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FORMING THE NEGATIVE: ARCHITECTING THE SPACE IN BETWEEN

From the Interior to the Exterior of the Dressed Figure

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Abstract

The fleshy human body is defined and given meaning through the dress. Western ideals and cultural practices identify the dress as a *fit-on* to the body. Whereas, Asian cultures recognizes the dress with multiple layers of clothing creating spaces between dress and the human body. Inspired by this practice and concept of the dress, the research aims to identify possibilities and notions of creating the dress from the interior to the exterior; designing from spaces in between to result in an exterior. In the process of developing a new approach for designing the dress, the need arises to re-identify its function as well. Therefore, the research relates to the contemporary functions of a dress and redefines them within the possibilities of the previously identified creation of the dress dependent upon the space in between. The research used an inductive methodology following the grounded theory to identify a concluding theoretical framework for designing the dress from the interior to the exterior. The research was primarily funded by qualitative data from archival sources. The research was funded by the Senate Research Committee of the University of Moratuwa under the grant no SRC/ST/2016/18.

Keywords. *Space Between, Negative Spaces, Fashion Approaches, Inductive approach, Grounded theory*

1. Introduction

When considering the transgressional history of the dress it is hard to identify whether the invention of the dress was merely to shelter the body, for it can be seen that using adornment for gender clarification dates back to pre-history. Regardless of the need of the dress, the dress through time while acting as a second skin has been creating and providing meaning to our cultures and societies and about our cultures and societies to us. This back and forth meaning provision related to the dress varies primarily in the contexts of the West and the East. The silhouette of the West begins with the light weight and free flowing garments of the Greco-Roman period and converts into a stiff

dress. Where the dressed silhouette was not defined by the lines and contours of the body but by pre-made structures that was made to result in a pre-defined visual figure.

The story of the dress in the east through time had a liberated definition of the silhouette resulting in styles of dressing where the second skin was donned with spaces between allowing a freedom of movement and also a more dynamic range of meaning. The research focuses on the chronological variations of the dress in the Indian sub-continent and the West to derive a sense of meaning up-to-date through dress. This comparative study is necessary due to the extent of globalized practices in the present day.

The first drastic measures of liberating the female figure from tight predefined silhouettes arose with the degree of functionality that was required in the times of WWI. While the products of the East have been flowing into the European region for centuries through the Silk Route, it is only as late as the 20th century did the concepts of dressing of the East officially took-on the runways of Europe with Issey Miyake's participation in the Paris collection in 1973. With his introduction to dressing the human figure allowing free space between the dress and the figure bought in a new era of liberated dressing in the Western fashion culture. Similar ideologies were followed by two other prominent Japanese fashion designers Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto.

The concluding theoretical framework of the research is a result of the identification of a theoretical gap in using the concept of space in between body and dress as an approach to design the dress. The framework will fund future pragmatic development of the dress based on an interior to exterior approach.

2. Methods and Methodology

The research paper aims to realize a theoretical framework based on a divergent collection of existing practices. Therefore, an inductive approach was followed. As depicted by Thomas (2006), Strauss & Corbin (1998) claims the emergence of a theory from studying data is the primary purpose of the inductive approach. He further continues explain underlying purposes of the genral inductive approches as following.

- to condense extensive and varied raw text dadat into a brief, summary format
- to establish clear links between the research objectives and the sumamry findings derived from the raw data and to ensure that these links are both transparent (able ti be deminstrated to others) and defensible (justifiable given the objectives of the research)

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- to develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences processes that are evident in the text data.

Therefore, the research was conducted through the general inductive approach primarily due to its appropriatedness for realizing models or theories based on the “underlying experineces” that can be identified in data.

