Corkodiles

Challenging body standards by exploring techniques of cutting and assembling primitive materials, which are mainly derivatives of wood, in order to rethink the visual expression of the body.

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1.2 Abstract

The motive of this work is to illustrate and visualize the socio-political objectification of the female body, in order to suggest explanations as to how female body standards are derived as a result of this objectification. The objective was obtained by exploring cut and assembling designs with powerful visual expressions, with sustainability as a point of emphasis.

As the result 8 shapes were created out of one single pattern formula, the formula that would probably never be discovered if the starting point were not a fragile cork material.

1.3 Key words

Art, Design, Sculpture, Creature, Body standards, Metareaction, Material properties, Worth, Primitivism, Sustainable Development
2. Introduction to the field

Hans Bellmer (artist, 1902-1975) created ball-jointed dolls picturing deformed and distorted girls and women with misplaced body parts in situations of physical and mental exposure, that were described as metaphors of sexuality with an obsessive focus. The female body was used as a fetish object from a male perspective. Illustration 2.1 shows a typical piece in which a young girl’s head has been put on a pregnant woman’s body. Her face is semi-covered by a distorted breast, her genitals are unproportionally enlarged and the artist has added an eerie coloring to the original black and white photograph.

To be able to communicate through design, strong visual expressions are sometimes needed. A contemporary designer who masters this area is Walter van Berendonck, who often uses exaggerated shapes to set the observer’s creativity in action. In illustration 2.2 the garment has been constructed in such a way that it is not really clear whether one is looking at a garment or straight into the eyes of a creature. This ambiguity leads the observer to have to decide what he is looking at, and so the process of interpretation of the designer’s work is started.

The duality of a physical shape is illustrated in illustration 2.3 below. Do we always see what we think we are looking at? By wrapping a body in a garment, the visual message can be distorted. Even wrapping one body in a garment picturing that same body can easily evoke insecurity to the observer. Which version of the body am I looking at? Which version do I choose to see? Why do I choose to see what I see? What is my own reaction to my conscious or unconscious choice?
Sustainability point

Materials

Bea Szenfeld cooperates art and craft into the wearable objects using paper as a main material (illustration 2.4). Her Haute Papier collection shows time consuming haute couture work in impressive shapes and structures.

An alterior aim in this work is that it needs to be sustainable from an environmental and social standpoint. The impact of fashion on the above needs to be seriously paid attention to. One tool at the designer’s disposal is choice of materials and methods. The materials used in this work was therefore primarily derivatives of wood, which are produced with a minimum environmental footprint. Illustration 2.5 shows a garment designed by Salomon Shayo made of cork, which is one of the materials that were used in this work.

“Feeling unique and special is still possible. Normcore has made us feel like we can’t be unique anymore, but how about taking normcore, normal, ordinary elements that we don’t even take notice on our daily lives and giving them a twist, making them special. Cork, Gum, Popcorn, neutrals, 2D figures; even the most banal elements around us can give us inspiration and become” – Salomon Shayo (https://www.notjustalabel.com/designer/salo-shayo?collection=203975). Unconventional but yet sustainable materials can be a statement by itself and their properties. It is probably matter of time and conjunctures to raise worthiness of them.

Methods

Issey Miyake Developed a new concept and production methods since 1970s (illustration 2.6)

“It is a single-step manufacturing process that does not create any waste fabric. The wearer extrudes their clothing from the tube by simply cutting along the lines of demarcation” (Utopian Bodies: Fashion looks forward, p. 38). Such a concept could be applied on the garment construction not only on basic garments but even on more advanced constructions with complicated appearances.
2.1 Motive and Idea Discussion

The society constantly seeks for some kind of action in their’s life in form of for exemple survival or putting themself in extreme situations. No matter what, a person would try to compensate the lack of adrenalin or whatever can make a person “alive” and “meaningful” in a society. “Boredom supports animal curiosity, fashions of doctrinal denials come quickly on the heels of doctrinal affirmation until naiveté is exhausted and all understand that it is necessary game, dressing up of the ego” (Human Nature and the Social Order, Charles Horton Cooley). “they build a model of nature that is contradictory. The natural is an idealization of the social. It is, perhaps, conflicting ego ideals that lead to contrary states of the soul” (Human Nature and the Social Order, Charles Horton Cooley). Fashion design is a powerful tool to affect society in a positive way. It can help express another side of a personality, stimulate natural instincts in form of self expression and to supplement missing emotions in a person.

