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Léopold Lambert

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DRESS BECOMES BODY: 
FASHIONING THE 
FORCE OF FORM 

BY ERIN MANNING

My intention is not to make clothes.¹
Rei Kawakubo

Some shapes hold things apart
Madeline Gins

“Cut to invent anew,” proposes Rei Kawakubo, owner and designer of the fashion label Comme des Garçons. “Make an abstract image.” “Break the idea of clothes.”

“Break the idea of clothes,” has been Kawakubo’s call for over 40 years, a call that has motivated the creation of some of the most intriguing clothing of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, opening up the field of fashion to an architectural potential perhaps unprecedented. With Kawakubo’s insistence that clothes are not a predetermined category, but a proposition according to which a body is invited to continuously reinvent itself, she has led the way toward a textile-based architecting of experience. In this regard, Kawakubo has pushed and continues to push the Spinozist mantra “we know not what a body can do” to its limit, recasting not only the realm of fashion but the way fashion situates itself in relation to other practices, especially that of architecture.²

That Kawakubo’s creations are sculptural is well-known, but they are also more than that. They are what Madeline Gins and Arakawa would call procedural architectures. Procedural architectures are propositional: it is what they can do that is foregrounded. To say that fashion is architectural is often to speak of it in representational terms. Despite the visible architectonics of Kawakubo’s designs, to focus solely on their form would be reductive: Kawakubo’s textile creations function architecturally in ways that far exceed representation.

¹ Interview with Rei Kawakubo on wwd.com (November 19, 2012)
They are productive. It is in this sense that they are procedural. Arakawa and Gins define procedural architectures as “overlapping tissues of density.” Architecture understood this way must be considered beyond the built environment. Procedural architecture is “a world-constituting procedure.” It builds worlds more so than buildings, its mandate to directly cleave the biosphere, or, in Arakawa and Gins’ vocabulary “to bioscleave.” This bioscleave procedural architecture fashions never stops cleaving. It is an active, procedural milieu that remains in-act as a persistent reminder that what sites life also cleaves the environment, opening it to its differential. Cleaving cuts open the field of experience. This cut has the effect of reorienting the field: the cleave, like decision in Whitehead, is the decisional force which activates, which tweaks the in-act toward the punctual creation of life-living.

A procedural approach depends on the rigour of the proposition that sets it in motion. An architecture is procedural if it is capable of opening up a field of relation or an emergent ecology such that it can activate the conditions for the continued interplay that keeps life in the process of self-invention. Most architectures, Arakawa and Gins argue, do anything but, deintensifying life rather than opening it to its potential difference. We follow their routes, we embrace their limits, and in so doing our lives become predictably oriented by them. What if instead we built toward the density of experience, beginning not with form but with textures of life-living, embracing the force of form that is the lively interstice of environment and body? What if instead of assuming that the built environment contained the pre-constituted body, we interested ourselves in the amalgam of their co-constitution?

The challenge is that the procedures of a procedural architecture must continuously be reinvented to stay apace with the architecting of experience. No procedure is failsafe, nor does one procedure work in all similar circumstances. A procedure must be crafted with care, must be relevant to the conditions already at hand, must be capable of activating the ecology of which it is part, must have enough longevity to leave a trace. More procedures fail than succeed. But this is part of their necessity, that they put us in the way of experimentation. A procedure is always connected to a constraint. At its best, this constraint is enabling. It asks of habit that it activate its conditions of possibility. From here, the procedure pushes possibility to its limit, excavating at the edges where possibility and potential meet. This is where the procedure most often fails: habits die hard, including our habits of reconstructing the already-known. A procedural architecting will not be capable of opening up the field of experience if the manner of opening contains the habit fully-formed. What is essen-

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tial is to work from the habit’s edging into experience, experimenting with the ways a habit’s repetition activates minor departures from the norm, keeping in mind that the only habit which holds on absolutely to its form is the habit of reducing experience to the what was.

With the work of Rei Kawakubo, I want to explore how procedural architecture activates minor gestures within fashion. Where the proposition, following Whitehead, is the lure that gets a process on its way, and the minor gesture is the activating force in the field of relation of the work’s working, the procedural is the following-through of a set of conditions toward repeatable difference. The procedural, as Arakawa and Gins define it, is what gives the minor gesture consistency without allying it to precomposed models of formation. For the procedural is not a set of instructions. While instructions are usually organized according to a linear set, the procedure is more diagrammatic, in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense: it activates zones of intensity in fields of relation and directs a follow-through that reintensifies at every turn. Where instructions are reiterable in their form and content, producing not difference but repetition of the same, the procedure does quite the opposite: it sets a path in motion that asks to be returned to, toward different results. “Let the word ‘procedure’ stand for that which baffles us as to what it is even as it brings us world.”

Enabling Constraints ///

In the everyday, habit operates as a choreographic tool. It directs our movement, organizes our time, makes experience predictable, framing it in ways that are usually associated with comfort and well-being, two concepts that make Arakawa and Gins highly suspicious. For well-being and comfort too often keep us in the same place, a place we return to daily without much thought, a place that doesn’t encourage experimentation. This place, framed as it is by the architectures that surround us, is anything but procedural, they argue.

Despite the focus in Arakawa and Gins’ work on the necessity to break habit, to open experience to invention and surprise, there is nonetheless in their work an attentiveness to what else habit can do. For habit, as both Arakawa and Gins and Kawakubo recognize, is a mutable force. Habit directs our movements, even while it constrains other tendencies. These other tendencies, constrained as they are, can be said to still be operative in germ at the heart of habit. The challenge is to make these minor tendencies operational, thereby opening habit to its subtle multiplicity and exposing the fact that habit was never quite as stable as it seemed.

