere appreciation for my work.

A sincere thank you goes to Ellwyn Hendrickson, who has helped in all phases of this endeavor. He was always willing to give his expertise whether it was discussing ideas or constructing set designs; he was an invaluable friend and helpmate.

Thanks are also due to Loriann Barcus, Kelly Van Den Busch, and Jeané King for their time and effort spent in modeling garments, they “made the show”; to Travis Reeves for his technical knowledge, enthusiasm, and dependability, which were essential to the success of the installation; to Bill Wikrent for his patience, expertise, and assistance in the areas of photography and Macintosh computers; and to Howard Nelson for his endless knowledge of desktop publishing and printing and his willingness to turn the writer’s ideas into reality.

The writer is truly blessed to have a family who provided unending support and love, especially her mother, Dorothy Stewart; her father, Cletis Myster, her sister, Robin Winkels; her brother, Dr. Randall Myster, and her daughter, Danica King. There was never a doubt on their part of the writer’s ability to accomplish her goals.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

We are at the beginning of a century in which technological developments have transformed culture and standards of living (Lovejoy, 1997). Our lives are controlled by information that is produced in vast quantities by technology: we feed on it, are controlled by it, are addicted to it, and our fascination with it is the zeitgeist of this age. The author raises the question of when does this flood of information no longer add to the quality of life but instead begin to nurture stress, confusion, and lack of control over one's own life?

This "Information Era" we are in is based on electronics and digital information that has invaded and affected every part of our lives: it is growing exponentially, shows no sign of slowing down, and we cannot escape from it (Sterry & Hendricks, 1999). Speed and efficiency are the controlling mind-set of our age, so much so that the expression "time is money" has become the battle cry that has heralded our charging into the twenty-first century (Rifkin, 1987).

Fashion assumes a prominent cultural role, making it an important artistic and cultural barometer. The pattern we call history is being made by us in our present dimension: it is a process of evaluation that allows us to understand modernity and to realize the characteristics of our age.

Statement of the Problem

The goal of this study was to design wearable art inspired by the effects of information technology on people at the beginning of the twenty-first century. These effects included the psychological, sociological, and physiological aspects related to the Information Age. The specific phenomena focused on were the tendency toward “overload”, the tendency toward “isolation”, and the tendency toward “touch deprivation”.

Limitations

The selection of appropriate fabrics and materials was somewhat limited because of the geographical area involved, whereas an area such as New York would have a far greater selection to choose from.

This study was contemporary and therefore the information available for the literature review was limited.

The design and construction of the garments were based on the author’s interpretation of the research: this may or may not be the perspective of the reader.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were defined by the author for use in this study:

1. **Wearable Art:** Art to wear: to carry or to have on the person.
2. **Zeitgeist:** The taste and outlook characteristic of a period or generation. The “spirit of the times”.
3. **Décolletage:** The low neckline of a woman’s dress.

4. **Sumptuary Laws:** The restriction of certain types of clothing to persons of a particular rank, social position, and economic status during some historic periods.
5. **Surplice bodice:** A top that has a diagonally, overlapping neckline.
6. **Installation:** A presentation, showing, or exhibition held in an indicated location.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Fashion Reflects History

Costume, being basic to man's culture and part of his history, (Gurel & Beeson, 1979) has a direct relationship with social concepts, economic conditions, technological progress, traditions, and mores. According to Roach & Eicher (1973), and Rouse (1989), when groups of people share particular patterns of dress those patterns become a social activity and express the values and the way of life that is shared by those groups of people. Batterberry & Batterberry (1977), Breward (1995), and Cunningham and Lab (1991), believe clothing serves as a means of societal communication but its meaning will depend upon the cultural characteristics of each society. Clothing then, provides an intimate look into the thoughts, ideas, attitudes, and beliefs of a culture; it is said to be a mirror of the past and the present that reflects the collective behavior of that culture. Anatole France, a French critic and satirist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, appreciated this relationship between clothing and social, economic, and technological progress and clothing and the traditions and mores of a culture when he authored, "If I were allowed to choose from the pile of books which will be published one hundred years after my death, do you know which one I would take? I would simply take a fashion magazine so that I could see how women dress one century after my departure. And these rags would tell me more about the humanity of the future than all the philosophers, novelists, prophets, and scholars"(Craig, 1968).

There are notable examples of periods in history when the clothing that was being worn was especially indicative of the contemporary culture. Instances of these time periods include the Renaissance, the post-war 1920's, and the paper dress craze of the middle 1960's; each of these three eras merits an explanation.

Clothing in the Renaissance

The Renaissance, which means “rebirth”, was a period in history that began in Italy around the mid-fourteenth century, spread throughout northern Europe and lasted until approximately the sixteenth century. Scholars and artists of the time participated in the revival of the ideals and values of the classical Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman eras from 500 BC to AD 330. They admired the philosophy, art, and literature of these ancient civilizations and began to identify with them (Wright, 1997). People believed that one thousand years of darkness and ignorance had separated them from this ancient era (Tortora & Eubank, 1998).

The Reformation, the civil war that split the Christian church into the Protestant and the Catholic groups, aimed at a redefinition of Christianity. One hundred years of religious wars were followed by a period of religious tolerance and this tolerance paved the way for a new and non-religious outlook on the world: it was called the “Enlightenment” (Tansey & Kleiner, 1996). People developed a secular “individualism”, a humanist way of thinking that focused on “man” and the qualities of human nature; this approach influenced art, literature, poetry, music, philosophy, history, and political systems.

The Reformation age of self- expression, emotion, and discovery put mathematics and science side by side with art and architecture. Alchemy,

astrology, metallurgy, mechanics, and navigation were also being discovered and studied. The invention of the printing press exposed people to works of philosophy, literature, and art; these in turn, influenced people's thinking about "individualism", social manners, and attitudes about clothing (Wright, 1997).

In England, in 1558, the daughter of Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, acceded to the throne. Because Queen Elizabeth was well educated, she encouraged a literary renaissance by bringing painters and sculptors to England and by encouraging the reading of Latin verse. William Shakespeare, who surpassed his contemporaries with his wide range of plays, comedies, dramas, histories, and tragedies, performed for Queen Elizabeth and her court (Tortora & Eubank, 1998).

