

Fashion and Philosophical Deconstruction: A Fashion In-Deconstruction

Flavia Loscialpo

Abstract

This chapter explores the concept of 'deconstruction' and its implications in contemporary fashion. Since its early popularization, in the 1960s, philosophical deconstruction has traversed different soils, from literature to cinema, from architecture to all areas of design. The possibility of a fertile dialogue between deconstruction and diverse domains of human creation is ensured by the asystematic and transversal character of deconstruction itself, which does not belong to a sole specific discipline, and neither constitutes *per se* a body of specialistic knowledge. When, in the early 1980s, a new generation of independent thinking designers made its appearance on the fashion scenario, it seemed to incarnate a sort of 'distress' in comparison to the fashion of the times. Influenced by the minimalism of their own art and culture, designers Rei Kawakubo, Yohji Yamamoto, Issey Miyake and, later in the decade, the Belgian Martin Margiela pioneered what can legitimately be considered a fashion revolution. By the practicing of deconstructions, such designers have disinterred the mechanics of the dress structure and, with them, the mechanisms of fascinations that haunt fashion. The disruptive force of their works resided not only in their undoing the structure of a specific garment, in renouncing to finish, in working through subtractions or displacements, but also, and above all, in rethinking the function and the meaning of the garment itself. With this, they inaugurated a fertile reflection questioning the relationship between the body and the garment, as well as the concept of 'body' itself. Just like Derrida's deconstruction, the creation of a piece via deconstruction implicitly raises questions about our assumptions regarding fashion, showing that there is no objective standpoint, outside history, from which ideas, old concepts, as well as their manifestations, can be dismantled, repeated or reinterpreted. This constant dialogue with the past is precisely what allows designers practicing deconstruction to point to new landscapes.

Key Words: Deconstruction, Derrida, *la mode Destroy*, body, mechanisms of fascination, consumer culture, history.

1. The Germs of Deconstruction

Deconstruction, as a philosophical practice, has spread its influence far beyond the borders of philosophy and academic speculation. Since its early popularization, in the 1960s, it has traversed different soils, from literature to cinema, from architecture to all areas of design.

The term ‘deconstruction’ possesses a particular philosophical pedigree, and its history of effects has been widely documented and meticulously investigated. This is not merely casual. Well known is in fact the resistance of Jacques Derrida, father of deconstruction, to provide a definition of it, and thus to surrender to the original Platonic question trying to fix the essence (*ti esti*) of the things that has long permeated Western metaphysics. Rather than being a methodology, an analysis, or even a critique, deconstruction is eminently an *activity*, that is, a reading of the text, which shows that the text is not a discrete whole, but has more than one interpretation, and very often many conflicting interpretations.

In any context in which it is at work, the a-systematic character of the deconstructive reading emerges in its putting into question and in re-thinking a series of opposing terms, such as subject-object, nature-culture, presence-absence, inside-outside, which are all elements of a conceptual metaphysical hierarchy.¹ The ‘deconstruction’ pursued by Derrida is indeed connected to another disrupting philosophical project, that is, the phenomenological ‘destruction’. In the philosophical tradition, destruction (*Destruktion*), as Heidegger explains, is a peculiar disinterring and bringing to light the un-thought and un-said in a way that recalls an authentic experience of what is ‘originary’.² The Heideggerian *destruction* and the *deconstruction* outlined by Derrida ultimately converge, fused by the same intention of mining the petrified layers of metaphysics that have for centuries dominated philosophy. Nevertheless, the deconstructive practice never finds an end, and is rather an open and complex way of proceeding.³

In an interview released to Christopher Norris in 1988, on the occasion of the International Symposium on Deconstruction (London), Derrida says:

deconstruction goes through certain social and political structures, meeting with resistance and displacing institutions as it does so. I think that in these forms of art, and in any architecture, to deconstruct traditional sanctions – theoretical, philosophical, cultural – effectively, you have to displace...I would say ‘solid’ structures, not only in the sense of material structures, but ‘solid’ in the sense of cultural, pedagogical, political, economic structures.⁴

