

Victoria Salinger

Advisor: Gridley McKim-Smith

*The Pont Neuf Wrapped: Framing the Bridge, Bridging the Frame*

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Chapter 1: Wrapping the *Pont Neuf*; Wrapping the Body

Silky sandstone-colored fabric billows downward, fixed high around the middle with silver chains. Fitted at the top, meter upon meter of fabric flows freely down, carving out the shape underneath, seeming to melt into the ground. The fabric is a synthetic woven polyamide. And underneath? Not body but bridge. It is a work called *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* in which the artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude wrapped a bridge in Paris, the *Pont Neuf*, in fabric. The plans for the work began in 1975, but it took the artists ten years to get permission from the French government to do the work and to engineer the feat. Three hundred professionally hired workers began wrapping the bridge on September 22, 1985. The bridge remained wrapped for a period of two weeks. The bridge was open to the public for the duration. In fact, people were encouraged to walk over the bridge and interact with the work. The work required 40,876 square meters of fabric, 10,076 meters of rope to hold the fabric to the bridge, and 12.1 metric tons of steel chain to wrap around the base of each tower of the bridge (See <http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/pn.html> 19 September 2006).

Wrapping the bridge is analogous to clothing it, and it is no coincidence that it is possible to describe the work in terms found in fashion magazines. For the fabric around bridge and body alike serves both to protect and to ornament what is underneath. In fact, the very difficulties in writing about a transient work, one which no longer exists, is one scholarship on fashion shares with that on *The Pont Neuf Wrapped*. As such, the scholarship on *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* and its artists provides enlightening new ways to discuss the relationship between body and garment for fashion theory. In The Fashion System (1967), literary and social theorist Roland Barthes examines what he calls the “written garment” of the fashion magazines, creating a semiotic system for these ‘garments’ (3). His chosen

emphasis on fashion in language is a fitting place to begin an exploration of such writing as it relates to *The Pont Neuf Wrapped*.

Barthes begins his text by explaining his choice of the “written garment” in a section called “Introduction: Method.” In the fashion magazines he finds two different types of garments: “image-clothing” and “written garment” (3). Each has its own unique semiotic system. The units of the written garment are words, yet their structure is different from that of language. The actual garment is of yet a third type, one which is merely represented or translated by these other two (Barthes 6-7). Barthes writes: “each of these structures calls for an original analysis, and we must choose” (8). His choice of ‘method’ is one which he purports will eliminate the complications of discussing ‘real’ clothing. For, “‘real’ clothing is burdened with practical considerations (protection, modesty, adornment)... only written clothing has no practical or aesthetic function: it is entirely constituted with a view to signification” (8). Barthes chooses to discuss the written garment in order to create a ‘pure’ semiotic system without the burdens of the difficulties of discussing ‘real’ garments. This choice dissociates the (written) garment from the body and its practical concerns.

Barthes’ text is a seminal one in the emerging field of fashion theory. It is filled with pithy commentary about mass culture and fashion’s relation to the modern. Yet, there seems to be something inconsistent about fashion theory relying too heavily on a book which is not about ‘real’ garments, but the written garment. In his review of The Fashion System for the New York Times, Flint Schier notes that “Barthes’s treatment of fashion in The Fashion System is his most elaborate attempt to reveal the little worlds of meaning enclosed in each nuance of social life” (Schier 7). Fashion is, for Barthes, a convenient example at best. Thus, The Fashion System is not about real garments on another level: it is about, as the title

suggests, the fashion *system* as a system of signs, or rather it is about semiotics. Barthes' use of fashion as mere example as well as his attempt to dissociate the garment in print from the 'real' garment and moreover the garment from the body connects his work to Immanuel Kant's explication of 'ornament' in his book, Critique of Judgment (1790), a term which continually resurfaces in writing on fashion if not always in Kant's terms.

Kant gives clothing on statues as one of three examples of ornament, or rather *parergon*, the term he borrows from the Greek. In his discussion of how one makes a proper reflective (aesthetic) judgment, he argues that charm and emotion, though they may be a part of one's experience of an object, can detract from a proper judgment of taste. He includes, by way of example, the *parergon*, or ornament: "picture frames, or drapery on statues, or colonnades around magnificent buildings" (72). The *parergon* for Kant is extrinsic to the work of art itself. It is not a part of "the whole presentation of the object" in an intrinsic way (72). Thus it may be mentally separated out and disregarded in the proper judgment of taste. This, too, is an impossible choice parallel to that of Barthes. While Barthes chooses to analyze the written garment disregarding the actual garment it purportedly represents or translates as well as the body that would read such a statement or wear the garment described, Kant argues that one must choose to disregard the framing ornament/ *parergon* in judging the beauty of the object within.

