Shylin Ferrera

COMD3504

Prof. Matthew Lange

<div align="center">Essay 1:</div>

<div align="center">Rei Kawakubo **Body Meets Dress--Dress Meets Body**</div>

Rei Kawakubo, not an artist, as she often likes to state. A "punk", against the establishment with the hopes of making something new. Yet what is truly "new" in the world of fashion? What separates the artist from the punk? For Kawakubo, it is the pursuit of something New, of something more than her last design. For this, I am going to be focusing on Rei Kawakubo's Spring 1997 collection titled _Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body,_ also known as _lumps and bumps_. More specifically, I'd like to focus on this ensemble.

Body Meets Dress--Dress Meets Body / Ensemble (bodice and skirt). 1997 (image taken from Moma, Museum of Modern art)

Designers have spent years attempting to "make the female body look good", yet what Kawakubo has sought to achieve is making the female look again. Developed in Spring/Summer 1997, the *Body Meets Dress--Dress Meets Body* collection was Kawakubo's pursuit in 'rethinking the body' (MoMu) . Kawakubo believes that the body, as well as the body of the dress, has no limitations. Although she offers little insight into her mind, people all over have interpreted this collection as a statement on physical desire. The padding feels as though it is out of bounds, breaking through the "traditional" frame of what a women's body should be. It is a true testament of the avant-garde to be so unusual in a traditional sense. Yet, it is this experimental piece that challenges what "unusual" should be.

There is a message here that is more than purely visual. The fact that the masses relabeled this entire collection as *lumps and bumps* is a testament to that. A testament to how they felt, perceived, and inevitably defined her collection in a way that suited them. As Helen Armstrong states in *Graphic Design Theory: Readings from the Field (2009)*, there is an inherent social responsibility when producing anything (Armstrong 13). What you create and release into the world is subject to opinion. Whether its specific intention was to incite equally specific opinions, no one, not even its creator, can account for the reaction of the masses. Kawakubo saw Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body, and the public saw Lumps and Bumps.

The reason I chose the specific ensemble I did, was for its implications as well as it being the most overt display of Kawakubo's message. As El Lissitzky of *Our Book* remarks, is in a communication is in a league of its own (Armstrong 26). It doesn't stop to respect the past, to cater to traditions, or to stick to one form. Communication swallows everything around it despite the medium, method, or platform, and the same can be said for Kawakubo's work. She communicates her message through her garments, the form is little more than a vessel. It is less

about the bodice and skirt and more so what they carry. In a sense, the shadow matters more than the piece itself.

Body Meets Dress--Dress Meets Body Collection. (Image taken from HiUan Kang Haaga)

As previously stated, the dress subverts expectations, rejecting the idealized perfect female figure. Even the pattern itself, Gingham, is a classic symbol of a retro-style domestic woman. A recognizable image of a housewife and a symbol of femineity, yet, the (perceived) grotesque lumps break the frame. No longer does your eyes follow smooth curves, it staggers and sways to padding. This concept is especially more impactful when considering who made these pieces, a woman. Yes, it is Rei Kawakubo, but would the effect be the same if it were a man behind it. As Mike Monteiro of a Designer's Code of Ethics states, "If you want to know

how women would use something, you're designing get a woman on the team that's designing

it." The core idea is the same, Kawakubo is a woman addressing woman issues and that is

impactful.

Rei Kawakubo's, _Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body_ is an avant-garde take on the

societal view of the idealized feminine form and femininity. Taking an innovative approach, she

pushed the boundaries of traditional fashion design in a thoughtful and provoking matter. She put

her message, her statement, before "aesthetics". To Kawakubo, it was not about creating a

beautiful piece, rather, questioning what exactly beauty is. In the style of El Lissitzky, she

managed to put "function over form", she thought about the purpose of her design before the

clothes themself in a truly insightful way.

Work Cited

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