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THE DECONSTRUCTED GARMENT AS BASIS FOR ORGANISING THE PERFORMANCE OF A CURATED SPACE: HOW CAN A CROSS-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH SHAPE THE FORMATION OF INTERIOR SPACE?

LESLEY TAYLOR

UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH

ABSTRACT

This paper will discuss a proposed methodology for planning space and flow within the gallery environment, drawing on a case study. Coll3ct was a 2010 exhibition that explored the narratives of collecting and collections, of the collector's connections to the past and to the present. Objects can be considered as companions to our emotional lives: they can provoke to make connections, and the conversations they hold when viewed become the starting point for more discussion.

The theme of 'past' will be relayed in the case study itself, 'present' discusses a cross-disciplinary approach to ways of planning a gallery/exhibit space and 'future' will be discussion of the proposed methodology.

The focus of this case study is a collection of sixties and seventies dresses belonging to an artist's deceased mother. From this collection, the comparison of the dress pattern's marks and the traditional floor plan became the theory behind the methodology for organising the performance of a curated space. The plan has its set boundaries whereas the pattern is only bound before it is cut from its sheet. Less 'solid' than sketching would be the approach of 'draping' the interior elements, as the dressmaker can to adjust 'fit' with the garment. The languages overlap – material qualities, performances, memories, histories, psychological attachments, inhabitation, identity and associations.

The paper proposes that deconstructing the elements of the interior - in the same way a dress pattern is already deconstructed – would bring an alternative disciplinary approach to spatial construction.

Karen Franck talks in “Yes, We Wear Buildings”¹ of literally wearing the building² as metaphor and so by using one discipline's method to organise another's, this can bring together the two in a curated environment with an emphasis on 'fit'.

CONTEXT

Coll3ct was a 2011 exhibition that explored the narratives of collecting and collections, of the collector's connections to the past and to the present. The theme of 'past' is relayed here as a case study; a method of mark making to inform a group collection documenting the process of the exhibition. Concurrently, work on the set up of one particular collection took place, that of an artist's accumulation of her late mother's 1960s and 1970s evening dresses. The collection of marks was informed by workshops, firstly with a dancer working to explore the relationship of the body to space and then with a visual artist exploring marks, lines, images and metaphorical relationships. How we experience and perceive space, what a line represents and how it can restrict design was considered throughout when making and collecting marks (eg dance scores, the group's own movement in a space, plans and within this research, the dress pattern, the movement of a skirt). We drew together our own collection of lines, marks, images, and narratives.

A collection of 1960s and 1970s dress patterns inspired a comparison between the pattern as basis for a garment and the floor plan as basis for a curated space. Looking back into dance scores and then pattern cutting marks made connections apparent. By comparing marks that ultimately create a three dimensional garment and how those pattern pieces are applied, a different way of approaching the notation and therefore how it is represented of interior space. The method of working of artist Brigid McLeer was used as a reference to how the group would build layers to the collection of marks over the time period that the exhibition was shown.

Comparisons Leading to Research and Methodology (Past)

"Fashion is architecture" (Fischer, 2009, p.11) ³

The exhibition "Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture" ⁴ in 2006 explored the cross-disciplinary methods used by fashion designers and architects. Buildings that were literally draped with fabric exterior walls and clothing designed as furniture as part of its performance were shown as exemplars. Shelter was a theme that was explored – temporary fabric tensile structures and models disrobing a collection to create a shelter. The visual and theoretical comparisons drawn within this exhibition and book feed directly into this research and paper by drawing on methods used by each discipline, questioning traditional and what may be perceived as non-traditional ways of experimenting with materials and space to explore the interior

Regarding work with the dress collection, looking into the format of the dress pattern, the marks of this two dimensional 'plan' effectively create a three dimensional object. This is comparable to a traditional floor plan that would dictate the layout and flow of an exhibition. Do we limit ourselves in the way we traditionally organise space within the lines of the floor plan? The interior is described through architectural practice and methods. How can a cross-disciplinary approach shape the formation of interior space?

