KURBITCH!
-EXPLORING THE STRUCTURE OF ORNAMENT AS DESIGN METHOD

BA IN FINE ARTS; FASHION DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

In architecture we usually divide built things into structure or ornament. The same way of thinking can be applied to fashion. First you have a construction (garment) and then you add an ornament, like a way of styling. This works aim to change that relationship. One way of exploring the relation between the two concepts is to subordinate structure under ornament in order to change the hierarchy between form and decoration. Ornaments have in themselves structural elements that can be transformed into construction. My aim is to find these and let them be the bearing structures when augmenting for new shapes and expression with a codependent relationship between the two.

The concrete methods of this work have been carried out through experimentation with different perspective on ornamentation in a trial and error process to achieve new expression and potential of ornament.

The results are various examples of the design method carried out in different scale and proportions. They show how the method could be used in a structural way to find form and a more pictorial way to build expression. It questions modernistic thinking with its form follow function principle and explores other values such as attraction of the eye and the expression of light reflective materials. It explores the clash between tradition and new material.

A new discussion could be raised about what is construction and what is ornament, if a separation is needed or even can be done.

KEYWORDS

Ornament, Structure, Fashion, Architecture, Design, Method, Decoration, Construction, Kurbits, Expression, Light, Modernism, Maximalism
BACKGROUND

Ornament:
1 archaic: a useful accessory
2 a: something that lends grace or beauty
   b: a manner or quality that adorns
3: one whose virtues or graces add luster to a place or society
4: the act of adorning or being adorned
5: an embellishing note not belonging to the essential harmony or melody — called also embellishment, fioritura

Structure:
1: the action of building: construction
2 a: something (as a building) that is constructed
   b: something arranged in a definite pattern of organization — rigid totalitarian structure — J. L. Hess
   "leaves and other plant structures"

(Merriam-Webster 2013)
Ornament vs. construction

Ornament and construction are often described as a contradicting pair (Sankovitch 1998). Usually we divide built things into its “skeleton” or structure and its “rags” or ornament. The separation between these two concepts emerged in the early 20th century with endless debates about the relationship between structure and ornament, construction and form, which formed the base for modernist thinking. Earlier, such a division had been unimaginable. Before that, structure was not considered to be self-sufficient and ornament was not reduced to a detachable object opposed to structure. Rather, ornament had a more incorporeal meaning. Whether or not you are for or against ornament, it continues to be understood as a separate, additional element to structure.

Ornamentation in architecture from pre- to post modernism

In 1856 Owen Jones published “The grammar of ornament - A global and historical design source book” that consists of 20 chapters with key examples of ornaments from a number of sources, diverse both historically and geographically. In the preface Jones suggests 37 “general principles in the arrangement of form and colour in architecture and the decorative arts”. For instance, “Construction should be decorated. Decoration should never be purposely constructed. That which is beautiful is true, that which is true must be beautiful.” and, “True beauty results from that repose which the mind feels when the eye, the intellect, and the affection is satisfied from the absence of any want” (Jones 1856, p. 5).

After the abundance of the ornamentation that characterized the 1800s' last decades, a strong reaction was not unexpected, according to Lars Olof Larsson. A short period was characterized by the ambition to free itself from the historical patterns and create a modern, “contemporary” ornamentation. But shortly after 1900, the ornament crisis became manifested. One of the strongest proponents of this approach was the Austrian architect Adolf Loos. In his manifesto “Ornament and Crime”, written 1908, he denies ornamentation all justification and declares that lack of decoration is the sign of an advanced society (Larsson 2010, p. 1). According to Loos, any ornament that decorates the human body, the body of a building or utility objects is there for a reliable indication of criminal energy, childish affectionos, sexual licentiousness and excessive hedonism (Loschek 2009, p. 180).

The concept “Form follows function” was introduced by the architect Louis Sullivan and was later realized consistently as a principle by Bauhaus (Loschek 2009, p. 180). This functionalistic way of thinking is the basis of modernism that can be attributed to the whole of the twentieth century. The lack of decorative detail became a hallmark of modern architecture and equated with the moral virtues of honesty, simplicity and purity. What began as a matter of taste was transformed into an aesthetic mandate.

