A DECORATIVE EFFECT

A project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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DECLARATION

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the exegesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Liam Revell

August 2012
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SUMMARY

This research project investigates the influence of decoration and decorating on a fashion design practice, exploring the transformative effects of both in relation to surface and structure.

Decoration is considered an after-effect, an element that can be differentiated from the object it adheres to, sometimes making it superfluous to the object’s function. In this project I consider decoration as having its own function – the ability, through its link to the ‘exterior’ world, to transform the shape, appearance and materials of forms by modifying their façade. I propose that the act of decorating organises singular and disparate elements, both decorative and structural, to create a whole form, which within the framework of this research is the garment.

It is the writings of Gottfried Semper that inform the major part of this project. He proposes that it is the decorative cover (the surface), and not the hidden structure, which expresses the purpose, the nature and the origin of the object, and that the object itself results from the primeval urge to create order through decorating. In the practical experiments I pursued as part of this project, I test ideas by investigating various examples of lace. I regard lace not only as a decorative cover but also as symbolic of the act of decorating itself, in the manner in which it takes individual elements to create a unified whole, a characteristic I see embedded in the process of its manufacture, with bobbin lace a particularly clear example.
SUMMARY CONT.

In response to the initial investigations into decoration, ideas of replication, individualisation and transformation, are explored, in both the practical experiments and in the text, through an analogy between the decorated cake and the clothed body and decorated garment. This is contextualised against the writings of Robin Boyd, who expresses contempt at the act of changing the shape and appearance of manufactured objects through decoration, a process he terms Featurism.

The findings of this research propose that decoration and decoring can inform fashion design practice. Decoration can be adjunct to the surface or structure of garments but it need not be an arbitrary consideration, and ultimately I argue that it is decoration and decorating that can be the catalyst in the design process either by representing an idea or through analysing its methods of manufacture to inform ways in which disparate elements can be combined to create a singular outcome.
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Dedicated to the memory of ‘Nancy Dog’ Lady Pretty Pinky Chico-Picot Gallagher Revell Hyphenated.
A Decorative Effect is a research project concerned with the role decoration and decorating play in generating garment design and garment outcomes. The decorative effect I pursue is regarded in this project as being transformative, in both a physical and atmospheric sense, and I explore it in relationship to structure and surface. The project involves a number of ‘experiments’ that study the impact of a decorative effect in the fashion design process.

The research is set against a background of historical and contemporary fashion design practices to consider how a decorative effect operates, and texts, particularly in the field of architecture, which discuss and question the influence decoration holds on the development of form.

One of decorations functions can be associated to display and while this research promotes this function it also intends to explore alternative functions such as its disposition towards changing the shape of forms and the nature of materials, its ability to communicate and its role in fashioning affects. The understanding of decoration that emerged from this research can be used to inform how a decorative effect can inform fashion design practices.

There are limitations to this project and a more intensive exploration of decoration, while desirable, is beyond the scope of this project. There are a vast amount of themes that could be explored in relationship to decoration, for example decoration and technology and decoration and gender, but those that I have chosen are focussed on how decoration is used in my practice and how it could open up new paths for its use in my design process. For the purpose of this research I did not find the need to include a historic study of decoration as this body of work is focussed more on the fundamentals of decoration rather than any particular time or place.

A discussion of architecture and decoration is aligned to one specific analogy between building and dress, that of Gottfried
Semper. There are alternative architectural movements where the connection between clothing/textile design and architecture are strong, the Arts and Craft movement for example, that are worthy of exploration yet such a study has been eliminated as being extraneous to this project. The reason behind this is that this area of discussion is vast and encompasses a variety of design movements. These have been discussed in depth by theorists such as Mark Wigley and to approach them all as part of this research would complicate it. This project is centred on my practice and therefore I have chosen the topics of discussion outlined in this Appropriate Durable Record to align to my own area of interest.

IN DEFENCE OF DECORATION

A motive behind this research is my belief that the physical, concrete presence of decoration is characteristic of fashion. This presence is implied not only in the visual presentation of contemporary and historic fashions but also in its language, which is populated with terms that describe styles of decoration and techniques used to apply it. Decoration, as a generic term, also describes in fashion an endless number of trims and patterns that have a non-specified appearance and are manufactured from a variety of materials. My research is not intended as a catalogue of decoration or decorative technique, though there is an element of it that does cite examples of both.

I understand decoration to be articulate. When used successfully, it is as fundamental to the tangible expression of an idea as are such things as the choice of materials and the form of the final garment. It has the ability to place a garment or multiple garments in a particular context that the garment alone cannot convey. As a visual thread it can represent the theme that is intended in the outcome and through repetition can join a collection together. This, I believe, is an important aspect of decoration. Yet I also wanted to reach beyond this function of communication and display. I was curious to see how decoration, which is often already employed as a design feature in fashion, could influence the way a garment is designed and manufactured.
‘Start with the dress and not the trimmings’
Gabrielle ‘Coco’ Chanel

In Ornament and Crime (1908), the Austrian architect Adolf Loos denounced the use of decoration. He believed it to be an accessory or secondary element to form. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reactions by modernist architects against decoration proposed a demarcation between decoration and form which was real or imagined. Some of the objections to decoration that emerged in architecture and the decorative arts in the mid nineteenth century (and that can still be heard today) are aimed at uses of decoration that transgress this dividing line. Louis Sullivan, for example, stated that the true and practical function of an object is best represented by its structure, and the most extreme cases of ‘decorative-phobia’ propose that this can only be accomplished through the annihilation of decoration. In part this research is prompted by my reaction to these views. I set out to investigate the nature of decoration and its interaction with structure and surface, with the intention of displaying the importance of decoration as one of three components that contribute to the whole.

In my investigation of the relationships between decoration and structure, as they present themselves in a garment, I have recognised the physical proximity that both have to each other and have attempted to exploit this closeness. The role played by the surface is important here as I understand it to be not only a boundary line but also an intermediary between decoration and structure.

APPLIQUÉ: A DECORATIVE EXPERIMENT

A metaphor that describes the cohesion of this project would be appliqué, a decorative technique where accessory fabrics are applied to a ground fabric, by sewing or adhesion, to create a picture or pattern. This project is of course not an exhaustive view of decoration but one where I have arranged smaller elements,
specific to my inquiry, and applied them to the ground cloth to create a picture of a decorative effect.

The title *A Decorative Effect* refers to the potential role of decoration and decorating in the garment design process and its outcomes. To assist in defining conceptions and limitations of decoration and decorating as a thing and as an action, an analogy was introduced into my practice. This was the decorated ‘fancy’ cake. This analogy also assisted in extending on the concept and definition of decoration by extracting further potential aligned to more abstract qualities. The abstract traits that emerged intrinsic to a decorative effect are those of change (a transformative effect) and production (a generative effect). The use of the analogy in this research could be seen as a ‘ladder’ - once the analogy was exhausted, the ladder (like Wittgenstein’s), was removed.

I observed the impact of a decorative effect on the structure and surface of garments through a number of design projects that I refer to in this text as experiments. The experiments are considered as pieces of the appliqué and are not presented in a chronological order in the Appropriate Durable Record. As the project evolved the picture that makes up the appliqué changed. Some pieces were discarded and new ones added and the pieces were constantly rearranged so that the final picture that is presented could eloquently explain my intent.

The experiment is ‘an empirical method…it builds upon the already existent by deconstructing and thus studying and changing its substance or conditions. It is an attempt at renewal with an open outcome, based on the possibility of trial and error’ (Loschek 2009, p. 64). My project experiments with decoration with the aim of questioning, influencing, and altering my own design practice. I commenced my project not with a series of predetermined outcomes that I systematically worked towards but in a way where each study informed how I would approach the next. On occasion the information that emerged from one experiment required me to revisit a prior one in order to reevaluate it. What were defined
from the outset were the elements of decoration, surface and structure, and throughout the project I experimented with them in order to elucidate a decorative effect. I started to imagine my design and manufacturing processes as themselves a way of decorating. I referred to the physical and abstract characteristics of decoration in order to stimulate my design activity, and to inform the aesthetics of outcomes and the methods of production used to achieve them. The results of my experiments are speculative and are intended to inform manufacturing processes.

As is often the case with appliqué, my picture is made from a variety of sources and I refer to texts and images that range from cake decorating to the use of decoration in fashion and architecture. Architecture was influential on my research because as a discipline the metaphor between buildings and clothing is sometimes evoked. It is also in architecture that we find debates surrounding the use of decoration. I set my research in the context of attitudes that are sympathetic to decoration and those where decoration is discussed as a positive force. The key theoretical texts that inform the picture are those of Gottfried Semper. His writings suggest to me ways in which it is possible for decoration to transcend the purely visual and inform design and manufacturing processes and creative output. I discuss aspects of historical and contemporary design practices where a decorative effect as I understand it is apparent and these, along with the experiments and theory, are pieced together and outlined in the Durable Visual Record (DVR).