The primary motive/purpose of this work is to motivate the idea based on a problem – the objectification of female bodies and creation of “body standards” in a more understandable and naive, yet sarcastic and deeply meaningful way. This is done in relation to the state of the art – a traditional or instinctual way of reacting to visual exposure (and sculptural approaches?). The state of art in the design process will be applied as an abstract idea or as the literal definition of it (in form of, for example, stereotypes within genders in fashion or art). For instance, facial contours will be literally applied on the patterns, but later on draped into more abstract shapes, where it would be difficult to define faces, but might give other visual futures, such as genitals. These comparisons are also important for the state of art. It is interesting how people can see things and categorize them by such of small amount of information.

The secondary motive – the work is important to society for two reasons: (i) society needs to be made aware of the effects (structural and individual) of the objectification, and (ii) the impact of fashion on sustainability needs to be brought to the light by rethinking resources and the worthyness of materials.

In relation to many fashion works, there is a lack of social and political messages presented in a way that is not forced. Instead, it is done in an intrusive way to bring attention to or highlight a brand, but not actually to try to change the situation.

Nick Cave’s Soundsuits (illustration 2.7) camouflages the body, masking and creating a second skin that conceals race, gender, and class, and forcing the viewer to look without judgment. Meanwhile Sara Lundberg’s OMG(s) (illustration 2.8), illustrates the spiritual potential of the dressed body. Henrik Vibskov’s pieces from the Sticky Brick Fingers collection is “perfectly balanced between eccentric innovations and wearability”, says Vibskov. Having facial references included as a part of maneuvered garment construction.

Victor&Rolf in the SS 2016 (illustration 3.0) represented the haute couture collection, inspired by cubistic art, as a straight example of how it can be wearable. “This season, the collection explores the idea of the archetypical white polo shirt meeting Cubism.” said a statement from Viktor & Rolf. “Mismatched facial features and body parts stuck onto, or cut out from, the fabric created abstract portraits”. (http://www.dezeen.com/2016/01/28/victor-rolf-haute-couture-collection-spring-summer-2016-performance-of-sculpture/)

Why it is important to use unconventional methods of constructing garments:
- Lack of meaningful expression without being forced
- Sculptural approach. Sculpting through interfacing garment-body lines.
- Rethink worthyness in primitive materials and techniques
- Challenge primitive materials (cork) and techniques (cutting and assembling).
2.2 Aim

To challenge body standards by exploring techniques of cutting and assembling primitive materials, which are mainly derivatives of wood, in order to rethink the visual expression of the body.
3. Method & development

As this project has limits in the form of material properties, the challenge was accepted and explored through a technique and method performed in an artistic way.

3.1 Design Method & Design of Experiments

There are several ways of approaching a design project, and therefore many different design methods are used within fashion design. As this project focused on sculpting and novel construction techniques to challenge traditional ways of constructing garments, the principle of knowing through making became significant. Maarit Mäkelä (2007) describes the process of knowing through making as “a method of collecting and preserving information and understanding.” This means that each artefact produced will create new experience and add to the designer’s knowledge (Illustration 3.1).
Draping 8 different shapes out one single pattern formula

Body bias

Breast-Waist-Hips
The "standard" of 90-60-90

Cut and Folding

Finding a perfect way of assembling that can deal with the material properties (limits + frugality) and applying it to the main concept about body standards.