Beckman & Ljungström write that during the 20th century’s second half, a countermovement was formed that questioned modernism’s universality and function. It started first among artists, but quickly spread to all occupational groups within form and design. The French philosopher and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s studies of human taste preferences from the 1980s supported this movement. They show that taste is learned rather than innate. What looks like an inherent perception of beauty with a sense of order and purity is rather the result of internalization that makes us choose for our social contexts. Bourdieu divides humans into two taste categories: the cultivated, bourgeois, and the folksy, uncivilized. The bourgeois choose analytically, the folksy emotionally. The bourgeois man’s intellectual perspective created a good taste that supported the values that Modernism celebrated, while the folksy man’s emotional way to show their taste was regarded as primitive and its objects as kitschy.
The ornament’s recurrence

Exactly 100 years after Adolf Loos wrote “Ornament and Crime” that effectively relegated ornament in architecture to the peripheries of the discourse the ornament is taking its first steps towards its re-emergence in architectural practice on a global scale. (Domeisen, 2007) Today, the demands of contemporary capitalist cultures of representation and societal trends towards individual expression are colliding with the homogenizing modernist idiom. A number of architects are rediscovering a lost language through which a building can speak to us about more than its own existence.

Words such as appliqué, decoration, ornament and pattern that earlier have been considered as uncivil or demonstrate a lack of design talent, according to modernistic thinking in the early and mid-twentieth century, have returned with great force during the beginning of the twenty-first century (Loscheck 2009, p. 197). “Now, even architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, who made their names with severe Calvinist boxes, transform almost every façade... into complete ornament.”

Architecture and fashion

Architecture and fashion have many similarities. They both provide people with protection and shelter and are created with the human body in mind (Hodge 2006). Although the end product differs a lot in scale and material, the creative process is similar in both disciplines. Both the fashion designer and the architect start with a two-dimensional medium, transforming it to create three-dimensional form. They share ideological and theoretical foundations and are influenced by the similar tendencies and creative impulses, resulting in garments and buildings that share stylistic or sculptural qualities. An architectural vocabulary has been applied to fashion to describe garments as constructed, sculptural or architectural. In the same way, architects have adapted words and techniques originated from the fashion world, such as pleating, wrapping and folding of surfaces and material.

Fig. 5 The facade of 40 Bond Street, NY by Herzog & de Meuron.

Pleats are used as construction in both fashion and architecture, seen here in an example by Junya Watanabe, fig 6 and foreign office architects, fig 7.
According to Hodge (2006, pp. 6, 188), Narciso Rodriguez has been recognized for his development of a sophisticated minimalist take on women's wear that owes a great and acknowledged debt to the work of Mies van de Roche and his "less is more" principle. They are both concerned with the inherent beauty of structure and construction and his approach to structure echoes, the Bauhaus Schools philosophy of "form follow function". "I approach designing a garment in much the same way an architect approaches designing a building with seaming for structure to create interesting fit lines and shape", he explains. Rodriguez follows the lines and curves of the female body to create very precisely fitted garments without relying on drape or volume to build form. His silhouettes are body close and minimize the amount of negative space between body and clothing, unlike designers who build silhouettes based on independent form. Instead he shows of the construction of a garment itself and relies on structural elements such as a built-in bra or a corset-like bodice to provide shape. He avoids applied or irrelevant decoration and allows the beauty of seams and dart to serve as his garments' only decoration. Rodriguez working method is draping. He rather uses a live model than a mannequin on which to pin and tape seams and lines in a very precise way to create perfect proportion, balance and fit.

Iris Van Herpen

Van Herpen, on the other hand, works with a sculptural and modern take on haute couture. "Form follows function is not a slogan with which I concur" says Iris Van Herpen. With a high level craftsmanship, she mixes old and forgotten techniques with high tech materials and innovation inspired on the world to come. Her design is closely connected to the female body and by bringing form, structure and material together, she tries to suggest optimal tension and movement. (http://www.irisvanherpen.com).

Van Hepen is an example of when ornament in fashion is used in a large scale. She builds and sculpts her silhouettes from non-textile materials forming an, architectural shell around the body. They have a tactile feel from the repetitive use of structure that forms wearable sculptures rather than functional garments.

Giles Deacon

An example when ornament is used in a smaller scale, more commonly seen in fashion, is Giles Deacons work from SS12. Silver leather has been laser cut into ornamental patterns in an all over manner or like decorative applications on dresses, t-shirts and skirts. This is a good illustration of ornament used in an applied way, only for it’s decorative abilities.
AIM

Problem formulation

In fashion minimalism seems to keep us in its iron grip and continues to be viewed as the so called good taste, I would like to explore a different direction by refusing to see ornamentation as secondary to construction. I want to change the relation between both concepts and find a way to equate the two.