The Durable Visual Record is presented as four essays, and these are the smaller pieces that make up the bigger picture of the appliqué. It explains the intent behind the studies that I selected to exhibit a decorative effect and the references that informed them. Essay one discusses my understanding of decoration, how it has informed my practice in the past, and its role in building appearances. In essay two I introduce the analogy and how it contributed to the framework of the project. Essay three considers the conditions of a decorative effect and its impact on surface and structure, and in the final essay I discuss a number of studies
that summarise, through an analysis of lace, a decorative effect in my project. Ultimately it provides a background to the body of work that extends on my studies and represents the findings of the experiment that will be presented in the form of an exhibition.
Decoration is a physical thing - a ‘literal presence’ (Benjamin, 2006), that is, it can be seen, touched and smelled. It is part of a visual and cultural landscape, and while this research is not a history of decoration, to neglect mentioning briefly the role it has played in articulating and defining taste (i.e. what is considered the prevailing influence) throughout generations of stylistic movements would be remiss. The use of decoration is not unique to Western society (where most of my inquiry has been centred) but we find here, amongst its art and design history, changes in style that is marked not only by continual shifts in the appearance of form and space but also by the way in which these are decorated. In the past 400 years, a survey of the decorative and fine arts reveals movements that, while informed by complex sets of ideologies, can be associated with idiosyncratic types of decoration. The terms Baroque, Rococo, Chinoiserie, Art Nouveau and Art Déco, to name some examples, are given to styles characterised by, amongst other things, particular forms and the decoration of those forms. While it is beyond the scope of this research to analyse with any depth the details of the innovations that occurred throughout four centuries of change, it is suffice to say that the decorative motifs that are typical of the periods mentioned were applied across a broad spectrum of forms, including buildings, objets d’art, furniture, jewellery and clothing.
Decoration is synonymous and used interchangeably with words such as trim, adornment, ornament and embellishment (Kolb 2010). All of these terms suggest accessory structures- elements that require another form that they can be integrated with or attached to. Paul Souriau, a Professor at the University of Nancy in the nineteenth century, describes a certain anxiety related to the decorative part extracted from its whole - “Imagine these bizarre garlands detached from the wall they are decorating; spread out on a table like a real object, this would send a shiver up one’s spine” (Souriau, 1893, p. 271, cited in Gordon, 1992, p. 18). Decoration can describe an object independent of a structure or form yet when decoration is part of a structure or form it is no less important than what it is attached to. It can be analysed as a separate part but essentially it is part of a greater whole.

**DECORATION AND ME**

In giving reasons to articulate my interest in decoration I could not give only one answer. As a fashion practitioner, I have been drawn to the use of applied decoration as a detail of dress especially in the haute couture where decoration, according to Koda and Martin (1995, p. 74), rather than being an afterthought is the enabling principle and ‘the matrix of the design process’. The process of hand decorating, both the design and execution of applied decoration, appeals to my inclination towards the artisanal. I would not describe myself as a decorator if that term were merely taken to imply the addition of an element to an existing form or space, as I am more concerned with the use of decoration as an element of a totality that includes the design and creation of the form itself.

My practice as a fashion designer has often incorporated decorative elements as physical expressions of ideas that are central to the material outcome. In past work I have been interested in decorative techniques such as knitting, crochet, quilting, appliqué, embroidery, patchwork and beading, using applied decoration as a means of transforming the surface of mass-produced
textiles. Often in using these techniques there were associations
to ideas surrounding heritage, memory and tradition but I also
understood them as methods that gave me the freedom to
articulate concepts using processes that are historically linked to,
while not uniquely, the production of clothing.

My final undergraduate collection as a fashion student was a
collection that gave precedence to decoration and decorating
in the design process and instigated my postgraduate research.
It was in this collection that the wedding cake and other ‘fancy’
cakes, popular in cultures influenced by Anglo-Saxon traditions,
first emerged as an object that presented analogies to dressing
the body and where decoration as intrinsic to the final material
outcome was evident. Visual research of cakes from the early
twentieth century exposed a pattern where the variation in the
arrangement of the cakes used as the foundation for decoration
were limited yet the range of applied decorations, which were
often symbolic in nature, was far greater. It was the decoration,
more so than the cake, which constructed an identity with the
decoration linking the cake to the celebration it was produce for
(see ill. 1.02).

Another theme that emerged from the study of ‘fancy’ cakes
and in particular the wedding cake was a language of tech-
nique common to both cake decorating and the decorating of
clothing. The terms piping, embroidery and lace work describe
applied cake decoration, which, while utilising different materi-
als and methods to achieve an outcome, can produce results
that are similar in appearance to the same techniques used in
decorating a garment (see ill. 1.03). This led to an interest in the
material of decoration that was explored through the use of edible
cake decorations such as sugar roses.

Fashion is said to function within a system of ephemera (Lipovet-
sky, 1987) and the materials used in cake decorating techniques
allude to the transient nature associated with fashion. A charac-
ter of the soluble, edible and unstable nature of the ingredients
used by the cake decorator mean that there is an expectation
that anything made from them will eventually disintegrate and degrade. In Kate and Rose (2006), a ready-made sugar rose, used typically as wedding cake decoration, was fashioned into a brooch and attached to a garment (see fig. 1.04). The rose is eaten exposing the brooch pin it is attached to. The rose is an impermanent decoration, yet after disappearing a new element is revealed. The conclusion that was suggested by this was that it is possible for what is attached to the surface of a garment, rather than its structure or silhouette, to inherit the transience characteristic of the continual transformations of fashion. What is placed on the surface can be removed and replaced with a new element that renews the appearance of a form that remains more or less static in appearance.
Image removed due to copyright.

1.03
Laces from Cake Design & Decorating
published in Vercoe and Evans (1966)
Liam Revell
Kate and Rose, 2006
Within this research I have been evaluating what is decoration, what it is to be decorated, and what the effects of decorating are. An overarching concern of this research is the use of decoration in the discipline of fashion design and contained within this research is an investigation of fashion as the whole of which decoration is a part. The concept and phenomenon of fashion in dress has been the focus of rigorous inquiry by theorists and philosophers in an attempt to define its nature (see Kawamura, 2005, Fashion-ology). It is a complex concept and, like other social and cultural phenomena, can be influenced by the values with which it is approached (for example, from a feminist perspective).

Fashion design as a practice describes an activity part of which entails the design of clothing, and there is a broad range of practices defined by this term with a diverse range of clothing products and associated paraphernalia, marketed as being or having the potential to be fashionable. To call clothing fashionable indicates that some clothing is not, and posits a difference between clothes and fashion. Gilles Lipovetsky (1987, p. 182) refers to fashion as the ‘aestheticisation of clothing’ and one of the roles of a fashion designer is to impart an aesthetic value to clothing, which as an object of utility is the basic element with which humans cover their body.

Decoration, too, is the ‘aestheticisation’ of a utilitarian object. Not only does this mean that decoration can be used to render functionality more palatable (though this is a subjective matter), it also means that it has the potential to impart or further enhance design properties such as harmony, balance and proportion, properties which contribute to the aesthetic value of the object, that is, to the success of its design. It speaks of appearance and not utility. Of the practice of the fashion designer, Kawamura (2005, p. 59) writes, “Fashion is symbolic production
while clothes are a material production. Fashion is a symbol manifested through clothing. While fashion design may take into consideration the practical concerns of an item of clothing (which extends beyond the ‘wearability’ of the garment into areas such as production constraints and market realities), it too is concerned with appearances and the success of the symbol is reliant on the appeal of the image.

It is difficult to define the forces that make something fashionable. Georg Simmel proposed that fashion, as a phenomenon, presents a dual nature - that of both imitation and differentiation. On the one hand it fulfils the need for the individual to be identified as part of a larger group, while on the other it satisfies the desire to be seen as distinct. The group that initiates and enacts the performance that is considered fashion, when imitated by others will devise new ways to distinguish itself as a group, and this encourages the evanescence exhibited by fashion. The dual nature can also be found to exist within the group itself. As much as fashion proposes a certain way of doing or being, it also encourages personalisation in appearances, and this is exhibited in the choices made available, through, for example, colour ranges, prints, patterns and accessories. The fashionable individual can identify with the group yet they also have the option of constructing an identity that maintains their own sense of individuality.