The dress pattern leads to the construction of the garment through its pieces. Those pieces are initially bound by the sheet they are printed on. The marks – lines - are directions to be followed by the maker. Once cut the maker can become the designer with the flexibility to edit and embellish where they see fit. The architect designed building has its floor plan as direction (boundary walls and ceilings) but once the designer has chosen the method to test ideas *within* those boundaries, they too have the flexibility to create layers, spaces, light and shade. Architect Elena Manferdini's use of games software when designing clothes is examined by Hodge “..the computer cannot do everything and, in the end, a combination of hand- and machine-sewing is needed to complete each design. Manferdini's work is a good example of architects looking to fashion and emphasizes the way the two practices can draw on and influence each other.”⁵

The dress pattern uncut is in plan state – lines and marks within a sheet of paper, with its boundaries being the edge of the sheet. Once cut, the pattern becomes a puzzle to be pieced together in a 1:1 scale. The pieces, once pinned and cut from the fabric, move, fold, curve and become three dimensional by pinning – temporary fixing open to change. It gains height and depth. The proposal is that this is a method that can be applied to the organisation of the interior space, specifically one holding a collection of artefacts – starting with the area in sections or simply the artefacts, allowing for overlaps (seams, interfacings) and ‘drape’ the space. More allowance for improvisation, more fluid, like dress fabric. The dress pattern is less dictatorial than the floor plan in its possibilities for change during construction of the end product. Practically, this draws on methods used for the collection of marks – the cutting, rearranging, testing and documenting of the process.

Experimentation as Development of the Pattern Theory (Present)

Following the dress pattern as a theme, experiments in a workshop setting were carried out, working in a quick intuitive style using firstly unravelled wool and later calico, the purpose being to find what interior and exterior spaces may evolve. By choosing to work with these materials the deconstructed garment theory moved forward.

For the first experiment strands of unravelled, and hence kinked wool were used to create a geometric border by suspending them vertically from a flat panel. This resulted in an interior space created by a temporary boundary that on viewing at eye level appeared to have no deliberate structure. When viewed from its underside the intended structure was apparent. As the material was already deconstructed (previously knitted) this led to further questioning about how far the new interior space and boundary could be deconstructed; sections could be taken away and the underlying structure would still be in place, if not apparent. It could be deconstructed to a single thread leaving only a memory, a trace of the boundary. Comparison can be drawn with Isobel Toledo's geometrically designed clothing to which “..she takes a reductive approach to pattern making – what she calls “romantic mathematics” - by paring each garment down to its simplest geometric form (cylinder, cone, etc)”.⁶

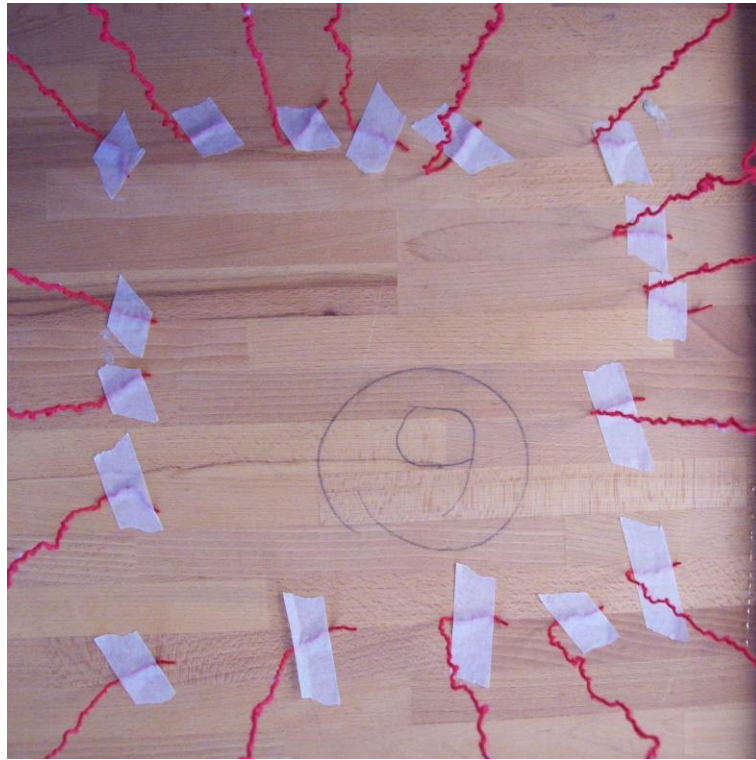


Figure 1. Initial wool experiment showing structure of space created

A second experiment using short strands gave a very different result. Without length to give weight to the strands these appear to create a more dishevelled boundary – itself being less obvious though still intended.



Figure 3. Second wool experiment

To take this further a one metre sheet of calico was used, scaling the experiment up from the few inches it had been at with the wool. The calico had no history other than some creasing through storage and transportation. There was a planned strategy which considered when to deconstruct the material, which was done in stages starting with the singular whole piece of fabric. This was hung by one corner and allowed to curl and drape naturally. Photographing from underneath revealed the internal space that it had created.