Spoken, written or visual language could in fact be the embodiment of forms of power and hierarchical systems of thought that have become so embedded in the language and in our consciousnesses that are now even hardly recognizable. The task of deconstruction is therefore to question the authoritarian foundations on which these structures are based, disclosing new possibilities of signification and representation. Among the fixed binary oppositions that deconstruction seeks to undermine are ‘language-thought’, ‘practice-theory’, ‘literature-criticism’, ‘signifier-signified’. According to Derrida, the signifier and signified, in fact, do

not give birth to a consistent set of correspondences, for the meaning is never found in the signifier in its full being: it is within it, and yet is also absent.⁵

The ideas conveyed by deconstruction have profoundly influenced literature, related design areas of architecture, graphic design, new media, film theory and fashion design. Derrida's relationship with the domain of aesthetics runs indeed alongside his deconstructive work practiced on contemporary philosophy: at first with *The Truth in Painting* (1981), then with *Memoires of the Blind* (1990), and finally with *La connaissance des textes. Lecture d'un manuscrit illisible* (2001), written with Simon Hantai e Jean-Luc Nancy. However, it is only with *Spectres of Marx* (1993) that Derrida's idea of a *spectral aesthetics* achieves its full development.

Through the decades, the possibility of a fertile dialogue between deconstruction and many diverse areas of human creation has been encouraged and ensured by the a-systematic and transversal character of deconstruction itself, which does not belong to a sole specific discipline, and neither can be conceived as a body of specialistic knowledge. In the words of Derrida, in fact, deconstruction, is not a

unitary concept, although it is often deployed in that way, a usage that I found very disconcerting ... Sometimes I prefer to say deconstructions in the plural, just to be careful about the heterogeneity and the multiplicity, the necessary multiplicity of gestures, of fields, of styles. Since it is not a system, not a method, it cannot be homogenized. Since it takes the singularity of every context into account, Deconstruction is different from one context to another.⁶

2. A Fashion *In-Deconstruction*

In the early 1980s a new breed of independent thinking and largely Japanese designers made its appearance on the fashion scenario, transforming it deeply. Influenced by the minimalism of their own art and culture, designers Yohji Yamamoto, Rei Kawakubo (Commes des Garçons),⁷ Issey Miyake and, later in the decade, the Belgian Martin Margiela, Ann Demeulemeester and Dries Van Noten largely pioneered the fashion revolution.

1981 is the year in which both Yamamoto e Kawakubo showed for the first time their collection in Paris. Their appearance forced 'the representatives of the world's press to examine their consciences'.⁸ Rejecting clichéd notions of glamour or the fashionable silhouette's look, they disclosed a new approach to clothing in the post-industrial, late 20th century society.

Just as in the philosophical or in the architectural practice, the deconstruction pursued by fashion designers generated new construction and signification possibilities, and questioned the traditional understanding of the *invisible* and the

just *unseen*, thus subverting the parameters determining what is high and low in fashion. The designers seemed to make a powerful statement of resistance. At first, the austere, demure, often second hand look of their creations induced some journalists to describe it as ‘post-punk’, or ‘grunge’. Nevertheless, the disruptive force of their works resided not only in their undoing the structure of a specific garment, in renouncing to finish, in working through subtractions or displacements, but also, and above all, in rethinking the function and the meaning of the garment itself. They inaugurated, thus, a fertile reflection that questioned the relationship between the body and the garment, as well as the concept of ‘body’ itself.

Almost a decade later, in July 1993, an article on ‘deconstructionist’ fashion appeared in *The New York Times*, with the intention of clarifying the origin and the directionality of this new movement, of such a still mysterious avant-garde. A ‘sartorial family tree’ immediately emerged:

Comme des Garçons’ Rei Kawakubo is mom; Jean-Paul Gaultier is dad. Mr. Margiela is the favoured son. And Coco Chanel is that distant relative everyone dreads a visit from, but once she’s in town, realizes they have of a lot in common after all.⁹