One of the effects of decoration, in the context of a fashion practice, is to exhibit this dual nature of fashion. Decoration, as a trim, embellishes a garment and, depending on the way it is attached, can be removed and replaced - it can mimic the role of the fashion accessory (unlike a woven pattern which is integral to the textile the garment is constructed from). Decorating a garment can be seen as a form of styling. Just as a variety of accessories such as handbags, shoes and jewellery can impart differences to the way any one particular garment or groups of garments appears, decorative finishes can add individual character to a garment. The appeal here lays in the idea that in producing replicas of the same garment a designer can trim
each single garment in a variety of ways in order to transform a standardised ‘core-form’.

Decoration has a physical presence and in the decorative arts various forms and styles of decoration have contributed to defining different stylistic movements. There is unifying aspect to decoration and as an abstract idea unification has informed an approach that is unpacked in the course of the project. Decoration is articulate and its application to a garment or collection of garments can mediate between the idea and the physical output. A discussion of decoration and its ability to communicate themes is apparent in the decorated ‘fancy’ cakes that are used as an analogy in this project. The decorated cake is an example of the tendency for decoration to define the appearance of an object rather than the underlying form. It also highlights the ability of the surface to be a site for change and in garment design this can be represented by transformations to the surface as opposed to the structure or silhouette of the form.
COVERING THE CAKE
As part of this project I researched fancy cakes, particularly wedding cakes from the first half of the twentieth century. The methods used to gain information included reading theory, a visual investigation, making and decorating cakes and research into the historical aspects of these cakes that included a study of recipe books relevant to the period. The cakes influenced the way in which I initially comprehended decoration, and reflected in the original working title of my project Making and Decorating: the Wedding Cake as a Metaphor for Fashion Design was an inclination to use this object as an analogy. Analogies aid in understanding a particular concept or phenomenon and help in defining the limits of how it operates (Benjamin, 2006), and I imagined the iced and decorated cake as a clothed and dressed body. There are three main elements that contribute to the appearance of the decorated cake that were referenced—the cake itself, the layer of icing and the decoration applied to and integrated with the surface of the icing. As an analogy the former two may be compared to the body and clothing respectively, and the third is self-explanatory.

CAKE/BODY ; ICING/CLOTHING

‘Remember that the final icing will take the contours of the cake, so be sure you have the surface right before applying the paste or the fondant.’

Jean Bowring, Jean Bowring’s New Cake Decorating Book, 1969

The wedding and ‘fancy’ cake as an object (a material thing that can be seen and touched) employs the cake’s form as a foundation for the addition of new and alternative surfaces and further layers of decoration. At its most extravagant the decoration is so dominant that the cake’s appearance and shape is transformed (see ill. 2.01). In The Australian Ugliness, Robin Boyd (1960 p.23), derides this effect of decoration, calling it Featurism—‘the subordination of the essential whole and the accentuation of selected separate features’ and defined two techniques
adopted to hide the ‘truth of man-made objects’ – ‘cloaking’, which changes the appearance of materials, and ‘camouflage’, which hides the shape.

In my analogy the cake, without icing or applied decoration, represents the unclothed human body. The cake is a ‘core form’ that is as integral to the act of icing and decorating as the body is to dressing. Yet as forms they are but one ingredient in the process of building appearances. It could be argued that both of these forms need no cover at all, or that 'cloaking' or 'camouflaging' them can be approached so that there is little impact on their appearance or shape, but in my practice I am more interested in championing what I see as the desirable traits inherent in these operations, such as the change in shape of the foundation form, altered surface texture and the denial of the reality of material that decoration can achieve.
Recipe 1: Cake Baked Decoration

(See ill. 2.02)

The following recipe outlines an experiment undertaken in the course of the research project. The premise was to introduce a decoration into a wet cake mix in order to force the cake to form around the insertion. The intent was to observe the disruption caused by introducing a decoration into the cake making process at a stage that is not standard in many recipes relating to cake baking and decoration. While the decoration did impact on the appearance of the finished cake it did not detract from its ability to be eaten. The decoration inserted into the cake suggested the artificial aids used in dress, such as tournures and shoulder pads, which assist in holding the shape of garment areas that extend away from the body. While these elements cannot be seen externally they correspond to Boyd’s ideas on camouflage as they change the appearance of the human body. Yet in changing the appearance of the human body they in no way detract from the ability of the garment to be worn.

You will need:

- 1 packet of cake mix
- 1 quantity of icing
- 1 ovenproof decoration (make sure it will fit into your mold)
- Hundreds and Thousands
- 1 cake mold

Make the cake as instructed on the packet. Pour all of the wet ingredients into the mold.

Before placing the cake mixture into a pre-heated oven insert the decoration (I used a large glass crystal). When the cake is ready take it from the oven and, after it has cooled, remove it from the mold and ice and decorate it.

You will notice that the cake appears different to those made in
a more traditional manner. By inserting the decoration before you placed the cake in the oven you will have succeeded in making a cake that not only removes the step of applying a statement garnish at the end but also has a shape that, due to the inclusion of the decoration into the wet mix, has an appearance not achieved by more conventional methods of cake baking.

Another thing you will notice is that the icing will not take fully to the baked-in decoration due to the slippery surface of the crystal, however, this serves in drawing attention to its inclusion. You may wish to omit the icing all together, but by choosing a colour that complements the decoration you will enhance the appearance of the cake by covering any irregularities on the surface, such as discolouration, that result from the baking process.

Next apply a liberal sprinkling of hundreds and thousands. This is not absolutely necessary but it does lend an attractive texture to the surface of the cake and the variety of colours allows you more choice when choosing the accessories you serve it on.

Serve.
Liam Revell
Cake Baked Decoration, 2010
Icing and garments are similar in that they can both become covers or veneers for an underlying form. I see this as the extent of this analogy, because, unlike many garments, icing as a layer is meant to conform to the shape of the cake. It may be necessary or desirable for a garment to conform to the shape of a body, though this is not a rule, yet both icing and garment (form-fitting or not) mask to a certain extent the reality of what they cover. While icing has the practical function of acting as a base capable of withstanding the application of further decoration, it simultaneously masquerades as the surface of the cake. It is a veneer that covers the true and often ‘imperfect’ nature of the form underneath and denies the reality of the surface of the cake it covers. The denial of reality is an element of decoration that emerged from the study of decorated cakes and informed many of the experiments that were undertaken as part of this project.

The shape of the cake beneath the icing is either dictated by the interior of the mold it is baked in or is built from the layering of multiple elements. Icing, in the case of the latter, becomes a cover that presents multiple elements as ‘unified, as a collective’ (Semper 1860, p. 123). This idea of the cover has a historical context in certain periods of Western fashion. Even a cursory glance at the history of fashion in the West reveals a desire to alter physical appearances, and while my research is not so much concerned with gender, this is especially true of the female body. Corsets, pads, bustles and crinolines, described by Koda and Martin (2001, p. 11) as ‘mechanisms of alteration’ have been employed to alter the natural form of the body, through extension and compression, to achieve ideals of feminine beauty. The visible layer of clothing that conceals the disparate elements used to reform physical appearances assists in reinforcing the fiction of the body created by these devices. Even without ‘mechanisms of alteration’ the garment will still present parts of the body as unified. An ankle-length skirt, for example, re-imagines the legs as a collective rather than as articulated, moving limbs. The garment becomes, as does icing, a veneer that fails to disclose the full truth of what lies beneath. Even when a garment
follows closely the contours of the body it may compress the flesh and displace it or alter the texture of the skin it clings to.

In *Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body, (Spring / Summer 1997)*, colloquially known as ‘lumps and bumps’, Rei Kawakubo for her label Comme des Garçons may be seen as questioning the idealised female body promoted by fashion at the end of the twentieth-century. By having down-filled pads sewn inside what in many examples are garments made of elasticised fabrics, and by over forming the body in unexpected places, such as the back, neck and waist, Kawakubo treats the body in a way not dissimilar to historical precedents where ‘mechanisms of alteration’ manipulated the form. Kawakubo, however, re-imagines the silhouette of the body. It is decorative camouflage and hides the shape of the true body it covers.
To reinforce the unconventional picture of the body proposed by Kawakubo, Rie Nei (ed Fukai 2002, p. 658) writes that ‘twentieth-century fashion discovered the body; however the clothes seemed to conform to the shape of the body’. It is evident from a study of the evolution of costume that during the twentieth century the external appearance of female fashion relied less and less on underpinnings to achieve the desired silhouette, and the fashionable body, devoid of added structures, sculpted by exercise and reduced through dieting, became the core-form on which clothing was based. Yet in Dress Meets Body, Body Meets Dress Kawakubo still seems to be interested in making an image of the external body that results from artifice and reinforcing the fiction by covering the disparate elements so that they appear to be part of the body. Regardless of the interruptions to the surface of the garments, apparent in the ‘drag’ where the moulding to the body normally associated with stretch fabrics seem to be intentionally neglected, the garments conform to the shape of the padding and present a new topology of the human form. Kawakubo uses the garment as a cover that, like icing, presents at face value a situation where all the elements, either indigenous or external to the body, are represented as one and this is suggested in the title of the collection Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body.