In the creating of conditions for new modes of existence, in the crafting of a procedural architecture, habit should therefore not be fully

4 Ibid.
discarded. A procedural architecting must look at habit’s repetitive pathways to see how they subtly diverge from what is perceived as their assigned choreography, finding within repetition the difference that keeps habit inventive. This difference, alive as it is with minor tendencies that keep habit from ever fully reproducing itself, is what procedural architectures make operative. As world-constituting procedures, procedural architecture works from these minor tendencies to extend experience to its full potential.

This is another way of saying that what architectural procedures do, before they create architectures, is create modes of existence. Modes of existence as Etienne Souriau defines them, are not states but passages. They are the transitory and fragile interstices of experience in the making.

Modes of existence neither emerge from nor belong to a subject. They do not define existence: they propose it. On a continuum with the Whiteheadian actual occasion, modes of existence are ecologies that activate a field of concern. This concern is active in the event itself, a concern for the world in its unfolding.

Modes of existence are less species than speciations, where speciation is understood as an emergent field of relation. They are speciations because they don’t name a state, but activate a modality that pushes existence to its intensive limit. They are speciations because they don’t fit into existence preformed but activate the minor gestures of its most potentializing edgings into experience. As such they are ecologies, ecologies that activate differential tendencies in the milieu of their co-composition. Modes of existence act, cut, reorient: they are world-constituting procedures.

Modes of existence are precarious. They emerge as they are needed and then, like actual occasions, they perish. It is not their stability that defines them, but the persuasiveness with which they affect all that comes into contact with them. This persuasiveness is what makes them compelling. It is an active participant in the event of their coming-to-be.

Modes of existence come into being through enabling constraints. They emerge out of a necessity that has a procedural tending. This necessity is enabling in the sense that it provokes new forms of process, but constrained in the sense that it occurs according to the limits of this singular junction. Each time a mode of existence comes into being, it does so “just this way,” in direct accordance with how the constraint was enabling in this singular set of conditions. And yet, just this way is always, like habit, open to deviation. Minor tendencies are everywhere present in all modes of existence.

For Rei Kawakubo, crafting enabling constraints for each new process is key to the techniques that make up her procedural architecting of experience. Kawakubo does emphasize the creative necessity of an open field for experimentation, but there is always focused attention in her practice to the quality of the constraints that delimit it. Her practice involves continuously experimenting with constraints she sets in place to see where else the process can lead, not only as regards the potential of the fabric she works with, but also with respect to the very tissues of density she takes as her matter of concern. For Kawakubo as for Arakawa and Gins, what is at stake is not simply the form the product takes. What matters is how the constraint embedded in the procedure becomes enabling of new processes.

Body and environment are for Kawakubo complicit partners in the reorientation of what textile can do. They are her palate. But neither are predefined, and importantly, she does not pretend to know, from one process to another, where the details of their co-composition will lead her: each new process requires a new enquiry into the body-environment constellation. With this as the directive that drives her practice, Kawakubo invests in the field of relation, the orientation of her practice always transdisciplinary. In the ecology of practices, she then requires that her process be invented each time anew through an emergent activation situated in the event of creation itself.

Kawakubo emphasizes that the intuitive problem, the problem that opens experience rather than seeking solutions, cannot be searched
out from beyond the bounds of a given process, cannot be found in a world preconstituted. She writes: “Going around museums and galleries, seeing films, talking to people, seeing new shops, looking at silly magazines, taking an interest in the activities of people in the street, looking at art, travelling: all these things are not useful, all these things do not help me, do not give me any direct stimulation to help my search for something new. And neither does [the] fashion history. The reason for that is that all these things above already exist.” Kawakubo is not inspired by the already existent configurations that make up our worlds. She wants to create at their interstice, in their coming-to-be: “In order to make this SS14 collection, I wanted to change the usual route within my head. I tried to look at everything I look at in a different way. I thought a way to do this was to start out with the intention of not even trying to make clothes. I tried to think and feel and see as if I wasn’t making clothes.” The enabling constraint here is clear: to work from the perspective of a new way of seeing. The intuition will emerge in the process, creating the problem in the art of time if Kawakubo doesn’t assume she already knows what fashion can do.

For Kawakubo, what is at stake is the making itself, not the making of the object. The object does not define the purpose, and cannot be subsumed to it. What she strives toward is to create a series of enabling constraints for each process that, in the ‘best case’ scenario, are procedural enough to create new modes of existence. Hers is a procedural fashioning: for each new process she invents procedures that push the very idea of what a garment can be to its limit. Kawakubo seeks not the final form, not the production of a neutral layer for a pre-existing body, but the creation of a propositional field that activates what a body can do in its co-constitution with an emergent environment.

This process of engaging with the working of the work is what Souriau calls “faire œuvre.” Like the mode of existence, which composes in the between of existence’s necessity, or existence’s persuasiveness, the œuvre à faire is the force of making that only knows itself as such after the fact, in the tense of “Oh! This is what I was looking for!” The not-knowing-in-advance is part of the procedure. For knowing is always to some degree reducible to the already-known. Habit will play a part in the process, but it must be procedurally tweaked. What emerges from the process must push the habit to its limit. The habitual carries within itself a certain degree of belief. The ecology of practices that is fashion believes, for instance, that it makes sense that a dress follow the shape of what we perceive as our body-en-

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7 Ibid.
8 Souriau, Les Différents modes d’existence suivi de L’œuvre à faire, 109.
velopes. This, we have come to learn, is how to clothe a body. We know, of course, that there have been other habits within fashion that have involved cutting cloth in ways that accentuate parts of the body in ways that are today unimaginable. We know that historically, the body-envelope has shifted in its proportions and emphases. We know that, despite the growing homogeneity of fashion across cultures, there remain cultural differences in regard to cuts, fabrics and habits of dressing. But nonetheless we tend to dwell within the realm of the imaginable.