Even before the word ‘deconstruction’ began to circulate in the fashion landscape,¹⁰ it became clear that some designers were already reacting and measuring themselves against the parameters that were dominating fashion. In 1978, for instance, Rei Kawakubo produced for Commes des Garçons a catwalk collection that included a range of black severe coats, tabards, and bandage hats.¹¹ Subsequently, in 1981, Yohji Yamamoto expressed a way of dressing that constituted an alternative to the mainstream fashion of the times: the clothes were sparse, monochrome, anti-status and timeless; knitwear resulted in sculptural pieces with holes, in mis-buttoning to pull and distort the fabric, in ragged and non conformist shapes, that were in complete contrast, in the form, with the glamorous, sexy, power clothes of the 1980s. Revolting against the excessive attitude and the little imagination that were anaesthetizing fashion, Margiela reworked old clothes and the most disparate materials, and for his first Parisian show (Summer 1989) choose a parking garage. Models had blackened eyes, wan faces. They walked through red paint and left gory footprints across white paper. For his 1989-1990 Winter collection, he used the same foot-printed paper to make jackets and waistcoats. Margiela says, ‘we were working one year, and wanted a concept. It’s a big word, but if you see what happened afterward, after five years, I think we can call it that’.¹²

Often labelled as ‘anti-fashion’, or the ‘death of fashion’, the works of the ‘deconstructivist’ designers incarnated a sort of ‘distress’ in respect to the mainstream fashion of the late 1980s. Nevertheless, just as Margiela’s former teacher at the Academie Royale des Beaux Arts, Ms. Poumaillou, insists, ‘instead

of killing fashion, which is what some thought he was doing, he was making an apology⁷.¹³ Making a parody of the already excessive and orthodox fashion of the times would have been redundant. Margiela's work rather concentrated in disinterring the mechanics of the dress structure and, with them, the mechanisms of fascinations that haunt fashion.

The way of proceeding adopted by Kawakubo, Margiela, Yamamoto could bear associations with the sub-cultural fashion movements of the 1980s. For instance, the idea of cutting up clothes could refer back to the ripped t-shirts of the punks and the subsequent street style of slicing jeans with razor blades. Nevertheless, the work of the 'deconstructivist' designers goes much further. Far from resulting in a mere collage, or in recycled post-punk, or even in some post-nuclear survivalism, 'deconstruction fashion', or '*la mode Destroy*' is above all a *dialectical device*. As Elizabeth Wilson clarifies, it is definitely a 'more intellectual approach, which literally unpicked fashion, exposing its operations, its relations to the body and at the same time to the structures and discourses of fashion'.¹⁴ Deconstruction fashion, which is always already *in*-deconstruction itself, involves in fact a thorough consideration of fashion's debt to its own history, to critical thought, to temporality and the modern condition.

3. The Deconstructed Body

The peculiar way in which 'deconstructivist' designers question fashion, through subtractions, replications and deconstructions, sounds like a whisper, in which what is not overtly said is both a consequence of and, at the same time, a condition for saying. Philosophically speaking, the force of deconstructive thinking can only be realized through the conditions of its dissemination. Similarly, for more than two decades, designers practicing deconstruction have unfailingly confronted themselves with the parameters that have determined and still determine fashion today. Their work represents in fact a reaction to and a critical reflection on traditional tailoring methods and paragons of body consciousness.

In fashion, a complexity of tensions and meanings, not only relative to the dimension of clothing, becomes manifest and accessible. At the centre of this complexity there is always the body, in all the modalities of its being-in-the-world, of its self-representing, of its disguising, of its measuring and conflicting with stereotypes and mythologies. The dressed body represents therefore the physical and cultural territory where the visible and sensible performance of our identity takes place. What deconstruction fashion tends to show is how absence, dislocation, and reproduction affect the relationship between the individual body and a frozen idealization of it.