**DECORATED SHOULDER PADS**

*Dress Meets Body, Body Meets Dress* uses padding to alter the external appearance of the body and this suggested to me more familiar examples of its use. In the construction of garments the shoulder pad serves both a utilitarian function but one that is also, I believe, related to the decorative, even though more often than not it is hidden from view, for example, in the case of a tailored jacket, inserted between the exterior shell of the garment and an interior lining. The utility of the shoulder pad resides in its use as an agent, complemented sometimes by canvas and interlinings, which assists in filling in the hollow created at this part of the body through the meeting of muscles and bones, creating a smooth base from which the garment hangs and to sup-
port a raised and extended shoulder line.

There are many historical and contemporary examples of dress where these ‘mechanisms of alteration’ are used in order to achieve an exaggerated shoulder line. In the 1830’s, for example, large cotton or down filled pads supported the volume at the head of the leg o’mutton sleeves that widened the upper torso and were fashionable in the dress of western women during this period. The shoulder pad contributes to changing the appearance of the upper body and even when its shape and size approximates the physical structure of the shoulder it ‘cloaks’ and ‘camouflages’ the natural form, altering its outward appearance. In my opinion this is how it acts as decoration. It may hold a utilitarian function but this function is often only required when creating a façade for the body.

The shoulder pads I use in my experiments are mass-produced and in their raw form they are presented in a way that considers their intended end use, that is, on the part of the manufacturer there is no attempt to conceal the materials they are made from or how they are made as it seems there is a presumption that the shoulder pad will be concealed by either inserting it between an outer shell and an inner lining or covering it with fabric. The appeal of the mass produced shoulder pad, in my experiments, is the standardisation of the object that results from mechanical reproduction. I see a link between this and the idea of the cake, which when produced under similar conditions and with similar elements (such as temperature, ingredients etc.), can be replicated numerous times using the same mold, each instance being more or less similar in form. Similarly, like the undecorated cake, the unembellished shoulder pad holds potential as a site for transformation, and the perception of its initial appearance, materials and use can be altered through the application of decoration.

The shoulder pad is an accessory structure - an independ-
ent object that contributes, through attachment or integration, to the construction of another - though its function is displaced when removed from its place within the garment. With Decorated Shoulder Pad (see ill. 2.04) I wanted to play on the idea of the accessory by converting the role of the pad from one that contributes to the display of the façade of the garment from the inside, into an object concerned solely with the exterior. In this experiment I use a shoulder pad whose appearance deviates little from the size and contours of the natural shoulder and is common in the construction of raglan sleeves where its role is to enhance the smoothness and support the roundness of a shoulder line that is characteristic of this style. Decorating the outside surface of the pad with three-dimensional decoration reduces its ability to achieve this function, yet it becomes another form of support that allows the transformation of the body.

Decorated Shoulder Pad is presented as an object that should not be hidden from view. It emerges into an exterior world - a world I associate with decoration and display. It is no longer defined by its supporting role but becomes an object, which as an accessory requires support, yet it is also an object that can exist independently of any other structure.
Liam Revell, Decorated Shoulder Pad, 2008
In returning to the shoulder pad as an object concerned with construction, I produced Cloak (see ill. 2.05), an approach where the design process is instigated by a structural element. I have defined a shoulder pad as a component of decoration - an accessory structure that contributes to the assembly and appearance of a garment - yet here, rather than it being chosen for its suitability to a shoulder line predetermined by the design of a piece of clothing, the cloak is produced to be suitable to the style (and styling) of a set of shoulder pads. The decoration transforms their original appearance, yet unlike Decorated Shoulder Pad their true function is never displaced. They sit on the shoulder and support the cloak whose shape is influenced by the way in which the fabric moulds around the decoration. I wanted this experiment to echo Gottfried Semper’s idea that surface decoration should not interfere with the cover, something intended to ‘cover, protect and enclose’, presenting itself as a continual spatial enclosure (Semper, G 1860 p. 127). The cloak itself is a cover for the body. There is no decoration that prevents it acting as such as the decoration, is beneath the surface and only exists here because it is the idea that instigated it.

The title Cloak not only refers to the style of garment but also references Boyd’s definition of cloaking, a technique that hides the truth of objects by changing the appearance of the materials they are made from, for example, through the use of a veneer (Boyd 1960). In this example, the shoulder pad has been transformed with the application of both a secondary material and decoration, and to make it explicit I reveal this by using a screen for the cover. A supplementary theme associated with the use of the screen is its relation to ideas of decoration as exterior and structural elements such as shoulder pads as interior (an idea connected to the common practice of concealing them). In this experiment the shoulder pads take on the dual role of structural/interior and decorative/exterior elements. The cloak, being a screen, reveals this and for me this is a way of communicating a way to merge decoration and structure rather than placing them in opposition to each other - here the shoulder pads are essential to the appearance and structure of Cloak.
From the analogy of the cake is it possible to further elucidate the potential of decoration in design and its transformative properties. The way the cake is iced and decorated can be compared to the dressing of the unclothed body. The ‘cloaking’ and ‘camouflage’ that is apparent in the icing and decorating of the cake can be seen as a desirable aspect of decoration as it changes the shape of the foundation form, alters the surface texture and denies the reality of the material of the cake underneath.

The use of padding in clothing is often done with the aim of idealising the body to reflect current ideals of beauty. ‘Mechanisms of alteration’, such as tournures, are used to transform the appearance of the natural body and can be thought of as decoration for this reason. With the example of the shoulder pad not only has it been used in certain historical periods to exaggerate a shoulder in line with ideals contemporary to a certain period but it is often used in tailoring as support and to smooth out concave areas of the shoulder.

While the shoulder pad can be removed from the garment and be ‘cloaked’, ‘camouflaged’ and offered as an independent decorative object it can still, even in its decorated state, retain its structural role. In opposition to the undecorated shoulder pad whose shape is dictated by the shoulder it is intended for, the decorated shoulder pad enforces its shape on the garment draped over it.
Liam Revell, *Cloak*, 2008
Recipe 2: Decorated Shoulder Pads

(See ill. 2.04 & ill. 2.05)

You will need:

1 set of pre-made shoulder pads
A quantity of felt (enough to cover the shoulder pads and extra for the decoration)
A quantity of fabric (I used several metres of a machine knitted lace)
Thread
Hand sewing needle

Cover the shoulder pads with the felt. Instead of cutting and sewing a dart out of the fabric so that it corresponds to the shape of the pad, it can be pleated to achieve the same effect. Manipulating the surface of the fabric in this manner, or by alternative methods that have the same result, allows you not only to achieve the desired shape but also to add an interesting detail to the appearance of the shoulder pad with little impact on its function (and really, if you’re going to see it, which we are, make sure it is pretty).

Use more fabric than the surface area of the shoulder pad, as you will need enough for the pleating and a quantity left over that can be trimmed to ensure a smooth edge around the pad’s bottom edge (we don’t want too much distraction, and a poorly finished pad will achieve just that). Once the shoulder pad is covered, decorate it with a frill or any other three-dimensional decorative feature you desire. Louis Khan, the American architect said that decoration is the ‘adoration of the joint’, i.e. it is used to cover things we don’t wish to see, and unless it is absolutely necessary I advise against this. If you do use a seam to join pieces of cloth together, weigh up whether or not it enhances the composition of the finished piece. A seam can be as decorative as any frill – Look at Madame Vionnet’s work for examples.

These shoulder pads make attractive accessories that can be worn on their own (pinned to the shoulders of a garment to allude to their function or worn on whichever part of the body you
wish to embellish and draw attention to) or be used as the base on which to drape a dress. When used as a base for draping a garment (I advise pinning them to a dressmaking mannequin before you commence this procedure), you will notice that not only do they extend the width of the natural shoulder line but that the depth of the applied decoration added to the pad will also deform its appearance, and this will obviously affect the silhouette of the garment.