Certainly a quota of the unimaginable continues to grace the seasonal fashion runways. But this is the crux: that the unimaginable is only to be paraded, not really to be worn—note that the bustle has not yet come back into fashion despite Yamamoto’s and Kawakubo’s best efforts! This is not to deny that each season does bring something new, and that we as consumer tend to welcome seasonal shifts in fashion. Sure, we collectively say: Lengthen and accentuate the leg with low-waisted skinny jeans! Put everyone in maternity clothes for a summer! And then, the next year: Widen the pant to accentuate the waist! Despite the normative directions of fashion’s operations — retain the proportion between waist, breast and hip! — mutability does have its place. As long as its tendings are relative to what came before, fashion’s variations are generally accepted and even welcomed.

But these are not examples of the unimaginable. They are simply small deviations from the norm. Within most contemporary fashion, difference remains relative to what came before. While change is an option, the commitment to difference tends to be constrained to possibility: difference rarely engages with true potential, with the unimaginable not-yet. This allows fashion to plan itself long in advance (designers tend to work up to two seasons ahead), holding creativity within a relatively predictable frame. We might see a change in colour, or a change in cut, but we will rarely be introduced to a completely different paradigm. The tweaking of the habit thus still remains within the realm of the habitual — it is more of a lateral stretch than a recomposition. Kawakubo does not operate this way. Against the parsing of fashion into seasons, she works procedurally, her attention not focused on the already-existent. This is the force of her procedural fashionings, that she understands that the edgings into existence of habit’s mutability are composed of the more-than of form, the more-than of the existent shapings of garment-imagination. In this regard, her work proceeds at the pace of a world-constituting procedure.

9 There also exists indigenous traditions in garment design that challenge the idea of the predefined shape of a body, inviting the body to define itself through an encounter with the fabric. These include the Indian sari, the Malay or Indonesian sarong, and the African kanga or kitenge, each of which is emergent as garment in the folding.
World-constituting never means world-constituted. To craft a procedure that is world-constituting, the fine-tuning must occur in the event — it must be immanent to the event’s coming — into-itself. Fashion that follows habit fully-formed is not doing this. It is creating according to an externally imposed normative framework. Kawakubo’s practice departs from this approach: she is very much engaged in the constitutive tendencies that open habit to its more-than. In this regard, her fashionings actively produce what Deleuze calls “a belief in the world.”

Like the world-constituting procedure, a belief in the world refuses to follow the world as given. A belief in the world is about crafting the conditions to encounter the world differently each time. Procedural architecture takes this as its mantra. To become procedural, a practice has to directly connect to habit’s mutation and, from there, create not new habits, but new incipient directionalities. These incipient directionalities will have the tendency, over time, to morph into habit. A procedural architecture must therefore be capable of activating minor gestures that continuously direct incipiency toward new modes of existence. Much tweaking is necessary to find the right balance between the static and the chaotic.

When incipiency tunes toward new modes of existence, it is because the emergent event has been mobilized in the differential of the in-act and the acting. Arakawa and Gins define this differential as “a tentative constructing toward a holding in place.” Scales and speeds coexist in this tentative fragility, reminding us that the procedural must work at differing degrees of intensity. “Everything is tentative, but some things or events have a tentativeness with a faster-running clock than others. So that there can at least be a keeping pace with bioscleeve’s tentativeness, it becomes necessary to divine how best to join events into an event-fabric, which surely involves learning to vary this speed at which one fabricates tentative constructings toward holding in place.”

To become procedural, scales and speeds must be taken up from the perspective of the event. This approach ensures that we do not fall prey to building world-constituting procedures that are simply sized and timed for human benefit. Procedures must be crafted that are capable not only of creating the conditions for an event that is perceptible to the human, that engages the human (within the scales and speeds of our own emergent bodyings), but that are also capable of fielding difference and creating openings in the continuously speciating arena of the more-than human.


12 Ibid.
In Arakawa and Gins’ writings, as in Kawakubo’s, there is sometimes the sense that the human body rears up as the starting point rather than one of many potential fields of activation within the relational milieu. And yet, a closer look at the workings of their work (including their writing, in the case of Arakawa and Gins) makes it amply apparent that it is the *event* of the work’s workings that matters. In their *faire œuvre*, in terms of what they can *do*, both Arakawa and Gins’ architectings and Kawakubo’s fashionings challenge the view that the human subject is at the stable centre of experience and that the body can be abstracted out from the complexity of the milieu:

> We do not mean to suggest that architecture exists only for the one who beholds or inhabits it, but rather that the body-in-action and the architectural surround should not be defined apart from each other, or apart from bioscleave. Architectural works can direct the body’s tentative constructing toward a holding in place, its forming in place. But it is also the case that how the body moves determines what turns out to hold together as architecture for it. ¹³

The tentativeness is in and of the body as mobile concept. A body is not a definitive form, but a tentative construction toward a holding in place. The tentativeness of all bodyings must be held onto in the creation of procedural architectures, for this is what makes the event remain open to speciating potential. The minor gesture makes ingresson into the procedure at just this intersection: the minor gesture lands onto tentativeness. In landing onto tentativeness, the minor gesture opens up the field of relation, making felt how the field is, by its very nature, co-compositional. In this tentative field of relation made felt by the minor gesture, “how the body moves determines what turns out to hold together as architecture for it.” The action does not belong to a pre-constituted body. Body is bodying, or, in Arakawa and Gins’ vocabulary, “tentative constructing toward holding in place.”