Significantly, in the early 1980s the work of designers pursuing deconstruction was considered a direct attack on western ideas of the body shaping. Their designs, apparently shapeless, were radically unfamiliar. But such a new 'shapeless' shape was subtly threatening the parameters prescribing the exaggerated silhouette of the

mainstream fashion of the times. When it first came to prominence, Kawakubo's *oeuvre* never seemed to be inspired by a particular idea of body-type or sexuality: it was simply 'neutral', neither revealing nor accentuating the shape of a body. As Deyan Sudjic underlines, her creations 'neither draw attention to the form of the body, nor try to make the body conform to a preconceived shape; instead, the texture, layering and form of the clothes are regarded as objects of interest in themselves'.¹⁵ Contemporaneously, Yohji Yamamoto, inspired by images of workers belonging to another age, was disclosing a new possibility in respect to the self-enclosed horizon constituted by prior representations of the body. As François Baudot remarks: 'in a society that glorifies and exalts the body and exposes it to view, Yohji has invented a new code of modesty'.¹⁶

By playing with an idealized body, deconstruction fashion challenged the traditional oppositions between a 'subject' and an 'object', an 'inside' and an 'outside'. It finally showed that the subjectivity is not a *datum*, but is rather continuously articulated, through time and space, according to different myths, needs, affirmations or negations.

Not by chance, a recurring motif in deconstruction fashion is the reversal of the relation between the body and the garment. Kawakubo's *Comme des Garçons S/S 1997* collection, called 'Dress Becomes Body Becomes Dress', masterfully exemplifies such operation: the lumps and bumps emerging from beneath the fabrics seem to be forcing the boundaries between the body and the dress, and to shape a different 'possibility' of articulating the modern subjecthood.¹⁷ No longer contained or morphed by its standardized and rigid representation, the body begins to react to the garment. It animates it and finally encompasses it. As theoretical indicators, these conceptual designs hold an immense critical importance, as they show that any departure from the perfection of some crystallized paradigm should not be understood as insufficiency or limit. And nevertheless the one represented, for instance, by *Comme des Garçons S/S 1997* collection is just a possibility, one among the many that can be and are yet to be drawn.

The reflection upon the border, the containment, the inside/outside demarcation is crucial for designers pursuing deconstruction, whose contribution regularly manifests itself in overturning this supposedly pacific relation. Indeed, a staple of Margiela's aesthetics is the recreated tailor's dummy, worn as a waistcoat directly over the skin, which tends to reverse the relationship between the garment and the wearer. The body actually wears the dummy: the tailor's dummy, a norm for classical sizes and proportions, to which the living body has for long been made obedient. In further occasions, as in the enlarged collection derived from doll clothes, Margiela explicitly refers to the problematic of the standardized body, for it ironically unveils the inherent disproportions of garments belonging to a body metonymically calling into question an idealized body of the doll. Several collections (*A/W 1994-1995*, *S/S 1999*) contain in fact pieces that are reproduced from a doll's wardrobe and are subsequently enlarged to human proportions, so

that the disproportion of the details is evident in the enlargement. This procedure results in gigantic zippers, push buttons, oversized patterns and extreme thick wool. In such a way, Margiela's practice of fashion questions the relationship between the means and the representation of the means, between realism and 'real', between reality and representation. The clothes produced for the line a *Doll's Wardrobe* are in fact faithfully 'translated' from doll proportions to human size, with the effect of producing an exaggeration of the details. As Alistair O'Neill highlights, 'Margiela points to the slippage between seeing an outfit and wearing it by showing how something is lost and something poetic is found in the translation'.¹⁸ By reversing the relation between body and clothes, and by playing with an idealized body, Margiela problematizes the traditional oppositions between 'subject' and 'object', 'body' and 'garment'. This peculiar manipulating, as Barbara Vinken points out, contributes to revealing how fashion 'brought the ideal to life, an ideal which, however, was such located out of time, untouched, like the dummy, by the decline to which the flesh is subject'.¹⁹

4. Ethics of Deconstruction Fashion

The disposition to seek, 'like the philosophical project of deconstruction, to rethink the formal logic of dress itself'²⁰ has become, through the decades, the motif that characteristically defines the practice of fashion pursued by 'deconstructivist' designers. Fashion, art, and a critical reflection on consumer culture are strictly intertwined in their *oeuvres*, which question our attitude towards time as well as the contemporary view of fashion, marked by a vivid tension between transitoriness and persistence.²¹

The particular ethic driving the work of such designers is clearly motivated by the refusal to be pervaded by the idea that fashion has to change and reinvent itself continuously. Yamamoto's, Kawakubo's, Margiela's designs seem in fact to neglect any temporary and yet constricting tendency or direction. In replicating clothes form the past, and in reassembling clothing and fabrics from past times, for instance, they perform these reproductions showing that there is no objective standpoint, outside history, from which ideas, old concepts, as well as their manifestations, can be dismantled, repeated, or reinterpreted.²² The constant dialogue with the past is precisely what allows Yamamoto, Kawakubo, Margiela, among the others, to point to new landscapes.