Depending on your taste in dress you may be accustomed to pads being hidden on the inside of the garment as a means to hold and/or extend the shape of its shoulders or used to conceal any figure faults you may have in that area. For whatever reason you wear them, I encourage you to celebrate the pad’s oomph by drawing attention to it, and decorating will achieve this. When using these pads as a base for your garment I advise that you produce it from a transparent material so that they are still evident when viewed by a second party. Decoration, is, after all often associated with the exterior, so why waste a good emphasis when you have one?
THE CHARM OF THE SURFACE
It is on or within the surface, the outermost or innermost layer of a form, which decoration operates, playing a role in appearances either as a superficial additive or by being integrated into it as it is made. There are two sides to the surface, a face side and an underside. In a form where the underside of the surface is not visible it is the face side that is the visually active element. It is the place where decoration assumes, conspicuously, the function of display (though the potential of the underside as a site of decoration can not be dismissed). This visible surface is articulate, possessing the means to express through its decorative finishes - an idea or feeling that is internal or external to it. As the ‘formulative element in everything intended to cover protect and enclose’ (Semper1860, p. 123) the surface can have ideas or feelings superimposed onto it and these can relate not only to the cover itself but whatever the cover encloses.

**A DEFINITION OF STRUCTURE**

Based on Semper’s tasks of tectonics (carpentry) outlined in Style in The Technical and Tectonic Arts; or, Practical aesthetics (1860, p. 624) I have defined the structure of a garment as:

1. The elements integrated into the surface of a flat material that assist in shaping a three dimensional form through the addition or elimination of volume (e.g. pleats, gathers, darts and tucks);

2. The elements that join together one or more pieces of a material to create a whole (e.g. a seam);

3. Supports used within the garment that assist in holding a shape (e.g. stitches, interfacings and shoulder pads);

4. The lines that mark the boundary of a garment (e.g. necklines, silhouette).
The term decoration is often used synonymously and interchangeably with the word ornament and this makes defining either confusing due to this tendency to substitute one for the other (Kolb, 2010). The terms, however, have conceptual differences. Kent Bloomer (eds Abruzzo & Solomon 2006), primarily in reference to architecture, proposes the following distinction between them. Decoration, he writes, is a ‘pleasurable arrangement of elements that articulate societal values, order and beauty’, a definition linked to the word’s etymology of honour, beauty and decorum, while ornament, from ornare, to equip, ‘is constituted by motifs that are repetitively distributed around structural and decorative elements to evoke natural cycles, efflorescence and transformation’.

Ornament, while it can be visually differentiated from the object it adheres to, is intended to conform to the conceptual properties or physical appearances of the form and its structural elements. Traditional uses of ornament rely on the symbolism inherent in its motifs, often derived from the natural world and its cycles, to reinforce design elements such as symmetry, proportion and direction. Decoration does this too, but it still retains an independence from what it adorns, its effect is on the overall composition, and it can be indifferent and unsympathetic to the underlying structure. In the Function of Ornament (2006, p. 8), Kubo and Moussavi propose a function for ornament that retains its integrity to the object, but instead of communicating through symbols it is a ‘figure that emerges from the material substrate, the expression of embedded forces through the processes of construction, assembly and growth. It is through ornament that materials transmit affects’.

While the distinctions between decoration and ornament are certainly more complex than what I have outlined, the differences I have defined allow a greater scope for the use of decoration in my practice. Trilling (2001, p. 23) writes that ‘all ornament is decoration but not all decoration is ornament’, and this is where the beauty of decoration lies. It can change the shape and appearance of a form through its application.
yet it can also be independent of it. Furthermore when decoration acts as ornament it can assist in constructing a structure and by being considered as part of a visual composition transmit affects that are intended in a garment’s expression.

MADELEINE VIONNET

The work of Madeleine Vionnet would best express my understanding of the differences between decoration and ornament and how they operate in garment design. Vionnet has been described as a ‘dauntless modernist’ (Koda and Martin, 1995, p. 28) yet unlike some of her contemporaries who are also considered to be modernists, such as the architect La Corbusier who regarded decoration as superfluous to functional form, Vionnet used decoration in her work throughout her career.

A Vionnet evening gown from summer 1939 consists of a black lace overdress appliquéd with velvet bows (see ill. 3.01). These motifs are decorative and do not refer to any structural component of the garment but work as part of the whole composition for visual effect. Decoration is an after-effect in that it can be differentiated from what it is placed on (Benjamin 2006, p. 16). As an appliqué, a technique that describes the application of one fabric to another, the bows are not an original part of the lace textile, that is they would have been applied after the lace was produced. They have altered the lace from its original state, and while they are after-effects they are not after-thoughts. They lend a distinction to the garment that may not have been achieved if the lace were left in its original form. There is an intent in the use of decoration in this garment and the bows are as carefully considered as the design of the garment they decorate.

Vionnet is associated with the use of the bias cut and often the stretch nature of the 45 degree grain informed how the decorative elements could be used. The stitches used to embroider garments, as an example, needed to be rethought by the embroidery house of Lesage so that they would work with the grain and
not against it (White 1987, p. 48). Vionnet would also employ decorative techniques to assist in the structuring of garments. Techniques such as pin tucking and seaming were used to add fitting to a garment and often to control the floaty nature of the bias and emphasise its sinuous nature. In a silk crepe day dress from 1926-27, Vionnet uses pin tucks both as a decorative scheme and to structure the garment by giving it form and shape (see ill. 3.02). This is ornament that parallels Kubo and Moussavi’s definition of it. Not only does it emerge in the production process in the pursuit of creating form, but it also reinforces an intended affect. In this example, the pin tucks are stitched on the straight grain, which assumes a diagonal position when the bias is parallel to the centre front. They assist in structuring the garment, while their direction visually alludes to the cross grain on which the garment is cut.

**150 WAYS TO DECORATE A DRESS**

Fashion was in a constant flux, but not everything in fashion was subject to change. Ornamentation and accessories, the subtle details of trimmings and fullness, were particularly influenced by fashion’s rapid modifications, while the structure and general forms of dress were much more stable. Fashion change mainly affected the most superficial elements of clothing; it generally had less impact on the cut...the so-called gown *a la française* remained unchanged for decades, starting in the mid eighteenth-century. Frills and furbenows, colours, ribbons and laces, details of shaping, nuances of fullness and length; such elements underwent constant renewal.

(Lipovetsky 1987, p. 22)

The surface of a garment is where decoration as a visible presence holds the most impact. A capacity of decoration, either as an accessory structure or when integrated into the surface, resides in its power to effect changes in appearance and it can give an individual character to an underlying form that remains more or less stable. This effect of decoration has a historical context, as discussed by Lipovetsky, and is apparent in the eighteenth-century practice of the *marchandes des modes* (fashion merchants) who were active in constructing
Image removed due to copyright.

3.01
Madeleine Vionnet, Evening gown 1939,
from *Haute Couture*, Metropolitan Museum of Art,
fashionable appearances through the decoration of surfaces. In Paris, the first female guild responsible for the making of women's clothes was established in 1675. Men retained the right to make women's corsets and therefore they ultimately dictated the shape of women's fashion. The *marchandes des modes* were part of the female guild and rose to prominence in the 1770's when dresses that relied on trimmings became fashionable (McNeil, Berg encyclopaedia of world dress and fashion 2010).

The *marchandes des modes* did manufacture certain items of apparel but they were mostly associated with their decoration of them. 'Their art is not too make anything; it consists in ingeniously furnishing a new look with all the varied and gracious ornaments of other arts, particularly that of braid and trimmings' (Anon 1785, p. 133, cited in Jones 2004, p. 92). This process was referred to as *enjoliver*, or to 'pretty up' (Grumbach & Parmal, 2006, p. 32), and their talent was in the arrangement of superficial elements such as feathers, ribbons, lace, braid and artificial flowers on ready-made headdresses and items of apparel.

From a contemporary point of view it is evident that the variety of styles in garments available to the eighteenth century woman of fashion was limited and innovation occurred not in the structure of the garment but on the surface. During the period they were active, successful *marchandes des modes*, by decorating the surface of garments, were largely responsible for informing and facilitating change through the application of superficial trim.

I have discussed two consequences of a decorative effect. Firstly, decoration plays a role in transforming the appearance of the surface through its addition. It is mainly independent of the surface but has an impact on the overall visual composition of a garment. I have considered how the mutability evident in fashion may be achieved not through changes in the underlying structure but by creating a sense of individualisation through applied decoration. Secondly, it can be used to change the structure of a garment, when it acts as ornament, by being integrated into the surface, and assist in reinforcing an intended sensation. In the following
experiment I investigated these traits of a decorative effect.

**DISHEVELLED SURFACE - BEADED SURFACE**

A garment pattern is the ‘catalyst between the three-dimensional garment and the two-dimensional fabric’ (Debo & Verhelst, 2003, p. 23). It is a template that holds much of the information regarding the structure of a garment, and allows the transformation of the two-dimensional surface into a three-dimensional form, and it can also indicate where elements external to the structure should be applied. It is a steppingstone between the designer’s sketch of a garment and the realised piece.