"Elizabethan dress represented the decorative equivalent of the use of words in the literary endeavors of prose and poetry" (Russell, 1983). Queen Elizabeth's décolletage can be seen as a sign of the first dawn of the Renaissance: "life was opening like a flower and clothes were responding with symbolic gestures" (Laver, 1969a). People's ideas had changed and they expressed these new thoughts in new clothing forms (Shover, 1926).

Queen Elizabeth, during her reign, issued numerous decrees called "sumptuary laws" which concerned the clothing of her subjects (Ryan, 1966). Clothing was the method by which members of the court shaped their world: the symbolism of dress provided a "powerful weapon in an intensely political arena where struggles for power, recognition, and attention demanded a constant and fetishistic emphasis on the cultivation of manner and appearance" (Breward, 1995). The clothing of the time broadcast changes as well as disguising social and political intentions for it masked the attitudes, status, and relationships of

the wearers. The choice of garments, colors, and applied decoration were both hidden and overt with visual codes that communicated messages.

Emblems of “various animals, minerals, and objects” (Breward, 1995) with specific meanings revolving around deceit and transformation as well as “references to colour, shape, texture, and specific recourse to figures taken from mythology, history, and the natural world” (Breward, 1995) were embroidered onto garments. Great importance were attached to appearance and to manipulating appearance in the Renaissance court; people at court were always aware of their audience, who might be admiring, who might be criticizing, and who might be judging them (Breward, 1995).

Costume in Elizabethan England was like the skillful renderings of the painters of the time, with the body stiff and motionless underneath, the clothing, as a canvas, was dripping with gold and pearls, and “lockets, pendants, bracelets, pomanders, rings, earrings “ (Laver, 1963), and precious stones. People wore their fortune, the visual communication of family wealth, as there were no banks in those days and it was the safest place to keep it (Breward, 1995; Hanson, 1972).

Clothing in the Post-war 1920's

In post-crisis eras, such as the 1920's after World War I, certain things always seem to happen: there is an inflated currency, a dance mania, a wave of female emancipation, and promiscuity. These things have a large effect on the clothing that women wear. Lines straighten by using “flatteners” to conceal the breasts and the hips: large hips are admired only in periods when populations

are rapidly growing and hips were not in “the spirit of the Jazz Age” (Laver, 1964).

The waist was de-emphasized (Laver, 1969a), and in the 1920’s the waist was even pushed down. When a normal waist is admired, it is the corset that makes it possible by making the waist smaller. The disappearance of corsets is always accompanied by promiscuity and an inflated currency. “No corsets, bad money, and general moral laxity; corsets, sound money, and a strong morality” (Laver, 1969b). Periods of female emancipation cannot be “tight-laced”, physically or morally (Laver, 1964).

By 1924, the “tubular” look (a straight line from neck to hem with no indication of a bust, waist, or hip) had established itself and the hemline was shortened. As a young woman sat down in a chair she showed her legs up to the knees and the thighs (Laver, 1964).

Hair, which in Edwardian times was considered a woman’s crowning glory, was “bobbed” or cut and the new boyish woman was confident, knew what she wanted, and set about boldly to get it. One of the main writers of this period, F. Scott Fitzgerald, wrote a short story entitled, “Bernice Bobs her Hair” which addresses the issues of the “modern woman” bobbing her hair for the first time. These new “immoral” fashions were fiercely condemned, but the “new woman” continued to wear them (Laver, 1964).

Women adopted drinking, smoking, and sexual habits that were typically seen as the sexual standards practiced by men. The woman of the 1920’s “was an active, boyish, ‘streamlined’ figure who reflected the new age of speed, efficiency, and worship of the machine age in which the human figure was both

freed from the strictures of the past and subordinated to the forms of the new machine age” (Russell, 1983).

Paper Dresses in the Middle 1960's

Since dress usually symbolizes changes in societal values and attitudes, the paper fad which took place from 1966 to 1968 represents the idea and the philosophy of a society making a statement for change (Cunningham & Lab, 1991).

The first paper dresses were made by the Scott Paper Company in March, 1966 “to promote a new line of paper napkins, toilet paper, and paper towels called ‘Colorful Explosions’”(Cunningham & Lab, 1991). With a coupon from these products, anyone could buy, by mail order, a paper dress and “by August, Scott Paper Company had filled 500,000 orders” (Cunningham & Lab, 1991). Other companies picked up on this market that said fun could be had without spending very much money: paper fashions were quickly made available in boutiques and department stores (Cunningham & Lab, 1991).

Paper dresses were available in several prints and styles: some were made with large photographs covering the front of the dresses: the pictures were of cats, eyes, flowers, a Buddhist peace sign gesture, and an Allen Ginsberg poem. All of the dresses could be customized with a pair of scissors (Cunningham & Lab, 1991).

Durability was not important because one could replace a paper dress with a more pleasing version when the mood struck: clothing supported the desire for a portable lifestyle that could be thrown away and replaced for little money. This throw-away concept reflected a more casual and liberated attitude

toward sex, relationships, and permanency. Sexual encounters no longer meant one had to get married and enter into a permanent relationship and paper dresses were a sign of this social change and liberal attitude (Cunningham & Lab, 1991).

The demand for paper clothing ended in 1968 because of a shift in social philosophy brought about by the underlying fundamentals of the hippie lifestyle and the emerging awareness of ecological issues such as pollution and waste. The short-lived interest in paper clothing “was in stride with other contemporary design and social trends that sought similar quick and disposable answers to daily life” (Cunningham & Lab, 1991). The fad was brought to an abrupt end by a sudden shift in cultural values.

Art Reflects History

The history of art seeks to understand past ideas, interests, attitudes, and personal, social, and philosophical values through works of art: these works reveal and document the cultural environments that produced them.

“Ultimately, art history seeks to arrive at not only as complete a picture as possible of art as it changes in time, but also an explanation of those changes . . . The fact is that a visible and tangible work of art is a kind of persisting event: it was made at a particular time and place by a particular person. . . . Although it is the creation of the past, art continues to exist in the present, long surviving its times. These (works) can be classified under architecture, sculpture, the pictorial arts (painting, drawing, printmaking, photography, and the craft arts), or arts of design which produce objects of utility (ceramic wares, metal wares, textiles, and similar accessories of ordinary living)” (Tansey & Kleiner, 1996). Thus it can be

seen that the changes of styles and tastes in the works of art of any given era reveal the shifting of the cultural environments of that era.