This work aims to reintroduce ornaments in a fashion context in the same way that it now finds it way back in architectural settings. I want to explore how ornamentation can be useful in fashion today. Even though the ornament is making a come back, ornaments are always subordinated construction. First you have a construction (garment) and then you add an ornament, like a way of styling. This works aim to change that relationship.

One way of exploring the relation between the two concepts is to subordinate structure under ornament. I want to explore what happens if ornament goes from an unnecessary additive element to be the essence of an outfit? This will be done by letting the ornament lead to form. Ornaments have in themselves structural elements that can be transformed into construction. My aim is to find these and let them be the bearing structures when augmenting for new shapes and expression based on ornament.

Another way to look upon the subject is to go back a bit more than 100 years in time, before the separation of ornamentation and structure was defined according to Sankovitch (1998). By using a similar way of thinking I want to investigate how ornament in fashion be used more incorporeal in the same manner that it used to be in architecture before modernist thinking smeared the concept. Is a separation between the concepts even needed or can they together build new expressions and new ways to look upon structure and appreciation of decoration?

In Rodriguez work, the structure is visible and functions as decoration of the garment in a minimalistic manner. By studying the structure of ornament, my intention is to find alternative lines and shapes as a base for construction and the building of three-dimensional form. And if I like Rodriguez let that ornamental structure be visible, is that enough for being the garments’ only decoration?

Another aim for this work is to create wearable ornaments, without building the kind of static sculptures that Van Herpen tends to do. By avoiding draping merely on the mannequin and instead, as Rodriguez does, use a live model or by draping on myself, my aim is to create garments that interact with the body in a better way and create interesting shapes and a new expression.

The aim is to explore the structure of ornament as design method.
GENERAL METHODS

Theory and practice

There has already been a separation between theory and practice since the decision to translate epistêmê and technê into knowledge and art/craft. (Thornqvist 2012, p.9) Translated like this, art is reduced to a tool or a method for science, not science or knowledge in and for itself. Instead of dealing with the fundamental development of the field itself, you tend to just “point out problem” and treat artifacts as products from a textual analysis.

What Thornqvist suggests is art as science; that result of basic art research is universal and precise, as well as valid and rigorous. Looking on the history of science experimentation has been used as a common methodology for exploring and constructing knowledge. Therefore, experimenting as a method for research within art can be used to state fact and build new knowledge and the artifacts should be seen as results of this experimentation.

The role of the artifact

What is the role of the artifact in art and design research? This is a question that Michael Biggs is asking (2004). He argues that objects in themselves cannot account for knowledge. Furthermore, he draws a parallel to objects in an aesthetic exhibition, which without context leads to the fact that its author has no control over its reception. And if the aim is to communicate knowledge or understanding, then deception cannot be an uncontrolled process. This situation is comparable to the meaning of individual words. Words have meaning in the context of sentences, alongside with other words. What is required is the combination of artifacts and an exposition that describes how it embodies and contributes to knowledge, understanding and insight.

Experiment as method in design

When it comes to design research, experimentation can be used as method for producing knowledge in form. (Brandt & Binder 2007). Experimentation is a scientific method with the goal to establish the validity of a hypothesis. An early and influential supporter of experimental science was Francis Bacon. In order for science to be useful, it must be organized, as was Bacon’s proclamation (Nationalencyklopedien). He suggested that based on a number of events, you could reach a likely conclusion. For Bacon, making is knowing and knowing is making (Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy).

In a design research driven by design experiments Brandt and Binder argue that the notion of program, experiment and question is a useful methodological grounding (2007). Design experimentation can be seen as a means for explore a possible program. The research question guides the investigation of a concept, while the program set up a frame for the experiments to take place and suggest an applied method.

The difference from ordinary design work and design research is that in a design work you prove its relevance through what the program can achieve in terms of finished designs, while in design research you have to show the strength of the program beyond the individual experiment. For others to gain from design research it is of great importance to be able to communicate what took place during experimentation and how it was evaluated.

SPECIFIC METHODS

The concrete methods of this work have been carried out through experimentation with different perspective on ornamentation in a trial and error process to achieve new expression and potential of ornament. A series of experiment has been carried out where each experiment differ slightly or very much from the previous. In spite of the differences each new experiment is influenced by the insight gained from the previous one. The outcome can be seen as arguments for new experiments.

