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A Skin-Deep Analysis on Deconstruction: How Transforming the Modern Surface Transformed Notions on Gender

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A Skin-Deep Analysis on Deconstruction:
How Transforming the Modern Surface Transformed Notions on Gender

by

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Degree of Bachelor of Arts in
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Professor Marc Katz
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While focusing on high fashion and architecture, this thesis explores an aesthetic transition between the early 20th century's "modern" style and the later 20th century style of "deconstruction." We believe the style of "deconstruction" revolutionized visual metaphors for modern gender identity through the manipulation and experimentation of surfaces. These metaphors were accomplished through transformation relationships between surface, structure, and ornament. This study exclusively uses examples from women's fashion and building façades for its analysis.

Key words: gender, deconstruction, fashion, architecture, Rei Kawakubo, Frank Gehry.

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INTRODUCTION

Previous Overlapping of Architecture and Fashion

Architecture and fashion design have similar origins, similar purposes, and areas of overlap in their creative processes. Both fashion and architecture originate from the need to shelter the human body from one's environment; "the connection between clothing and shelter dates back as far as the Ice Age, when humans used animals' skins to cover themselves" as well as clad "exteriors walls for crude structures."¹ Since then, the two design practices have expanded into means of aesthetic experimentation and expression of "identity – whether personal, political, religious, or cultural."² On top of sharing relatable origins and purposes in society, the sequence of their creative processes can be strikingly similar as well; the designer for either begins with a flat two-dimensional medium, transforming it to create complex three-dimensional forms. This is can be demonstrated by the phenomenon of designers adopting certain vocabulary and tectonic strategies. For example, "vocabulary derived from architecture has been applied to garments: i.e. architectonic, constructed, and sculptural. Similarly, architects have borrowed sartorial strategies and vocabulary from the fashion world such as draping, wrapping, weaving, folding, printing, and pleating surfaces and materials."³

Both practices produce art forms meant to directly interact with their audience, i.e. buyers and inhabitants, as well as serve utilitarian purposes. Because of their interactive nature, "both garments and building are invaluable anthropological artifacts that mark

¹ Brooke Hodge, "Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices In Fashion + Architecture," *Skin and Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture* (Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2006) 11-21, here, 12.

² *Ibid.*, 11.

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

important cultural and economic conditions, stylistic preferences, and new developments in technology and materials, when viewed as a part of a historical continuum.”⁴ The choice of materials, and what forms they are used to construct, reveal aesthetic preferences at the time, and even economic climate. The choice of ornamentation on a building identifies and communicates the type of space the building encloses for its inhabitants. Ornaments and accessories that are worn communicate how the wearer wants to be identified; pious, devoted, risk-taking, athletic, rich, or modest.

There are number of occurrences through history in which we can detect, “the same prevailing aesthetic tendencies, ideological and theoretical foundations, and technological innovations have influenced each, resulting in garments and buildings that share stylistic or structural qualities or derive from common creative impulses.”⁵ When viewed as a part of a “historical continuum, both garments and building are invaluable anthropological artifacts that mark important cultural and economic conditions, stylistic preferences, and new developments in technology and materials.”⁶ In fact, one could even argue that fashion has a long history of dealing with the “kinds of complex forms and constructions that architects are now able to construct thanks to advancements in software and building materials.”⁷

The fluted columns and drapery folds in ancient Greek architecture provide us an example of an overlap in aesthetic preference. The flutes and the drapery echo “the cylindrical form of the chiton – the iconic woolen tunic made from a single length of fabric draped over the bodies of both men and women. Both classical Greek dress and architecture were conceived in harmony with the proportions of the human figure. In fact, different types

⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁷ Ibid., 12.

of chitons were named for the Doric and Ionic architectural orders.”⁸ Because the human body was viewed as the golden standard for harmony, proportion, and balance, architecture and clothing were designed with the intent either echo or emphasize the structure of the human figure.

Similarly, we can look at the “Medieval propensity for extreme verticality...in both Gothic dress and architecture” through its use of “sharply pointed shoes, sleeves, and hennins [conical headdresses] relate directly to ogival arches and soaring spaces of Gothic structures such as the thirteenth-century cathedrals at Amiens, France, and Salisbury, England.”⁹ Another example occurs in the 1850s, when “prefabrication of building materials and advancements in steel construction resulted in light, open architectural spaces, as fewer structural elements were required to engineer buildings. The Crystal Palace, an open web of cast-iron girders covered with glass designed by Joseph Paxton for the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, had one of the most open and expansive building interiors of all time.”¹⁰ Meanwhile, “a similar approach to construction was applied to women's wear: as a practical solution for heavy layers of petticoats or crinolines, designers developed armatures of metal hoops to support the wide dome-shaped skirts of the 1850s.”¹¹

The Gendering of Architecture and Fashion

While academics and designers pointed out areas of overlap between fashion and architecture, why are the rhetoric and associations surrounding them different? Let us first consider their most obvious differences, such as their materials and scales of production;

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

architecture often requires highly durable materials to construct spaces for multiple human bodies to inhabit. Fashion, on the other hand, often uses flexible and more delicate materials to clothe a moving human body. If both practices use two-dimensional materials to construct objects meant to accommodate three-dimensional spaces or subjects, or specifically to “cover” them, why then is it that architecture is considered monumental and permanent, and fashion design is thought to be ephemeral and superficial?

While the most obvious differences to point out would be their temporalities, buildings are often expected to be of use longer than clothing garments, and scales of production, the associations surrounding these practices reflect assumptions about gender and aesthetic sensibilities. While male fashion designers and female architects exist and have achieved success, there also exist long-held traditions of men building houses, and women weaving and creating textiles. In fact, those verbs alone have long been associated with gender and creative capacities; think about the different methods Odysseus and Penelope used to preserve their marriage through *reserving* space. Odysseus built (or carved) his marriage bed from a tree stump (i.e. a sacred place and permanent place) and Penelope used her weaving and unraveling to thwart the suitors, to avoid someone else replacing Odysseus.

Penelope and Odysseus, both characters in Greek Mythology, are believed to exemplify *arête* (excellence, or heroism), especially due to their intelligence. Penelope, in particular, is the only female character throughout Greek mythology (besides the goddess Athena) characterized by her intelligence. Her particular form of intelligence, called *mêtis*, is discussed and related to architectural theory in Anne Bergren’s “The (Re)marriage of Penelope and Odysseus Architecture Gender Philosophy.” Embracing, “both mental and manual prowess, both language and material”, “*mêtis* works by continual shape-shifting

turning the morphê of defeat into victory's tool. Its methods ...[exploit] the essential form of mêtis, the “turning” (tropos) that binds opposites, [manifests] in the reversal and the circle, in weaving, twisting, and knotting, and in every joint. Mastering mêtis, is a matter of manipulating 'the circular reciprocity between what is bound and what is binding.’”¹²

While Odysseus is known to exhibit mêtis (i.e. Trojan horse), Penelope is hailed as master of mêtis for the ways she manipulates the prides of the suitors to her advantage. She does in a number of ways; one way is by sending messengers to deliver small messages of hope the suitors individually.