Wearable Art

The roots of wearable art go back to 1969 when five friends, after graduating from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, started making clothing for themselves and for their friends. They approached clothing design as artists and “were interested in clothing both the body and the spirit” (Constantine & Reuter, 1997).

The five leaders in the wearable art movement, which was not actually intended as a movement, were: Sharron Hedges, Janet Lipkin, Jean Williams Cacicedo, Deanne Schwartz Knapp, and Marika Contompasis. Jean Williams Cacicedo’s coat creation entitled *Chaps: A Cowboy Dedication* “celebrates the traditional costume of the cowboy from all over the world. It is a melody of textures and materials that incorporates hand-dyed wool, felting, knitting, crocheting, and appliqué. This strong work of art seems intended for the wall, or for temporary display upon a figure. The coat is less a thing to wear than a statement about the performance of wearing” (Constantine & Reuter, 1997).

Artisans that produce wearable art are interested in an individual’s relationship to his or her clothing and in an individual’s relationship to his or her environment. The artist strives to analyze clothing by discerning its functions and meanings in a given society as well as revealing his or her personal views in order to create a three-dimensional piece that can communicate these things and will invoke a reaction from others. Hence, it is an intimate statement from the artist soliciting a response to his or her perspective of his or her world.

Technology and the Information Age

At the Beginning of the 21st Century

A new world is born after every “few hundred years in Western history”(Drucker, 1992) causing society as a whole to rearrange itself. People born within fifty years of this “transformation” (Drucker, 1992) “cannot . . . imagine the world in which their grandparents lived and into which their own parents were born. . . . We are currently living through such a transformation” (Drucker, 1992).

Toffler (1983), divides the world into three economies. The “First Wave” is agriculture, the “Second Wave” is industrialization, and the “Third Wave”, which is our present economy, is information.

The workers of this new world put knowledge to productive use and own their knowledge; “the controlling resource and factor of production are knowledge” (Drucker, 1992); knowledge or information become the “new wealth”, “saleable commodity”, and the substitution for manual labor (Rifkin, 1987; Teich, 1997). Toffler (1970) underscores this idea when he quotes Francis Bacon, “Knowledge . . . is power”.

Work is “becoming increasingly a mental function, the place of work is becoming global, workers are expected to be more skilled, education for work is taking place at a higher level of skill development, and skill upgrading is continuous throughout life“ (Sterry & Hendricks, 1999). Toffler (1983) put forth that “[The] new ‘mind workers’, if you want to call them that, have skills and information that amount to a kit of head-tools. They own the ‘means of production’, in a way that unskilled factory workers never could.”

Technology then, is the “application of knowledge and during that application, new knowledge is produced which in turn formulates information” (Sterry & Hendricks, 1999). Information is the product of the information age and “It not only can be created it also can be gathered, categorized, stored, retrieved, and distributed . . . in conventional forms such as books in libraries, [and] growing amounts of information [are] being processed and made available in multimedia formats through a variety of networks” (Sterry & Hendricks, 1999). According to Kipnis (1991) “Technology is the use of systematic procedures to produce intended effects. The goal of most technologies is to produce outcomes that require less work, and that are more uniform and predictable than can be produced by unassisted effort. . . . Technology’s goal is to ensure that events will occur as planned. . . . The evolution of any new technology follows a predictable path from human control to machine or system control. Both in the home and at work, each change in technology reduces the need for human input.”

Information technology can be defined as gathered information that is digitized and converted to bits; in bit form it is manipulated and sent through communication systems and then converted back to “a form that can be detected by . . . human senses” (Sterry & Hendricks, 1999).

We have just left a century whose technological developments have transformed culture and living standards (Lovejoy, 1997) because technology forces societal change and adjustment; this change produces societal instabilities, insecurities, needs, and desires. A society and its technology cannot be separated (Westrum, 1991). Every technology has a dual potential; “one potential can be to improve the human condition by allowing the user to perform some task that

adds value. A second potential can be to destroy social order thus creating problems for people and cultures” (Sterry & Hendricks, 1999). Postman (1992) feels this society is deifying technology and hence, creating a “culture without a moral foundation“ and undermining the things that make life worth living.

Stoll (1995) compares the analog world of his parents to the present digital world and sees “handwriting replaced by word processing, mail by e-mail, accounting books by spreadsheets, rotary dials by Touch Tones, drafting by CAD [Computer Aided Design] . . . ours [world] is one of artificial reality, software tools, and expert systems . . . Makes me wonder what history we’re leaving behind.”

“Data smog”, according to author David Shenk (1997) is an expression for the “muck” of this Information Age:

It gets in the way; it crowds out quiet moments, and obstructs much needed contemplation. It spoils conversation, literature, and even entertainment. It thwarts skepticism, rendering us less sophisticated as consumers and citizens. It stresses us out. It is the pile of unsolicited catalogs and junk mail arriving daily in our home and electronic mailboxes. It is also the TV ads and twenty-four hour news flashes. It is the faxes, the [miss-dialed] numbers and sales calls we get during dinnertime, it is the Web sites we visit, the pile of magazines we pore over, and the dozens of TV channels we flip through whenever we get a free moment. Information and entertainment are everywhere, stadiums and theatrical stages have giant TV screens surrounding them, bars and airport lounges have TVs hanging from the ceilings and mini-TVs are installed in front of

seats in new airliners. Cellular phone conversations are going on everywhere and beepers and laptops follow us home and go on vacations with us!

The author proposes that the vast amounts of information that people are exposed to on a daily basis no longer add to the character of their lives but instead foster stress, confusion, and alterations in how people interact and feel about themselves. The new digital technologies have produced some grave social implications and negative effects on the quality of life for many people. The focus of the writer's study is three information age phenomena which include: the tendency to become "overloaded" with information, the tendency toward "isolation", and the tendency toward "touch deprivation".