Ways of construction

The most common way of constructing garments is to start from block patterns. These works in that way that a mathematical system that works with the measurements of the body assists in making a foundational pattern that later on can be transformed into any kind of garment. One example is Inger Öberg’s classical learning book (Lindqvist 2013, p. 36).

An alternative approach to construction of garments is Andreas Ekblit’s work presented by Thornqvist (2012, pp. 74-77). It focuses on the expression of the construction method itself and builds on live drawings for finding immediate structure and expression of dress. My starting point for construction of garments has been the ornament. As in the case of Andreas work, I directly translated the ornament into construction to find structure.

Draping on the body

When it comes to draping, it is of great importance which model you choose. Different suggestions can be the tailor’s mannequin, a live model or your own body. Each option offers different solutions and will affect the outcome. When working on the mannequin, you have a neutral pre-model of the body (Thornqvist 2012, p. 82). But one consequence is that the perspective you have standing in front of the mannequin, as you usually do, will lead to a focus on the front of the upper body, forgetting the silhouette as a whole. This is a result that can be seen in Van Herpen’s work with shapes that leaves big parts of the body unexplored and tends to be quite static.

Rodriguez’s use of a live model provides a more fluid way of draping, where the whole body will be taken in consideration. Another key element here will also be movement since the garment has to relate to the body in motion.

My choice has been to drape on my own body, which gives a dynamic way of draping with opportunities to twist and turn the fabric, stepping through holes and openings to explore other possibilities impossible to achieve on the static mannequin or hard to explain for a live model.

Kurbits

Based on ornamentation and its plethora of variants, my first choice was to focus on the Swedish kurbits. This choice was the result of my desire to focus on something foldoristic and well-liked by many, to use an ornament found in homes rather than in churches and other public buildings associated with the bourgeois and intellectuals. When the term kurbits is used, in this work it aims mainly at the ornaments as decorative furniture painting on cupboards, shrines and boxes and not to tapestry painting, which often are illustrations of the Bible.
Finding form

One of the questions in this work was to find new ways to use ornamentation and free it from being regarded as secondary to construction. An approach to this was to make ornaments into construction. This succeeded in the way that the outcome shows that it is possible to transform the structure of ornament into construction.

In the process of making the structure of ornaments into form, the projector has been an important working tool. A picture of a traditional Swedish kurbits has been projected and traced onto a square piece of fabric. The next step is to cut out the pattern of the ornament and start to experiment with the given shape on the mannequin or, more preferably, my own body. When experimenting on my own body, I find possibilities that are impossible to reach when draping on a mannequin.

What is interesting with this way of building shape is the contrast between the dynamic lines of ornament and the static square, between the body close and the void. The ornament’s organic lines interact and embrace the body and discover new paths around it. On the other hand, the square provides with areas that form into space between body and dress. I started by using a stiff but lightweight non-woven fabric that enhances the space and is an influential variable in creating this sculptural silhouette.

When working with this method, intuition has been of great use when choosing which ornament to use as model for experiment. I can predict most likely if a certain ornament will work in a structural way or not, even if I cannot say what garment it will form. This is determined in the next step of the process when I start to experiment on my own body. A garment is held up either by resting on the shoulders or the hips. Therefore, the decision to put my head through a hole formed by the cut out ornament leads to the fact that it most likely will turn out as an upper garment such as a top, jacket, coat or dress, unlike the choice to make the hole a bit bigger and place it at the waist, which then will form a skirt or a pair of trousers.

Another factor in the determination of garment, according to this method, is how big a square the ornament is placed upon. A smaller square will lead to a jacket or a short dress, in contrast to a bigger square which will lead to a full-length dress or a coat. In the beginning of my process, this was made completely by chance, as the choice of ornament. But the further I went in my experimentation, I learned to understand the relationship between size and shape of the ornament in contrast to the size of the square. This understanding allowed me to control my process, if not completely, then at least a bit towards a planned outcome.