The writing and methodology of these two men has continued to effect writing on fashion. The charge that fashion is ornamental, extrinsic to the body, frivolous and transient, has slowed down its emergence as a discipline or object of study. Much writing on fashion continues to make a choice like Barthes'; that is, studying the image of the garment rather than the garment itself, or studying the fashion system as a whole without reference to

individual (real) garments. There is good reason for this, for the transient and ornamental is indeed difficult to discuss. The very fact that what is fashionable is unstable, constantly changing, furthers this difficulty. *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* is difficult to write about and talk about in much the same way, and can be read as a statement for fashion theory that it must attempt to overcome these difficulties, and that Barthes' and Kant's choices are impossible ones. One cannot discuss *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* without discussing its artists or the *Pont Neuf* itself. Similarly, one cannot discuss the *ergon* (work) without the *parergon*, nor the garment without the body.

Like the fabric around the *Pont Neuf*, clothing is a boundary between the supposedly intrinsic self or body it surrounds and the outside world. On the one hand, it acts as physical protection from that world. On the other hand, it is a part of the self image projected to that world. For fashion theorist Elizabeth Wilson, dress "links the biological body to the social being, and public to private" (2). Further, "it is also a mirror held up to fix the shaky boundaries of the psychological self. It glazes the shifty identity, freezing into the certainty of an image" (59). The image of the mirror Wilson uses recalls Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, wherein the Self uses the Other as mirror in creating its own identity. The self is not a stable category but rather something which is being constantly redefined in light of its reflection in and from society. Fashion and dress, then, become a part of the performance and creation of identity.

In considering fashion as part of a performed identity, it is necessary to further define the term performance. As sociologist Joanne Entwistle argues, fashion differentiates between masculine and feminine, and the fashionable subject/body discussed in most of the literature on fashion is often an implicitly 'female' one (Entwistle 142). Thus it is necessary

to understand this performance in relation to the performance of gender. Entwistle turns to Judith Butler, who examines the terms 'sex' and 'gender' in her book, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. Butler argues that sex and gender are not natural categories but rather are culturally constructed through the repetition of acts. These performative acts do not just express a given gender for Butler but rather these acts create the very categories of gender.

Butler's notion of the performative one is based on a linguistic one: that of J. L. Austin. In How to Do Things with Words, Austin discusses a type of statement he names a performative utterance. He cites such examples as "I do" in the context of a marriage ceremony, "I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*," "I give and bequeath..." as in a will, and "I bet you..." (Austin 5). Statements such as these do not merely describe an event or report a fact. Rather, it is the uttering of the sentence itself which is the action. In saying "I name this ship..." etc., one is in fact naming the ship, not describing one's own actions. Such performative utterances as action have the power to enact a change and transform an object. When spoken at the proper time and place by the authorized individual, the language itself transforms the ship into the named *Queen Elizabeth*. For Butler, such a performance entails the inscription of gender onto the body. Reading the garment as similarly performative, the implication is that the garment acts on the body, affecting the individual's sense of self and thus his or her ability to articulate an identity or subjective "I" in language.

Fashion, then, is a part of the performance that inscribes sex and gender onto the body. The body that the garment supposedly frames or encloses is not itself a natural one. Garment and body alike are social constructs. The garment is a social construct in yet another sense: it is literally constructed by a group of people from designers to seamstresses



and workers in the fashion industry. Entwistle argues that these bodies too must be considered in a viable theory of fashion (1). In Seeing Through Clothes, art historian Anne Hollander argues that the way we *see* clothing and the body alike is always already mediated by cultural norms and assumptions. Hollander studies the representation of clothing and fabric in art, focusing on painting and sculpture. She points to examples throughout the history of art where bodies, dressed or undressed, are shaped according to ideals of beauty of the time. One such example is Francisco de Goya's *The Nude Maja*, painted circa 1800. The maja's nude body "seems to show the effects of corseting without the corset" (Hollander *Seeing Through Clothes* 91). Thus, for Hollander, even the painted nude is "dressed" in societal conventions.

Though her focus is re/presentations of the garment in art, Hollander's argument carries over to garments on real bodies as well. The way society sees the body is affected by clothing and vice versa. Perhaps it is easier, physically at least, to separate the clothing from a human body than to separate its image from that of a painted figure. Clothing can be removed. Yet, following Hollander, its affect on the perception of the body cannot. In this sense Hollander's work parallels that of Entwistle within writing on fashion. Entwistle argues that the woman cannot be separated from the clothing, and moreover, that clothing as object cannot be studied without considering the context of the bodies of those who produce, consume, and wear it.