Facial contouring

Cut outs according to highlighted parts on the face

"Facial contouring"

Facial expressions appearing unintentionally

Further exploration of body bias

Highlights of the female body

Hans Bellmer's art

Interpretation of the Male Gaze

Assembling

"Facial contouring"

Cut outs according to highlighted parts on the face

Draping 8 different shapes out one single pattern formula
3.2 Experiments of Design and Design Rationale

As this project aims to re-think ways of using materials, an open design space with no built-in censorship was essential, especially to start with, in order not to inhibit the creative process. When initiating a project focusing on sculpting, observational studies are needed to be performed. This was done through collecting input and studying the female body together with clothing construction in different ways. The first moment was to study pictures and images describing and defining the chosen field. Here, analyzing the philosophy of Hans Bellmer and the method with which he developed his dolls played a significant role as a cornerstone of this work, but also works of Viktor&Rolf and Issey Miyake were inspiring and added nuances in the form of methodological development.
After having studied and interpreted the gathered image material, the practical work took further development. A great deal of weight laid against efforts and experiments to find ways to express abstractions of bodies by means of applying the chosen methods and materials.

Illustration 3.3 Range of materials that were explored

Illustration 3.4 One of the first quick experiments with cork that was fused with the fabric, cutted and draped. This method and material took further exploration.
The method of cut and assembly was a consequence of the choice of material. A second foundation cornerstone of this work is a solid link to sustainability, which limited the range of possible materials to use. The reason for choosing derivatives of wood was, apart from its apparent link to a philosophy of sustainability, that it constitutes a primitive material that does not attract much attention in the fashion industry. In fashion literature, derivatives of wood are very seldom mentioned, and if they are, they are mostly expressing static shapes, as accessories to garments made out of more conventional materials (illustration 3.3 and 3.4). Very seldom, derivatives of wood are treated as a material worthy of creating fashion out of.

In the initial phase of the experimental work, new insights emerged due to the behaviour of the material. Great difficulties were experienced with veneer and saw flakes, while other derivatives such as paper and cork proved more workable. As the work progressed, the respect for the material grew. Especially cork stood out and grew a soul, which led to that it became the main material of the work. It is a fragile material that deserves respect, which influenced the method moving forward, and the later in the experimental process, the more important challenging the value of this raw material became. It turned out to be a battle between the designer and her designs on one side, and the material and its properties on the other.
Experiments with materials

First steps of the investigation was very abstract and predictable material and shapewise.

Draping real wooden veneer in combination with printed on a plastic wood (illusion)

First steps of exploration

Molding printed on a plastic wood
1. Molding with wooden flakes and silikon to create flexible shapes yet structural

2. Molding veneer through wrapping wet jersey around the mannequin


4. Draping an abstract shape using two dummies. Using a primitive craft technique - basket weaving
Material behaviour

In order to find desirable shapes through different types of draping try outs were done.

Draping (static)

Draping in Motion
Experimental pieces in different perspectives

Molded veneer through moisture

Cork fused with the mesh fabric
Draped through cutting and folding

Shape through silikon and wooden flakes

Draping real wooden veneer in combination with printed on a plastic wood (illusion)

Weaving the shape

Fusing veneer with fabric

Interfacing paper and fabric
Directions

From this point onwards, the project will go in two different directions.

First direction (experiment)

Choose “More abstract and “fine” shapes” ------->

Sketched line-up

First outcome of the exploration

Molded veneer

Manipulated paper

Weaved Veneer
Multiple dimensions enabled creation of many different shapes from only two outcomes.

In this direction were chosen two different materials (veneer and paper) which were executed throughout weaving method using ripped cotton fabric.

This method (Interweaving) giving a good support and flexibility which is important in creating shapes.

This direction had no place for further exploration in this particular project because of:
- Lack of time
- Too abstract shapes
- Too “fine”
- Not the right estetic
- Not the right state of mind
Second direction (experiment)

In this direction, "More organic and rounded shapes" were chosen since it is closer to a ball-jointed doll appearance.

This method of cut and assembly will take some time in order to find the perfect technique. But a simple cut representing body bias will be the starting point.

To get rounded shapes, small curves of each body part needed to be cut out and assembled. This proved to be very complicated and time consuming.
Further exploration of body bias

Studying body
Highlights of the body

“Facial contouring” Cut out according to highlights of a face

Facial expressions appearing unintentionally
The emotional intent of Bellmer’s art is one of the main themes of this project, as he tried to convey negative perceptions of female body standards, and abuse victims. This project is striving to find the same approach while utilizing his philosophy as the backdrop.