Similarly, Kawakubo does not design for a pre-existing form. She designs in the event-fabric of a reorienting of what fashioning can be. “I put parts of patterns where they don’t usually go. I break the idea of ‘clothes.’ I think about using for everything what one would normally use for one thing. Give myself limitations.”¹⁴ In Kawakubo’s practice, even the fabric, the materiality of the proposition that moves her work, becomes procedural, oriented toward a tentative encounter with emergent modes of existence that activate a bodying not yet defined. Procedurality moves materiality to its limit.

That Kawakubo’s experiments are not constrained to a focus on the garment is key: otherwise she would not be capable of pushing the

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¹³ Ibid., 50.
¹⁴ “Rei Kawakubo’s Creative Manifesto.”
material beyond its attachment to the forms vividly associated to current habits within the fashion industry. “The main pillar of my activity is making clothes, but this can never be the perfect and only vehicle of expression. I am always thinking of the total idea, and the context of everything. Fashion alone is so far from being the whole story.”

The “total idea” Kawakubo composes with includes the totality of what a material can do, the material here never abstracted from the question of bodying: when Kawakubo asks what the textile is capable of, she is necessarily also asking how a bodying exceeds its putative limits. Creativity is at work, but a creativity not restricted to the creation of either a subject or an object. When Kawakubo says “one cannot fight the battle without freedom. I think the best way to fight that battle, which equals the unyielding spirit, is in the realm of creation. That’s exactly why freedom and the spirit of defiance is the source (fountainhead) of my energy,” what is at stake is not a capitalist creation of the newest new, a new body, a new object, but the activation of the force of relation that has as its goal the fashioning of a new mode of existence. Freedom here, as in Bergson, is allied to the in-act, activated in the field of experimentation. Linked to the concept of creativity, which in Whitehead is defined as the “actualization of potentiality,” freedom in Kawakubo’s work is what makes the everyday operational.

Speaking of modes of existence, Souriau writes: “It’s a matter of invention (like you “invent” a treasure).” There is no pre-determined existence (just like the treasure only takes form “as treasure” when it is considered one). Since existence is only ever invented from within the field of relation and no two events activate the same field in the same way, modes of existence as Souriau defines them are by necessity interstitial. This interstitiability is what gives modes of existence their differential force and protects them from becoming restricted by habitual forms of life. Nonetheless, to “become a treasure,” a mode of existence needs a push toward consistency. What gives the mode of existence the consistency it needs to become itself is the minor gesture. How the minor gesture courses through and punctuates a mode of existence will define how the mode’s interstitial nature lands as event-time. A mode of existence punctuated by the minor gesture of a procedural fashioning has the consistency of a bodying alive in an ecology it carries on its back. This carrying is the carrying of an intensity momentarily harnessed in the now of a potentializing architecture. This potentializing architecture, carried as the fashion-

15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 For more on Whitehead’s concept of creativity, see Alfred North Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, New York: Free Press, 1938.
ing that is another term for the becoming-body, is always an opening to artfulness.

**Beyond Site ///**

Kawakubo resists being cornered into ethnicity. Where she comes from is an accident of birth, her husband Adrian Joffe reminds a journalist.\(^{19}\) This is not to say that the country of her birth has no effect on her practice. What it means is that with the creation of new modes of existence come new tentative ways of siting oneself. Historical memory crosses over, of course, but Kawakubo is firm: her practice is never a replaying of history as a simple score. What matters for her is not the cradle of inheritance, but the force of form that pushes experience to its limit.

This is not to underestimate the importance of what came before. As Whitehead would say, nonsensuous perception, the way pastness folds into presentness to tweak the in-act, makes a difference in the coming-to-be of what experience can do. The key is to understand that nonsensuous perception is not analogous to the carrying-over of a history fully-formed. Nonsensuous perception is an inheritance of the past in the present, an inheritance always in the midst of reinvention, of recomposition. The past is in this way always a futurity in the making. In Kawakubo’s case, one of the areas of inheritance, I believe, is a specific cultural encounter with two singular forms of spatial patterning, the kimono and the tatami. These two patternings have orientations in common: both tend toward a complexity of potential form-takings, both are minimal in their cut, preferring the simplicity of a straight edge that refuses to mould to a shape predefined, and, as a result, both are open to various interpretations of what a fashioning (of the environment, of the body) can do.

In the kimono, a garment used across genders that is cut in a way that does not conform to a given idea of pre-existing body-contours (cut beyond the length of the body, for instance, refusing to use body-dimension as a point of departure, preferring instead to foreground texture, color, the artistry of the textile itself) there is the inheritance of a different way of thinking the pattern: there is a sense of the infinite in the cut of the kimono, of the infinite line. For the kimono is not made to fit, its lines are not contouring, its cut is not first and foremost gendering (though its textures can be). How it is worn is what makes the difference, and there of course contouring and gendering both occur. But that this happens in a second stage means that the garment retains an openness to invention: as emergent patterning, the kimono evokes not shape as aligned to pre-existing form, but a processual unfolding that changes in each singular instance of dressing.