This plays on their pride, and keeps them from communicating with each other, which buys her more time. The most famous example is when she promises to pick a suitor after she finishes weaving a shroud of Odysseus’s late father, Laertes. She weaves the shroud by day, but by night she unravels it. Once again, she plays on their pride by exemplifying the perfect wife, making her more desirable to the suitors. But for now, Penelope maintains her position unmoved. “By imitating the desires of her suitors in the twin strategies of secret, false messages and the treacherous un(weaving) of a shroud for Laertes, her husband's father, she turns her adversaries into co-constructors of her ambiguous place.”¹³ In buying herself time, Penelope avoids being forced into one of the two situations; she will either be relocated to her father’s home, or will be forced to pick one of the suitors, letting him intrude on her husband’s sacred space. At a time where a woman’s location was determined by which man she lived with, Penelope succeeds in occupying a space by herself, but can only do it through creative tricks.

¹² Ann Bergren, "The (Re) Marriage of Penelope and Odysseus Architecture Gender Philosophy," *Assemblage* 21 (1993): 8.

¹³ Bergren, 12.

Odysseus's contribution to preserving the sacred space of their marriage is their marriage bed the carved out a tree stump. The immovability of their bed, the act of creating something monumental and permanent is the sensibility that has been associated with architecture and masculinity. Penelope, on the other hand, reserved the space through manipulating realities, specifically, the surfaces. Like her weaving, her methods are more dynamic. The long-held tradition of assigning gender to weaving and building have come to assign gender to architecture (male) and fashion (female).

Characterizing The Modern Surface

Hodge introduces the “emerging ideals of modernism” during the early to mid-twentieth century to reflect an aesthetic movement towards “greater simplicity; the ornament was stripped away, forms were pared down, and structure began to be exposed.”¹⁴ This take on modernist style echoes the opinions of most theorists and art historians of that time. They compared modern works to the ornament-heavy works (whether that be garments or buildings), claiming that the pure, seamless, and naked surfaces signified transcendence of civilization; that adorning surfaces to assign meaning and identity to objects was a less refined practice of the past. Alfred Loos in particular, an architect and theorist whose writings and buildings, such as “Ornament and Crime,” directly enunciate this mentality and preference. Hodge also points out this predilection for streamlined and non-colored surfaces “is particularly evident in the works of architects Le Corbusier and J.J. P. Oud and fashion designers such as Coco Chanel and Cristobal Balenciaga.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Hodge, “Parallel Practices”, 14.

¹⁵ Ibid.

However, later theories put forth other explanations for what had happened to the ornament. Perhaps the ornament had never been done away with; perhaps the relationship between the ornament and the surface had been transformed through modern style. Two theorists in particular, Anne Cheng and Mark Wigley, discuss the intimacy between the invention of modernist style and fixation on skin at the turn of the twentieth century. In the first couple chapters of her book, *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface*, Cheng gives examples for how the:

“Philosophic preoccupation with surface serves as a cornerstone for a host of Modernist innovations in a variety of disciplines and forms...think of Virginia Woolf's description of life as ‘a semi-transparent envelope’ and Oscar Wilde's claim that ‘only superficial people pay no attention to appearances’; in art the trajectory from Cezanne's planar Cubism...in architecture, the move from the Modernist celebration of blank walls to the ‘surface talk’ that still dominate architectural debates today; in medicine, the new focus on epidermal functions and its semiotics; the accelerated development of scopic technology and the birth of what Hugh Kenner calls ‘transparent technology’. Even in psychoanalysis there is Freud's reputed methodological shift from what might be called ‘excavating archaeology’ to so-called ‘surface analysis’ or, in the context of conceptualizing the nature of the ego and its ontology, his evocative description of the ego as a ‘projection of the surface’ and, later, Jean Laplanche's depiction of the ego as a ‘sack of skin’.”¹⁶

Although the rest of her analysis primarily focuses on racialized skin, Josephine Baker's in particular, she weaves a compelling story for how modernist style's obsession with skin

¹⁶Anne Anlin Cheng, *Second Skin: Josephine Baker & The Modern Surface* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2011) 10.

reflected a change in how people related exterior surfaces to objects as wholes. This obsession with skin and surfaces, she believes, represented a “tensile and delicate moment” in history in which “flirtations with the surface led to profound engagements with and reimaginings of the relationship between interiority and exteriority, between essence and covering.”¹⁷ This change in thought contrasted to previous intellectual tradition, in which cultural values divided into shallow surface and authentic interior. Now surface itself was relied on to embody the essence of the object. “From aerodynamics tears to the glass wall, modern design and aesthetic philosophy remain absorbed in the idea of 'pure surface'. Contemporary designers continually manipulate the relationship between the inside and outside of objects, garments, and buildings, creating skins that both reveal and conceal, skins that have depth, complexity, and their own behavior and identities.”¹⁸

Mark Wigley takes it further in *White Walls, Designer Dresses*. He talks of how Corbusier’s “white walls” have not been given proper attention, how they are often, perhaps mistakenly, interpreted as “naked” surfaces. He claims these readings conceal the “fact that the white is a layer”, with its own relationship to the surface. Although everyone seems to be everywhere concerned with the beauty and purity of the naked body of industrialized structures, modern architecture is not naked. From the beginning, it is painted white. And this white layer that proclaims that the architecture it covers is naked has a very ambiguous role. “Supposedly, it is inserted into the space once occupied by clothing, without being clothing as such...no matter how thin the coat of paint is, it is still a coat. It is not simply inserted into the space vacated by the clothing. It is itself a very particular form of clothing. And by

¹⁷ Ibid., 11.

¹⁸ Ibid.

sustaining a logic of clothing, modern architecture participates in many of the economies from which it so loudly announces its detachment.”¹⁹

Neutral colors are known to be the most effective in expressing dynamic three-dimensional possibilities for rendering dynamic form. The choice of the whitewash enhances the uniformity of the final product; the ornament has bonded to the surface; they together emphasize the structure of building itself. It would appear that in modern aesthetic provides examples for how the ornament, the skin, and the structure work are so inextricable, they end up defining one another.

And yet there is more. Wigley continues to highlight the importance of the significance of the ornament (the whiteness) by referencing Semper’s theory on what has defined architecture since the beginning of time; a definition that “involves a fundamental transformation of the account of the origin of architecture on which so much of traditional architecture discourse tacitly or explicitly bases itself.”²⁰ According to Semper, the essence of architecture is found more in its covering layer than its material structure. The definition involves a fundamental transformation of the account of the origin of architecture on which so much of traditional architecture discourse tacitly or explicitly bases itself. “The story of architecture is no longer one of naked structures gradually dressed with ornament, [because] architecture begins with ornament.” In fact, it is “only the decoration that is structural. There is no building without decoration. It is decoration that builds.”²¹

Semper’s definition of architecture makes it relatable to applied arts such as fashion. To define architecture not only by its skin, but its second skin, is to identify “the textile

¹⁹ Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995) xviii.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

²¹ *Ibid.*

essence of architecture”, acting more as a garment than a body; “a surrogate skin of the building. The evolution of skin, the surface with which spatiality is produced, is the evolution of the social”²². This definition also blurs the lines between “low” decorative/applied arts and the monumental “high” arts, the former on which Semper based his theory. In doing so he inverts the traditional architectonic, “subordinating structure to decoration by demonstrating that the false accessories are actually the ‘true’ essence of architecture, claiming that all craft begins with the weaving that simply originates as building. It precedes the structure on which it might be propped, and all the other crafts emerge out of it.”²³ This inversion necessarily disrupts the traditional “vision based upon the a “carefully preserved image of architecture” in which elements of the exterior “supposedly articulates, and is subordinate to, some inner truth...The truth of architecture is now located in its visible outside rather than its hidden interior.”²⁴

Surface and structure are consumed by their own decoration. Through this consumption, the meaning for the entire object now exists on the surface, because “architecture turns out to be nothing more than texture. To occupy a space, and access its interior, “does not involve passing through some kind of opening in the surface.”²⁵ Experiencing a building by its surface, or “its weave”, is to enter it.