A 'semiotic blur'²³ has for long characterized fashion, in which incessant mutations take place in such a way that can hardly be interpreted or fixed in the collective consciousness. The spiral of consumerism is encouraged and enhanced by these fast and endless substitutions of imagery. The work of designers practicing deconstruction is motivated by the awareness that what is present always refers back to what is not *hic et nunc*, and hence creation does not happen in an empty blank dimension. These designers might be mainly known for their radical interpretation of fashion, but a thorough knowledge of fashion history is what

precisely forms the base of their creativity. As Alison Gill remarks in particular about Margiela, the Maison's *oeuvre* is both 'a critique of fashion's impossibility, against its own rhetoric, to be 'innovative', while at the same time showing its dependence on the history of fashion'. These words best summarize a significant feature that is definitely common to all designers practicing deconstruction.²⁴

In not being dictated by any particular trend, deconstruction fashion seems to address a provocation to consumer culture, in which the process of production is separated from consumption. The theorist Herbert Blau has even dared to suggest that, 'if there is a politics of fashion, leaning left or right, the practice of deconstruction, as it was in the early nineties, might have been considered the last anti-aesthetic gesture of the socialists style'.²⁵ When they first came to prominence, designers pursuing deconstruction were revolting against the glamour that permeated the previous decade of fashion, in favour of what Blau calls an 'anaplasia of dress'.²⁶ While a manifest political intention in their works might be a too strong claim, their critical impetus towards fashion and culture cannot be underestimated.

Far from being an evasion, or a product of pure fantasy, deconstruction fashion has always been characterized by a critical nuance, as it tends to revolt against fashion in its most oppressive and glamorous form. However, it does not simply aim at replacing the old fashion parameters it tries to dismantle with new ones. What it does, in fact, is working for disclosing and showing 'other' possibilities. Emblematic, in this respect, is the case of Margiela's reconstructions stemming from raw materials.

The deconstruction and reconstruction of clothing has been a leitmotif of Maison Martin Margiela's repertoire for years. This finds its most significant expression in the 'Artisanal Collection', for which existing clothes or humble materials, such as plastic or paper, are re-worked in order to create new garments and accessories. The collection could be interpreted as the Maison's answer to the haute couture of the classic fashion system. The unique items of the Artisanal Line are fabricated in the same labour-intensive way as in haute couture. The term 'luxury', however, undergoes here a semantic shift: it does not mean precious materials, but rather indicates the hours worked in the production of each piece. In this way Margiela unmasks human labour as the real source of the value of a garment. Recycling, nevertheless, is not the ultimate scope of Margiela's fashion, which has even been compared, not appropriately, to Italian *arte povera*, or considered as a forerunner of eco-fashion.²⁷ Borrowing, altering, recollecting and manipulating become for Margiela a cultural and critical practice that deconstructs couture techniques and gives life to new formations by reassembling old clothing and raw materials. Caroline Evans draws a parallel between Margiela's practice of fashion and the activity of *bricoleurs* in the early nineteenth century:

Margiela's transformations of abject materials in the world of high fashion mark him out as a kind of golden dustman or ragpicker, recalling Baudelaire's analogy between the Parisian ragpicker and the poet in his poem 'Le Vin de Chiffonniers' (The Ragpickers' Wine). Like Baudelaire's nineteenth-century poet-ragpicker who, although 'marginal to the industrial process...recovered cultural refuse for exchange value', Margiela scavenged and revitalised moribund material and turned rubbish back into the commodity form.²⁸

Margiela's practice of recollecting and reconstructing, rather than being an explicit critique to the consumer culture and the fashion system, is an index of the awareness that any critical fashion is always anchored in a specific moment of capitalistic production, consumption and technological change. It *performs* a critical reflection on fashion, unmasking its crystallized myths and commercial roots.²⁹ The uncanny re-creations that finally emerge are characterized by a respectful attitude, and by the belief that individuality and contingency cannot be replicated, or better, that any replication would bear a significant difference.