The pattern is a type of mold that allows a garment to be replicated, as often as required, and I establish it in this experiment as a fixed, unchanging element in the production of multiple surfaces (see ill. 3.03). The nuances of fitting integrated into the pattern, which are often dictated by the specific fabrics chosen for a garment, are not neglected but are secondary to a decorative effect I examine here. I set out to exploit what I see as the characteristics of reproduction inherent to the pattern to explore a relationship between decoration, surface and structure.

*Dishevelled Surface* (see ill. 3.04) is the original garment for which the pattern was drafted. The method used to achieve this surface was informed by the decorative technique of smocking. This method uses gathering to compress the volume inherent in the cut of a loose upper body garment commonly called a smock. The reduction of volume, which is most often achieved in the chest and wrist areas of the garment, is intended to create fit. The gathers are held in place with embroidery stitches that are decorative and, in the case of the stem stitch used in this experiment, impart a degree of elasticity to the gathered areas.

*Dishevelled Surface* was influenced by the depiction of *déshabillé* as depicted in the portraits of the late seventeenth cen-
3.03
Liam Revell,
Template, 2009
tury painter Sir Peter Lely. Déshabillé describes, the state of being partly or carelessly dressed and with this garment I wanted to achieve something that looked crumpled and uncontrived, although, like the scenarios presented by Lely, it was contrived in its execution. I intended to make the garment appear careless yet to manipulate it enough so that it took on a certain degree of structure in reference to the body.

This is where the use of decorative technique as a way of imparting structure becomes apparent. The first stage was to impart a degree of fit into a smock that I draped onto a dressmaker’s mannequin. This I did by gathering the shoulder line, neckline and waist, using a technique based on smocking, reducing their volume to achieve a closer fit to the body. There are two parts to this garment - a silk overdress and polyester under dress. While the gathering in the silk is only a temporary treatment the nature of the polyester fibre in the under dress means they are set permanently through the application of heat. I bound the gathered areas tightly and set these areas by boiling the garment in water. This resulted in the creases apparent in the majority of the surface of the garment, though I employed a stem stitch at the neck and shoulder to make the gathers permanent yet still flexible.

The holes visible in the pattern allude to the dots marked on the surface of a garment in the smocking process (they indicate where the gathering stitches should be made). Subsequently these dots were used to denote the placement of decoration in any further examples of garments produced using this pattern. Beaded Surface, as the title indicates, has beads sewn onto the surface of plain-weave cotton at exactly these points (see ill. 3.05 & ill. 3.06). Unlike the creases set into the textiles used in Dishevelled Surface, which effectively assist in structuring the garment, they are superficial to the surface.

This experiment could be further developed. For example, to observe the impact of the decorative techniques (that is the decorative effect) on the final form of the garments it would be of benefit to have been more consistent in the selection of textiles.
3.04
Liam Revell
Dishevelled surface, 2009
for both Beaded Surface and Dishevelled Surface. In doing this the experiments would be an even more detailed examination of the concept outlined in the section 150 Ways to Decorate a Dress (pp. 48-52). What is revealed, however, is that it is possible to evoke a different mood or feeling for a garment by changing certain conditions that contribute to the final form, for example textiles with different fibre compositions, the colour of the textiles and the decorative techniques added to or within the surface, even while using the same pattern to cut the garment.

**SEMPER AND DECORATION**

It has been proposed that fashion and architecture are ‘parallel practices’. Regardless of differences in scale there are similarities in the processes, aesthetics and language that inform them (Hodges, 2006). The human body is a shared concern of the two disciplines, and the way it is covered is a consideration for both. My interest in architectural theory has been focussed on instances where the analogy between garment and building has been evoked to discuss the relationship between decoration, structure and surface (see Wigley, 1995). Of all the discussions where the analogy is presented it is the theories of German architect Gottfried Semper that resonate the most, and in this chapter I discuss his ‘Principle of Dressing’ (Prinzip der Bekleidung), its influence on my project-based research project and the studies that I undertook as part of my project. Semper’s theories suggest ways of using decoration as more than an embellishment of surface and structure – it can be the catalyst for creation and even be the garment itself.

**THE PRINCIPLE OF DRESSING AND THE MASK**

‘It is not just that the architecture of a building is to be found in the decoration of its structure. Strictly speaking, it is only the decoration that is structural. There is no building without decoration. It is decoration that builds’.

(Wigley 1995, p.11)
3.05
Liam Revell
Beaded surface, 2009

3.06
Liam Revell
Beaded surface (detail), 2009
In his pioneering text, *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts, or Practical Aesthetics* (1860), Semper’s thesis transcended the analogy of clothing and architecture by proposing that it was textiles and clothing that gave birth to and informed the appearance of architecture. He proposes that the beginning of the weaving of textiles and building coincided, and he reinforces this by demonstrating that the words for the elements of buildings, in Germanic languages, reflect their origins as textiles and the influence of clothing on them. *Wand* (wall), for example, shares an etymology with *Gewand* (garment) and the word *Bekleidung* (dressing) has as a root *kleiden*, to dress or to clothe.

The ‘Principle of Dressing’ (*Prinzip der Bekleidung*) is discussed from an architect’s point of view, and the woven textile, the ‘hanging carpet’, is the spatial motive, the original wall. It defined space by capturing it, separating inner life from outer life. It was never load bearing though eventually for technical reasons a load bearing structure replaced it. When the solid wall appeared it was dressed and presented as a carpet. It was covered in a garment that disguised the reality of its material, whatever that material and its construction was, because the solid wall was foreign to the idea of space creation. The dressing ‘carries within itself the nature of the thing’ (Semper 1860, p. 250), that is, the characteristics of the textile and the garment retained the surface markings of the carpet – the decorative motives that emerged in the process of weaving. The carpet might still be woven and hung on the wall, but often the material of the carpet was transformed into a layer of paint or stucco and applied to the wall as a form-fitting dress. The dressing retained its status as a woven textile and represented the original idea – the decorative hanging carpet, the original boundary of space. The decoration of the wall represents the motivation behind the creation of the wall.

Semper extended on the idea of dressing, aligning it to the idea of masking and the mask. The decorative mask is the outermost layer. It disguises the framework, the essential supporting structure of a form, but not as a ruse – the mask articulates the character the form is playing. In the example of a building the role of the
building is not represented by its structural elements or construction, which the mask denies, but by its outward appearance and the decoration that is attached to the exterior. It is the decoration and not the structure that speaks of the building’s purpose.

Another of Semper’s examples attributes the motive for the permanent monument as the fixing in one place of a ‘festival apparatus’, an ‘improvised scaffold’ hung with tapestries and dressed with garlands, trophies and other forms of decoration specific to the occasion. The decoration adorns, not the scaffold but the event being celebrated. This is an important distinction. The decoration does not define the structural parts of the scaffold nor does it hide them with the intent to deceive— it is the scaffold’s raison d’être – the scaffold exists to support the accoutrements of the celebration. As a mask the decoration represents and attends the festival, making its idea material. In Semper’s building the dressing and the mask, as concepts, are independent of their structure though not in opposition to it. They come together to create a whole. Yet their functions are autonomous, having evolved from aspirations quite distinct from one another.

From Semper’s writings emerges the theory that the decorative treatment of the surface of a form communicates the primary motive behind its creation. It holds the key to the forces that provoked its materialisation (its physical form). Semper’s dressing and mask symbolise the idea, an idea that cannot be separated from the materials (the matter from which it is made), the techniques used to fashion them into form, or their presentation. The underlying structure (‘scaffold’) differs from the dressing and mask not only physically but conceptually, because it has another motive. It has evolved from ideas related to utility, such as protection, security, durability and support. It never determines form but assists in supporting the role that is enacted by the dressing and the mask. It is the decoration that builds, not the structure, because it is the decoration that holds within it the very essence of the form’s being.
The idea of communication is normally associated with ornament but the maxim that ‘all ornament is decoration but not all decoration is ornament’ (Trilling 2001, p. 23) opens up the definition of decoration allowing it to act in many of the same ways as ornament does. The application or integration of decoration to a form impacts both its structure and surface. When decoration is visible it can be symbolic of an idea or feeling that is external or internal to a form. Decoration can be more than purely visual, however, and it can be used to fashion materials into form and transmit affects. A garment’s structure consists of those elements that allow the shaping of three-dimensional form and pieces to be joined together. Madeleine Vionnet is an example of a fashion designer whose output incorporated ideas of the use of structural elements such as seams, darts and tucks for the dual purpose of structure and decoration.
LACING IT TOGETHER
Let it not be condemned for a superfluous wearing, because it doth neither hide nor heat, seeing it doth adorn.