Hollander begins her book with a section on drapery beginning with classical sculpture and moving forward in time. This is a fitting place to start for a study of clothing in art as well as of clothing, for much art and literature on and about clothing begins with or quotes from classical drapery. The imagery of drapery is a potently idealized one throughout

the history of art. From the loosely draped, rectangular garments of ancient Greece, the form of which survives in Roman and Greek sculpture, to playfully draped fabric adorning nudes or accentuating the background of paintings, drapery often connotes a sort of detached, idealized beauty. Of sculpted garments on these sculptures, Hollander notes: “the garments of these figures seem not to clothe the bodies so much as to supplement them, indicating the position but not the shape of the legs” (Hollander *Seeing Through Clothes* 3).

Philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel takes up precisely this quality of drapery in his lectures on aesthetics. He sees drapery as antithetical to modern fashion<sup>1</sup>. Whilst fashion is always changing, drapery is an unchanging classical ideal. For Hegel, the purpose of art is a spiritual one. Believing in the separation of mind and body, Hegel believed that it was the face alone which possessed spiritual expression. Thus, it was proper for the Greeks to make clothed statues (Hegel *On Drapery* 146-149). Drapery ensured that it was the head, or rather the mind it contained, and all its proper spiritual connotations, that was the focus of attention. Neither was the body something of which to be ashamed. Drapery allowed the *form* of the body to be seen, without the distractions of the naked body, or of modern clothing. Modern clothing could not serve the same purpose, for in it, one does not see “the fine free, and living contours of the body” (149), but rather the garment itself. Instead of seeing the unitary beautiful free curves of the body, one sees pieced materials of fabric.

In his focus on form, Hegel parallels Kant’s formulation of drapery on statues as ornament. For Kant, such ornamentation is proper only inasmuch as it enhances one’s judgment of an object through form alone. “On the other hand, if the ornament itself does not consist in beautiful form but is merely attached, [...] then it impairs genuine beauty and is called *finery*” (Kant 72). For Hegel, drapery on statues enhances the organic beauty of the

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<sup>1</sup>‘Modern’ clothing for Hegel was post-Enlightenment, nineteenth century.

human form, idealizes it, and hides its imperfections. The focus is on the form within, not the ornamentation itself, making drapery ‘proper’ both in Hegel’s sense and in Kant’s. Yet, Hegel concedes that modern fashion must be as it is, for practical concerns of mobility (Hegel On Drapery 149).

A discussion of modern fashion may be enhanced by considering these formulations of dress as ornament. To get dressed is to adorn or ornament the body, just as to wrap fabric around a bridge is to ornament it in attempts to temporarily aesthetically enhance it.

Anthropologists of fashion have argued that all cultures ‘dress’ the body in some way, be it through clothes or through body paint or jewelry (Entwistle 6). Anything put on, against, or around the body can thus be viewed as ornament (*parergon*). A simple leap, then, to clothing on (around) a bridge, or on a live, human body? Or is there something more complicated about the relationship between body and garment, a performed subjective identity in which fabric and flesh cannot be dissociated?

For Charles Baudelaire, the relationship between the live human body and the otherwise inanimate fabric is a unique and complex one. In “The Painter of Modern Life,” he writes: “living flesh imparted a flowing movement to what seems to us too stiff” (2). Further, “everything that adorns women, everything that serves to show off her beauty, is part of herself” (30). For Baudelaire, the clothing that ornaments the woman’s body is inextricable from the complete image that is woman. Together, woman and garment are beautiful and full of life. Just as the woman needs the garment to be fully ‘dressed,’ the garment needs the woman to be fully alive. Worn on a woman’s body, the garment moves flowingly with the woman. The relationship between woman (body) and garment that Baudelaire sets up is a reciprocal one. On the one hand, the woman needs clothes to be

complete. But just as the woman needs the garment, so does the garment need the woman, to give it life.

Just as it is impossible to understand the garment without the body that wears it, so is it impossible to understand the garment without the society that constructs it as fashionable. Paris is a fitting place to begin exploring the latter relationship, for Paris is not only the home of the *Pont Neuf* but also an important center of fashion. In Paris Fashion: A Cultural History, costume historian Valerie Steele traces the history of Parisian fashion and its maintenance of the title ‘fashion capital.’ She argues that Paris maintains power over the fashion industry even in an increasingly global economy because of unique cultural factors of the city. Fashion is not just an industry in Paris; it is a way of life. Steele points to fashion’s role in the French Revolution as an indicator of the cultural importance of fashion. Seemingly small details about the way one dressed bespoke a certain class, and thus a certain side in the revolution. Refusing aristocratic norms of dress by wearing a certain type of pant, or even changing details like trim became a symbolic statement. Dressing too well or too poorly became dangerous. Fashion, far from the frivolity with which it is sometimes associated, became literally revolutionary (Steele 43-44).