Tendency to Become "Overloaded"

One of the most prominent defining characteristics of the culture of the twenty-first century is the commitment to saving time, and the irony of the times is the increased feeling of being divested of time (Rifkin, 1987). The human mind can perceive time as a clock measures it, in hours, minutes, and seconds. The computer works in the time frame of the "nanosecond", which is a billionth of a second: although the human mind can conceive of a nanosecond, "it is not possible to experience it" (Rifkin, 1987). The impact of shifting between clock time and computer time is a major source of distress for some computer users. As the users "become more enmeshed in the . . . time world of the computer, they become less and less able to readjust to the temporal norms and standards of the traditional clock culture. They become victims of a new form of temporal schizophrenia, caught between two distinctly different temporal orientations"

(Rifkin, 1987). Humans cannot as yet increase the speed at which they can process all of the information to which they are subjected (Valovic, 2000). A breakdown in performance and logic occurs when the human nervous system is overloaded “with too many bits of information (stimuli) at one time” (Markert, 1997).

Technology is coming at such an incredibly fast pace that people have to learn new technologies every three or four months and downsizing of industries has left the populace jobless and with obsolete skills. Job stability is a concept of past generations (Shenk, 1997).

The sales goal of the information industry is to convince consumers that whatever type of technology they have, it is not enough. Even though the machines themselves could last for many years, computers are “socially perishable”(Shenk, 1997) and the “industry’s rule of thumb”(Shenk, 1997) is: you must upgrade your computer system at least every two years. The continuous upgrading of machinery undermines society’s sense of security and continuity (Shenk, 1997).

The populace often feels as if life is going by much too expeditiously; they are carried forward from meeting to meeting, from call to call, and from errand to errand (Shenk, 1997) with virtually all of life’s “transactions, both business and personal” (Valovic, 2000) being affected. Therapists are told that individuals feel as if they are losing control over the basic structure of their lives (Shenk, 1997).

Swenson (1998) offers that one of the “surprising and discomfoting aspects of this incredible information proliferation is that the more we know, the more certainty seems to recede. . . . Instead of becoming more certain about the truth, we become more insecure.”

The over-stimulated society of this age leaves many people feeling overwhelmed with symptoms such as chronic stress, ulcers, depression, hypertension, weakened vision, confusion, frustration, impaired judgment, decreased benevolence, overconfidence, and what Evan I. Schwarz in *Wired* magazine calls “the official brain syndrome of the information age”, culturally induced Attention Deficit Disorder or ADD. This is a brain imbalance that causes extreme restlessness, boredom, and distraction; people with this disorder find it extremely difficult to concentrate on any one thing for more than a few seconds, their minds wander and they find themselves doing several things at once. On the other hand, many other people are becoming unhealthily addicted to the “mania”. Computers provoke a compulsive behavior in a large number of people; they develop feelings of dependency and feel they cannot function without their computers (Shenk, 1997).

Tendency to Become Isolated

As the internet connects people “into the entire universe of information, it also encourages isolation. . . . The Net is a very good way of creating communities with their own norms. The corresponding danger is fragmentation--people who are totally divorced from reality, forming communities and reinforcing the group’s delusions. ‘Heaven’s Gate’ is the worst and most visible example of this” (Shenk, 1999). Technology is leading people “toward narrower worlds where information is tailored to . . . specific professional, cultural, political, and leisurely interests. [People] will spend even less time interacting with people outside [their] range of interests . . . ” (Shenk, 1999). This “social polarization” is the reason given for the “nasty disagreements

and seeming inability of people to come together to form consensus on important issues” (Shenk, 1999).

As individuals spend more time on the internet with “virtual reality overtaking real reality” (Stoll, 1999), social skills are becoming lost. Time spent on the computer without interacting face-to-face is restricting people’s skills in connecting with others. “The ability to read each other’s gestures and facial expressions, to express our feelings, to strike up conversations with strangers, to craft stories, and to tell jokes” (Stoll, 1999) is lost with excessive time spent on the Internet. Other social abilities that suffer are “how to interrupt . . . how to share time with another . . . how to speak to an audience . . . [and] when to be quiet” (Stoll, 1999).

Rifkin (1987) put forth a description of isolated behavior:

According to Craig Brod and other psychologists, many people have so accommodated themselves to the new sped-up time frame of the computer that they have become impatient with the slower durations they must contend with in the everyday clock culture. In clinical case studies, psychologists have observed that computer compulsives are much more intolerant of behavior that is at all ambiguous, digressive, or tangential. In their interaction with spouses, family, and acquaintances, they are often terse preferring simple yes-no responses. They are impatient with open-ended conversations and are uncomfortable with individuals who are reflective or meditative. Computer compulsives demand brevity and view social discourse in instrumental terms, interacting with others only as a means of collecting and exchanging useful

information. Above all, they put a high premium on efficient communication. For that reason, says Brod, “They prefer to communicate with people who are ‘system literate’ so as to transfer information quickly. People who talk too slowly or in general terms are avoided or ignored.” In work situations, computer compulsives find it exceedingly difficult to switch back and forth between the computer time world and the slower clock time world. . . . Computer compulsives do not easily tolerate interruptions when they are “interfacing” with the computer. Every encroachment threatens to break their concentration and their transformed time consciousness. . . . They are uncomfortable with extended interpersonal interaction and often feel that appointments interrupt “their mission to generate code and work intensely with a program.” One programmer at a major software company says that he finds staff meetings and socializing with other workers to be an annoyance and is often angered by interruptions of his work. . . . The sense of isolation wrought by the introduction of the computer is being felt. As people rely on the computer as both a form of communication and a time frame through which they relate to their fellow human beings, they are finding it more and more difficult to slip back into face-to-face interchange. Psychologists warn that people are losing the traditional temporal skills that have allowed them to relate to each other intimately.

“Pluggies” is a term for people who are plugged into their technology but tuned out to everything around them. Pluggies are asocial people who are

“over-stimulated by artificial intelligence and instant gratification, but underexposed to genuine experience” (Bergheim, 1990). These people love to be left alone with their computers and free from the problems of dealing with other people (Cole, L. & Cole, M., 1998).

Computer networks isolate people from one another: tolerance of people’s imperfections is usually not a characteristic of the information age; signing off or “flaming” (e.g., sending an offensive, insulting, and complaining e-mail) is usually the preferred way to end an unsatisfactory communication between people. “It [is] the same intolerance found on the highway, where motorists direct intense anger at one another” (Stoll, 1995).