If we buy Semper’s theory that the essence of architecture originated from weaving (or cladding), that would make Penelope, not Odysseus, the originator of architectural practice. At the very least, Penelope mastery of *mêtis* originated the practice of both fashion and modern architecture.

²² Ibid., 12-13.

²³ Ibid., 24.

²⁴ Ibid., 24-25.

²⁵ Ibid., 25.

How the Style of Deconstruction Responded

Modernist style took the ornament to the surface and bonded them into a single layer and entity; a style that produced fine-finishing, clean lines, and unblemished surfaces. One could even describe modernist style brought John Berger's "skin without a biography"²⁶ dream to life. It was the dream of the skin unifying the object as a whole. To some degree, it was a style appeared to hide imperfections or disruptions. If there is anything that human beings learn about perfection, throughout their life, it is that it is almost always short-lived. The state of perfection itself is haunted by its own fragility; because "perfection is secretly monstrous. Tortured from within, the seemingly perfect form confesses its crime, its imperfection."²⁷

The threat took its full form in the style of deconstruction. While this style has often been misunderstood for reflecting literal violent/destructive attitudes for the medium itself, Mears and Wigley defend the deconstructivist architects and designers, by saying that these designers, through their work, demonstrate reverence for the mediums they create with, but skepticism for the values their disciplines were founded on. Another interpretation is that deconstruction from both architecture and fashion was meant to reflect themes within Derrida's theories of deconstruction. When you observe the works from both disciplines, you will find similar visual keys; transparent/highly visible layers, irregular and ambiguous geometry, deliberate exposure to framework, neutral color palette, recycling and resembling, and lack of additive adornment.

In *Deconstructivist Architecture*, Wigley clarifies what deconstruction meant for

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²⁷ Mark Wigley, "Deconstructivist Architecture," *Deconstructivist Architecture: The Museum of Modern Art, New York* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1988) 17.

architecture:

“Deconstruction is not demolition, or dissimulation. While it diagnoses certain structural problem within apparently stable structures, these flaws do not lead to the structure's collapse. On the contrary, deconstruction gains all of its force by challenging the very values of harmony, unity and stability, and proposing instead a different view of structure: the view that the flaws are intrinsic to the structure. They cannot be removed without destroying it; there are, indeed, structural. A deconstructive architect is therefore not one who dismantles buildings, but one who locates the inherent dilemmas within buildings.”²⁸

The projects that Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley exhibited in *Deconstructivist Architecture*, did not share a distinct consistent style, but all constructed an unsettling building by exploiting the hidden potential of modern thinking. The sensibility that distinguishes these projects is that the dream of pure form has been contaminated. “Form has become a kind of nightmare. It is the ability to disturb out thinking about the form that make these projects destructive....Rather they emerge from within the architectural tradition and happen to exhibit some deconstructive qualities.”²⁹ This sensibility ends up disturbing a “set of deeply entrenched cultural assumptions which underlie a certain view of architecture, assumptions about order, harmony, stability, and unity.”³⁰

Deconstructivist architecture reveals these values, such as harmony, stability, and unity may have upheld cultural assumptions about architecture, but did not uphold architectural structures themselves. Even though the form appears to be distorting itself, this

²⁸ Ibid., 11.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

“internal distortion does not destroy the form. In a strange way, the form is somehow remains intact. This is an architecture of disruption, dislocation, deflection, deviation, and distortion rather than one of demolition, dismantling, decay, decomposition, or disintegration. It displaces structure instead of destroying it.”³¹

The dream of purity achieved by Modernist style set the stage for the inevitable nightmare of deconstruction. Its perfect surfaces concealed the traces of production, and unconsciously created a suppressed alien. Through the disturbance of pure form, we are given architecture “that slides uncontrollably from the familiar into the unfamiliar, toward an uncanny realization of its own alien nature: an architecture, finally, in which form distorts itself in order to reveal itself anew.”³² Deconstructivist architecture suggests that the practice itself has “always been riddled with these kinds of enigmas. That they are the source of its force and delight – that they are the very possibility of its formidable presence. The surfaces that were sculpted by modernity were disfigured from the inside out.

And yet is it really that simple? To some degree, perhaps modern works limited themselves because the goal was a single end point, perfection. The creative process in this case would appear to take a linear path. In her book, *Japanese Fashion Designers*, Bonnie English claims Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto were more interested in exploring the space between the body and the surface, because women’s fashion had traditionally relied on a close relationship between the body and the surface of the garment, or at least the appearance of a close relationship. The obvious dilemma with this is that it echoed the long-held tradition of a woman’s physicality being intimately tied to the surface that she marks her identity. It is not accurate to say that Kawakubo and Yamamoto designed pieces that

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

completely covered the body all together. The mesh pieces and deliberate holes inserted onto the garment exposed parts of the body, as opposed to forming it.

It would be too simplistic to say that surface and structure are at war with one another in deconstructivist design. It also certainly does not resemble the love affair between the ornament, surface, and structure we see in modern design. They appear not bonded, but as Wigley mentions they are inseparable. We end up witnessing a more dynamic relationship between surface and structure. But what happened to the ornament? The ornamentation in the deconstructionist style is the space, or rather layer, between the body and the surface.

Within their works, you can find that each designer is making a journey to discover the true meaning behind fashion and architecture. For artists from both disciplines, they find truth in the mediums themselves; through experimentation, Rei Kawakubo found truth and beauty in the properties of textiles, as Frank Gehry found truth by unpeeling his own buildings. These techniques and patterns mimics the weaving and unweaving of Penelope's *mêtis*. They are more focused on the circularity of the creative process than the end point of perfection.

FASHION'S FEMALE IDENTITY THROUGH "LE DESTROY" FASHION

The French Coco Chanel and Japanese Rei Kawakubo remain two of the most iconic fashion designers in history. No designer during their time, or after, could avoid being influenced by the legacies of these fashion giants. They are both considered to be self-taught designers who revolutionized women's fashion by creating a style that incarnated a "modern" female spirit for their respective historical contexts; specifically during significant moments in military history. Chanel's popularity first peaked among Parisians during WWI (1920s), and then later among British and Americans crowds post WWII (1954). While her label, *Comme Des Garçons*, continues to prove itself a force in the haute couture world, Kawakubo is best remembered for her dramatic debut in the Paris's spring fashion show in 1981. Her works from that show expressed an aesthetic cultivated in the wake of the 1945 Hiroshima bombing. Both Chanel and Kawakubo's designs were created to inspire 20th century women to express the strengths of their identity through personal style. And while there may be differences in how they choose to depict the "modern" women, there is a commonality of style shared by both. First of all, both women are famous for their use of a primarily neutral color palette, but are most well known for their iconic use of black. This color choice created striking Silhouettes and shadows, breathing into their women an air of mystery and power.