From ornament to structure step by step

1. Tools needed for experimentation.
3. Exploring different possibilities for the cut out kurbits on myself.
4. First design proposal fitted on mannequin.
5. Modification of pattern.
6. Second design proposal fitted on mannequin.
7. Different material tested and evaluated, here denim strengthened with wooden glue solution.
8. Later the design changed into the jacket presented in outfit 3. Final prototype.
DEVELOPMENT

Starting point

When starting experimenting with ornaments, a question of scale was raised. When it comes to ornament in fashion, it is almost always used in small or medium scale, more in an all-over manner. Therefore it was hard for me to challenge my perception of how big an ornament on body could be. In the beginning my experiments were in small scale. A breaking point was when I tried a square piece of fake fur with a cut out kurbits on a small scale wooden doll. Proportions of ornament on body suddenly shifted from very small to very big. With this in mind I continued by using the projector to experiment with ornament on body in various scale.

First succeeded experiment

My first experiment of projecting an ornament upon a square was towards an unplanned result, means I had no garment in mind. After cutting out the ornament I placed my head through a hole in the middle and got an immediately result in form of an apron like dress. This experiment can be seen in the first outfit of the line up. Almost no alteration has been done except change of material a scalloped edge has been added. This was my first step in developing a method from the structure of ornament.
Light and the reflection of light

Some of my early material experiments involved a pattern of LED on a transparent, florescent vinyl, an experiment with flashing LED and fiber optics and a cut out lace on the florescent vinyl. Loschek writes that light is a means used to achieve colour and patterns not only in architecture, but also in experimental clothing (2009, p. 67). Experiments with LED integrated into clothes or applied to decorative necklaces or bracelets as well as fluorescing fabrics attract attention, at catwalk presentation in particular.

My experiments led to developing a glitter jacket with 200 tassels made of fiber optics and formed into a figure of a kurbit on both the front and back of the jacket. Each tassel was provided with a flashing RGB LED behind. The outcome is the rather hysterical, eye catching jacket in outfit 5. It is an applied way of using ornament but successful in the way that the flashing tassels both provides with pattern and three-dimensional form.

Attracting the eye

Tapparelli writes about Bronze shavings as ornament when scattered over a horizontal surface. (2007, 23). Bronze shavings is an industrial by-product that take on the function of an ornamental motif in that they attract the eye and hold the attention of the viewer.

Since the purpose of ornament is to beautify and attract one’s gaze, I thought it was suitable for this work to experiment with light which demands the attraction of the eye. This was later reduced into find and use materials that is light reflecting, florescent or in other way shines such as radiant film, glitter coated fabric, sequins and fluorescent plexi glass. This can be seen as an interpretation to create a similar surface as the bronze scattered ones Tapparelli talks about.

First line from left: Silver sequins, transparent florescent vinyl, moon dust coated pvc. Second line: Florescent neon plexi glass. Third line: Radiant film, holographic sequins, silver glitter coated pvc.
Material

One of the challenges in my choice of material has been the fact that my shapes are dependent on certain strength in material. It has to be light-weighted, yet vigorous to support form. As a starting point, a grey non-woven fabric used as backing for pads for office furniture was used. I was pleased with the sculptural silhouettes achieved with this material. Therefore, the challenge was to imitate that material and create new ones with the same possibilities. I have worked with stiffer material in different kind of ways. The light glitter fabrics have been fused together with a non-woven fabric that offered the same properties and the lilac glitter fabric together with the grey non-woven fabric. For the same reason, the jeans have been strengthened with a wooden glue solution. Both ways give the ability to achieve raw edges that does not fringe, which is necessary for making the different shaped edges I have used throughout the collection.

Extracts from workbook

To challenge my method a series of experiment was executed. The relationship between the scale of the ornament and the square was tested and evaluated. The coat in outfit 4 is a result of a series of experiments seen above. Here I wanted to get a result which would cover more of the body than earlier experiments. Therefore I started of using a square of appropriate size and chose an ornament that I thought would be interesting for creating three-dimensional form. My main argument for this was the arch as you can see in the picture of the kurbits used as model. The result was pleasing and various alternation and tryouts in different material was made before getting to final result. The other experiment seen above was made to really challenge the scale and relationship between ornament/square. I chose to project a kurbits onto almost 4 meter of fabric with full with. This turned out in a full-length dress with trail. The result was not as pleasing as previous mentioned since the large square (or rectangle) is providing with to much extra material that is not able to create form.
Handpainted kurbits on transparent vinyl with florescent edges

In this experiment my aim was to use ornament more traditionally way. Since kurbits usually is
handpainted on cupboards, shrines and boxes as a decorative element I wanted to use the same technique
but on an unconventional material. I started experiment with paint on a neon pink transparent vinyl
with florescent edges and found out that some colours gave a glowing effect on the surface when seen
from the back. I used that to handpaint a kurbits, like a front print, on a t-shirt. The result shows an
interesting clash between traditional technique and use of ornament on new expressional material.
This additive way of using ornaments can be seen as the background represented in this work or as an
attempt to enhance it's traditional usage.
When trying my method on trousers I encounter problems. I can’t decide if it is the shape or scale of the cut out ornament or the size of the square that is the problem. I have a hard time figure out how to use the structure of the ornament in a fruitful way. After experimenting with different kind of ornaments as a base for structure I give up.

