

The trends of late modernity

According to Sebastien and Benjamin de Diesbach of Promostyl, based in Paris, the trends which are present in the world today, and thus in sports, are influenced by two major factors: one is technology, the other is the individual.

The technologies of happiness

It is common to note that technology is in constant evolution and is perpetually changing the lives of human beings. It is also quite obvious to note that the public's attitude in respect of technology is globally very favourable. There appears to be a modern consumerist equation: the more 'technology' a product incorporates and integrates, the more technological its appearance, the more popular it is.

Why is technology so popular? Mainly because it is perceived as facilitating everyday life for the population at large; it is seen as a bridge between the world and our desires.

Today, we expect technology to provide happiness, here and now, instant gratification.

Sensuality is back

Technological progress has allowed Man to detach himself from reality, to escape his duties - whether familial, moral or institutional. Man has become a wanderer, one who is the master of his own identity. But as it is impossible to reinvent oneself every day, 'identity' has undergone a crisis and many people are finding comfort in the acceptable and gratifying representation of such and such brand, a certain range of products... This is why fashion is reintegrating the world of sports wear. It is a trend we have noticed in past seasons with the arrival on the sports market of certain elitist brands such as Prada and, more recently, with Chanel and Castelbajac and the launch of a surf collection for Rossignol.

The consumer is seeking an identity in fashion more than in technology. Women want sports equipment to emphasise their shapes...hence the development of flattering cuts and seams in sport garments. The collections by Nike Women and Murphy & Nye are good examples of this trend.This self-affirmation, which negates the 'all technological' approach, explains the success of Roxy - the Quiksilver line targeting young adolescents and women with a sexy attitude.

We are also coming back to traditional dress codes, elegance and, above all, discretion. Protective garments must be multifunctional,

they must adapt to both the city and the mountain…they are no longer considered 'armour'. A new streetwear is coming.Thus, for parkas, laminated fabrics (lightweight and stretch) are having more success that their more rigid, coated counterparts.

Furthermore, sensations (on the physical level) and emotions (on the mental level) have taken on a much greater emphasis in our society: this is why body-defining products, which free the body and skin while allowing us to feel more emotional, are so popular today.

Body-defining garments from the world of track-and-field events, as well as undergarments, are moving into sectors such as that of the outdoors. Manufacturers today study the movements of the body and gestures of snowboarders and hikers in order to better adapt fabrics and cuts and shapes. Zippers are designed to follow the curves of the body (such as the Y.K.K. flexible zipper), replacing the straight versions of the past.

Freed of outside influences

The quest for liberty and autonomy all contribute to making products lighter. The question of weight is becoming a major sales argument. Everything must be light: pure designs as well as massive objects, plastic and metal alike.

Accessories will also be light: the Span Triax Nike marathon shoes have shed 300 grams thanks to the use of nylon uppers. The Gregor Whitney backpack lost a full 453 grams with its lighter nylon and closure buckles.

Being together

Notwithstanding that we are talking about technology, the public's attitude is ambiguous: we desire and we fear. In the current context of economic disorders, terrifying technological progress and terrorism…it is obvious that we feel concerned, plagued by the notion of security. Our safety, that of our loved ones, our colleagues, fellow citizens and our country comes to the fore.

We feel a spirit of solidarity, we are quicker to speak to one another in the street…we feel more like a member of a community, we are less aggressive and individualistic, we tend to pull together for common causes.







Back to meaning

An expression of this trend is the desire to reaffirm one's relationship with the exterior world, of re-establishing ties with the space and time of reality. We belong to a world, a vast world where we are actors.

This feeling is very strong among outdoor sports people - it also explains the enormous success of Jacques Perrin's film "The Migrating People", a documentary/reportage film on the life of birds, their history and their social organisation. The film shows that there are other lives, other existences than that of humans, and these lives are more in tune with reality.

Another path in the return to meaning: that of 'original' people...those who live on the fringes of contemporary attitudes. They do not wish to participate in either production or consumption of material products. They live within themselves, self-sufficient, taking sustenance from themselves.

It is typified by the story of Mélanie and her friend Quentin (above) who left Paris last September with a bag of horse feed and went to Romania by bus, then bought a horse and a wagon. From Botosami (Moldavia) on the Ukrainian border, they crossed all of Romania, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

Moving at horse-speed, they travelled along roads and dirt tracks, stopping in villages along the way, sleeping in barn yards. They wandered about, carrying their dwelling with them, discovering a variety of local regions and cultures.

Streetwear is already showing signs of this type of voyage of discovery, with the profusion of folklore knits flooding the market.

Natural materials

The very real desire to re-establish a direct relationship with nature is expressed in the footwear sector with the development of natural materials. Whether denim, leather or suede: natural materials are comforting and elevate the consumer's spirit with their nobility.

The added-value of meaning is responsible for the success of the 'retro mountain' fashion. Investigating the past through old-fashioned brands provides reference points and connects the consumer with a certain heritage. This vein has been exploited by the Italian brand Napapijri which interprets references to the past: shoes in leather or suede, a variety of knits with traditional motifs. In coming seasons, minimalism in technical equipment such as single-colour polar fleece, will be abandoned for traditional mountain motifs such as trapper's checks.

Re-editing the classics

We will see the re-inventing of fascinating equipment and garments from the 20th century. Like the first snowboards (brand: Originalsin), whose design is strongly reminiscent of do-it-yourself projects! These new editions of old-fashioned equipment are the clear expression of our desire for simplified technology; technology that we can easily understand and which is not hidden under the shell of bio-design.

In summary:

Technological progress has removed us from the reality it has created of contradictory desires:

- the withdrawal of the individual.
- the need to come together.