Five strips were then torn from the sheet and hung vertically in layers – the theme taken forward from the wool experiment and developing it further. Accidental and deliberate connecting of the strips created further new interior spaces that could only be viewed by photographing. The strips were increased to a quantity of seven and from these three mobius strips were created, intertwining with each other. Compartments were created by doing so and more internal images recorded. The mobius strip questions boundaries. Where does it start and finish? Does it start and finish? The flow of the strip can be followed resulting in all of its single surface being traversed. The nature of the strip is that movement/flow is continual, never ending. It also questions ratios, its own being twice the length of its original material state by creating just a half twist and securing the ends. This simple experiment highlights cross-disciplinary considerations when experimenting within the design process:

- start and end points
- flow
- edges and boundaries
- edges as lines
- movement through materiality
- material responses

Karen Franck also identifies cross-disciplinary metaphors, “Wrapped, smooth, fluid, transparent, layered, material, border, sleeve, exposed, texture, fold, facing, pattern, decorative, fabric, ornament, veiled, fluted, fastened, patch, stiff, cosmetic, worn, reveal, covered, hung, formal, symmetry, cut, foot, fussy, elegant, measure, size, image, model, sketch, design, style, seam, coat...”⁷. “..The continuing overlap of terms suggests a deep commonality between building and clothing – in experience, ideas and design”⁸.



Figure 4. Single sheet of calico hung from one point

The final stage of the experiment was to halve all of the strips making a total of fourteen to work with. A roof-like experiment turned into one resembling a tunic. This made for a strong ‘clothing a space’ connection. The imagery was then hand traced, firstly tracing the interior spaces only and secondly finding continuous lines that were present. The tracings referenced the marks of a dress pattern as those intended to inform the performance of an interior space. The lines being on semi-transparent

paper echoed that of the paper pattern. Shaun McLeod's writing can be used to summarise this method, "Spontaneous images, often filled with personal significance, are the very stuff of creativity" and of "image>action" and equally "image<action [...] image and movement constantly informing and modifying one another" ⁹. Hodge observes that "Some architects and fashion designers use a responsive or intuitive process to translate their ideas into three dimensional models and patterns. For example, both Gehry and Kawakubo have used materials at hand – a rumpled pillowcase, a crinkled paper bag, a crumpled piece of velvet – to assist in communicating their concepts to colleagues who then work on the often complex technical issues required to actualize it" ¹⁰.



Figure 5. Mobius strips intertwined

Analysis Of The Process

The cross-disciplinary experimental process developed from the initial dance workshop prior to the Coll3ct workshop (the Space Gallery had exhibition artefacts arranged within it during the workshop making for movement flow being interrupted and notation of this being recorded after each experiment) through, some months later, to the calico experiment and conclusions drawn from this intermittent process. The dance workshop involved movement within space and observing the space by considering sight and restricting this then recording the outcomes. These outcomes were then used as basis for the first of three visual artist workshops and became content of the mark making collection, documenting the process of the exhibition's performance. The marks were not pre-planned but intuitive and, in this exemplar, a group output. Daniel Libeskind's work "serves as an example of

how collage has been introduced into an architectural context”¹¹. As with the dance workshop process of drawings, “Libeskind carves existing plans into meaningless segments and then reassembles them with concern not for spatial implications of the diagram, but textual preferences of how light and dark interact [...] allowing fragments to assume a renewed vitality”¹².

The dress pattern consists of pre-planned marks, designated to be separated and reassembled to create an end product; a garment that occupies interior and exterior space. Using an experimental process, similarities are drawn but it is overall a more intuitive way of researching a method of organising the interior space.

Stages: Both start with deconstruction

Table 1. Comparison of processes across the two disciplines

Dress pattern	Material experiments
	Deconstruction: wool and calico as material for experiments
Deconstruction = pattern. Deliberate marks	Experiments = accidental marks as result
Basis for creating garment	Marks as basis for organising the space
Deconstruction = fabric and pattern attached and cut from original sheet	
Creation of garment	Performance of the interior space

Summary Of Methodology (Future)

The original proposal of the comparative processes of the dress pattern and floor plan as definers of space have been taken forward by experimenting with basic, deconstructed, pliable materials and using the cross-disciplinary approach. A system evolved that could be emulated in other materials and textures for differing situations where interior space is to be shaped. By using the experimental process and working in a less structured but more intuitive fashion, parallels between the two disciplines have drawn closer; the overlap of language – material qualities, performance, memory, history, inhabitation and association – becomes even more apparent.