By declaring the precise amount of hours required for the production of each piece, Margiela overcomes the alienation that for Karl Marx defines the relationship between the consumer and the product.³⁰ Through the declaration of the labour intensive production Maison Martin Margiela seems to temporarily reconcile the consumer with the process of production. It doing so, it remarks its debt towards the tradition and history of fashion, while at the same time it deconstructs the mechanisms of fascination and re-discusses our assumptions regarding fashion.

Deconstruction fashion is not a simple and strategic reversal of categories. At the origin of such a practice there is always the consciousness that it can never constitute an independently and self-enclosed system of operative concepts. Just as there is no language, or no critical discourse, so vigilant or self-aware that it can effectively escape the condition placed upon its own prehistory and ruling metaphysics, there is no creation, or re-creation, allegedly pure or innocent. Any creation, as well as any critique, is always a situated practice. Hence, deconstruction fashion itself is always already *in*-deconstruction.

As Jacques Derrida has incessantly warned, deconstruction is not an operation that supervenes afterwards, from the outside. In an interview with directors Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering, he says: 'you find it already in the thing itself. It is not a tool to be applied. It is always already at work in the thing 'we' deconstruct'.³¹ Through the deconstructing practice, and the exposure of the means that lead to the formation of certain idealized parameters, some designers have masterfully managed to problematize and re-think a series of opposing pairs (i.e. original-derived, subject-object, nature-culture, absence-presence, inside-outside), whose

stronghold has for long been un-attacked. Through their questioning designs, they suggest, time and again, that everything can be re-interpreted and re-constructed differently. This uninterrupted movement from the finitude of the materiality to the infinite interpretation is what allows designers practicing deconstruction to listen to the voice of historical tradition, in a dialogue that extends to the present and discloses other possibilities of understanding. Deconstruction fashion seems then to dwell in a place that is neither inside nor outside the fashion scenario, but stands always already on the edge or, in Derridean words, ‘*au bord*’.

Notes

¹ Before Derrida, Nietzsche has denounced the rigid and deathly regularity of the metaphysical heritage, which he compares to a ‘Roman columbarium’, *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, W. Kaufmann (ed), Viking Penguin Inc, New York, 1976. On the connections between Derrida’s work and Nietzsche, as well as Freud and Heidegger, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s preface to J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G.C. Spivak, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD and London, 1976.

² M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, Harper & Row, New York, 1962.

³ *Deconstruction, II*, A. Papadakis (ed), Architecture Design, London, 1999, p. 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7. In the essay ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’, Derrida warns: ‘repetitions, substitutions, transformations, and permutations are always taken from a history of meaning [*sens*] – that is, in a word, a history – whose origin may always be reawakened or whose end may always be anticipated in the form of presence’, in *Writing and Difference*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1978, p. 279.

⁵ N. Sarup, *Post-Structuralism and Post-Modernism*, Harvester and Wheatsheaf, Hertfordshire, 1988, p. 36.

⁶ *Deconstruction, II*, op. cit., p. 8.

⁷ Deyan Sudjic reckons that a significant role in the impression that Kawakubo made in the western scenario of the early 1980s was the ‘perceived exoticism’ of Japanese designers. D. Sudjic, *Rei Kawakubo and Comme des Garçons*, Fourth Estate and Wordsearch, A Blueprint Monograph, London, 1990, p. 84.

⁸ F. Baudot, *Yohji Yamamoto*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1997, p. 10.

⁹ A.M. Spindler, ‘Coming Apart’, *The New York Times*, July 25th, 1993.

¹⁰ According to Mary McLeod, the term ‘deconstructionist’ ‘entered the vocabulary of fashion shortly after the Museum of Modern Art’s Deconstructivist Architecture show in 1988’, M. McLeod, ‘Undressing Architecture: Fashion, Gender and Modernity’, *Architecture: In Fashion*, D. Fausch, P. Singley, R. El-Khoury, and Z. Efrat (eds), Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1994, p. 92.