The home has become an office with people communicating with colleagues via e-mail and staying inside for days or weeks. According to author Maia Szalavitz (1996):

Once you start replacing real human contact with cyber-interaction, coming back out of the cave can be quite difficult. I find myself shyer, more circumspect, more anxious. Or, conversely, when suddenly confronted with real live humans, I get manic, speak too much, interrupt. I constantly worry if I’m dressed appropriately. . . . At times I turn on the television and just leave it to chatter in the background, something that I’d never done previously. The voices of the programs soothe me. . . . Online, I find myself attacking everyone in sight. I am irritable and easily angered. I find everyone on my mailing list insensitive. . . . When I’m in this state, I fight with my boyfriend as well, misinterpreting his intentions because of the lack of emotional cues given by our typed dialogue.

The Internet puts people in touch with thousands of people around the world, but people are losing their ability to interact with real people: computers are becoming “safe havens in which to hide” (Stoll, 1995). While society is being bombarded with electronic communications, sensory isolation is a threat that belongs to all people. Everyone has the need to be in touch with other people both psychologically and physically (Cole, L. & Cole, M. 1998). Technology changes how people interact with each other and how they feel about themselves (Kipnis, 1991). People are chatting on-line, playing games on-line, dating on-line, making love, and even marrying on-line; they are safe within their own electronic world (Bergheim, 1990). But, without the basic affirmation of our physical selves, something important is missing and this lack turns people inward, makes them narrow, frightened, angry, hostile, lonely, despondent and more prone to living in a fantasy world (Simon, 1976).

Tendency to Become Touch Deprived

Human beings are covered with skin, which is the organ of the body that is the most sensitive to touch; the sense of touch is “the earliest sensory system to become functional in all species” (Montagu, 1978). The skin’s surface area “has an enormous number of sensory receptors receiving stimuli of heat, cold, touch, pressure, and pain” (Montagu, 1978) and tactile points vary from 7 to 135 per square centimeter (Montagu, 1978). The sense of touch, over all the other senses, gives people a perception of reality of the external world and of the reality of one’s own body: for it is the body that gives people their links to physical reality. (Katz, 1989; Montagu, 1978). Katz (1989) states, “What has been touched is the true *reality* that leads to *perception*; no reality pertains to the mirrored image, the

mirage that applies itself to the eye. . . . Touch [has] precedence over vision, and visual space [is based on] tactual space.”

Man has always been a social animal and has the need to be psychologically and physically connected to other human beings; isolation is a most dangerous penalty (Cole & Cole, 1998; Morris 1971). Morris (1971) states that the stress induced by our modern culture “breeds anxiety and feelings of insecurity” and touching calms these feelings; “the more we are forced to keep apart, the more we need to make body contact. . . . If he (e.g., the human being) does not find true intimacy--even if it is only with one single person--he will suffer. . . . We are capable of living and surviving in such appallingly unnatural conditions that, instead of calling a halt and returning to a saner system, we adjust and struggle on. . . . This has become one of the greatest ailments of our time, a major social disease of modern society.”

The following two chapters describe the interpretation of the effects of information technology on people at the beginning of the twenty-first century in the medium of wearable art.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

This study designed three ensembles of wearable art that were inspired by the effects of information technology on people at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The effects investigated included three phenomena, “isolation”, “tendency toward overload”, and “touch deprivation” as they relate to the Information Age. The designs were an attempt to interpret the technological climate and to reflect that interpretation in the medium of wearable art garments.

The Design Process

The creation of the three ensembles started with the selections of the fabrics and materials, which became the inspirations for the designs. All of the materials used in the designs were chosen for their capacity to invoke emotional responses from the viewers. For example, soft fiberglass screening and clear vinyl were used to create the perception of “isolation” and aluminum screening, tangled wires, and a metallic stretch fabric were used to establish the sensation of being “overloaded”.

Designs for the ensembles were sketched on paper to decide upon the types of garments that would be used, how many pieces would be in each ensemble, for what gender the garments would be constructed, what size they would be, and what methods would be used for their construction. Fabric and other materials were manipulated on a dress form to conceive of ways of putting components together; color and the emotional impact that the materials would invoke in the viewers were the most critical considerations. The resulting three

ensembles for the “overloaded”, “isolated”, and “touch deprived” themes consisted of several pieces, which included dresses, hoods, a jacket, a mask, and a headpiece.

Flat pattern and draping techniques as well as hand and machine sewing were the methods of construction for the traditional fabrics and trims. A hot glue gun, a multi-purpose industrial strength adhesive, tacky glue, and electrician’s tape were the means used to put together the non-traditional materials. These materials included copper castings of human fingers, electrical wires, tape, and other components used for electrical work, computer boards and other computer elements, paper maché, and fiberglass and aluminum screening

The three ensembles will be discussed in greater detail under each corresponding section.

Fabric Selection

Traditional fabrics for the garments included, a metallic, taupe, stretch knit; a black, power-stretch knit; a peach-colored vinyl with a non-woven backing; a clear vinyl; a black, net piece; a peach-colored, woven lamé; and a metallic, copper-covered, cotton cording. These pieces were purchased at S.R. Harris Discount Fabric Warehouse in Brooklyn Park, MN; Hancock Fabrics in Eau Claire, WI; Jo Ann Fabrics in Maplewood, MN; and Wal-Mart in Menomonie, WI. Wide, black fabric tape used to enclose the seams of the fiberglass screening garment was gleaned from the student fabric supply in the apparel area at the University of Wisconsin-Stout.

Non-fabric materials for the garments included aluminum screening, fiberglass screening, electrician’s tape, electrical connectors, electrical cords and

plugs, and metal grommets. These materials were purchased at Fleet Farm in Menomonie, WI; Wal-Mart in Menomonie, WI; and Hancock Fabrics in Eau Claire, WI. The computer parts came out of an outdated Apple Macintosh.