This history of an openness to the line — think the kimono as an assemblage of straight lines — an openness that at all stages of the process inquires not into the fit of the garment but into its material potential, is perhaps what gives Kawakubo the confidence to ask her pattern-makers to work collaboratively with materials before even thinking of the form they can create. She mentions, for instance, giving her pattern-makers a crumpled piece of paper with an invitation to create something beyond a form, something that is not yet clothing, not yet architecture, but a mode of existence that brings both into tentative appearance.20

The tatami, as I mentioned above, is another example of an inheritance that may have an effect on the kinds of constraints Kawakubo develops in her procedural approach. The tatami as it is used architecturally can be seen as an activator of space’s malleability: the tatami room, in a traditional Japanese context, keeps the environment bare enough that the space can become the conduit for more than one kind of activity. Furniture is kept to an absolute minimum, the space itself open to continuous reorganization. In this regard, the tatami room can be seen as an architecting of mobility for a tentative holding in place, for an experience of spacing or bodying wherein “the design process never starts and finishes.”21

Both these inheritances encourage us not to delimit Kawakubo’s creations to a superficial definition of “Japaneseness,” but to emphasize that inheritance as a nonsensuous operation has procedural potential. These inheritances, if they make a difference, do so only in the way they energize a procedure yet to be invented, opening experience in its unfolding to the discovery of the oeuvre à faire, not the work as it has been historically pre-oriented, but the work’s working in the now of its evolution.

Take the “Dress Becomes Body” (Comme des Garçons collection): the public’s response when this collection came out was to see the clothing only with respect to what it did to the preexisting body and how it aligned with or diverged from the history of fashion design. Within this contingent of responses came the unsettled gaze that wondered whether this was a collection that idealized deformity or disability, whether it was an affront to the body itself.

Such responses to the collection are in the mode of first contact. They all depend on a vocabulary of the pre-existent and on the categories available within this vocabulary. But what if we look further, taking Kawakubo’s procedural fashioning at its word. What if instead

20 Timo Rissanen, “Types and Fashion Design and Patternmaking Practice” Nordes 2 (special issue on Design Inquiries), 2007, 3.

of beginning from what we know, from the habits of fashion, we began in an encounter with tentativeness? “Persons need to be rescued from self-certainty, but they also need to put their tentativeness in precise order in relation to works of architecture.”

In the “Dress Becomes Body” collection, a shaping occurs. Why must we assume that this shaping hides a body? Why not take instead this shaping for what it is, as the event in itself, a event that includes a body-world co-composition? What if instead of assuming that the person is not the shape, we were open to a different concept of personing that included its architecting? Arakawa and Gins speak of “organism that persons.” Could this be what is at stake in “Dress Becomes Body”?

Look again, this time refusing to abstract body from shape. See the personing as the architecting and refrain from selecting out from the emergent shaping the contours of the body’s skin-envelope. See the shape for what it is: a new contouring. Acknowledge this tendency to see textile as that which covers and not as a materiality in its own right. See textile in the moving, as an active shaping of what a body can do. See textile as an ecology of practices that is not separate from the body which it clothes. And now wonder at the ways you have become capable of abstracting the one from the other (and then wonder about how you abstract the sitting body from the desk, the walking body from the street, the sleeping body from the bed).

Look again. This time see the shaping not as a still body covered with material, but as mobile architecture. Can you see the bodying beyond an image of what you consider a deformation of a preexisting shape? Can you see that the humpback, the strange shoulder-hip tumour may not prefigure the grotesque body of your horrified imagination, but might instead remind you of what you see every day as you walk around the wintry city of Montreal?

22 Gins and Arakawa, Architectural Body, 50.
Look again. Now see the tentative architectures. See the movement that was made invisible by the tendency to abstract textile from body. See the backpack, see the cross-body purse. See the puffy coat with the baby underneath, collar slightly open for its head. See what you see every day from November to March in your cold climate and wonder again why when you saw it in the subway, on the street, in the café, you didn’t see it as a disfigurement. Wonder at how quickly just yesterday you were able to see this body-dressed-for-winter as a body separate from its fashioning, at how quickly you unburdened the skin-envelope from its Michelin-Man coat. And note in surprise what Kawakubo’s work has given you: a new mode of perception. Now looks again and see not the clothing that mask a moving body, but a shape in the making that includes movement, the includes textile, that includes body, the three together an ecology that is an emergent bodying, a procedural fashioning. Note with some awe that the “Dress Becomes Body” collection is not the high and useless fashion you may have assumed it was, but a lively encounter with the everyday.

The envelope has been ruptured. We are accustomed to the act of excision, of subtraction. Parsing is what we neurotypicals are best at. We see the winter-clad body with its thick coat, the knap-sack, the heavy bag and we simply excise them from existence. We assume that the body is the shape underneath instead of the force taking form of an ecology, instead of a speciation. What else does that mean we don’t see?

The “Dress Becomes Body” collection is a world-constituting procedure for autistic perception: Kawakubo has created a shaping that refuses to celebrate the parsings that make reflective consciousness the order of the day, and she has made it available for all of us. With “Dress Becomes Body” she has introduced us to a modality of perception not so far from our everyday experience that we can’t account for it once it’s made available for perception, and yet far
enough that we perhaps realize how we’ve become distanced from the operative interstitiality of modes of existence in-forming.

Souriau has a word for the cleaving that makes operational a mode of existence: \textit{instauration}. This untranslatable word, which means to constitute, to create, to found, to inaugurate, is defined in Souriau as the capacity of the mode of existence to settle itself into the world as procedural. “A philosophy of \textit{instauration} will bring together at once the modes of the in-act and those of being, studying by which path they can be combined.”\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Instauration} directs the mode of existence toward what Whitehead calls the becoming of continuity. \textit{Instauration} is the inflection that makes felt the difference in the event. Allied to the punctuating force of the minor gesture, instauration marks the decisional cut in experience. It is here, in the activation of difference, that new modes of existence are redirected toward new forms of life-living.