¹¹ Herbert Blau recalls that ‘the rip, the tear, the wound that we associate with modernist wound was a factor in the sartorial mutilations of *Commes des Garçons* some years before, when the notion of rending fabrics was still (or again) a radical gesture – in the case of Rei Kawabuko’s designs, not only radical, but stylishly perverse.’ *Nothing in Itself*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1999, p. 177.

¹² Spindler, loc. cit.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ E. Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, London, 1985, p. 250.

¹⁵ Sudjic, op. cit., p. 54.

¹⁶ Baudot, op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁷ Concerning the collaboration between Rei Kawakubo and artist Cindy Sherman, see H. Loreck, ‘De/Constructing Fashion/Fashions of Deconstruction: Cindy Sherman’s Fashion Photographs’, *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, Vol. 6, Iss. 3, pp. 255-276.

¹⁸ A. O’Neill, ‘Imagining Fashion, Helmut Lang & Maison Martin Margiela’, *Radical Fashion*, C. Wilcox (ed), V&A Publications, London, 2001, p. 45.

¹⁹ B. Vinken, *Fashion Zeitgeist*, Berg, Oxford-New York, 2005, p. 150. In grasping the peculiarity of Margiela’s *oeuvre*, the author remarks: ‘that the body is not a natural given but rather a construct is what Maison Martin Margiela’s fashion offers to our gaze through ever-new variations’, B. Vinken, ‘The New Nude’, *Maison Martin Margiela ‘20’: The Exhibition*, Mode Museum Provincie Antwerpen, Antwerp, 2008, p. 112.

²⁰ C. Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2003, p. 250.

²¹ Moreover, in contrast with the cult status of fashion designers of the 1980s and the 1990s, Kawakubo, Margiela and Yamamoto use to draw attention on their work and to present the label as a result of a collective work, rather than an extension of the designer’s individuality.

²² Barbara Vinken acutely remarks: ‘the old is not excluded and denied but is made into the material of the clothes. It is not the matter of historicism, a revival of a past epoch, but an inscribing of traces of mortality... The traces of use, the time of their making, the history of clothing are inscribed into the creations: they absorb time, decline, age into themselves’, B. Vinken, ‘Fashion: Art of Dying, Art of Living’, *Fashion and Imagination: About Clothes and Art*, J. Brand, J. Teunissen and C. de Muijnck (eds), ArtEZ Press, Arnhem, 2009, p. 87.

²³ Concerning this aspect of fashion he argues: ‘today we have reached such a level of cultural commodification that the duplicity of the sign, that is, that the product might actually ‘mean’ something, can be done away with’, I. Chambers, ‘Maps for the Metropolis: A Possible Guide to the Present’, *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1987, p. 2.

²⁴ In W. Wenders' documentary film 'Notebook on Cities and Clothes' (1989), Y. Yamamoto says: 'I know myself in the present that is dragging the past. This is all I understand'.

²⁵ For a critique of Margiela's work, as an exclusively aesthetic experience, see A. Ross (ed), *No Sweat: Fashion, Free Trade and the Rights of Garment Workers*, Verso, New York and London, 1997.

²⁶ 'Anaplasia' is a medical term that means a reversion of differentiations in cells and is characteristic of malign neoplasm (tumours). H. Blau, *Nothing in Itself*, p. 175.

²⁷ See S. O'Shea, 'Recycling: An all-New Fabrication of Style', *Elle*, 7, 1991.

²⁸ C. Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity, and Deathliness*, pp. 249-250.

²⁹ In discussing the position of such designers within the fashion system, Caroline Evans observes that 'there is a paradox in this type of design: however oppositional or experimental it might be, it remains locked... into the very capitalistic system whose cycles of production and consumption it might be seen to be criticising'. Nevertheless what cannot be underestimated is that 'this type of fashion design makes theatre of out of material that spoke to us, reaching parts that most polemicists cannot reach, but only in the realm of symbolic', *Ibid.*, p. 262.

³⁰ K. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. B. Fowkes, Penguin Books, London, 1979, pp. 163-177.

³¹ 'Derrida – The Movie', documentary by K. Dick and A. Ziering (2002).

Bibliography

Baudot, F., *Yohji Yamamoto*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1997.