The “Overloaded” Ensemble: The Relevance to the “Overload” Phenomenon

As has been stated in chapter 2, page 16, “The over-stimulated society of this age leaves many people feeling overwhelmed with symptoms such as chronic stress, ulcers, depression, hypertension, weakened vision, confusion, frustration, impaired judgment, decreased benevolence, overconfidence, and what Evan I. Schwarz in *Wired* magazine calls ‘the official brain syndrome of the information age’, culturally induced Attention Deficit Disorder or ADD.”

The “overload” ensemble was an interpretation of this phenomenon. The dress fabric was composed of a synthetic fiber knit and had a metallic thread knitted into it, which gave it a “hard” appearance; the addition of silver electrician’s tape and computer cords and plugs added to the machine-like quality of the design.

Although the headpiece enclosed the wearer’s head, it was made of screening, which allowed all of the stimulants of the environment to be experienced. Since there was no escape, it was a form of entrapment similar to the experience of living in today’s society.

The profusion of wires that entangled the dress and the headpiece were a frustration to the wearer; there was no way to extricate herself from them or to put them in any type of order. The wires enmeshed the wearer and left her unable to make sense of her environment, a situation which parallels living in the over-stimulated society of today.

The dress. The decision was made to create the ensemble for a female; the light taupe stretch fabric embedded with silver threads was draped on a dress form, removed, and sewn together with a home sewing machine. The dress exhibiting the “overloaded” phenomenon is shown in Figures 1 and 2. The resulting long, barebacked gown had asymmetrical pleating along the right hip. The strap holding up the one-shouldered garment was the main electrical cord and plug from an Apple computer. The cord, which was attached to the left shoulder with the use of a hot glue gun, went down the back of the garment, through an electrical channel and intersected with a rectangular circuit board which had been bonded to the dress at the center back with a hot glue gun. The cord then continued up over the right shoulder where it was secured by three electrical channels that had been glued onto the front of the dress.

Tucking on the outside of the dress radiated from the bust to the waist and to the hip areas to give shaping to the garment. Thin wires in red, yellow, green, and black were attached to the tucks along the stitching with a hot glue gun and were then run through more electrical channeling. The channeling had been fused onto the dress fabric with hot glue; the wires spilling from the channeling were allowed to hang in loose, tangled coils around the whole garment with some of the ends joining with electrical connectors.

A small, copper circuit board as well as a small computer component with a tiny mirror were bonded above the left hip on the front of the dress with a hot glue gun. Silver electrician’s tape was sewn by machine to the top of the pleating as well as to the entire top edge of the dress to provide stability as well as ornamentation.



Figure, 1. Front of "overloaded" garment.



Figure, 2. Back of "overloaded" garment.

The headpiece. A piece of aluminum screening was wrapped around a metal lampshade frame to shape the foundation of the headpiece and secured with a center back seam using silver electrician's tape. The screening was formed to echo the contours of the human head. The headpiece exhibiting the "overloaded" phenomenon is shown in Figure 3.

The front and back of the headpiece extended over the front and back of the dress; it came just to the top of the bodice. Two semi-circular shapes were cut into each side of the headpiece allowing it to fit over the shoulders and to be stable when worn. The bottom of the headpiece and the edges of the shoulder were cushioned with a strip of foam and then sealed with silver electrician's tape, covering the sharp edges of the aluminum and providing comfort for the wearer. The tape was also ornamental and served as a unifying element between the dress and the headpiece.

A wire "crown" was fashioned at the top of the headpiece by using a hot glue gun to bond a bridal hat frame made of wire, small batteries, a small circuit board, and an electrical outlet. Thin red, green, yellow, and black wires were glued to the crown at several points, fell to the wire lampshade frame where the ends were joined by electrical connectors; they then cascaded freely to the bottom of the headpiece.

The "Isolated" Ensemble: The Relevance to the "Isolation" Phenomenon

As stated in chapter 2, page 18 and 19, "Pluggies" is a term for people who are plugged into their technology but tuned out to everything around them. Pluggies are asocial people who are 'over-stimulated by artificial intelligence and instant gratification, but underexposed to genuine experience.' These people



Figure, 3. Close up of "overloaded" headpiece.

love to be left alone with their computers and free from the problems of dealing with other people.”

The “isolated” ensemble was an interpretation of this phenomenon. The close fitting under-dress hugged the body keeping it secure in its isolated environment inside the jacket and hood. The fiberglass screening and the clear vinyl hood and hand pockets allowed the wearer to look out and be seen by others, but did not allow for face-to-face interaction with other people. The wearer could only interact through the technology that was built into her world (e.g., the computer components and the myriad of wires); all of the wearer’s physical requirements and mental stimulation needed for survival were supplied by her lonely environment.

The dress. The decision was made to create the ensemble for a female; a simple, floor length, form-fitting gown with long sleeves and a surplice top was designed using the flat pattern method and sewn with a home sewing machine. The dress exhibiting the “isolated” phenomenon is shown in Figures 4 and 5. A heavy, black, stretch, synthetic, knit fabric was utilized for the entire dress except for one of the sleeves. A metallic, netted material with ribbon sewn in a swirling pattern over the netting was chosen for the other sleeve because of its resemblance to a computer circuit board.

The jacket and hood. The flat pattern method was used for the design of the jacket and hood; the style resembled that of a Japanese kimono with its simple rectangular shaping. Black, fiberglass screening was used for the body and sleeves of the jacket and for a portion of the hood. Both of the pieces were sewn on a home sewing machine. Wide, black fabric tape was sewn to all of the seam allowances encasing them to prevent the wearer from being cut by the



Figure, 4. Front of "isolation" garment.



Figure, 5. Back of "isolated" garment.

fiberglass. Clear vinyl pockets were sewn to the ends of the overly elongated sleeves.

The oversized hood was cut from five pattern pieces. The hood exhibiting the “isolated” phenomenon is shown in Figure 6. The two side pieces were made of fiberglass screening; the two back sections and the large, wide, front section which extended one third of the way down the front of the garment to form a pocket, were made out of clear vinyl. All of the hood sections were sewn together with a home sewing machine.

A heavy wire was attached to the contours of the hood along the outer edges with a hot glue gun; this gave it support to hold its shape. An aluminum gutter drain was curved into a semi-circle and inserted into the inside of the front of the hood to hold it out from the wearer’s body. The gutter drain did not need to be glued, as it rested on the top of the wearer’s head and balanced on its own.