It is extremely interesting how he assembled porcelain dolls by misplacing and deforming body parts. Playing on Hans Bellmer’s methodology of misplacing body parts resulted in facial expressions appearing on my garments.
The transition into the facial expression

Garment/Body parts (Bias/Basic)

Pattern that was executed through analysis of garment and doll making.

“wrong” placement that don’t make any sense but fits into the construction.

Assembling of patterns

Facial expressions approaching

Enhancement of female futures

Facial expressions appearing announcemently

New pattern that enhances facial futures yet functioning as garment’s pattern
Scaling

Unfortunately, the material properties limited the possibilities of finding new shapes.

In an effort to move on and find interesting shapes, scaling of the pattern seemed necessary to proceed.

This was a successful outcome, but further development was deemed unnecessary, partly due to time constraints.
The result of this process is a bit overly done, thus the search for new shapes via scaling will not be pursued further.
New direction. When the idea has born.

The most challenging part in the exploration was the way of connecting “body parts”. Therefore the experiment of weaving method was done. As mentioned earlier the weaving method gives stability and flexibility so this method provides much potential. Unfortunately this method proved to be very time consuming and has been postponed.
During the analysis of all the experimentations the main problem was undoubtedly the way of assembling.

This problem brought about the exploration of a new assembling technique - by applying cuts in certain places, and executing cut-outs in a certain pattern so that it would be possible to insert one part into another to hold those two parts together. This method created interesting shapes on “joint” parts.

Unfortunately, one method of cutting parts in a certain way to enable assembling (functional cutting of patterns), will not work due to adverse material properties. It is very fragile.
Facial features created by interaction of two pieces that were cut in a certain pattern.
Crucial activity

Building a “bridge” in order to create a “joint”. The “joint” becomes the center of the construction - the point when it will be possible to drape a garment into shapes (cut, twist, fold etc.) Construction would be built on and held by/onto the arms.

One example of method development in regards to the growing respect of the material, was that the initial cut-outs of patterns, to include the thrown-away cut-out parts, were gradually re-utilized in the designs. Later, this developed into only cutting in order to totally avoid waste of the material. This also served the purpose of sustainability. Towards the end, this thinking was refined so that one single cut shape was used to assemble several different designs.

One example of material related challenges with cork was weak points while draping and assembling. Parameters such as weight distribution and foldings for support needed to be addressed in order to continue the work.

Patterns arose from a fusion of basic pattern making in relation to curves originating from body standards. As the method was slowly refined as described above, the designs seemed to slowly but surely turn into faces, expressing different moods, feelings and creatures. This development fit the purpose of this work completely, as it gave the designer the power to turn a female body standard into a face expression. Out of all human ways of communicating without words, face expressions is the most powerful language, instinctively understood by a global audience.
The pattern was created by the basic pattern serving as the foundation (the pattern of a sleeve) on a flat rectangular surface. By draping it on a 1/4 mannequin, smooth lines were created that followed armholes. Those line had to cross with “weak points” in the ideal proportions that could give enough measurements for twisting while draping, and also provide enough stability to not break the construction. The hole in the middle of the pattern gives enough space for the body to go through and executes a desirable cut-out in order to express facial features.
Aim of this step: Cut the solid material, avoid waste, create functionality resulting in waste-free and aesthetical shapes possible to drape.
Same concept different approach

This line-up was built on one single concept - to reflect body standards and to rehearse the body which is mirrored as a face (creature) through cut-out and assembling techniques.

Even though the same concept was applied, two of the examples were exceptional and therefore chosen to be further developed.

The chosen examples have endless possibilities to create different expressions out of just one piece.

Cuts that contain facial features and draping techniques varies from one outfit to another since the PATTERN FORMULA is the same on all of outfits.
Variations of one single piece that looks different from each perspective (3-dimensional properties). Endless possibilities...
During the material research, jute weave stood out for its natural raw properties which compliments the relevance of sustainability.