Chanel's athletic look presented a modern woman marked by a physically active nature; an assertive woman, prepared to enter the working world by take on the men's role by working, while still wanting to appear feminine. Her line was compromised of skirts, dresses, and accessories like traditional women's wear, but it took on a new feminine sensibility. Beyond this new feminine sensibility, "Chanel also adopted male fashions- short hair, ties,

collars, long tailor-cut jackets, pyjamas – to create a boyish look”³³. Her tweed suits and skirts echo the lines and textures of aristocratic men’s sportswear. So in order to distinguish her collection, Chanel punctuated her style with bold accessories; layered strings of false pearls, and red lipstick. These accessories, more theatrical than delicate, contribute to a femininity that desires to stand out as opposed to being praised for being demure. This modern woman’s sartorial armor relies on a delicate balance between recognizable feminine characteristics and masculine characteristics.

Rei Kawakubo’s “Le Destroy” style in 1981 evoked activity as well, but not of Chanel’s robust physical activity, instead presenting its energy as *embedded in the visual properties of the garments themselves*. Through this, Kawakubo’s clothing reflects her nuanced, never-ending mental activity. The clothes took neither a clear frontal angle, nor a recognizable silhouette, feminine or masculine. The streamlined forms and seamless surfaces from the first half of the century concealed much of the fashion designer’s labor in the final product. Kawakubo’s work from the 1980s drew direct attention to her profession’s mental and physical processes, by exploring the relationship between the female body and her clothing. She created multi-faceted surfaces through the layering of different fabrics, some of them transparent, which were sewed in a way to highlight their irregularities. Along with the visible seams and labels, she exposed the wearer’s skin with mesh inserts and deliberate holes. The “loose frayed hems and edges”³⁴ gave her clothes an unfinished, makeshift quality. They “sometimes appear to be coming apart or look recycled or made

³³ Mary Louise Roberts, “Women are Cutting Their Hair As a Sign of Sterility,” *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Free.

³⁴ Patricia Mears, "Fraying the Edges: Fashion + Deconstruction," *Skin and Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture* (Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2006) 30-37, here 30.

from composite parts.”³⁵ This caused fragments to demand as much attention as the whole. Like Chanel, Kawakubo was also influenced by the “conception of what it means to be a woman in a male-dominated society.” Her mental preoccupation with this topic created works that helped foster female “intellectualism in fashion, and her influence can be seen in a wide variety of designer's collections”³⁶. Through these stylistic decisions, Kawakubo presented a complex woman characterized by her many thoughts. While uncertain on what it meant to be a woman in a post-war era, she distinguished herself by drawing on the different textures of her personality. The unrecognizable silhouette of her clothes challenged the way she was perceived, and what was expected of her. She inherently invited the gaze, but deflected it deftly.

Along with different aesthetic sensibilities, these looks promoted two differing forms of intelligence as well. One could argue Chanel popularized practical intelligence for her female wearers; encouraging them to carry themselves with the confidence and initiative of a man, while still resembling an attractive woman. Whereas Kawakubo’s “Le Destroy” style evoked an abstract intelligence marked by complexity and reflection. Chanel’s woman figuratively marched into battle during a war period, whereas Kawakubo’s woman sorrowfully searched the world for meaning after enduring a devastating war.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Noël Palomo-Lovinski, *The World's Most Influential Fashion Designers: Hidden Connections and Lasting Legacies of Fashion's Iconic Creators* (New York, N.Y.: Barron's, 2010). 166.

Silhouettes and Space:

The Dominating Presence of Black Voluminous Forms

Like tormented spirits that haunted the runway, the black and oversized silhouettes of Le Destroy imbued female wearers with dramatic presence as well as an uncertainty about female identity. Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto, a fellow designer and early supporter, first presented their works to the Western world during the Paris ready-to-wear collection shows in April 1981. While a majority of their peers exhibited “elegantly decorated, crisply tailored, and formfitting looks,” the Japanese designers presented “oversized often asymmetrical black clothing that featured intentional holes, tatters, and unfinished edges”³⁷. This infamous debut became the point of origin from which the fashion of “deconstruction” has been traced.

Viewers were immediately struck by the dark and ragged forms the:

“unrelentingly black on black aesthetic — in combination with loose silhouettes and ragged finishings — earned their devotees (of Yamamoto and Kawakubo) the nickname *karasuzoku* or ‘crow gang’... With the exception of a few, most serious journalists in the United States and Europe were both perplexed and occasionally angered by the clothes they viewed as antiestablishment and anti female.”³⁸

For both Western and Eastern aesthetic tradition, the “ubiquitous presence of black carried centuries’ worth of weighty symbolism which they presumed had been processed through a kaleidoscope of self-conscious modernism or postmodernist theory by the designers. Black conveyed a plethora of culturally influenced meanings, including poverty, devastation,

³⁷ Bonnie English, “Rei Kawakubo and Comme Des Garçons,” *Japanese Fashion Designers: The Work and Influence of Issey Miyake, Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo* (London: Bloomsberg Plc, 2012).

³⁸ Mears, 33.

sobriety, asceticism, intellectualism, chicness, self-restraint, and nobility”.³⁹ But, could the color black characterize a woman in a way that would evoke such offense to Western journalists? The answer can be found in one of the reviews, "Japanese fashion star, Yohji Yamamoto is correct in his assessment of his own work. His designs are definitely 'for the woman who stands alone'. Who would want to be seen with her Yamamoto's clothes would be most appropriate for someone perched on a broom.”⁴⁰

Indeed in Western folklore and mythology, dangerous women, such as the Furies, avenging goddesses, and witches, all iconically wear black; for it is meant to embody the supernatural “powers of darkness.”⁴¹ And while these particular associations are formidable, black marks a sophistication in its wearer. After all, sophistication “often consists in the knowledge or experience of the darker side of life: of evil, unhappiness, and death”⁴². In fact its standard connotation with the sinister has given black a fashionable edge in Western culture since the 14th century.⁴³ The habit of wearing black consistently reoccurs “in the course of fashion...always [gaining] power, whenever it comes to the surface, from its ancient flavor of anti fashion”.⁴⁴ Before the 20th century, before the rise of Hollander’s “Modern Bohemian Black,”⁴⁵ “there were two sorts of black clothing in Western Culture; there was “the conventionally sober, self-denying black and the dramatic, isolating and distinguishing black”⁴⁶. Modern incarnations of black garments are worn by women of all professions. The modern businesswoman, for example, may wear a black suit to “create an

³⁹ Mears, 34.

⁴⁰ Mary L. Long, “Yohji Yamamoto,” *People* (1 November 1982):7.