The History of the Worthies of England, Volume 1 (Fuller, 1662 cited in Browne 2004, p.4)

Lace is a microcosmic representation of the overall project and encapsulates the aims of my exploration. As a whole cloth and the product of the techniques used to manufacture it, in particular those produced by bobbins and needles, lace mediates the elements of decoration, surface and structure. It has enabled me to unpick the physical and abstract characteristics of a decorative effect.

I discuss a number of themes associated with lace in this essay and how they have suggested ways to explore a decorative effect in my experiments. These experiments blend the separate considerations, evident in the first part of the project, lacing them together, as you will, in order to bring forth the essence of a decorative effect on my practice. I refer to a variety of definitions of lace to observe how it is that it functions as decoration, surface and structure, and use the information accumulated from these experiments to inform my findings on a decorative effect.

**LACE : PROCESS AND SURFACE**

Bobbin lace is made on a pillow using between eight and one thousand threads wound onto bobbins. The threads are manipulated, on top of a pillow and the actions of twisting, plaiting and twining create a textile. The holes (ground) that make up the pattern of the lace and the figure are produced simultaneously during the process. It is made in separate pieces joined at a later stage or in a continuous length. Needle laces are produced using a buttonhole stitch, or variations of this stitch, and descend from surface decoration such as cutwork and drawn thread work.

The appearance of lace, ‘a decorative openwork fabric in which
the pattern of spaces is as important as the solid areas’ (Sheperd R 2003, p.2), and the techniques used to make it, particularly bobbin and needle laces, have informed my studies. It has stimulated design activity, the aesthetics of outcomes and methods by which I manufacture them.

One of the earliest studies associated with lace is Paperlace (see ill. 4.01). The definition of lace proposed by Sheperd removes lace from its traditional methods of manufacture, offering new directions for making it. In this experiment the lace like effect is achieved through the removal of area from the surface. This is in opposition to traditional lace making techniques where, like Semper’s wall that defines space by capturing it, the yarns used to manufacture the textile ‘capture’ space, resulting in the figure and the pattern of holes that make up the ground. The series of holes in Paperlace brings forth the figure, accentuating the pictorial element. The paper surface is decorated, as I see it, through transforming its appearance, by adding (or in this case taking away) something not intrinsic to it. Like the paper doyleys it references, and where a similar technique is used, the surface is imparted with a lace effect.

Paperlace is an example of material transformation. This is a decorative effect that has interested me from the beginning of my research and is evident in the example of the lace used on the cake that keeps the appearance of the textile but is realised by using materials and processes not associated to more traditional forms of lace. The way lace is represented with a change of materials requires a rethinking of the techniques used to achieve it, but, like Semper’s wall dressing, it still retains traces of the original form to which it refers.
Paper lace, as a material, was used as an element in Lace Scaffold, a study suggested by Semper’s theory of dressing and the mask (see ill. 4.02). A white t-shirt is masked by a layer of lace that is not attached to its surface but to a ‘scaffold’ that is suspended from the neck as if a piece of jewellery. The decoration and the garment have two different functions: the t-shirt is a spatial arrangement that covers the body, for practical reasons, while the lace presents a theme intended in the garment. It denies the reality of the t-shirt, and to refer once again to Robin Boyd (1960, p.23), it cloaks and camouflages by changing its shape and appearance.
The scaffold in this experiment is, like Semper’s scaffold discussed earlier, an element of the form whose primary role is of support and the intent in making it from translucent PVC was to highlight a sense of invisibility. Regardless of its appearance it contributes no more than a supporting role in the expression of the garment, the starring role being taken on by the paper lace that is attached to it. Both the t-shirt and the scaffold can remain constant in appearance and this can be transformed through the application of decoration to the scaffold. Their presence in the final outcome is to highlight that decoration can be instrumental in the presentation of a theme and that the underlying form, while contributing to the how the form appears, has little or no role in expressing an intended affect. A decorative effect renders an expression for a garment that represents an underlying idea.

4.02
Liam Revell
Lace scaffold, 2010
LACE: DECORATIVE SYMBOLISM

Lace has been a decorative element of fashionable dress since the sixteenth century. Historically it has been used to make whole garments or to trim and hide elements of them – for example, lace is used to hide seams and raw edges. It has also been a textile used in the manufacture of accessories such as collars, cuffs, scarves and veils. It is considered decorative because its perceived delicate nature and gossamer appearance seems to preclude any utilitarian function - as Thomas Fuller expresses it, lace, when used as a cover for the body or part of it, imparts neither modesty nor the comfort associated with more ‘practical’ textiles (Fuller, 1662 cited in Browne 2004, p.4).

As a luxury item lace ‘was originally understood as a sign of aristocratic distinction rather than adornment. Thus the semiotic function of this fabric at first took precedence over its beauty; or rather its aesthetic value is inextricably tied to its semiotic status’ (Gordon 1992, p. 57). Prior to the industrialisation of the textile industries in the early nineteenth century lace was made by hand and when lace first appeared it was a luxury item. As a luxury item its prohibitive cost designated status and wealth and was allocated to the garments of royalty, the aristocracy and elite clergy. Being a textile that represented wealth and power it often employed emblematic devices that could indicate familial affiliation and place of the origin of the lace.

The semiotic properties of lace are also evident in the wedding cake. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment the wedding cake as we now understand it appeared, but during the nineteenth century the cake used in the ceremony went from being that ‘which happened to be baked for weddings to highly distinctive structures, instantly announcing their association with a wedding’ (Charsley 1992, p.121). The decoration often employed emblems that were symbolic of the unification of two people and was mostly generic, though it could be made distinctive by being,
for example, ‘copied from the material used in the bridal gown’ (Bowring n.d., p.95). Here lace is a symbol of the bride and rather than simply decorating the cake it links the cake to the person.

While lace is often appreciated more for its aesthetic value than utilitarian function, this has not always been the case, and within lace there resides a symbolism that can be traced back, according to Semper’s theory, to the knot – a fundamental technique used in the creation of textiles. As a symbol the knot is one of the oldest, tangible representation of what Semper refers to as the cosmogonic idea (from the Greek kosmos signifying order and adornment alike), the impulse to arrange singular elements in a harmonious and decorative manner to create form. It is both a technique and the pictorial expression of an idea. Gradually it developed into more complex techniques such as plaiting that, because of its strength, was used as a seam to join pieces of textile together, and from here ‘the seam gave rise to lace, that splendid and luxurious fabric’ (Semper 1860, p. 223). Both Earnshaw (1985) and Levey (1983), in their histories of lace, refer to examples where techniques that gave rise to fashion laces are used to join two or more pieces of a garment together. In an abstract sense this idea of union, the way in which many elements can be transformed from the singular into a whole, is what I find holistic to a decorative effect.

The use of lace as a symbol of the seam, the ‘expedient that was invented to join pieces of a homogenous nature – namely, surfaces – into a whole’ (Semper 1860, p. 153), suggested to me ways in which I could attempt to connect the elements of decoration, structure and surface while simultaneously keeping intact the use of the seam to stress ‘how the parts are connected and interlaced towards are common end’ (Semper 1860, p. 154).

Structure Number One (see ill. 4.03) and Structure Number Two (see ill. 4.04), while composed of what may be seen as heterogeneous rather than homogenous elements, are an attempt at creating a form that unifies the elements of decoration, surface and
structure while simultaneously emphasizing their differences. The experiments were informed by the idea of confusing what could be considered decoration and what could be considered structural and the lace textile is the surface that mediates between these elements. It consolidates, as a symbol of the seam and as a cover for the body, the separate elements into a whole.

The lace surface is transformed into a structure by reducing its surface area and joining together separate pieces of textile to create a whole—the decorative surface becomes a structure. The surface of the structure, a machine-made lace that resembles hollie point (a needle lace where the design is formed by leaving spaces in the stitching), is a screen explicit in revealing the structural supports and emphasizing them as something not necessarily inherent to the garment. In turn these supports, the padding, which are often obscured by being inserted between the outer and lining layers of a garment, become visible and their visibility is enhanced by coating them in a layer of patterned fabric that differentiates them from the garment.

Yet it is not the lace that physically joins all the elements. It is the ribbon, a narrow strip of fabric normally associated with decoration, which links everything together. It is attached to the padding and is woven in and out of the surface of the garment. Within this operation is a reference to bobbin lace whose manufacture involves the intertwining, braiding and twisting of separate threads. The result of this action is that the separate threads are unified to create a decorative textile.