The French have a unique understanding of the cultural power fashion holds, Steele argues, one which permeates their writing. She cites the influence of and writings on fashion by French authors including Baudelaire, Honoré de Balzac, and Louis Sebastien Mercier. These writers saw a relationship between fashion and modernity, understanding the power of the ephemeral. They created a veritable philosophy of fashion. Paris’ well-structured fashion industry and historical precedent can only partially explain its success in the contemporary fashion world. Steele argues that “at least as important is the depth and

sophistication of Parisian fashion culture” – a culture written about and created by authors such as Baudelaire (289). The ornamental and transient nature of fashion is not something to be defended against, but rather something to be celebrated. Baudelaire and his contemporaries celebrated this connection between the transient and the speed of modern life.

The garment bridges between the individual body and the society in which it is constructed. It also acts as a temporal bridge, as Baudelaire understood and as Steele and others later point out, between the past and the present. For what is fashionable must make a claim to be so presently by defining itself against the fashionable of the past. As fashion trends change, new clothes replace old ones before they become un-wearable, on the runways and in individual homes. Even if this were not so, clothing would retain a degree of impermanence or transience due to its medium of fabric. Fabric rots or wears out; it discolors; it disintegrates. People grow out of clothing. In his indictment of consumer capitalism, “Conspicuous Consumption,” economist Thorstein Veblen argues that the practice of replacing clothes before they are worn out (a relatively new phenomenon when he was writing in the late nineteenth century) is a symptom of capitalism. Consumer culture was, for him, a means of status marker for the wealthy. Thus dress becomes a status marker for those who can afford to be constantly “in fashion” as trends change increasingly rapidly.

Theories on fashion in Veblen’s time often invoked Marxist, class-based arguments. What is fashionable is defined and set apart by the wealthiest classes. The lower classes attempt to emulate what is ‘fashionable,’ but once they succeed, the trendsetting upper classes again change what is fashionable, defining it against the ‘unfashionable’ dress of the masses. The formerly fashionable becomes unfashionable and the cycle begins again. Even

after some of Veblen's class-based argument became outdated, defining the fashionable against an unfashionable remained. Barthes' semiotic approach to the fashion system mandates not only that the fashionable be defined in opposition to the unfashionable, but that the unfashionable is an unspeakable, implicit opposition. Sociologist Georg Simmel uses similar logic to Veblen to argue that fashion undergoes a constant cycle of death and rebirth. A garment or style is always *becoming* fashionable, but once it reaches that status, that very status is its own undoing. For him, the cyclic nature of fashion embodies beginning and end simultaneously, and thus "fashion always occupies the dividing-line between the past and the future" (295).

Chapter 2: The *Parergon* and the Boundaries of the Artwork

Fashion as theorized by Simmel and Veblen, as well as by Baudelaire and his French contemporaries cited by Steele, shares with *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* these multiple levels of transience. On the one hand, they share the transience inherent to the medium of fabric. On the other, like the unfashionable garment, the wrapping around the *Pont Neuf* was removed long before the fabric began to show its wear. This instability and tendency towards rapid change makes choosing a verb tense in writing about fashion and *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* difficult. In fashion, it is at least in part this difficulty which makes Barthes choose to write about the “written garment.” For Barthes,

Clothing “in print” provides the analyst what human languages deny the linguist: a pure synchrony; the synchrony of Fashion changes abruptly each year, but during the year it is absolutely stable; by studying the clothing in magazines, it is possible to study a state of Fashion without having to cut it artificially, as a linguist must cut the tangled continuum of messages (8).

Thus Barthes hopes to get around the difficulties of constantly changing fashion by focusing a period of time (a year or season) small enough that fashion is stable in that period. When one reads in a magazine “this garment is fashionable,” that statement is true even if the magazine is twenty years old and the garment hopelessly outdated according to the present season.

The case for *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* is still more complex. One of the first guidelines one learns in writing about art and literature is that one always discusses the work in the present tense. But what if the work no longer exists? Or perhaps *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* still does exist, in cultural memory, in film, in photographs, and in preparatory sketches made by Christo. In any case, whether or not the work still exists in some sense, the *Pont Neuf* is no longer physically wrapped in fabric. Even if one writes about the work *The*

*Pont Neuf Wrapped* in the present tense, one must switch into the past tense to discuss the *Pont Neuf*, wrapped. The distinction between the two is subtle in writing, near impossible to discern in speech.