A proposal for a solution to the problem comes up when doing another experiment. When starting working with this ornament I already have trousers in mind. Therefore I choose a stylized ornament and also the scale and placing on the square with a planned outcome for the experiment. Earlie experiments has been more random when it come to scale and placing of the ornament, letting the method lead to form without having a specific garment or garment type in mind. This is a more applied way of using the method and can also bee seen as more decorative way of using the method. The outcome is different, good or bad can be debated.

As mentioned on previous page the outcome for this particular experiment was to be a pair of trousers. But when experimenting with the ornament on body I find other possibilities like skirt or dress. Since I find the structure of this ornament a bit easier to read than others I decide to make a dress out of it. The dress will be made in a holographic radient film.
Composition and dynamics

The line up is the result of various experiments where each outfit can be seen as parts of a whole. The result contains examples where ornament has been dealt with in different ways and in different scales, figurative or structural, from a small decorative edge to an ornament covering the entire body. A selection has been made with dynamics in mind.

The dynamic inherent in any particular shape, color, or movement can make its presence felt only if it fits the comprehensive dynamics of the total composition (Arnheim 1954, p. 432). When dealing with the fact that most of my materials and shapes are very expressive, question have been raised such as if I need to tone down and add neutrals to find dynamics in color, material and shape. My respond to this has been to not to work with neutrals but instead work with various proportions of these elements to find dynamics.
OUTFIT 1
Denim apron dress with scallop edge
Body in holographic sequins
Shorts in holographic sequins with scallop edge
Necklace in fluorescent plexiglas
OUTFIT 2

T-shirt in transparent vinyl with florecent cut scallop edge
Ornamental skirt in moon dust coated pvc fused together with rubberlike table felt
Underskirt in holographic sequins
OUTFIT 3
Jacket in grey non-woven fabric and radiant film
Skirt in grey non-woven fabric and radiant film
OUTFIT 4
Coat in glitter coated lavender denim fused together with grey non-woven fabric, with scallop edge
Shorts in silver sequins with scallop edge
OUTFIT 5

Jacket in glitter coated pvc with tassels of fiber optics and flashing RGB LED with scallop edge
Chaps in glitter coated pvc with scallop edge
Shorts in silver sequins with scallop edge
OUTFIT 6
Ornamental dress in radiant film
Body in sequins
OUTFIT 7

Jacket in moon dust coated pvc fused together with rubberlike table felt with scallop edge
Trousers in moon dust coated pvc with scallop edge
DISCUSSION

This work concern the possibilities with ornamentation as design method, freeing the ornament of being subordinated construction and find its inherent structural element and let them lead to form. It questions modernistic thinking with its form follow function principle and explores other values such as attraction of the eye and the expression of light reflective materials. It explores the clash between tradition and new material.

The results are various examples of the design method carried out in different scale and proportions. They show how the method could be used in a structural way to find form and a more pictorial way to build expression. They argue for a more intergraded way to work with the concepts of structure and ornament and highlight the discussion of decorative work in fashion.

In my analysis and reflections over this work I will discuss it from some different perspectives and pinpoint some of the questions raised during design seminars and in the critique I got after presenting my work for the opponent. I will discuss some possible ways to develop the work further and try to place the work within a context.

Evaluation of result

After having presented a final proposal for a complete line up, one can come to some conclusions. The first one is that expression is strongest when working monochrome in material and colour and in an overall manner as you can see in outfit 4, 6 and 7. When trying to balance shapes and expression with “normal” garment and material such as shirt and jeans the outcome gets messy and unclear as in outfit 1, 3 and 5. They do not complement the garments built by ornamental structure in a supporting way but instead lower the outfits overall expression. These pieces has been removed, except from denim, as a material, in outfit one, and replaced with under garments made out of matching sequins to each outfit. Also the necklace has been moved from outfit 3 to 1 to create a more monochrome unit-by-unit feel to the collection as a whole.