Structure Number One and Structure Number Two are wholes that result from the arrangement of originally separate elements. They are how I represent what Semper referred to as, and classified architecture as, a cosmic art. Decorative elements and techniques, structure and structural supports and surface, are organized so that there is an agreement between them, and they are arranged decoratively, that is, with the conscious intent to create an order, to produce form within space.
4.03

Liam Revell

Structure number one, 2008
4.04

Liam Revell

Structure number two, 2008
The decorative effect represents the cosmic urge, that is, part of its effect is to arrange singular elements to create a unified form. It is concerned with the relationship singular elements have to each other, the sequence they appear in and the methods used to piece them together. It agrees that the body is the framework a garment references but places no emphasis on decoration, structure or surface, as ultimately it is the way all three are used together that informs not only the exterior appearance of a garment but the interior space the body sits in.

LACE AND AFFECT : LACE AS A STRUCTURE

Decoration as a symbol can communicate an idea that is not intended, as 'inherited symbols remain dependent on a particular cultural moment or context and cannot survive changing conditions' (Kubo and Moussavi, 2006, p.18). This is how I imagined lace, not as a physical piece of decoration that symbolizes a technique or origin but as the creation of an affect that is associated with it and uses its technical processes to manufacture garments and explore the form of them.

In a collection of Autumn/Winter 2009/10, titled Decoration Accident, Tao Kurihara explores a decorative effect (see ill. 4.05). The design process was not instigated by a theme external to fashion but by decoration that is used in the embellishment of clothing and the bow and how textiles are manipulated to make them contributes to the forms produced for this collection. Kurihara explains that the outcomes were achieved ‘by taking the base fabric and twisting and tying it up with ribbons and making the design becomes one big decoration’ (cited in Ince & Nii eds. 2010, p. 138). She used the decoration not as a symbol but as a self-imposed limitation that assisted in exploring how a garment, and its surface and structure, could be created.
Image removed due to copyright.
Within lace-making processes there resides an approach to the construction of garments (see ill. 4.06). Lace is an example of such a thought, and the plaiting, twisting and twining used to create bobbin lace is referred to in order to fashion separate elements into the one garment (see ill. 4.07). A description of lace as a textile where the ‘whole pattern is fabric, and the fabric is the pattern’ (Channer, cited in Earnshaw 1983) inspired my approach. I created a pattern that created a pattern.

A dressmaking pattern was drafted by draping onto the figure rather than imagining it through a flat, two-dimensional configuration reliant on a block and the subtleties of fit are incorporated into the separate pieces that contribute to the whole. In this experiment ready-made lace textiles were discarded in favour of a construction process that produced a garment that
alludes to the appearance and construction of bobbin laces. The symbolic aspects of lace were disregarded as an influence on the outcome and it was lace as a decoration that informed how the voile, the textile the garment is manufactured from, could transmit an affect, that is, how it could produce a change in the textile to create a form. To an extent this experiment is a conclusion that summarises much of what is associated with the decorative effect pursued in this research. Decoration does not need to be separate or subordinate to a structure but can become it.

Lace is a textile that is used in this project to inform and extend my approach to my design practice. There are many aspects of lace that make it a desirable object for study. It has symbolic associations not only as a textile but to the cakes I studied early in the project. It can also communicate a feeling for a garment when used to cloak an underlying structure. The way in bobbin lace is manufactured is an example of a textile where the decorative components and structure of the cloth are bound together and emerge during the production process. It is this third trait of lace that was exploited to conclude that the process of construction in pursuit of creating form can achieve a result where decoration is not secondary to a form but can become it.
4.07
Liam Revell
Lace is lace, 2011
CONCLUSION
The aim of this project was inspired by a desire to understand the relationship between decoration and structure, particularly in fashion garments. Decoration is influential in my practice as a fashion designer and initially I was reacting to attitudes that regard decoration as an element that is deceptive in expressing the function of a structure and one that should be subordinate to it. The suppression of decoration that I was challenging became important to how I pursued knowledge that supported the practice I was developing and also could extend on theories of decoration already in existence.

While in this project I focus on the use of decoration in fashion, I propose that the approach I have developed could be used in other design disciplines. In re-evaluating decoration as more than a physical presence that is an accessory to a surface or structure I see it as contributing to the creation of form in the way it alters the appearance of the form. It can be the catalyst in the design process, influencing how single elements are arranged to impact on the manufacturing processes and aesthetics of a material outcome.

When I commenced this research project I was primarily concerned to discuss decoration as essential to the character of fashion. I viewed decoration as something that, while the focus of as much attention as the design of the garment appeared last in the sequence of imagining and its realisation - it was the conclusion, summing up the ideas I wished to express

I still maintain the position that decoration as a physical presence is essential to the production of fashion in my practice; however, I have extended my approach by evolving methods where the importance of decoration becomes apparent in how it drives the design process, and informs the aesthetics of outcomes and the methods used to manufacture them.

The analogy between a decorated object and a garment is something that I introduced into my practice for the first time. It instigated the research, and the iced and decorated cake
opened up conceptions of how decoration, surface and structure work and interact, which I then compared to the clothed and decorated body. The findings I extracted from the analogy informed many of my initial studies and laid the groundwork for subsequent investigation. For example Boyd’s use of the terms cloaking and camouflage to describe uses of decoration inspired approaches to the exploration of materials, techniques and appearances that wove their way throughout the whole project. The analogy, however useful, can also limit the inquiry – a point of recognition must be reached where its usefulness can no longer be exploited and new ideas must be threaded into the design process to move the investigation forward.

Decoration has an association with display – a function that should not be underestimated. Its role as display is apparent in the wedding cakes I engaged with as a visual investigation. The addition of one or more layers to the cake, the host, changes its appearance, yet these layers, in essence, become its expression, informing us of the intention that informed its creation. This is what inspired me to move forward, to leave the analogy behind. Decoration is not contingent display but symbolic of an idea either internal or external to the construction to which it is applied. Display also suggested ways that decoration, in transforming appearances, becomes a force that lends an individual aspect to the construction, either by highlighting its difference from another of a similar type or by linking it to its user. I became intrigued by the potential for transformation that resides in the use of decoration when applied to materials, objects and forms. This is something I have come to see as one of the essential impacts of a decorative effect.

The studies I undertook as part of this project and my experiments with decoration were more extensive than I have indicated in this text, yet the findings were often replicated, so I found it necessary to present only those whose outcomes could eloquently explain my intent. Through decorating extant items such as shoulder pads, and by playing with the order in which physical decoration appeared in my studies, I started to witness
the effect decoration has on outcomes - it changes the appearance of materials and objects and may alter the shape of forms.

A characteristic of a decorative effect, that of transformation, informed further studies, not by using decoration as a purely physical element but by using it as an idea. The ideas associated to decoration emerged from a study of lace, the symbolism associated to it and its construction techniques. By abstracting the qualities of decoration, my practice became one of decorating. I wasn’t decorating the body per se but rather the idea that conceived the garment. In considering the intent of investigating the transformative properties of decoration and the impact on structure and surface, I manipulated the basic elements used in each study and arranged them to create a space for the body to sit in.

I feel that this definition of my practice has altered the step by step approach I once had to the design process. I still include in my design process visual research, design through drawing, patternmaking, draping, toiling and sampling to achieve a final outcome, but I now mix these stages up, inserting them into the process when they are required. Decorating consumed all the processes and each step; the way a piece of paper was transformed into a pattern or fabric into a garment, for instance, was imagined as a microcosm of the act. Each process stands alone, but they are all one.

Aspects of each theory I visited had an influence on this project, but it was Semper who suggested to me ways in which decoration could be more than a mere accessory to the structure. In his explanation of the creation of architecture he saw decoration as a symbol of production and evolution, carrying within it the nature of the thing it decorated. He saw the dressing and the mask as the denial of reality, but something that was necessary if ‘form were to emerge as a meaningful symbol’ (Semper1860, p. 439). These aspects of decoration led me into an area of research where I explored decoration, not as something symbolic of the form but as the force that gives rise to form.
On reflection the most successful studies were those that investigated lace. They are evidence of my practice as decorating. The nature of lace as decoration informed my design process from idea to realisation. Once where my design process was instigated by external themes, it now became internal to the appearance of the material I was using, its symbolism and method of production. It highlighted a potential for decoration to interact at various stages of design and manufacturing activities. The nature of lace informed the aesthetics of the outcomes and the methods used to produce them.

My exploration of a decorative effect changed the way I view and use decoration. Not only have I been able to observe a range of impacts it has on the structure and surface of a garment, but I have also used these observations to evolve an approach to design where this impact is utilised to its advantage. Ultimately I have questioned the role of decoration as an element that is secondary to structure and in turn a decorative effect now guides my own emergent design practice in the way I develop and produce garment outcomes. The decorative effect resides in more than just the way a particular piece of decoration appears. It exists in its history, its symbolism and its construction processes and in exploring and extracting information from these it has become the *sine qua non* of my creative process.


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