This linguistic difficulty leads to further questions about the nature of the work, *The Pont Neuf Wrapped*. Namely, what precisely is the work of art? Christo and Jeanne-Claude argue that wrapping “transforms the bridge, for fourteen days, into a work of art” (See <http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/pn.html> 19 September 2006). Is it bridge alone (*Pont Neuf*), then, and not bridge and fabric together (*Pont Neuf*, wrapped), which constitute the work (*The Pont Neuf Wrapped*)? Drapery on a bridge then parallels Kant’s example of drapery on a statue as ornament. It is the bridge itself which is the *ergon*/work, and the fabric mere extrinsic *parergon*. In The Truth in Painting, Jacques Derrida deconstructs Kant’s explication of *parergon* starting from Kant’s example of the frame. The *parergon* as frame is literally stuck on at the edges of the work, standing apart both from work (*ergon*) and not-work (*milieu*) (Derrida 61). He argues that it is not, as Kant would have it, so simple to separate out what is intrinsic to the work and what is extrinsic. It is not possible to make the disinterested objective judgment of taste Kant posits. Moreover, it is not possible to separate out and disregard the extrinsic frame in making such a judgment.

Derrida points to Kant’s explication of the *parergon* as filling a lack in the internal system of the *ergon*. What makes drapery on statues, bodies, or bridges *parergon*? “It is not because they are detached, but on the contrary because they are more difficult to detach and above all because without them, without their quasi-detachment, the lack on the inside of the work would appear” (Derrida 59). Thus the *parergon* is inextricably linked to the *ergon* for the *ergon* needs the *parergon* to mark it off and constitute it as *ergon*/work. This link makes



it impossible to discern what is central or intrinsic to the work, and consequently what is extrinsic. It is not just the boundary between *ergon* and *parergon* but also the boundary between *parergon* and *milieu* (environment or not-work) which is problematic for Derrida. It is impossible, according to Derrida's logic, to separate out *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* either from the *Pont Neuf* or from the Parisian environment of 1985, including the sophisticated culture of fashion posited by Steele.

Wrapping the *Pont Neuf* physically separates it from its environment, making it stand out as the frame does a painting. Even as that wrapping hides the bridge it draws attention to it, and to its relationship with the Parisian *milieu*. It foregrounds the history of the bridge from its construction to its many transformations to its current state, serving as a reminder of its triumphal creation by man. The building of the *Pont Neuf* began under the reign of Henri III in 1578 and was completed in 1606. The bridge was officially inaugurated in 1607 by King Henri IV. It was the first bridge in France not to include houses along its sides, making traffic flow easier, as well as the first bridge not to charge tolls for crossing. It rather included pavements for pedestrians to cross, safe from the mud and horses. At the time of its completion, the bridge was one of the widest bridges in Paris. It was a popular, heavily trafficked bridge on which purportedly one could find people from many different classes at any given time. (Donovan 27).

The *Pont Neuf* has thus served to connect Paris both literally and metaphorically. In the early seventeenth century, it was unprecedented for its accessibility and ease of crossing. This earned it the appellation *Pont Neuf*, which means new bridge in French. Spanning the Seine, it connects the left and right banks of the city and is central to the city. For the next few centuries it underwent a number of restorations and transformations including the later

addition of shops along the bridge and the repeated building and destruction of a water pump. On the artists' official website, Christo writes: "wrapping the *Pont-Neuf* continues this tradition of successive metamorphoses by a new sculptural dimension" (See <http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/pn.html> 19 September 2006). This transformation is in keeping with the history of the bridge, for it too served to connect people, bringing millions into the city to see the work (Vaizey 13). Through it, the bridge earned again its ironic title of new bridge (*Pont Neuf*).

The many reconstructions of the bridge, the irony of the oldest standing bridge in Paris being called the *Pont Neuf* (New Bridge), the fact that it connects the Left Bank and Right Bank of the city – all this and more is an inextricable part of *The Pont Neuf Wrapped*, as is Paris' status as fashion capital of the world. This makes any attempt at separating out the work of art from the supposedly natural or extrinsic environment problematic. Despite the fact that Kant's explanation of ornament/*parergon* is in a section discussing proper judgments of taste in nature, he makes the inexplicable leap to frames around pictures and other art objects, which mandate an entirely different mode of judgment. Kant is quite careful to separate art from nature in his discussion of judgments of taste. Wrapping the *Pont Neuf* questions this separation even as it seems to uphold or recreate it. For it does indeed physically separate the man-made bridge from its surroundings. But it is a stretch to call the surrounding city of Paris 'natural,' and moreover the history of Paris and the history of the bridge are intertwined. The boundary between nature and art, or moreover between the natural and the manmade is as malleable and constantly shifting as that between *milieu* and *ergon* which is the *parergon*.