⁴¹ Alison Lurie. *The Language of Clothes*, (New York: Henry Holt, 2000) 188.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid*

⁴⁴ Hollander 365

⁴⁵ Hollander 386

⁴⁶ Lurie,192.

effect of authority and dominance...[not] for arousing trust or affection.”⁴⁷ This sensibility resembles the effect Chanel’s black garments were meant to create for her wearer. For Chanel, a woman wearing one of her black suits or dresses could convey a striking presence at a social event, or contain an air of authority in the working world. The black turtleneck, worn by artists and intellectuals, symbolizes what Hollander calls the “Modern Bohemian Black” for its “sensitive outlook on life and a consuming devotion to one’s art.”⁴⁸ These two examples give a rough feel for the difference between Chanel’s black and Kawakubo’s black, with Kawakubo’s black, resembling the Modern Bohemian black.

Mears claims the way Kawakubo channels the female form through the role of darkness alludes “to the rusticity, simplicity, and unself-conscious restraint of pre-industrialized Japan,”⁴⁹ thought to be embodied by the samurai warrior. While Junichiro Tanizaki wrote his seminal essay, *Praise of Shadows* before either Yamamoto or Kawakubo were born, Mears believes his writing articulated the “moment in Japanese history—between old Japan and its modern incarnation” that later inspired the two designers to veil the female figure in black. Because “black dyes [historically] connoted rural life as well as the noble warrior,”⁵⁰ “the samurai spirit is black. The samurai must be able to throw his body into nothingness, the color and image of which is black.”⁵¹ Not only does darkness personify the spirit of a lone warrior, but it also “affects the way in which a woman's body is seen or not seen”⁵² in Japanese society:

⁴⁷ Ibid.,192.

⁴⁸ Ibid.,193.

⁴⁹ Mears, 35.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Mears, 34.

“The body, legs, and feet are concealed within a long kimono...to me this is the very epitome of reality, for a woman of the past did indeed exist only from the collar up and the sleeves out; the rest of her remained hidden in darkness. A woman of the middle of upper ranks of society seldom left her house, and when she did she shielded herself from the gaze of the palanquin the dark recesses of her palanquin. Most of her life was spent in the twilight of a single house, her body shrouded day and night in gloom, her face the only sign of her existence...women dresses more somberly. Daughters and wives wore astonishingly severe dress. Their clothing in effect no more than a part of the darkness. The transition between darkness and the face.”⁵³

While Tanizaki’s literature captivates our imagination, the reader must ask: what does he mean by to throwing one’s body ‘into nothingness’? We can approach this topic by answering a simpler question first: How can the structure and cut of the clothing affect the way the wearer moves and behaves? While clothes are literally lifeless and inanimate, their cuts often “suggest different forms or ways of being animate— ways of posing, holding ourselves, or moving around.”⁵⁴

While she undoubtedly revolutionized women’s fashion by encouraging physical movement, Chanel unfortunately did not succeed in liberating them from the social constraint of beauty. Her “sporty, casual” chic was a look created for the modern woman “that was comfortable, practical, and compatible with an active life.”⁵⁵ Shortening her skirts to above

⁵³ Junichiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows* (1933), trans. Thomas J Harper and Edward Seidensticker (Stony Creek, Connecticut: Leete’s Islands Books, 1977), 28.

⁵⁴ Malcolm Barnard, "Fashion, Clothes and The Body," *Fashion Theory: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2007) 267-271, here 269.

⁵⁵ Roberts (free-flowing text).

the ankle⁵⁶ not only pushed the boundaries of feminine modesty, but also encouraged her wearers to navigate public, specifically male, spaces with ease. In addition to encouraging physical movement, Chanel's clothes are also credited for liberating women from the physical compression of traditional beauty standards. In contrast to the silhouettes produced by corsets, the simple straight cuts of Chanel's jersey dresses "[assured] a loose, easy line" by removing the waistline altogether⁵⁷.

While Chanel's clothes are constructed on the principles of freedom, the look she created subjected her followers to another set of constraining aesthetic standards. The "new concept of beauty [that] arose in the 1920s... was based on faith in the body's malleability, its ability to be shaped and improved. As a result, 'women began to use more makeup and invest greater amounts of time and money in beauty products for their face, skin, and hair' as well as their physical shape"⁵⁸. The Chanel's look may have allowed movement, but looked best on women with svelte athletic bodies; a physique that required rigorous attention to one's physical shape, "achieved only by continuous, strict dieting"⁵⁹ and physical activity. "An article in *Vogue* (1923) commented on how much time women were spending in "instituts de beaute" and insisted that in order to achieve the look, the modern woman must 'greet with a smile the incessant admonitions, the harsh instructions of the trainer, masseuse, professor: 'Stand up straight, don't slump your back, eat little, don't drink, walk, get up, lean over ... think of your health, of hygiene above all'"⁶⁰. Although they allowed physical movement for their wearers, the clothes also carried suggestive implications on *how to move*. Chanel's style

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ "A La Conquête d'une nouvelle jeunesse," *Vogue*, (1 April 1923).

ultimately relied on an intimate relationship between the female body and her clothes. Corsets tried to maleate the female body into a female form through external compression, whereas dieting methods attempted to maleate the female *from the inside*. The external compression implemented by corsets now took its form through verbal instruction on how to physically hold one's self. Chanel's designs ultimately seduced wearers with a fantasy of an ideal, liberated self. While her look succeeded in breaking away from traditional notions of feminine beauty, it could not escape the societal expectation for women to produce beauty.

Kawakubo, on the other hand, has explicitly defied this expectation by making the “Japanese concept of wabi-sani (acceptance of transience and imperfection, and finding beauty in them)”⁶¹ intrinsic to her designs. Her clothes demonstrate a different relationship with the female body. Instead of expecting the clothing to flatter the body, she designates the “space between the fabric and the body that is most important”⁶². Not only did Kawakubo and Yamamoto's “exclusively unfitted or oversized” Silhouettes negate the “blatant sexuality of fitted [and flattering] Western clothes”, but it also introduces the “possibility of layered or voluminous clothing [becoming] a sculptural form on its own”⁶³.

In addition to completely obscuring the wearers' figure, the volumetric forms encourage their female wearers to literally take up more space than fitted clothes would. Kawakubo's use of volume deviated from the traditional uses of volume in women's wear (such as petticoats), by transforming the relationship between the female body and the clothing. These silhouettes openly defied expectations for women's fashion to produce

⁶¹ Palomo-Lovinski, Noël 166

⁶² English (Free-flowing text)

⁶³ Ibid.

beauty by revealing or accentuating the shape of a woman's body⁶⁴. This idea was most imaginatively pursued in Kawakubo's spring/summer 1997 "dress becomes body" or "Bump" collection, "and again in her 2010 collection, where padded sections are added to the clothes to distort the contours of the body including the shoulders, back and hips, allowing the actual clothing to critique the notion of the perfect female shape"⁶⁵. Kawakubo explains these distortions of proportion exemplify the "'actual' rather than the 'natural'. 'The body becomes dress becomes body'"⁶⁶. The distorted shapes of these dresses recall the compressed and bulging curves produced by corsets, yet free the clothing from the expectation of physical beauty.