Computer circuit boards and an assortment of small, electrical, computer parts were inserted into the clear, vinyl, front pocket of the hood and glued down with a hot glue gun. Twenty-four gauge copper wiring and small, black, green, red, and yellow wires were threaded through electrical carriers that had been bonded all along the edges of the hood, the front pocket, and the sleeve pockets. The wires were then allowed to hang loosely between the carriers. An electrical cord that originated in the center of the front pocket and was made stable by gluing, ran around the side of the jacket, up the center back of the hood, and plugged into the top of the hood at the center of the wearer’s head.

A mask was created from paper maché and several small, computer circuit boards, several tiny batteries, and a large electrical outlet with two plugs; a set of stereo earphones was glued onto the mask with hot glue. Only the paper



Figure, 6. Close up of "isolation" hood.

maché was then painted using white and blue acrylic paint; the detailing was highlighted with metallic gold and silver paints. The mask was placed on a mannequin during the installation at the Menomonie Theater Guild Studio, Menomonie, WI, as part of the “isolated” stage setting. It paralleled the white, theatrical foundation mask that had been worn by the live model as she interacted with the mannequin as part of her performance at the opening reception.

The “Touch Deprived” Ensemble: The Relevance to the “Touch Deprivation” Phenomenon

As stated in chapter 2, page 21, “Man has always been a social animal and has the need to be psychologically and physically connected to other human beings.” The stress brought about by our modern culture breeds anxiety and insecurity; touching calms these feelings. The more people are forced to be apart, the more they need to make bodily contact. The human being who does not find true intimacy--even if it is only with one single person--will suffer.

The “touch deprived” ensemble was an interpretation of this phenomenon. The peach-colored, skin-like fabric of the robe and hood completely covered the wearer, not allowing her to touch or to be touched by others. The message spelled out by the computer-key buttons, the subtle turning up of the hood-collar’s ends, and the futility of the copper fingers trying to “touch” the wearer, were all messages that proclaimed: “I’m lonely, I’m missing a very important aspect of my life and without it I cannot live and function as a fulfilled human being”.

The robe and hood. The decision was made to create the ensemble for a female; the flat pattern method was used to design the robe and hood and a

home sewing machine assembled the two-piece unit. The floor length robe had a simple A-line shape with two bust darts for a minimum of shaping and a round neckline which allowed the wearer to pull it over her head when donning the garment. The robe exhibiting the “touch deprived” phenomenon is shown in Figures 7 and 8. A plastic, computer key cover, which was originally used for the F1 through the F12 keys of an early Apple computer, was attached to the robe at the center front with a hot glue gun and became the button placket. The computer keys were also attached with a hot glue gun on top of the placket and became the buttons; the buttons spelled out the compelling message, “Help me, delete us, option-control-work, return”.

The sleeves were styled after Renaissance-type sleeves in that they were elbow length in front and fell to knee-length in back. The sleeves, however, were set in backwards to allow the knee-length part to be at the front of the garment so that the entire length of the wearer’s arms and all of the hands would be covered, preventing physical contact with others. A computer cord was fused with hot glue to the back of the right sleeve, brought around to the front of the garment, and glued to the inside circuit board of a mouse. The “mouse” was glued next to the front button placket with a hot glue gun; a wax mold of human fingers was attached with industrial-strength glue to the circuit board and the fingers were placed to hover over the keys, ready to type out their message.

The hood was cut oversized from two pattern pieces; it covered most of the wearer’s face so that she could not come into contact with other people yet allowed her to peer out. A metallic, copper and cotton cording was secured with a hot glue gun to the front edge of the hood. The cording was long enough to enable it to be tied underneath the chin in a large bow



Figure, 7. Front of "touch deprived" garment.



Figure, 8. Back of "touch deprived" garment.

and for the two ends to hang down the front of the garment almost reaching the floor. Copper castings of human fingers were connected with hot glue to the ends of the ties and to the outside of the left front of the hood. The hood exhibiting the “touch deprived” phenomenon is shown in Figure 9.

A peach-colored, vinyl fabric having a human skin-like quality, was utilized for both the robe and the hood; the sleeves and the hood were lined with a shiny, peach-colored lamé. The lamé was also used for the gathered, bias-cut hood-collar which was sewn to the bottom of the hood; the collar’s front edges came to points that turned upward, which symbolized a subtle reaching out to others.



Figure, 9. Close up of "touch deprived" hood.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Discussion

Wearable Art Aggregates

The three areas of research inspired by the effects of information technology on people at the beginning of the twenty-first century included the phenomena “isolation”, “overload”, and “touch deprivation”. These effects were interpreted into three wearable art aggregates by the author.

The Presentation

In accordance with the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science Degree, the design advisor and design committee approved the garments prior to their display. The design installation was advertised to the general public by two local newspapers, the campus newsletter, and posters. It was held at the Menomonie Theater Guild Studio in Menomonie, Wisconsin for five evenings starting with a “by invitation only” reception on Monday, May 15, 2000 and ending on Friday, May 19, 2000. The invitation is shown in Appendix A.

The outer vestibule, the area where guests first entered the building, announced the installation with an eleven by seventeen-inch placard mounted on an easel surrounded by several yards of fine, black netting. A small end table was set up along the wall by a sofa to accommodate the book which visitors used to record their thoughts. The placard / poster is shown in Appendix B.

The space for the installation was large and open with very high ceilings. It presented a wonderful opportunity to create a surreal environment that would strengthen the audiences' appreciation and comprehension of the three planned themes by allowing for three stage areas to be created, one for each of the three categories: "overloaded", "isolated", and "touch deprived". Risers and flats were utilized to create elevated platforms as stages for the three ensembles, while backdrops using doors, stairs, windows, plants in urns, fabric draping, glass blocks, mirrors, and various computers parts were developed to further enhance the understanding of the three topics.

For the opening night reception, three live models, wearing the three different ensembles, became the personifications of the categories that were being explored as they left their stage platforms and moved around the room interacting with each other and the audience. The live modeling benefited the spectators who strolled around the theater, able to view the garments from all angles and appreciate the detailing and underlying meaning of each piece.

The only cosmetic that was used on the models' faces was a white theatrical foundation. The effect was similar to that of the Geisha girls of Japan in that their faces became masks that told of the conditions that were being portrayed to the spectators.