This relationship between the natural and the manmade is explored by art historian Rosalind Krauss in “Sculpture in the Expanded Field.” Krauss examines the definition of ‘sculpture’ in relation to the terms landscape and architecture. She argues that by the 1960’s, sculpture constituted such a diverse group of works that the term could only be defined by negation: “it was what was on or in front of a building that was not a building, or what was in the landscape that was not the landscape” (Krauss 41). By expanding more traditional notions of sculpture in this way, she was able to include and categorize seemingly disparate land art and other attempts to shape or affect the environment like Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s. This method of definition by negation parallels Kant’s construction of *parergon*. The *parergon* is, quite literally, *hors-d’œuvre*, or outside the work, extrinsic to it. It is not the *ergon* or work, neither is it the *milieu* or background. From her own set of oppositions, Krauss constructs a quaternary field including landscape, architecture, not-landscape, and not-architecture, placing Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s work *Running Fence*, a 5.5 meter high white nylon fence meandering along the California landscape, for example, between landscape and not-landscape as a marked site (see <http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/rf.html> 14 April 2007).

The field Krauss sets up goes beyond straightforward binaries. It allows for an artwork to be a term and its opposite simultaneously, and thus offers a slightly more flexible way to understand works such as *The Pont Neuf Wrapped*. Krauss situates some of Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s work on the architecture/not-architecture axis as axiomatic structures. She describes this category as “a process of mapping the axiomatic features of the architectural experience – the abstract conditions of openness and closure – onto the reality of a given space” (Krauss 46). The *Pont Neuf* itself is an architectural work. The fabric used

in the wrapping itself is clearly not-architecture, even as it takes on or marks out the form of the architectural element. In this respect, *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* fits into Krauss' category of axiomatic structures quite nicely. Yet it would not be too far a stretch to place the work on the landscape/not-landscape axis. For, again, the fabric around the bridge is not literally *landscape*. Yet the fabric over the bridge, especially given its neutral sandstone color, does become a part of the aesthetic of the land. As art critic Marina Vaizey argues, "Christos are backdrops, décor, and centre stage all at the same time, noticeable objects in the landscape and the city and part of the landscape and the city" (12).

Inherent in Krauss' terminology, as she herself admits, is a divide between nature (landscape) and culture (architecture). The *Pont Neuf* is made of a natural material – stone. The fabric wrapped around it, in contrast, is a synthetic one. The bridge's very name (*Pont Neuf*/New Bridge) is indicative of the problematic relationship between nature and culture that the act of wrapping foregrounds. Despite the name, it is now the oldest extant bridge in Paris, and is a sharp visual contrast with the metals and synthetic plastics of the newer bridges. Thus the bridge is simultaneously new and old, nature and culture. Wrapping the *Pont Neuf* served to mark it, setting it apart as a unique art object and as one which is important to French cultural history.

On the one hand, it is possible to see the stone bridge as a 'natural' part of the city of Paris, because of its age and material. The fabric around the bridge, then, is 'culture' to the bridge's nature. It is what the artists added to the environment which does not 'naturally' belong there. On the other hand, the bridge itself is a man-made construction, seeming to fall neatly on the "culture" side of the divide. Yet man-made and culture are not synonymous. For the bridge was constructed to create a path *over* the river, the *Seine*, to cross or transgress

a natural barrier. Parisian culture was built *around* the natural river, metaphorically and physically speaking. Nature is inextricably a part of culture. In his analysis of *The Pont Neuf Wrapped*, Dominique Laporte notes that for centuries, the building of bridges was considered a sacred act. It represented transgression of supposedly natural boundaries by man, a presumptuous attempt to dominate nature (19). A bridge connects man to the unknown on the other side. A bridge serves as a transition between two sides or banks of a river.