Deconstruction may evoke thoughts of ‘end of process’ (eg taking a building down, altering a garment, working with an initial strand or a sheet of material) but it has been used here as a start point, the beginning of a process of interior and curatorial organisation. The experiment with the mobius strips theoretically echoes these questions. Putting this in the context of edges and spaces within the interior Hodge queries, “How does one distinguish the place where a person's back actually touches a chair? Where does a head end and a hat begin? What is the line between figure and ground, self and

world?”¹³. The edgelessness can be assimilated with the 'unfinished'. Discussing use of fine art as practice based research, Jo reports that “The incomplete, clashing structures [...] creates tension toward the realisation of potential order. Therefore, the order of collage leaves room for conflict and for tension, and defies any attempt at totalisation. This different view of order is significant for architecture as an art that has traditionally been associated with the creation of order. The order which collage proposes can be incorporated into the work of architecture to produce a work based on elements rather than overriding concept or form”¹⁴.

Karen Franck describes us “wearing the building”¹⁵. The proposed methodology has close assimilation by nature of the materials used within the process. “Both buildings and garments are made by hand and machine to enclose and yet display the human body in all its physical, cultural and psychological dimensions. Each is an extension of that body. Each touches and is touched, seen and felt”¹⁶.

McLeod compares “improvisation as methodology”¹⁷ when describing experiments in dance and “‘Structured improvisation’ in which the order of events was set and known, but the movement material within each [...] was changeable and indeterminate”¹⁸. This reflects the method used in the ‘fabric as space’ experiments. On using this process to organise a curated space, McLeod’s observation (relating to dance) can be applied; “It is a gesture toward an alternative space inside a familiar one”¹⁹.

CONCLUSION

Jo reflects that “The elements of the collage play a double role; they are manipulated, cut out, overlaid, drawn on or painted over to give them a representational role within the painting, but they retain their identity as scraps of material; fragments of the real world”²⁰. The experimental processes linking the materiality of clothing and the paper pattern to the interior space discussed in this paper are a start point to potentially larger scale experimentation and organisation of the interior. It enables comparison of the flow of the hem of the skirt in relation to the flow of the plan.

To follow a less structured, more visceral method of planning the interior through experimentation with what may be viewed as the tools of another discipline makes for exciting and potentially limitless inspiration. The approach is one of using a different set of tools free from the architectural frame.

Endnotes

[1] Franck, K (2000) Yes, We Wear Buildings, *Architectural Design*, Vol 70/No 6

[2] Franck, K (2000) Yes, We Wear Buildings, *Architectural Design*, Vol 70/No 6:p.94

[3] Fischer, A. (2009) Construction (Lausanne:AVA Publishing SA) p.11

[4] Hodge, B. (2006) *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson)

[5] Hodge, B. (2006) *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson) p.18

[6] Hodge, B. (2006) *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson) p.18

- [7] Franck, K (2000) Yes, We Wear Buildings, *Architectural Design*, Vol 70/No 6:p.94
- [8] Franck, K (2000) Yes, We Wear Buildings, *Architectural Design*, Vol 70/No 6:p.94
- [9] McLeod, S. 'Experiencing Masculine Identity Through Dance Improvisation', in Bartlett, E and Bolt, B. (eds) *Practice As Research: Approaches To Creative Arts Enquiry* (London and New York: I.B Taurus, 2010)
- [10] Hodge, B. (2006) *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson) p.17
- [11] Jo, S (2004) Re-discovering the Creative Collage in the Architectural Representation, *Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association, 2004*, p.85
- [12] Jo, S (2004) Re-discovering the Creative Collage in the Architectural Representation, *Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association, 2004*, p.85
- [13] Hodge, B. (2006) *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson) p.260
- [14] Jo, S (2004) Re-discovering the Creative Collage in the Architectural Representation, *Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association, 2004*, p.83
- [15] Franck, K (2000) Yes, We Wear Buildings, *Architectural Design*, Vol 70/No 6
- [16] Franck, K (2000) Yes, We Wear Buildings, *Architectural Design*, Vol 70/No 6, p.94
- [17] McLeod, S. 'Experiencing Masculine Identity Through Dance Improvisation', in Bartlett, E and Bolt, B. (eds) *Practice As Research: Approaches To Creative Arts Enquiry* (London and New York: I.B Taurus, 2010)
- [18] McLeod, S. 'Experiencing Masculine Identity Through Dance Improvisation', in Bartlett, E and Bolt, B. (eds) *Practice As Research: Approaches To Creative Arts Enquiry* (London and New York: I.B Taurus, 2010)
- [19] McLeod, S. 'Experiencing Masculine Identity Through Dance Improvisation', in Bartlett, E and Bolt, B. (eds) *Practice As Research: Approaches To Creative Arts Enquiry* (London and New York: I.B Taurus, 2010)
- [20] Jo, S (2004) Re-discovering the Creative Collage in the Architectural Representation, *Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association, 2004*, p.88