The patrons thoroughly enjoyed the reception and the interaction with the models. Two comments taken from the guest book stated, "Loved the live models--made the clothing come alive--could appreciate all of the subtleties of the garments" and "Wonderful use of models, drove the message home, thank you. Great job."

Mannequins took the place of the live models on the remaining evenings of the installation and became another “canvas” for the garments. The stark, completely, white figures paralleled the white foundation “masks” of the live models in depicting the entrapments of being “overloaded”, “isolated”, or “touch deprived”; the rigid and stationary properties of the mannequins could not, however, equal the live models in portraying the driving points of the installation.

Theatrical stage lighting was set up to cameo each of the settings. Pink was focused on the “overload” stage, peach radiated on the “touch deprived” area, and blue shone down on the “isolated” platform; each of the colors evoked an emotional response from the viewer that elicited empathy for each of the conditions being portrayed. A police car light, placed on the floor of the “isolated” stage, rotated and punctuated the space with red thrusts of brilliance thereby adding to the surreal quality of the space. Two sound systems delivered musical interpretations of the technological theme with selections such as “Body Freefall, Electronic” by Luke Slater and “Technologies of Transcendence” by Explorium.

On the other side of the room an eclectic grouping of mismatched lamps, chairs, and tables was separated from the performance area by open door frames and plants in urns; the separation was an illusion set up to accommodate seating for the refreshment area. The guests enjoyed sitting, standing, and moving freely between the reception and the theater areas as they discussed the surroundings, its meanings, and their interpretations. Comments from two guests were, “Recently I saw some coverage of the latest in fashion design featuring the wearing of high tech stuff, and I think it was being presented as desirable,

certainly as chic. For myself, it represented another example of ‘cyber envy’-- the desire to transform into the likeness of this inhuman, or at least non-human, collection of plastic and chips and screens--non-flesh. Thank you for your statement” and “To take the area of your expertise and use costume as a vehicle for making a concise statement as to what technology is doing to us as a people--overloading-- isolating-- touch depriving-- this is no mean thing to pull off.”

The installation was a kaleidoscope of space, color, music, movement, and people thoroughly enjoying themselves in their environment. It was a very stimulating, intriguing, and worthwhile endeavor, one that would merit repeating with a different set of sociological issues.

Documentation

During the installation, photographs were taken of the garments while being worn by the live models as they performed, as well as of the stage area, the reception area, and the guests. A video was made during the evening and serves as an accurate testimony to the event. Photographs were also taken of the mannequins wearing the garments. Professional slides with a live model wearing the three ensembles were made; these slides will be used to make applications to enter various juried shows.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The Goal

The goal in this study was to design wearable art inspired by the effects of information technology on people at the beginning of the twenty-first century. These effects included the phenomena of “overload”, “isolation”, and “touch deprivation”.

Methods and Procedures

To begin this study, a review of the literature relating to the current technological climate was conducted. Literature exploring the psychological, sociological, and physiological aspects as they relate to the Information Age and the effects that these aspects have on people was also reviewed.

Using this information, garment designs were formulated into three units, “overload”, “isolation”, and “touch deprivation”. Wearable art ensembles representing each of the phenomenon were designed and the ensembles were constructed by flat pattern and draping techniques. Hand and machine sewing, a hot glue gun, a multi-purpose industrial strength adhesive, tacky glue, and electrician’s tape were also used in constructing the garments. A wide variety of materials, including copper castings of human fingers, electrical wires, tape, and other components used for electrical work, computer boards and other computer elements, paper maché, and fiberglass and aluminum screening were used.

An opening night reception with live models occurred on Monday evening, May 15, 2000, at the Menomonie Theater Guild Studio, Menomonie, WI.

For the remainder of that week from Tuesday, May 16 through Friday, May 19, 2000; 4:30 to 6:30 P.M. at the Theater Guild Studio, mannequins were utilized to display the garments on the stage risers.

Recommendations

This study has been very interesting, as well as very worthwhile because all of the information is contemporary; the knowledge that is available on these phenomena, “overload”, “isolation”, and “touch deprivation”, is in progress. Several questions arose that could form the basis for further investigation.

- 1) Technologies are not neutral; they come with biases that reflect values and aspirations (Shenk, 1997). It would be worthwhile to investigate some of these biases and discern how they are affecting people.
- 2) Investigate the role of government on the continuing information societies of the world.
- 3) Examine the ways that people develop individually to cope with the barrage of information that will only continue to increase at a faster pace as time goes on.
- 4) The proliferation of information poses a challenge to convert it to knowledge and wisdom; computers should not be a substitute for a person’s own “cognitive skills of awareness, perception, reasoning, and judgment” (Shenk, 1999). A continuing investigation of this situation would be fascinating and beneficial to everyone.

It is the author's hope that this paper has led the reader to become more aware of the negative aspects of the current technological culture and to seek ways to protect him / herself from these facets of the virtual world. Difficult questions as to where information technology is taking us need to be considered.

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APPENDIX A:

Sample invitation for the opening reception of the design installation at the
Menomonie Theater Guild Studio, Menomonie, WI.



FRONT

Thesis Design Exhibition

In her Master's design project, Susan R. King delivers one woman's response to her perception of our contemporary technological habitat

You are cordially invited to attend the Opening Reception

Monday, May 15, 2000, 7-9 o'clock PM

Menomonie Theatre Guild Studio

502 Second Street West,

Menomonie, WI

Light refreshments will be served

INSIDE

Appendix, A. Invitation for the opening reception of the design installation at the Menomonie Theater Guild.

APPENDIX B

The placard/poster for the design installation at the Menomonie Theater

Guild Studio, Menomonie, WI.

What is the effect of
surrounding ourselves
with technology all day,
everyday, at home, at
work, and in our cars,
with no relief?

John Naisbitt, from **High Tech, High Touch**, (1999)

Thesis Design Exhibition
by
Susan R. King

May 16-19, 2000
4-6:30 P.M.

Menomonie Theatre Guild Studio
502 Second Street West
Menomonie, WI

All are invited; Admission is free

Appendix, B. Poster for the design installation at the Menomonie Theater Guild Studio.