The general inductive approach was followed by the grounded theory to analyse gathered data. “...grounded theory seeks not only to uncover relevant conditions but also to detemine how thw actors under investigation actovely respond to those conditions, and to to the consequences of their actions” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

3. Spaces and Silhouettes of the Dressed Figure: the Western Ideal

The territory that is considered as Europe in the present day recognizes itself as a civilization from the beginning of the Hellenistic era of the Grecian Empire. Therefore, for the scope of the research, the study of the silhouettes for the West will begin with this period. The Hellenistic period begins with a rich exposure to wide range of cultures with the conquests of the Alexander the Great in 323 B.C. and ends with the conquering of Greek states by the Romans beginning from 1st cent. A.D. This section will explore the chronological variations of the silhouette, where a notion of liberation arose and where and how the physical female figure was liberated. The research will later identify a revival of the Greek celebration of feminine contours in the modern era. Section 3 will showcase two types of spaces, a static space and a dynamic space within the Western ideal. It will further showcase the how the dress was created from the exterior to the interior allowing the gap for the research scope.

03.1. CHRONOLOGICAL VARIATIONS

The world’s oldest human figurine is a 4inch tall clay statue discovered in Austria known as the Venus of Willendorf. The figure has some of its features completely ignored and the others greatly exaggerated. (How Art Made the World; More Human Than Human, 2005) The exaggerated features allow the depiction of a very fertile woman. This was 30, 000 years ago and our obsession with a figure to idealize our need to become more human than human has already begun. While the obsession of the perfect human figure follows up-to-date, in which perfection is understood as the ideal showcasing of socially constructed gender role, a peak point in the perfection of the figure can be seen in the Greek Classical Ages; the Hellenistic period with its advances in art, mathematics, philosophy and politics. The mostly worn lightweight garments; *chiton* draped over the curves of female figure enhancing the form of the body while providing great freedom of movement (Department

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of Greek and Roman Art, THE MET, 2003). This ideology is evident in their sculptures for the perfect figure in Classical Greece was the athletic figure. Therefore, the undressed figure was created showing a figure partially relaxed and partially in movement. The layers of drapery enhanced this athletic ideology, folding and creasing following the curves of the body.



Figure 1, Free flowing garments creating space between while enhancing the athletic Greek figure (Source: <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/03.12.17/>)

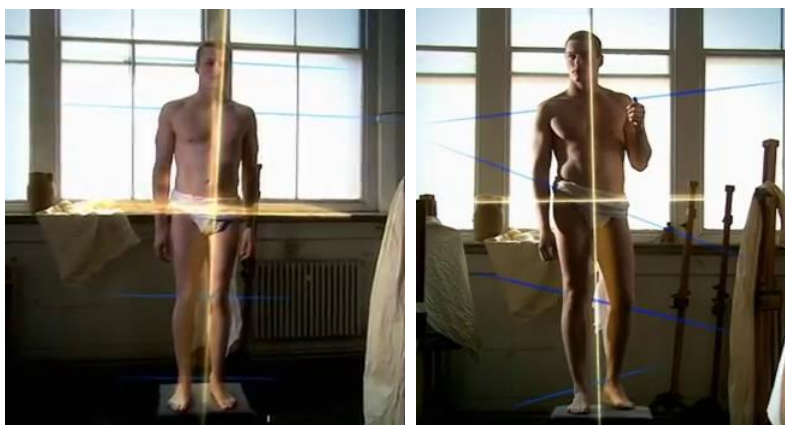


Figure 2, The Grecian athletic figure seen in all period statues (Source: (How Art Made the World; More Human Than Human, 2005)

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The Roman era had a similar sense of dressing, where both men and women both wore garments flowing over the body resting in the shoulders. This pattern continues till the end of the Roman Empire and the in-flux of the *barbarians*; people of the present day Scandinavian region as referred to by the Romans, and the concept of the ‘pant’ came into the civilized Western world. This was worn under the free flowing garments. The variations of this styling continued and a significant change in the dressing of men and women can be seen in the Renaissance, where the dress upon the body was used to show a preconceived idea of the figure than the previously recognized celebration of the body by the use of free flowing garments. The exaggerated figure first was created by adding multiple layers of fabric under the final outerwear (Entswitle, 2000). The function of many layers of fabric was created with crinolines and corsets resulting in very narrow waistlines and wide hips. A static space was created under the outerwear between the crinoline and the body. Due to the tightening of the upper torso to create a narrow hip movements were restricted although there was obtained static space in the lower torso (Stets & Burke, 2000).