Understanding landscape as ‘nature’ is just as problematic as understanding architecture or the built environment as ‘culture.’ In Landscape and Western Art, Malcolm Andrews argues that landscape is “mediated land, land that has been aesthetically processed” (7). It is landscape, and not land, which fits into the frame of a painting. Landscape is land commodified, framed, and packaged. Andrews traces the etymology of the word landscape to the German *landschaft* or *lantschaft* – “a geographic area defined by political boundaries” (28). Another early meaning of the word was the land surrounding a town. The word connoted boundaries in its many reincarnations. It connoted something peripheral to a main subject or geographical area. Early glossarists, who derive the English word from Belgian, Dutch, or German prototypes all connect the word landscape to the idea of ‘ornament,’ ‘by-work,’ or ‘*parergon*’ (Andrews 29). Perhaps it is more appropriate to use the more modern term ‘cityscape’ to describe Paris in 1985. In any case, the land- or city-scape of Paris serves as one more layer of frame for *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* or rather for the *Pont Neuf*, wrapped. Just as the fabric ornaments or surrounds the bridge, the city surrounds the wrapped bridge, acting as background or periphery to the work which is *The Pont Neuf Wrapped*.

By wrapping the *Pont Neuf*, Christo and Jeanne-Claude drew public attention to the bridge itself, serving to recall the history of the bridge and its importance to Parisian culture, just as the frame around a picture draws attention to the picture itself, marking out its status as art. Wrapping, then, marks out status just as framing does: through its wrapping, the *Pont Neuf* is transformed from a functional bridge to a work of art (the *ergon*) in its own right. Yet, as the title of the work suggests, it is not the bridge alone, but *The Pont Neuf Wrapped*, bridge and fabric together, which constitute the work. The frame or wrapping sets an object apart as Art, but in doing so becomes sublimated into the artwork. Fabric and bridge are set apart as one against the Parisian *milieu*.

The very difficulties in categorizing and reading the work are just another level of Derridean frame. Though the *parergon*, often quite literally as in the case of the frame around a painting, is meant to delineate and set apart the artwork, it instead becomes impossible to discern what is a part of the art, and consequently what is extrinsic or parergonal to it. Moreover, what is traditionally considered outside the work actually contributes to the production of the *parergon*. The fabric around a bridge or the frame around a painting remains *parergon* and not *ergon* only inasmuch as society upholds the object within as artwork. In her book on Christo<sup>2</sup>, Vaizey argues that the medium of Christo's work is not the material fabric alone, but also society. The process by which a work is made and its socio-cultural context are a part of the work. Thus, "context is as important as content, the frame and framework as essential as that which they contain" (11). What is important for Vaizey, then, is what the *parergon* reveals about the *ergon* – what the

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<sup>2</sup> It was not until 1994 that Christo and Jeanne-Claude insisted that the works they made together be billed as by "Christo and Jeanne-Claude" rather than simply Christo. Thus, most early scholarship on the duo, even when admitting Jeanne-Claude's integral part, refers to the artist as Christo. In hopes of maintaining grammatical consistency, the artist(s) will be referred to as "Christo" in the context of discussing such scholarship.

act of wrapping revealed about the bridge and about the Parisian culture in which it was situated. Though the bridge was literally concealed for two weeks, the wrapping maintained a form readable as “bridge.” People who have walked the bridge every day without really seeing it, without looking at its details or feeling its cool smooth stone, may have wondered what has been hidden.

### Chapter 3: Wrapping, Framing, and Packaging

Just as the frame around a painting instructs the art museum visitor to focus his or her vision on the area within, so does the wrapping of the bridge mandate such attention for the bridge, even as it remains hidden. The wrapping revealed the bridge as a commodity object, connecting the attitude of the spectator to that of the consumer. Through the rhetoric of the frame and the institution of the museum, the art object is reified and commodified. The packaging of consumer goods available in stores is meant, like the wrapping around the bridge, to make the object inside (underneath) more attractive and desirable. It is meant to draw attention to the object. Ironically, unlike most consumer packaging, the wrapping of the *Pont Neuf* does so precisely by hiding the contents within.

How does the hidden bridge relate to the packaged consumer good? When one purchases a commodity object, one is not merely paying for the requisite object/content, but the packaging, the brand name, and all the context that comes with it. One cannot separate out the consumer fetishism from a neutralized object, devoid of its packaging or commodity status. Art, through the physical frame, and through the framing institution of the museum, is not immune to such commodification. Christo has shown an acute understanding of the commodity status of art throughout his career. Before he met Jeanne-Claude, he created a series of wrapped packages. In the 1960's, he created a few such packages out of fabric, rope and twine. There was nothing 'inside' these packages per say. The fabric was the package, with no differentiation between extrinsic packaging and intrinsic object. Christo continued to wrap a variety of objects from tables and chairs to magazines and even a woman (Vaizey 126).



When he began working with his wife Jeanne-Claude, their first two wrapped architectural structures were both museums: *Wrapped Kunsthalle, Bern* (1967-1968) and *Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Wrapped* (1968-1969). Molly Donovan, curator for an exhibition of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's work in the Vogel Collection, notes:

“the act of binding the exterior of a museum in fabric suggests the artists' ambivalence toward the program of the museum, for in doing so they symbolically shield its very function as a display of objects. The museum itself becomes both object and architectural monument, in addition to a mummified fetish” (25-26).