The “Dress Becomes Body” collection invents a mode of existence that is in alliance with what Arakawa and Gins call “a site of sited awareness.”\textsuperscript{24} It makes felt the double articulation of the in-act and the acting at the very level of perception itself. To articulate the concept of sited awareness, Arakawa and Gins develop the concept of the landing site. The landing site seeks to articulate how a perception, a movement, a tendency, extracts itself from the wider field of experience to land \textit{just this way}. For Arakawa and Gins, this landing can be said to be an “apportioning out”: “That which is being apportioned out is in the process of landing. To be apportioned out involves being cognizant of sites. To be cognizant of a site amounts to having greeted it in some manner or to having in some way landed on it.”\textsuperscript{25} It is important to understand that the landing is not first and foremost spatial nor is it oriented by a preexisting subject or object. The siting is a bringing into relation. This bringing into relation has the capacity to dimensionalize, and when this happens, architectural tendencies in the environment are brought to the fore. But the landing site can also have other functions, working more at the level of perception, of attention, or even making felt edgings of experience that are still in germ. Arakawa and Gins write of “dancing attendance on the perceptual landing site,” of “landing sites dissolv[ing] into each other, or abut[ting], or overlap[ing], or nest[ing] within one another,” of “distributing sentience.”\textsuperscript{26} The landing site is not a location, not a point, but the tending, the abutting, the segmenting that selects out what is most persuasive at this eventful conjuncture.

\textsuperscript{23} Souriau, \textit{Les Différents modes d’existence suivi de L’œuvre à faire}, 164.
\textsuperscript{24} Gins and Arakawa, \textit{Architectural Body}, 51.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 7-9.
“Dress Becomes Body” sites awareness by creating the potential for a perceptual landing to occur differently. How perception lands has an effect on how a tentative architecting toward a holding in place bodies. In the event of “Dress Becomes Body,” the emergent shaping procedure invites perception to reorient: perception lands differently. The landing site activated by the collection is operational, it makes felt perception’s processual nature. Siting awareness in the field of relation opens perception to its neurodiverse potential. This challenges our tendency to assume that what we perceive is simply preconstituted form, opening perception to what for neurotypicals has tended to become latent. With “Dress Becomes Body,” we directly perceive the activity of shaping. Because perception lands differently, the work gives the neurotypical the rare opportunity to participate in the ecology that is autistic perception, an ecology where morphogenesis trumps form, and body becomes bodying.

In the siting of awareness activated by this and other Comme des Garçons collections, as with Arakawa and Gins’ built procedural architectures such as Bioscleave House in Long Island and the Reversible Destiny Lofts in Tokyo, what is at stake is the process of shaping that lands awareness differently. To land awareness is a way of working the work, of faire œuvre: it brings into focus not the work as such but the very procedurality of the work’s workings. This is not to say that all work by Kawakubo and Arakawa and Gins does this to the same degree. Different procedures produce different ecologies, and the same is true in reverse. While for me, for instance, Arakawa and Gins’ Tokyo lofts are capable of activating a procedural architecture that remains vital and reorienting at each juncture, I find myself less certain about Bioscleave House in Long Island. Similar materials were used in each of these two architectures, and yet what they do is divergent, it seems to me. This is likely because the fields of relation (cultural, social, environmental) are profoundly different in the two cases. Whereas in Tokyo the architectural inheritance of the tatami room brings a certain continuity to the work of Arakawa and Gins, opening habit to its mutation in a way that makes the everyday operational in new ways, in New York the house feels strangely deactivating, its hard, bumpy floor sometimes more of an affront to movement than an activator. Perhaps in New York, the house is simply too excised from the everyday, out of context and therefore procedurally not quite ready yet. This is not to say that the house has no potential, but simply to emphasize that each ecology of practices will emerge to different effect, opening up different fields of potential that will themselves always to some degree have to connect with the inheritances that come with the act of life-living.27

What is most interesting about a procedural approach, it should be clear by now, is not the final form a process might take. What is at stake is the shaping itself, how a form might be capable of remaining procedural, and even more so, how its procedurality is capable of keeping minor gestures alive. In the case above, both architectures remain procedural, but they do so to different degrees. What matters is how these degrees are taken up in experience. What matters is what new processes they enable: what new modes of existence they solicit, what minor tendencies they call forth. What matters is how the work is attended to in the modality of sited awareness, how its instauration is felt and how the work’s faire œuvre persists, persuasively. What matters is how the event continues to be procedurally capable of carrying the untimeliness of event-time — “Oh! That’s what it was!” — while operatively attending to the singularity of the event in this
iteration of its coming-to-be. For work that works does take a stand. It stands in the time in which it lands, and it makes demands on that time. It marks it. A procedural architecting, a procedural fashioning, always involve an encounter with a work that persists even as it stands, that engages with the openings of potential even as it takes its place, here and now.

This is the strangeness of the procedural as world-constituting, that it must at once be taken up in the absoluteness of its self-determination in the here and now and that it must at the same time remain open to the differential of times not yet invented. How to create conditions whereby the here and now and the necessity of time’s unfolding coexist? This might produce some anxiety. “What can I do so as not to be paced out of existence?” ask Arakawa and Gins. The only way not to be paced out of existence is to remain steadfastly in the act. For to be paced out of existence suggests being on existence’s edge and watching it go by. This only happens when there is an assumption that what matters is outside of the event, this event of life-living. If we consider our being to always be in the midst, if we consider that the body is never one, never outside, never enveloped, but always a singular speciation of an emergent ecology, there is no danger that we will be paced out of existence. But this does not mean that the immortality Arakawa and Gins make the beacon of their work will be attained. What will remain immortal is not the human body, but the procedural force that bodies, that architects, that fashions, the procedural force that sites awareness in the field of relation. What will persist, in shifting ecologies that include us but are not limited to us, is the more-than, the body as a society of molecules, a tentative construction toward a holding in place.