The WWI changed the manner of dressing completely going back to free flowing garments of ancient times but additionally freed the ankle as well. The figure of the 1920’s was radically different that it ultimately resulted in a rectangular figure where the dropping dress from the shoulder swallowed the hips into the dress as well (Sonelik, 2014).

03.2. LIBERATION OF THE BODY

The 1900’s began with the knowledge of health hazards of the crinoline. This resulted in a gradual decrease of the wideness of the corset and the concept of “monobosom”, where the female bust was less highlighted so that the characteristic “S-curve” of the period would be highly visible (Glasscock, 2000). While recovering from WWI, 1920’s had a sense of *liberation* and *modern times* deeply rooted even in the daily practices. Pioneered by designers who have set-up studios and design houses in Paris, 1920’s liberated the female body to such an extent that it had lost all sense of curvaceous bodies of the female. Leading designers like Coco Chanel found inspiration for her clothing mostly from detailing and silhouettes of men’s suits. While comfort of stylist garments has reached great degree by this time it has lost the sense of femininity in the silhouette.

It can be noticed how the waist has completely disappeared with the uneven placing of the feather trim. The idea of black in women’s clothing and rich in details of manly garment construct reached its height and stays important up-to-date with Coco Chanel’s *Little Black Dress*. The relation to the male garment construct to liberate the female body can be seen later on in the 1980’s

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which continues to the present day with creations of Rei Kawakubo, in her brand *Comme des Garçon* (Like a Boy) and in creations of Yohji Yomamoto who rejected ideas of beauty in the norm by creating garments which acknowledged the idea of space in between for liberation and freedom of movement.



Figure 3, early versions of the Little Black Dress, By Chanel, 1927 (Source: <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1984.28a-c/>)

The 1930's looked for the curves of the female figure again without losing the comfort, the mobility and the freedom of the dress of the 1920's. The westerners who looked into the Orient through centuries to bring out a sense of exotic in the West shows intriguing examples of Asia in the western dress in the 1930's (Koda & Martin, 2004).

The lost feminine figure has reappeared in these dresses by relating to Asia and its traditional roots. While the Madme Gres' rendition of the cocktail saree dress is a direct reflection of the saree with a reduced length Balenciaga's evening wrap has considered being voluminous, creating a space between finding inspiration in the kimono (Koda & Martin, 2004).

03.3. RECOGNITION OF SPACE IN BETWEEN

The 1968 May revolution in Paris bought a novel era of design and construct to all creative fields. 1970's began with attempting to break away from all the previous styles of fashion and therefore dressing. Amid, this revival Issey Miyake, entered the Paris fashion arena with the idea of *A Piece of Cloth; A-POC*. A-POC provided freedom of movement of the body as never seen in the Western fashion arena. The later developments of A-POC provided a very extensive freedom to the wearer that the design was in a tube of cloth which could be manipulated and worn as preferred by the wearer. Even in his later collections such as *Pleats Please* more and more kinetic space was created

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within the space between body and dress as a result of the construction of the dress.

As it was mentioned before in the 1980's the simultaneous introduction of the Japanese contemporary duo, Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yomamoto brought out the ideas of space in between the dress and the to break away from celebrated feminine silhouettes (Manning, 2015). These spaces were filled and layered to convert and deform the shape and form the figure.



*Figure 4, A-POC by Issey Miyake,
(Source: Fashion Memoir: Issey Miyake by L Benaim)*

The research identifies the acknowledgement and recognition of the space in between by Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yomamoto, but does not identify an approach of designing the dress based on the space in between. It was understood that the designs created for the exterior resulted in dresses with spaces between and not styles of dressing which was resulted dependant on the interior. For the fluid space is subjected to change with the change of the exterior and does not showcase a change in the exterior as a result of the change of the interior; the space in between.