Kawakubo and Yamamoto's shadowy volumetric Silhouettes and forms cultivated dramatic and enigmatic impression for their wearers. Their methods not only challenged how bodies are expected to look, but also challenged how viewers looked at bodies. The space between the body and the garment becomes the "nothingness" the female wearer throws herself into. "Nothingness" refers to what character the wearer resembles, which is nothing. The self-erasure of "nothingness" is the only identity a woman can take on if she wishes her existence to be free from expectation of aesthetic pleasure.

Movement & Multiplicity:

Process and Surfaces

While color and volume to challenge the way women were viewed, Kawakubo used complexities of surface to challenge how women identified themselves. The multiple uses

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

and textures of the garments require women to approach wearing clothes in creative and abstract ways. Despite their “unpolished” quality, Kawakubo’s garments almost always require some complicated form of production. Because of this, each piece could not be a perfect copy of one other, giving each piece its own unique identity. The “earliest clients of Kawakubo and Yamamoto knew that the two designers were not actually deconstructing” the clothes in the same way the punk movement “cut and slash the inexpensive, readily available clothing to achieve a pauper aesthetic”⁶⁷. Rather, they were deconstructing certain conventions in beauty and production to change the rhetoric around female identity.

Through this approach, Kawakubo and Yamamoto “maintained a healthy respect for a craft” by “carefully ‘constructing’ clothes using specially made textiles and design techniques”⁶⁸. Kawakubo begins garment construction by “disregarding its function” or recognizable characteristics. She “deconstructs, then reconstructs”⁶⁹. Even in how the garments were worn, there was no straightforward method. For example, she once made a “dress that had not openings, making it impossible to put on” over one’s head; but she insisted it could be done, by being worn as an apron⁷⁰. She also “used jacket lapels to design halter neck jackets and make scarves”⁷¹. To wear her designs, require mental flexibility and resourcefulness; for they are “meant to be worn in a variety of unconventional ways, encouraging the boundaries between occasion-specific wear and everyday wear to collapse.”⁷² Instead of expecting the clothes themselves to embody an image of confidence and intelligence, the wearer uses her intelligence to wear the garment in a creative way,

⁶⁷ Mears, 34.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ English

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

which in turn, gives her confidence. While women are traditionally expected to cultivate and maintain a perfect appearance, Kawakubo encouraged this play of aesthetic self-determination, but encouraged a different approach; instead there being a fixed endpoint of perfection, the goal was to explore the process of self-determination through creativity and abstract thinking.

Her style was described as “unadorned,” and Kawakubo, like modern designers before her, looked to the secondary skin to define the ornament. But instead of unifying wearer’s skin and body to the fabric to produce “pure” surfaces, Kawakubo used textile properties to create her decoration. In a way, the surface breaks away from the original structure (the female body), to create its own structure. Consequently, the surface functions as site for both structure and ornamentation. The decoration that persistently shows up on Kawakubo’s clothes are deliberate holes, tears, knots, or mesh inserts.

Not surprisingly, these details required a specific and complicated procedure, and demonstrated Kawakubo’s insistence on experimental process. She took issue with the “uniform” fabrics and “flawless textures” that modern textile machines could produce. She famously stated “I like it when something is off-- not perfect. Hand weaving is the best way to achieve this. Since this isn't always possible, we loosen a screw of the machines here and there so they can't do exactly what they're supposed to do.”⁷³ Experimenting with the fabric’s surface itself “demonstrated a basic respect for textiles by minimizing cutting and sewing-- emphasizing inherent quality of the materials rather than cleaving fabric to the body.”⁷⁴ Apart from her “infamous Lace Sweater of 1982, a black knitted top deliberately woven with

⁷³ Mears, 34.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

holes,”⁷⁵ “she worked with Hiroshi Matsushita to produce loom-distressed weaves in their textiles, by reformulating the actual fabric in the loom. By 1982, sweaters were intentionally produced with holes or dropped stitches in the knitting so they would appear as rips and tears. Tampering with the computer-controlled looms allowed her to create a variety of random ‘flaws’ in order to escape the uniformity of mass-produced textiles, and sophisticated computer programs allowed for self-generating patterns with interesting surface textures.”⁷⁶

The multiple-purpose quality of her clothes was accompanied by the multi-faceted quality of the surfaces. If these two qualities are meant to reflect anything about the woman wearing it, it is that she identifies herself by her skin, not her physical form. The wearer’s secondary skin, was layered and cut in a way to remind the viewer that irregularities in the surface are what reveal true character. Opposing the earlier modern garments that excluded the labor from the surface to achieve purity, both Yamamoto and Kawakubo turned the surface into a site of interaction. Kawakubo interrupted the expected unity of the modern garment by implementing “folds and pleats, exposed stitching and contrasting textures and fabrics, as well as...’found’ objects,”⁷⁷ to create composite surfaces. While the general shape and color of her garments concealed the female form, Kawakubo expose parts of the wearer’s body, particularly *her skin*, by weaving intentional holes and mesh insets in the fabric⁷⁸. What the hole, or the transparent section, exposes to the viewer is important to understanding the dialogue between surface and body.

Caroline Evans and Minna Thorton point out that her Rose Rayon dress of 1985, for example, the body is not simply or straightforwardly displayed or covered... What the dress

⁷⁵ Mears 34

⁷⁶ English.

⁷⁷ English

⁷⁸ Mears, 37.

does is to reveal 'parts of the body through unexpected vents or holes'. The problem is that which parts are thus revealed are to some extent 'chosen' by the consumer, or wearer, of the garment. With this dress, and with much of Kawakubo's work in the early 1980s, the wearer decides how to wear the garments and therefore decides which body parts are revealed. Also, the parts of the body that are revealed are 'not presented as static, but as a moving and hence constantly changing' (ibid.)...Finally the parts of the body are revealed, but the 1985 dress at least, are those parts for which there is no obvious or well-known name: the back of the knee, the lower part of the ribcage, and so on.⁷⁹

By choosing to expose the female body in a way that does not sexualize the female form, Kawakubo suggests a fundamental change in the way a viewer looks at the female body. If women's fashion is expected to produce beauty through exposure of female form, Kawakubo does just the opposite. And yes, female skin may also be fetishized, but dissociating it from the bodily form neutralizes (and confuses) its sexual charge.

If seams represent locations of conjunction, then Kawakubo's repeated exposure of seams, allude to the composite quality of her surfaces. This implies the female identity may be still in the process of developing, and despite her sophistication, she is also vulnerable. The reoccurrence of visible seams reminds the viewer the wearer has many parts to her personality. The fact that the clothes are complex to make and wear imply that her story is layered, complicated, and mysterious, and that only she possesses the knowledge for how it was woven. The emphasis is on her formation, not her form. You are exposed to her various parts, but not how they are woven together. And while she does not draw attention to her bodily form, she is not afraid of exposing her skin. Because her experiences, biography, is

⁷⁹ Barnard, 268.

written into skin, and her secondary skins. The non-uniformity of her surface addresses her complexity. She, like a woman dressed in traditionally modern clothes (i.e. Chanel and Calvin Klein) conceals and reveals. She is not afraid to expose the multiple textures and materials of her personality, making it hard to fit her into any category. Her surfaces disclose more about her character than her form does.