Scale

By experimenting with the ornament in different scale, my aim was to investigate its inherent aesthetic values in various ways. An experiment with the same object in different scale in relationship to the body can show how form and fit can challenge our perspective of dress and its interaction with the body (Thornqvist 2012, p. 48). When working with the ornament as design method for creating three-dimensional form, the scale of the ornament is so big that it covers parts or the entire body.

One assumption for working with ornaments in small scale, yet not in a figurative manner, is the edge that has been cut like an ornamental framing to the whole garment. An intermediate between these can be seen when I have worked with ornaments in a figurative way more than in a traditional decorative manner, such as the hand painted kurbits in outfit 2, the necklace in outfit 1 or in the overall ornamentation made out of flashing LED and fiber optics in outfit 5.

Potential and limitation of method

This method has great potential for finding new form and expression within fashion. The work shows how it is possible to use the structure of the ornament as a base for building shape. You can use the method in different scale to create different garments and it is also possible to reduce the forms made into more understandable garments. It would be interesting to continue to challenge the scale between the static square and the organic ornament to see what expression can be made at its most extreme.

The problems encountered when trying to make trousers were dealt with and a pair of chaps was made to show that it is possible to make trousers from the method. I still think that this could be developed further.

A consequence when working with this method is that since it is built upon cut out holes, it leaves part of the body revealed. This means that it needs complementing undergarments which only purpose is to cover the body. In the final result the problem is solved by matching garments underneath the ornamental pieces, as a blank canvas, on which they can speak for themself. But it would be interesting, as a next step, to continue to develop the method further and integrate the two element more so it could be self-sufficient.

Since the method is relying on the structure of ornament to create form. A interesting question can be raised on when is it construction and when is it ornamentation, if a separation is needed or even can be done.
When talking about aesthetics, it is hard to be impartial. Through history, many philosophies have evolved, regarding what beauty is. Loschek describes aesthetics in design as the exclusive aim for the product as such rather than technology or functionalism (2009, p.95). She quotes Manfred Schmaltlriede: “The aesthetic emerges as an organizing pattern, the construction of which is defined according to our perception. Since we have no access to the processes of our perception, all that remains are the products, whose patterns can we altered through reflection. We experience the “aesthetics”, the sensual perception, as a standardized phenomenon. To perceive an object, an event, an action or a situation as it is, as opposed to all the associations that point beyond it, constitutes an aesthetic moment.”

Rodriguez’s work echoes Bauhaus’s “less is more” principle. Van Herpen refuses the same concept and works with the contrary. My work is much more into “more is more” but I am still striving for balance, but maybe a maximalistic one.

One matter regarding aesthetic when working in a maximalistic manner is that the forms achieved from making construction out of ornaments is quite complex, and question needs to be raised on when and how forms can be simplified into more understandable shapes and wearable garments. The only way to make those decisions is to start from the only constant: the making of clothing, the body. Only there, important factors, such as wearability, comfort, garment in motion, and the aesthetic expression overall, can be evaluated.

Ornament or decoration

It is hard to distinguish the terms ornament and decoration. All ornament is decorative but not all decoration is ornament. Ornament exists beyond the rules of decorum. (Domeisen 2008, p. 9). McNicholas discusses the definition between the concepts based on definitions of the two words in The Oxford English Dictionary. It defines ornament as “primarily functional, but also fancy or decorative” The word derives from the Latin “ornare” which translates as “to honor or adorn.” Ornament can be described as a manifestation of beauty or what makes beauty visible. He quotes Thom Phillips who wrote “Ornament serves strength with strength. It is not an afterthought as is decoration. It is not merely applied but becomes one with the object it helps create.” It is not just an addition to a functional object in order to make it more attractive. The definition of decoration according to the OED is “an embellishment temporarily put up on some special occasion.” Ornament and decoration are both celebrative visual pleasure but decoration implies grandeur of little consequence, because it is changed easily, while ornament implies purpose and celebration of function (McNicholas 2006, pp. 4-7).

Translated into fashion this means that the difference between ornament and decoration is how incorporated the element is in the garment, if it has structural values or if it is just an additive element placed upon the garment as an afterthought. In the final result you can look upon the painted kurbits on the vinyl T-shirt in outfit 2 as an example of decoration where as in garment such as the denim apron dress in outfit 1, the coat in outfit 4 or the chaps in outfit 5 is just some examples of when the kurbits has been used as ornamentation in a structural manner.