Modes of existence as they are crafted out of ecologies of practices are never primarily human. They are ecological, active at the interstices of what life is becoming, life understood not in terms only of the vital, but as an active vector that passes through the organic and the inorganic. Life as life-living, as force of form invented in the cut that cleaves experience, opening it to new modes of existence.

**Choreographic Architecture ///**

In addition to siting awareness, “Dress Becomes Body” architects mobility. Architecting mobility does not mean creating a site for mobility. It refers instead to a way of understanding the siting of awareness through a focus on the force of form. A choreographic architecture dances attention, siting an event in the midst of its potentiality.

28 Madeline Gins and Arakawa, unpublished paper.

When a choreographic architecture comes to the fore, what is perceived, what is lived, is not the siting of the body but the fielding of its mobility. It is here, in the differential folding of the choreographic potential of mobile architectings that fashion and architecture most readily meet. For when fashion becomes procedural what it does is assist us in attending to how a bodying is already an architecting of mobility at a different scale.

Kawakubo’s work embodies such choreographic tendencies, bringing to awareness the dance of attention active in the materiality of her textile creations. This is very apparent in her early work, often termed “deconstructive.” I draw attention to the work of the so-called deconstructive period for two reasons. First, to challenge the usage of the way the term deconstruction tends to be used in fashion, and to suggest that deconstruction, taken as an engaged rethinking of what textile can do, is still very much at work in the current collections produced by *Comme des Garçons*.30

When deconstruction is theorized in relation to Kawakubo’s work (as well as to other Japanese designers such as Yohji Yamamoto), it tends to denote the making apparent of the seams of a garment in a way that creates a conversation about the garment’s form. It foregrounds, for instance, the unfinished seams and tends to make a statement about counter-culture (emphasizing, for instance, the way

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30 It is important to emphasize that not all collections are primarily designed by Rei Kawakubo, though she does supervise the process. Junya Watanabe has been an important designer for *Comme des Garçons*, first as a patternmaker starting in 1984, and then as a designer in 1987. He started designing under his own name in 1992. Other designers include Tao Kurihara and Kei Ninomiya.
a given designer refuses to conform to *Haute Couture*’s norms). Derrida’s definition of the term takes it much further. For Derrida, deconstruction is never a method, but rather a way to return again to the act of reading or making in order to see how it stages its alliances to form, to history, to epistemology.\(^{31}\) This approach encourages an account of how the work moves, and what it can do in its incipient activity. In the case of fashion, this allows to turn not to the form itself but to the materiality of construction itself, to the ways in which the deconstructive gesture activates the force of form.

In the context of the choreographic in its relation to dance, it is always compelling, I find, to explore the share of movement that “remains,” that is “left over” in the passage from force to form. This is particularly perceptible in the work of choreographer William Forsythe. In rehearsal, Forsythe repeatedly encourages his dancers to “leave behind” the form of the movement in order to explore what exceeds its form, its representational stature. I have written about this in terms of the “what else,” asking what else movement can do in its fielding of relation? It seems to me that the “what else” is of central importance in Kawakubo’s so-called deconstructive work, a gesture that once again brings architecture and fashion together, but not in terms of scale or form, I want to argue, but in terms of what is left behind. How, for instance, has what takes shape altered, refigured, reoriented past ecologies of fashion in the making? How has its operation incited a

reengagement with inheritance? The garments portrayed in the image below from the spring-summer 2011 collection are particularly interesting in this regard. What is at stake here is not simply the making apparent of the seams of the garment’s production but a foregrounding of the immanent potentiality in the seams, at the edges, in the linings of the garment. The infinite line returns here, but where it goes is not toward the kimono. The kimono is perhaps what the form could have been. The garment below is what was left behind.

What was left behind is the “what else” of Kawakubo’s procedural fashions. This left-over share of movement-moving, the share that has not quite taken form, opens up future processes. Like the what else in Forsythe that activates the more-than of form, the what else of fashioning is what opens material to the potential of its infinite line.

It is important to emphasize that these garments (like many others), placed on display for the runways of that 2011 season, are not for direct consumption. They take the season’s garments (the works that will be sold in boutiques around the world) and emphasize their procedurality, making felt not only the tentativeness of their propositions, but the more-than, the what else, of their constructedness.

Kawakubo states repeatedly that fashion is neither the starting nor the endpoint of her research. Fashion for her is not limited to the idea of a holding-in-place of a body as pre-formed. Nor is it about deconstructing the past in the linear sense often attributed to both her work and that of other Japanese designers such as Yohji Yamamoto, nor simply, as the deconstructive vocabulary within fashion would have it, of revealing tradition and pulling it apart at the seams. It is, rather, about constructing toward a tentative holding in place, more re-constructing than de-constructing, thereby cleaving the body-concept toward an architecting that sculpts mobility more than form. That this work reveals its seams is of course necessary at times, and amongst my favourite pieces of *Comme des Garçons* are these early works, not simply because they shed and fade and show their fragility, but because they open the act of dressing to the fragile articulations of its very composition, allowing the garment to function as a lively interstice. That the garments feel alive is key to their artfulness.