Kawakubo created a woman who had been traumatized and fractured from the war, but who still tries to create her own individual identity in a post-war life, by picking up the pieces. The only way she could do this was to flout the expectation of using clothes to present a beautiful body. Both 20th century designers provide elements of movement in their created women, but Chanel creates a woman who is ready to experience physical movement, and Kawakubo's woman experiences movement within her mind; her constant reflection shapes an identity that is always shifting and reconstructing. This is evident in the stylistic properties of their clothes. Rei Kawakubo's look presented a woman who has a dramatic, enigmatic, and defiant air about her. She does not like to be viewed one way, and she is conceptual. She does not look for your trust, because she stands alone. The transformation between Modern style and Le Destroy evokes Penelope's intelligence. Before it was just mimicked, but now it is brought to light, and shed its deceptive intention and represents itself proudly.

MASCULINE IDENTITY THROUGH DECONSTRUCTIVIST ARCHITECTURE

Practices of Truth vs. Practices of Narrative

In his book, *101 Things I Learned in Architecture School*, Matthew Frederick states two philosophical points of view on what architecture is meant to exercise. Architecture can either be “an exercise in *truth*. A proper building is responsible to universal knowledge and is wholly honest in the expression of its functions and materials”; or architecture can be an “exercise in *narrative*, vehicle for the telling of stories, a canvas for relaying societal myths, a stage for the theater of everyday life; architecture is the thoughtful making of space”⁸⁰

While the styles of Le Corbusier and Los Angeles-local Frank Gehry appear quite different, they are both known as experimental architects who produced some of the most iconic and revolutionary buildings in the 20th century. They also represent, what Frederick described, the philosophical split in what architecture should produce. Le Corbusier’s “modern” style, known for its simplicity and associations with Functionalism, presents a type an architecture that aims to produce truth. On the other hand, Gehry’s “deconstructivist” style, known for its complex geometric forms and unfinished quality, creates a narrative through architecture. His early works, particularly his home in Santa Monica, feel more like *sites* than *objects* to behold.

⁸⁰ Matthew Frederick, *101 Things I learned in Architecture School* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2007) 84.

If we consider “architecture and masculinity to be mutually reinforcing ideologues,”⁸¹ and expect the architect to produce “truth” through his work, then we can assume that the production of truth is inherently (thought of as) a masculine responsibility; which would also mean that architecture, in turn, is expected to affirm masculinity through its construction. Therefore, a man who constructs truth through architecture also constructs and affirms his masculinity identity. Not only do the “pristine white surfaces and simple [streamlined] geometric forms”⁸² of Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye embody Western notions of truth (i.e. clarity, purity, unity etc.), but they render a masculine ideal as well. If “architecture is an conservative discipline that produces pure form and protects it from contamination,” then the Gehry house marks “a different sensibility, one in which the dream of pure form has been disturbed.”⁸³ The story woven into Gehry’s site is that of how an individual identity is affected by the building of masculinity. And while Villa Savoye and Gehry’s house contrast in meaning, both Le Corbusier and Frank Gehry’s manipulation of *surfaces* present ideas how an individual identity is affected by the construction of masculinity.

The formation of masculine identity, depicted through Gehry’s architecture, resembles Penelope’s process of metis and Kawakubo’s production of garments; weaving and unweaving, constructing and deconstructing. Deconstructivist architecture, as a style, embraces unresolved transformations. Most of the deconstructivist architects whose works were presented in Johnson’s and Wigley’s 1988 MoMA exhibition explored the deconstructivist forms specifically through warping and rotating grids to create revolutionary

⁸¹ Joel Sanders, “Introduction”, *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity* (New York: Princeton Architectural, 1996) 11-25 here, 11.

⁸² Galenson, David W. *Innovators: Architects*. No. w15661. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2010.

⁸³ Wigley, *Deconstructivist Architecture*, 10.

constructions. To begin designing from the grid operates under the assumption that architecture is meant embody truth, and that to warp its grid is to warp the truth. An architect's attachment to the grid is really an attachment to "a carefully preserved image of architecture in which that which is seen on the outside supposedly articulates, and is subordinate to some inner truth."⁸⁴ Gehry used a layer of corrugated metal, to renovate the original house by disrupting its native form; he approached deconstruction through the element of skin, creating layers, as opposed to the element of structure that used grids. Gehry's attention to layers and skins operates under Berger and Semper's claim that architectural practice was truly founded on weaving (ie. cladding); that structure is actually subordinate to the surface. Yet architecture has yet to be recognized as having roots in the feminine.

Before Gehry became famous for the metallic wave-like surfaces of his Walt Disney concert Hall and Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, it was his Santa Monica residence that became his first iconic work. Its iconicism arose "because it [brought] together all the elements of the glossary patiently elaborated by Gehry in order to redefine the terms of his architectural logic."⁸⁵ The original pink house, a 1920s suburban home, now "acts as a referent that the architect overlays with a new outer wall that perturbs and reorganizes the spaces, openings, and functions as a whole. Corrugated sheet, wire mesh, the critical reinterpretation of balloon-frame construction, the dispersion of program elements, the breaching of planes, the geometric deformation of the volume; the house is simultaneously

⁸⁴ Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995) 24.

⁸⁵ Frédéric Migayrou, "The Organon of Frank Gehry", *Frank Gehry* (Munich: Prestel, 2015) 23.

construction and deconstruction, assemblage and dissemination.”⁸⁶ Wigley describes the Gehry house as a three-staged renovation of an existing suburban home:

In the first stage the forms twist their way out from the inside. A tilted cube, for example, made up of the timber framing of the original house, bursts through the structure, peeling back the layers of the house. As these forms push their way out, they lift off the skin of the building, exposing the structure; they create a second skin which wraps around the front and sides of the new volume, but which peels right off the rear wall of the house to stand free, like stage scenery... The original house becomes a strange artifact, trapped and distorted by forms that have emerged from within it.⁸⁷

The original house is now “embedded in several interlocking additions of conflicting structures [and] has been severely distorted by those additions.”⁸⁸ The first stage of renovation depicts the intrusive presence masculine constructions have on the original identity of the house. The cube, a symbol for mathematical perfection, is the source of discord that caused the layers to peel back in the first place. The agent of geometric purity (the cube) makes the house vulnerable, by forcing a “gap between the original wall and its displaced skin.”⁸⁹ The harmony between ornament, surface, and structure valorized by high modernist style is now violated by its own ideal. The void, triggered by the cube’s insertion, represents a “zone of conflict in which stable distinctions, between inside and out, original and addition, structure and façade are questioned.”⁹⁰ Structural chaos caused by sophisticated

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Wigley, *Deconstructivist Architecture*, 22.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

masculinity (the cube) is then compensated for by a brutal unpolished hypermasculinity, signified through the industrial corrugated metal sheets and chain link fencing, to support the house.