04. Spaces in Between; the South Asian Figure

The South Asian feminine figure is dominated by the pleats, folds and drapes of the saree. Section 4 identifies various expressions of the saree with examples from India throughout the wide variations resultant of the various states and the styles of dressing Sri Lanka. Then, the chronological variations of the saree are taken into consideration. Finally, the relationship of the saree to constructing a dressing style from the interior to the exterior is explored.

04.1. EXPRESSIONS OF THE SAREE

It is said that one can never go wrong with a saree. While this statement resembles the deep acceptance of the saree in our societies it also expresses the wide range of suitable expressions that can be realized through the wearing of the saree. Traditional styles of saree draping communicate the area of the wearer as well. The freedom and allowance of movement of particular drapes defines the plausible activities that can be conducted by the wearer.

04.1.1. *The emotional and sensitive saree*

The emotions that can be expressed enhanced and expressed through the saree is of a great magnitude. The fall of the saree; *pallu* allows facial expressions to be highlighted. The covering and the uncovering of the body with movements takes the wearer from modest to seductive in an instant (Banrjee & Miller, 2004).



Figure 5, *Facial expressions enhanced with the use of Pallu*
(Source: (Banrjee & Miller, 2004))



Figure 6, *Dramatic expressions of the exposed skin by covering other areas using the saree* (Source: Banrjee & Miller, 2004)

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In these examples it can be noticed how the saree has been used to bring out a variety of meanings, by and about the wearer integrating with facial expressions and bodily movements. Due to the construction of the dress from interior to exterior the use of the body is exaggerated in the exterior.

The wearing of the saree to suit the activities that is conducted wearing it, additionally to providing ease of work, it also showcases the social standing of the wearer. The saree above the ankle is worn by the working class woman with many a chore to complete. The worker in the paddy field wears the hem of the saree at a midi length, at a glance communicating to the viewer of their daily practices. In such cases the attributions of femininity to the wearer is received not due to the enhancing of the female figure by the saree, but because of the social placing of the saree (Lynton, 1995).

04.3. FROM THE INTERIOR TO THE EXTERIOR

The saree is dressed from the underneath to the final outer wrap and the underneath layers can be seen from the outside with the movement of the body. The manner of dressing in the saree creates a resultant final outer wrap dependant on the underneath layers as opposed to being two isolated entities.

When the final outer wrap of the saree is considered as the dress; the exterior, the pleats and folds underneath can be considered as a dressing of the space in between; the dressing of the interior. The research identifies this as a potential area of inspiration to develop a framework. The below shown variety of draping styles while primarily depicts the geographical area of the wearer to the viewer who is unaware of this location resemblance finds further meaning in the manner of dressing.



Figure 7, Overlapped pleats, drapes and folds of the Saree forming the interior to the exterior (Source: Banrjee & Miller, 2004 edited)

5. Architecting the Space in Between

Section 5 formulates the theoretical framework on which pragmatic explorations of dressing the spaces in between can be conducted upon. The need of architecting the space arises due to the fact that within the concept of architecting, the dress can systematically move from obtaining voluminous spaces to the minimum space through specific verifications in the method of structuring the space. Therefore, section 5, first elaborates on the need of architecting the spaces in between and its benefit to create the final outcome and then creates a theoretical framework for forming the spaces between dress and body.

05.1. THE RATIONALE OF ARCHITECTING

The identification of parallels between architecture and fashion has historical roots which perhaps pre-dates Vitruvius (1st cent. BC) (Quinn, 2003). The parallel is such that, the dress is considered as a second skin to the body whereas buildings are seen as an extended version of shelter of the second skin. The difference in magnitude stands as the primary classification factor (Miles, 2008).

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When drawing parallels and identifying similarities between fashion and architecture, two main patterns were recognized. One was to see similarities in the visual language and to identify a nature of rigid construction of the dress. The second was to find similarities in the approach itself which resulted in visually differentiated outcomes yet in a process of deconstructing the dress and the building it would showcase similarities in the build-up. The research identified the potential of the latter method to construct a theoretical framework for dressing the space in between. In that, the recreation of the city of Rome by Giambattista Nolli (1701 – 1759) focusing on the spaces in between building of the city provides inspiration for the architecting of the dress. The Nolli map immediately takes the viewers focus to the between spaces. Therefore, especially with a scale of the city it allows the understanding of the flow of the city.