Kawakubo does not work from a desk. She does not use fabric swatches. She does not sketch. She seeks no ultimate experience, no precise moment of revelation. As she says, “there is no eureka moment, there is no end to the search for something new.” Instead, she works, intuitively, problematically, to create conditions for the activating of connections heretofore unavailable to her, she constructs to make felt a relation that has not yet come to the fore. But she does not stop there. “Often in each collection, there are three or so seeds of things that come together accidentally to form what ap-
pears to everyone else as a final product, but for me it is never end-
ing.” Kawakubo continues, she persists in a serial manner, working in the interstices of what is on the way, in the art of time. “There is never a moment when I think, ‘this is working, this is clear.’ If for one second I think something is finished, the next thing would be impos-
sible to do.”32

In a procedural fashioning there can be no end to the process. This is a serial adventure with pinnacles of form that emerge along the way. The middle, the milieu of the in-act, is what is at stake. In this milieu, architectings of mobility produce tentative bodyings. Fabric shapes. But metamorphosis is what is most sought after. Kawakubo designs in interstitial seriality, always toward that which “can and cannot be found.”33 “Boundaries for an architectural body can only be suggested, never determined.”34

In the middling, everything is at stake. Remember: this is not pure process. It is replete with the becoming of continuity, with the cleav-
ings, the enabling constraints that make of process a practice. A collection must emerge, for it is from here, from the materiality of a form-taking, that the next procedure, the next dress, coat, pair of pants will invent itself.

But are these really still dresses, pants, coats? Ideally we would need a processual concept for these incipient forms. A dressing? A coating? A trousering? The same would need to be said of the procedural architectures - not a house but a housing, a lofting, a rooming, a thresholding. For procedural processes to make a difference, they must be created such that they can perform, reshape, constrain in ways unforeseeable. This is a difficult call, and often it fails. When this happens, the potentializing “dressing” returns to the habitual “dress,” the “thresholding” becomes reduced to “entryway.” In such cases the modes of existence the procedural fashioning sought to create lost the sense of their potential trajectory, becoming less a pathway than a finite project, as Souriau might say, losing the force of their incipient directionality.

The complicity here between a procedural fashioning and a proce-
dural architecting is as speculative as it is pragmatic. In either case it cannot be about the product. It has to be about how the procedure does its work, and keeps working. This is hit and miss. It requires a long and rigorous process of experimentation, of study, and a willing-
ness to begin anew without pretending to know the starting point. Re-
call Kawakubo’s constraint: begin with the belief that we don’t know

32 “Rei Kawakubo Doesn’t Sketch, Use A Desk, Or Like Being ‘Understood’.”
33 Ibid.
34 Gins and Arakawa, Architectural Body, 68.
what clothing can be. In a procedural approach nothing can be taken for granted. It is always a question of the ecology at hand, of the architecting toward mobility of an emergent bodying:

Landing site configurations articulate at least this many positions; nearnearground, nearmiddleground, nearfarground, middlenearground, middlemiddleground, middlefarground, farnearground, farr middleground, farfarground; nearmiddleground, nearfarmiddleground, middlenearmiddleground, middlenearfarground, farnearmiddleground.

But take care, Arakawa and Gins remind us, not to think of these shifting grounds as positions, for they are also "areas of an architectural body, which takes its ubiquitous cue and command from the form and features of an architectural surround, subtending all positions within the surround's confines." The environmental surround in a procedural fashioning is infinitely productive, for the starting point is topological: the body is that which folds. Without articulating it as such, I believe Kawakubo’s procedural fashioning takes this notion of the body as its starting point. The fold is where it always begins — the

35 Ibid., 71.
36 Ibid.
37 This concept is developed at more length in Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, “Just Like That: William Forsythe, Between Movement and Language,” in Thought in the Act, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.
fold of the tissue paper she gives her pattern cutter as an inspiration, the fold of the texture that constrains the scissors when she cuts, the fold that resists, that reshapes, that escapes finite form. Hers is a lifetime of research into the fold, the fold produced by the body’s bending, its kneeling, its touching, the fold of the texturing of a given piece of fabric, of the pleating so often part of her designs, the fold of the inside-out that brings the back to the fore in a garment, turning the seam on itself, the fold that resists becoming a seam, the imperceptible fold, even, of the infinite line. For it is a fold, imperceptible as it may be, that I see as the inspiration of her Autumn-Winter 2012 two-dimensional collection, a collection that strangely accentuates the body’s n-dimensionality.

A procedural architecture, in its siting of awareness at the scale of the middlenearmiddlefarground, takes the fold at its point of inflection, making apparent how the fold is the force of form the Euclidean architecture of our most normative surrounds must always build against: the fold of the hill within the landscape, of the air as it rushes against cement, creating a vortex that bends and twists, the fold of the body that moves with the building’s capacity to make space for it. To commit to a procedural approach is to commit to this fold, imperceptible as it might be, and of course to commit to how it cleaves, and then to persuasively include it, to architect at its limit, inventing new ways of colluding with it, all the while attending to the dance of attention active within the force of the event’s own procedural unfolding. For what the fold does first and foremost is remind us that the body is never one, is never outside the ecology of its environmental architecting, its nearfarmiddleground never a question of bare ontology. The body is that which folds into the architectural surround, that which folds into the architecting of mobility that sites awareness, that which folds into its own activity, that which remains infinitely serial, that which cannot but procedurally unfold. What a procedural fashioning can do is bring this tendency to its limit. Kawakubo’s procedural fashionings begin here, at this point of inflexion, architecting toward the creation of fragile modes of existence. Here, in the edging into itself of world-constituting procedures, Kawakubo designs not for the body but for a belief in the world.

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38 There is a conceptual connection between the absolute fold or infinite line described above and Deleuze and Guattari’s “abstract line.” They define an abstract line as “a line that delimits nothing, that describes no contour, that no longer goes from one point to another but instead passes between points, that is always declining from the horizontal and the vertical and deviating from the diagonal, that is constantly changing direction, a mutant line of this kind that is without outside or inside, form or background, beginning or end and that is as alive as a continuous variation — such a line is truly an abstract line, and describes a smooth space. It is not inexpressive.” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia II*, Brian Massumi (trans), London: Continuum, 2003, 498