The material also has a practical purpose of making sculptures more durable by applying it on the cork surfaces.
The decorative design on the jute weave provided a desirable visual aesthetic and supplementary support for the garment construction.
This example features the shape of a naturally fallen drape. This was made possible by holding the edges of the circle, and applying an upper part of a jersey bodystocking on the edges so that the construction could rest on the head and shoulders. This provided necessary weight distribution and flexibility so the garment wouldn't feel forced. This piece of the cut-out provided new visual features to the creature while adhering to the non-waste concept of this project.
Even though the pattern gave many possibilities to create new shapes, it was difficult to find shapes that are not too similar to each other yet have “red thread throughout the whole collection. This particular shape was created out of the same pattern concept but in two layers so it could be possible to build dimensions.

The piece looks complex but consists of a pretty simple draped construction that has fast points on the sleeves and in the circle area.

The jersey fabric gives the illusion of a liquid sculpture. That idea blends the unwieldiness of this particular garment.
This piece was a result of missplacing the sleeve area on the legs.

Additional support was found by applying a cardboard band in the certain place so that it would hold the construction and distribute the weight evenly.

In this case the non-waste concept resulted in a messy outcome and confusion about the body standard concept. Therefore some parts were removed in order to reach more clear lines.
Cut-out pieces which were originally regarded as waste were re-utilized as decorative/supportive details, or as a foundation for an outfit which gives promising and stable shapes.

This example is a simple shirt with sleeves made of cork. Visualizing garment references and sleeves are the starting point of the main method. This piece illustrates the least amount of cork material being used and the beginning of the exploration of this method.
After trying out the Formula on unconventional materials, the project moved on to more "garment-ish" materials such as cork fabric. Despite that there are just 4 cut-lines, 2 seam-lines, and very simple curves/construction, this one-piece creates a complex visual effect.
This piece illustrates how the one small cut can affect the whole appearance.

The surface from inside of the garment was covered in black silicon in order to enhance the facial features and make the construction look light even though it is the heaviest out of 8 shapes.

Stripes made out of velcro were a functional detail from the beginning, but for this example, the decorative purpose of the stripes were relevant on the aesthetic level for the harmony of the whole collection.
Progression

Overview of experimentations if progression

1. Exploring material properties and relevant methods
2. Finding Approaches

3. Juxtapose
4. Pushing it to maximum effect

5. Clarifying
Relevance of materials, details, and colors

the color combo

stripes: from function to a detail
details: references of the nature

the color combo

Suspenders: Velcro in order to adjust and to hold the construction

Jersey for the liquid effect of the wooden shapes

Relevance of materials, details, and colors

the color combo

stripes: from function to a detail
details: references of the nature

the color combo

Suspenders: Velcro in order to adjust and to hold the construction

Jersey for the liquid effect of the wooden shapes
Frugality in development

Chronological development of minimization of wastes from cut-outs to only cuts.
Relevant materials and color hues

Jersey in colors of different skintones. Soft and stretchy such like human skin.
Chosen materials: aesthetic qualities of natural materials
Sketched line-up
Discussion and Reflection

This work aimed to challenge body standards and material properties in order to rethink visual expressions of a female body within the garment construction. As the investigation showed, while constructing, a female body have a tendency to have facial futures. Is that restrictions of the traditional garment making or is that the human prejudices that make it significant?

The horizontal and vertical measurements constituting the foundation for this pattern-drafting process are taken from the client in an upright, static position. Facial futures were still the main focus of expressions and were applied through the cutting technique. As the exploration continued, the cutting and assembling technique leaded to the draping technique, which was depended of material properties. Therefore shapes were found by restrictions.

It should be noted that although the main concept was about body standards in the social environment, the execution of patterns also took literal forms such as cut out faces in the development. These cut outs began to be a part of the new construction method, which are not really appears as faces but plays a big roll in creating shapes.

Thereby, a collection of factors, which are both literal and abstract can lead to new construction methods. These factors can be used, as an advantage of creating something that people might feel uncomfortable with or just to awake some kind of awareness. Which is important in terms of female objectification when standardize bodies.
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