Blau, H., *Nothing in Itself*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1999.

Brunette P. and Wills D. (eds), *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994.

Carrol, D., *Paraesthetic*. Methuen, New York, 1987.

Clark, J., *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back*. V&A Publishing, London, 2005.

Connor, S., *Postmodernist Culture*. Blackwell Ltd., Oxford, 1989.

Culler, J., *Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1983.

-
- De La Haye, A., *The Cutting Edge: 50 Years of British Fashion*. V&A Publications, London, 1997.
- Derrida, J., *Glas*. trans. Leavey, J.P. and Rand, R., University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1986.
- , ‘Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy’. *SEMLA*. Vol. 23, 1982.
- , *Of Grammatology*. trans. Spivak, G.C., John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD and London, 1976.
- , ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’. *Writing and Difference*. trans. Bass, A., Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1978.
- , *The Post-Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*. trans. Bass, A., Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1987.
- , *The Truth in Painting*. trans. Bennington G. and McLeod, I., Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1987.
- Evans, C., *Fashion at the Edge*. Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2003.
- , ‘The Golden Dustman: A Critical Evaluation of the Work of Martin Margiela and a Review of *Martin Margiela: Exhibition (9/4/1615)*’. *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*. Vol. 2, Iss. 1, 1998.
- Frankel, S., *Visionaires: Interviews with Fashion Designers*. V&A Publications, London, 2001.
- Gill, A., ‘Deconstruction Fashion: The Making of Unfinished, Decomposing and Re-Assembled Clothes’. *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*. Vol. 2, Iss. 1, 1998.
- Grand, F., *COMME des GARÇONS*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1998.
- Heidegger, M., *Being and Time*. trans. Macquarrie J. and Robinson, E., Harper & Row, New York, 1962.

Loreck, H., 'De/Constructing Fashion/Fashions of Deconstruction: Cindy Sherman's Fashion Photographs'. *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*. Vol. 6, Iss. 3, pp. 255-276.

MAISON MARTIN MARGIELA: Street, Special Edition. Vols. 1 & 2, 1999.

MAISON MARTIN MARGIELA: '20' The Exhibition. Mode Museum Provincie Antwerpen, Antwerp, 2008.

Marx, K., *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. trans. Fowkes, B., Penguin Books, London, 1979.

McLeod, M., *Undressing Architecture: Fashion, Gender and Modernity. Architecture: In Fashion*. Fausch, D., Singley, P., El-Khoury, R. and Efrat, Z. (eds), Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1994.

Nietzsche, F.W., *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*. Kaufmann, W. (ed), Viking Penguin Inc, New York, 1976.

Norris, C., *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*. Methuen, London, 1982.

Norris C. and Benjamin A., *What is Deconstruction?*. St. Martin Press, Academy Editions, London, 1988.

O'Shea, S., 'Recycling: An All-New Fabrication of Style'. *Elle*. 1991.

Papadakis, A. (ed), *Deconstruction, II*. Architecture Design, London, 1999.

Polhemus T. and Proctor L., *Fashion and Anti Fashion*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1978.

Ross, A. (ed), *No Sweat: Fashion, Free Trade and the Rights of Garment Workers*. Verso, London, 1997.

Sarup, N., *Post-Structuralism and Post-Modernism*. Harvester and Wheatsheaf, Hertfordshire, 1988.

Spindler, A.M., 'Coming Apart'. *The New York Times*. July 25, 1993.

Vinken, B., *Fashion Zeitgeist*. Berg, Oxford-New York, 2005.

—, 'Fashion: Art of Dying, Art of Living'. *Fashion and Imagination: About Clothes and Art*. Brand, J., Teunissen, J. and de Muijnck, C. (eds), ArtEZ Press, Arnhem, 2009.

Wilcox, C. (ed), *Radical Fashion*. V&A Publications, London, 2001.

Wilson, E., *Adorned in Dreams*. I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd, London, 1985.

Flavia Loscialpo Phil. PhD. (Sapienza University of Rome). She works and lives in London, where she is a visiting post-doctoral fellow at King's College. Her areas of research are philosophy of language, Wittgenstein, deconstruction, curation and visual culture.