“Less is a bore – more is more”

A recurring discussion about my work has been in which context it is taking place. It has been hard for others to see it in a commercial setting and my aim has never been to position in that field. I can see a possible use for my work within stage and performance, the garments could be used in a music video for example. My goal for this collection is also to not only make an editorial photo-shoot but also to work with film. I think it would be interesting to take my collection one step further and present it in a scene and create a holistic experience. I want to create a fashion fantasy that pushes the boundaries for conventional thinking.

When talking about context I also think you can see parallels between this collection and Japanese street style Kawaii. Cute or Kawaii began with the young in Japan during the 1970’s. (Clark 2012, pp. 373-374). It was soon picked up by brands such as Sanrio who is the maker of the iconic Hello Kitty. Other styles as the “Lolitas”, with its bows, frills and laces, all in pink, followed. Japanese subculture is full of different styles extreme in expression. Fashion, popular culture, street style, garment, image, music are so combined that distinctions of “high” and “low” become meaningless.

Within the genre it is common to build your style upon a character, or more or less be that character. Like the Gothic/Punk music duo Hitomi Yoshizawa and Rika Ishikawa, or Hangry and Angry, who like Hello Kitty also is animated cats origins from comic-books. As I see my collection, I have a character in mind. When starting to communicate about the expression that I searched for it was hard for me to describe it, a description that recurred was “Angry My Little Ponys on speed”. It is glittery and pink, ornamental and feminine but it is also angry and provocative, strong and daring. This is a revolt, a statement as a contrary to modernistic thinking and aesthetics, but also against what I consider an overly stereotypical view of feminism. It could be seen as an expression for the new Gaga-feminism.

Gaga-feminism

Lady Gaga is a symbol for a new kind of feminism (Halberstam, 2013). She is a master of media manipulation, a sign of a new world disorder, and a loud voice of different arrangement of gender, sexuality, visibility and desire. We can use the world of Gaga to question new femininities. This punk feminism hits at a future and gestures toward new forms of revolt. Gaga feminism tracks a version of feminism that will not settle for banal accounts of women striking out for independence and becoming powerful in the process. This version of feminism are not “becoming women” in the sense of coming to consciousness, they are unbecoming women in every sense – they undo the category, they play with it, take it apart like a car engine and then rebuild it so that it is louder and faster.
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APPENDIX

Critique of Lina Ericsson’s work Denimized

Firstly I have to say that I had some problem doing a proper opposition on Linas’ work since the report contains many gaps regarding important parts of the work in both its method, development and result that will be added by Lina later on. My critique however is based on the report as it was given to me.

Lina has an interesting concept and aim for her work that is of much relevance for the fashion industry today where denim wear is always represented in the passing trends and right now feels very relevant. She has done an extensive research both in theory and practise regarding denim, its archetypes, the history and the use of denim in the fashion of today.

Lina wants to blend the two areas of textile and fashion design. She has put a lot of effort on textile and surfaces and less in form, therefore I feel that the work sometimes lacking in those areas. Lina has done a great job with her material experiments adding a new and very appealing textile surface to denim. I think the contrast between material and technique is important and well executed in the examples with glitter on denim and less expressive in the needle punched manipulated examples, like the pink skirt for example. A suggestion is to blend the wool with some other shiny fibres, similar to the ones she has used in some of her material experiments (fig. 14, 16, and 18).

Lina has used the denim archetypes as a base for her work and used them in different scale to find new form. I think that she could have been more daring and challenged the scale even more. Complementing material and garments to the denim pieces is important for Linas’ work and here I think that there is not as much emphasis put in as into the denim. Heavy knits are a good and suitable choice but could be made stronger by adding another element. It would be interesting if Lina went on with her material experiments on knitted materials. What happens if you fuse them together with other materials or use the needle punch technique on knits? I really like the glitter coating used in the dungaree dress, maybe that could be used on jersey to create a complementing material to use in t-shirts and tank tops? Could you do crossovers between knit and denim, like doing the denim archetypes in a knitted material, like the teddy she has used in the skirt in outfit one? Another suggestion is to the sequin embroidery on the jersey pieces in the same way that people working with denim wear use print as a complementing element in their collections.