Villa Savoye's exterior walls articulate the perfect containment of space and are then elevated pilotis. Meanwhile Gehry's added metal exterior struggles to contain its space on the ground, which results further rupture and displacement of the pieces articulated in the second and third stages of renovation. Despite its ruggedness, the metal wall is not substantial enough to support all sides of the house, and thus, in the second stage, the structure of the rear wall, which is unprotected by the skin, bursts and planes tumble out."⁹¹ The third stage is characterized by further displacement, so the "backyard fills up with forms that appear to have escaped from the house through the breach in the rear wall, which then closes, these forms are then put under tension by being twisted relative to each other and to the house."⁹² While many have considered Gehry's house to be an architectural failure, one could also argue that Gehry's true execution was he exposed the modern architecture's folly; that "Western architects and theorists, from Vitruvius to Le Corbusier", who, in their attempt to locate and to fix architecture's underlying principles...recruit masculinity to justify practice."⁹³ While modern architecture opposed strongly to adornment's excessive sensuality, it also relied on their own ornaments to produce a masculine architectural identity, that was located in the exterior walls.

The transformation from Le Corbusier's pristine white walls to Gehry's corrugated metal wall emphasizes how exterior walls are more than often used to supplement the

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Sanders, 11.

masculine more than the feminine. The surfaces of the building that are not protected by the second skin, allow the relationship between the inner and outer forms to collapse and appear on the outside of the structure. “The Gehry house becomes an extended essay on the convoluted relationship between the conflict within forms and conflict between forms.”⁹⁴ The interventions of masculinity have caused rupture and displacement to the interiority of the house. Gehry mocks the architect who sacrifices the integrity of the house’s original identity, by attempting to impose his masculinity onto the house. Gehry’s renovations of his Santa Monica house initially means to enhance and strengthen the original house, but ends up exposing the fragility of identity altogether.

And while manly interventions cause confusion and chaos to the pre-existing identity, they also introduce create a new spatial identity. I am referring to the “gap between the original wall and its skin”. Violating the border that once defined the *inside* and *outside* led to the birth of the in-between space. The in-between space, becomes “the vehicle through which Gehry works out his issues and puts a space between himself and the world,” because it is located in neither the feminine domestic private space, nor the masculine industrial public space. Not being a traditional architectural space makes it the perfect area for an undecided identity to navigate and reside. This space would be another example of “nothingness” the deconstructivist architect throws his body into.

⁹⁴ Wigley, *Deconstructivist Architecture*, 22.

Gehry's Photographs and the Spaces In-Between

As it turns out, the in-between space was what fascinated Gehry the most in architecture.⁹⁵ In LACMA recent Frank Gehry exhibition includes a collection of snapshots of urban spaces taken by Gehry in the 1970s⁹⁶. He takes his pictures at angles where the “interstitial spaces between various technical equipment”⁹⁷ are invisible; all the viewer can see are the shapes of “metal-frame structures, overhead cranes, silos, warehouses stocked with construction materials, quarries on hillsides cement factories, power stations,”⁹⁸ the silhouettes for which form an industrial landscape against the horizon. While the angular compositions of these silhouettes do not resemble idealized architectural forms, they have a way of looking integrated; it is because all of the objects in the photos belong to the environment of construction. They are the buildings that do not represent the final architectural product, but they loosely represent the process of its production. These urban skylines may have inspired the silhouettes used by Gehry his Santa Monica House. The industrial skylines in Gehry's photographs resemble the lines and textures on Gehry's Santa Monica house.

The structure of Gehry's house alludes to the structures used to build them. Not only do the building's textures exude an industrial character, but also these materials serve to “powerfully constitute...the resources of architecture and buildings.”⁹⁹ Gehry's residence presents itself as a site permanently under construction, because it defines its façade with construction material (such as corrugated metal, chain link fence, and timber beams).

⁹⁵ Migayrou, 46.

⁹⁶ Migayrou. 50-53.

⁹⁷ Migayrou, 42.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Materials that often used in the construction of architecture, but are in hidden in the final product are now brought to the front and center. While Gehry's architecture may not deliver ideal "truth" in the way Le Corbusier's buildings do, his use of materials produces a more "honest" kind of architecture; honest in that the material are less processed and groomed from the final product.

Le Corbusier's open-floor plan meant to create an uninterrupted inner space for circulation and movement. Meanwhile all of Gehry's brought movement to the surface with how he organized the exterior surfaces' lines and textures to contrast against one another. Gehry made his Santa Monica house, a "focal point on which there converge two conceptions of history, a locus of conflict between the old house, memory and history and the new, an avant-gardism that comes to destroy."¹⁰⁰ Instead of being a shell of protection, the house is now a site that interacted with the rest of its environment, but also seemed to haunt original history of the space as well. Negative spaces are produced by interaction between the layers of the house. And identity is formed within these conflicted spaces.

While a final product of Modernist style would have structure, surface, and ornament melded into one layer, Wigley claims the final product of this building appears to reenact the splitting of these layers, allowing Gehry's architecture to depart from Modernist expectations. But the power of house comes from the sense that the additive elements were not imported from the outside "but emerged from the inside of the house. It is as if the house had always harbored these twisted shapes within it; that the space inside the house was always meant to be overthrown by the spaces in between."¹⁰¹ While Gehry's house does not produce truth, it could be providing several narratives. The first possible narrative is a satire

¹⁰⁰ Migayrou, 16.

¹⁰¹ Wigley, *Deconstructivist Architecture* 22.

on how masculinity's attempt to project itself onto architecture, ends up making itself penetrable. The other narrative could be about where identity is truly formed: within sites of interaction or conflict. The spacing in between the equipment creates the visual dialogue of forms in Gehry's photographs. Gehry emulates these dynamic in-between spaces in the layers of his house. The void, produced by the estranged relationship between external and internal layers, is the ideal space to form one's identity.

CONCLUSION

The style of Deconstruction embraces never-ending transformations. Within their works, you can find that each designer is making a journey to discover the true meaning behind fashion and architecture. For artists from both disciplines, they find truth in the mediums themselves; through experimentation, Rei Kawakubo found truth and beauty in the properties of textiles, as Frank Gehry found truth by unpeeling his own buildings. These techniques and patterns mimic the weaving and unweaving of Penelope's *mêtis*. Similar to how Penelope manipulates the suitors' perceptions of her through her weaving and words, Kawakubo and Gehry manipulate gendered expectations about form, through their manipulation of surfaces. They are more focused on the circularity of the creative process than the end point of perfection.

The love affair between the ornament, surface, and structure we see in modern design is transformed into dynamic relationship between surface and structure in the style of deconstruction. The site to form an identity, free from gendered expectations is located in the void between structure and surface. For Rei Kawakubo, existing in the space between garment and body distanced the wearer from the expectation to embody the ideal female

physique. For Frank Gehry, the space between his exterior building skin and original house distanced himself from expectation to produce truth to affirm one's masculinity.

Kawakubo challenges viewers to look more at the irregular surfaces of her garments than their form. Kawakubo wants her female wearers to be identified by the complex layers that make up her surface. The emphasis is on her formation, not her form. You are exposed to her various parts, but not how they are woven together. And while she does not draw attention to her bodily form, she is not afraid of exposing her skin.

While Gehry's architecture does not produce pure form (i.e. authority and truth), it produces an honest narrative about the formation of identity. And that "truth" architecture is expected to embody damages spaces more than it builds and strengthens. Identities are meant to be formed within sites of conflict and interaction.

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