Figure 8, Nolli Map (centre of Rome)

(Source:http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/EART/maps/nolli_06.jpg)

The deconstruction of the Nolli map can be identified in several aspects.

- Addition of structural elements – the creation of the dynamic city of Rome can be done through the systematic addition of its elements dependant on a pre-defined hierarchy
- Layers of structural elements - the city can be thought of as overlapping layers. This could follow a visual hierarchy or hierarchy of usage. Furthermore, the layers can be identified as separate layers or constructed with intertwined layers.
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- Structuring using separated elements – the visual expression of the Nolli map shows us that the city can be constructed using a variety of separated forms to finally result in an intertwined whole.
- Filling - another manner to see the construction of the Nolli map is to see it being filled with objects and spaces to result in the final city with its dynamic expressions.

These particular allowances of architecture make it the ideal methodology to follow when creating the dress taking the approach of constructing from the interior to the exterior.

05.2. FORMING THE SPACE IN BETWEEN

The understood practices of dressing through chronological variations of the East and the West and the final identification of the possibility of architectural methodologies to fund the construction of space in between, the following theoretical framework can be produced.

01. Body + Addition of elements – material can be added on to the body to enhance forms, to deform the figure creating resultant meanings.
02. Body + Filling – A defined boundary that is dependent on the movements of the body can be filled.

For these two methodologies the following assumption can be made due to the given cases

- The extent of the space varies between an unknown maximum and a bare minimum upon the body.

The minimum as explored by Issey Miyake;

“In 1970, Issey Miyake appeared on the fashion scene with his idea of “Peeling Away to the Limit.” ... At the beginning, his clothing consisted of pieces of irregularly shaped fabric. ... Breaking all of the rules, his pieces of material were merely clinging to the body. Moreover, each piece was stripped away one after another until the body itself was in full view. The result, in a way sadistic, was to take the body and the clothing away from each other, reducing their relationship to the minimum.” (Koike, 1978).

Expansive undefined maximums as evident in these 19th century crinolines.

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03. Body + Layers – layers of material can be constructed from the interior to the exterior. In this process the earlier concepts through data showcases two distinctive categories.

Multiple layers originating from multiple base forms

Multiple layers originating from a singular base form



Figure 9, Various expansions of the crinolines of the 19th century (Source: <https://agnautacouture.files.wordpress.com/>)



Figure 10, Ensemble by Rei Kawakubo and Junya Watnabe - multiple layers of fabric filling up the space from the body to the exterior dress (Source: <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/2001.742a,b/>)

04. Body + Structuring – focus can be drawn to specific areas of the body by using means to visually enlarge it -as in the pre-historic Venus of Willendorf- or by framing in various manners to create dramatic exposure -as the saree covers specific parts of the body to highlight other areas-.

6. Conclusion

The research aimed at identifying a framework, a set of fundamentals to begin pragmatic construction of the space in between body and dress through archival sources. Following an inductive method through the means of grounded theory the research continuously questioned the existence of the theoretical gap the research explored. With the understanding of historical practices of both east and the west it came into light that the recognized gap of a specific approach of constructing the dress relating to the space in between does exist. Finally, a set of fundamentals were developed allowing the inception of pragmatic explorations of the space in between. The research concluded that the space in between can expand from the minimum limit of the skin of the human to unknown vast expansions. This space can be dressed with multiple layers of separated material or a singular material folded and pleated into multiple layers to result in different meanings. When conducting pragmatic construction, it is mandatory to keep in mind that the resultant should be the exterior and not the interior similarly to contemporary practices.



Figure 11, Use of cylindrical structural elements (Source: Student design project, Dept. Of Integrated Design, University of Moratuwa)

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