Wrapping a museum, then, frames, packages, and commodifies the institution as object the same way the framed images within are commodified and fetishized, even as the exterior of the museum itself is hidden. Ironically, it is then *only* the inside to which the spectator/consumer has access.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's works deny the commodification of the art object through the museum in yet another way. Their large-scale, temporary works, like *The Pont Neuf Wrapped*, are free to the public and cannot be sold. For Laporte, this subverts the capitalist notion of commodity as sign, for it is the *idea* of the work, in the form of preparatory drawings and collages, rather than the ephemeral work itself which is sold. The artists funded *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* themselves, and earned no money from the viewing public, or even from book and film sales. Laporte juxtaposes the ephemeral artwork which cannot be sold with the way wrapping an object turns it into a commodity, via its “signification as merchandise” (34). Wrapping the *Pont Neuf* turns the bridge into a commodity as an idea or sign. Though a bridge, or the land it crosses, may be sold, *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* as cultural icon cannot.

One possible problem with Laporte's approach is his implicit separation of the work (*The Pont Neuf Wrapped*) from the sketches made for it. As Derrida argues, it is impossible

to determine what is or is not intrinsic to the work. The sketches sold of the work become independent artworks in their own right, and not merely because they represent the idea of *The Pont Neuf Wrapped*. But if these sketches, too, are parergonal or supplemental to the work, then they cannot be separated from the work itself. They are a part of the commodification of the artwork (*The Pont Neuf Wrapped*) and vice versa. Nevertheless, Laporte's reading of the relationship between wrapping, framing, and packaging in *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* and other works by Christo and Jeanne-Claude is an acute one and one worth further consideration.

Laporte continues to compare Christo's early wrapped objects (bridge, museum, chair, even air) to his wrapped storefronts realized in the 1960's. These life-size constructions of wood, Plexiglas, and sometimes aluminum were illuminated with electric light, but "wrapped" from the inside, so that the display window denied the viewer the expected transparency of 'window' and thus access to the goods within. Laporte questions whether the object wrapped is the empty space inside the window, or whether the outside is wrapped from within. After all, the window display is not *inside* the wrapping. If there is an 'inside,' it must be not the window display but rather what is on the other side of the window. Thus, the *Showcases* and *Store Fronts* "define the relationship between wrapped 'content' and surrounding space" (60). By turning this relationship inside out, the implication of these windows is that the world itself is commodified – an implication Laporte traces through the Christos later works. Following this logic, the wrapping of the *Pont Neuf* commodifies not just the wrapped bridge, but its *milieu*: the socio-cultural moment (Paris in 1985) which produced the wrapping is distilled, reified as art, and thus commodified.

From their varying perspectives, Laporte and Vaizey both argue that the “outside” is part of the work, whether that outside be what is physically outside of the frame or the context in which the frame or object within was produced. Just as the *parergon* is impossible to detach from the *ergon*, so is it impossible to detach from the *milieu*. For it is precisely the *milieu* of cultural norms which produces the *parergon* as such. This lesson is an important one for writing on fashion as well. It is impossible to discuss the garment without considering the body that wears it and the society which produced it as fashionable. Further, Paris’ fashion culture is a part of the *milieu* of *The Pont Neuf Wrapped*. Just as the *Pont Neuf* connects one side of the city to the other, so does the fabric ornamenting it act as a bridge connecting the *Pont Neuf* to this culture in which it was built and in which it continues to play a central role. So, too, is the artists’ understanding of the importance of the choice of the medium of fabric for their works connected to *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* and to this culture of fashion.

Paris was a perfect choice for artists whose work emphasizes the ephemeral nature of fabric, and thereby of fashion. Christo himself is adamant about the importance of fabric to his (their) work. Understanding the delicate balance between the garment and the body, he says “fabric is almost like an extension of our skin” (quoted in Donovan 20). *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* is metaphorically framed by the history of the *Pont Neuf*, of fashion in Paris, as well as by the precedents of wrapping in Christo (and Jeanne-Claude)’s work. This includes many other aspects of the artists’ lives and careers as well. The discourse on the pair, including biographical and art historical writings, are similarly a part of this context or frame. It is not just the bridge which is literally wrapped or framed, but also the artists themselves

who are being framed by their own self-conscious creation of artistic identity as well as the discourse on their works, despite their refusal of the institution of the museum's frame.

The framing of this identity is further complicated by the collaborative nature of the artists' work. Each of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's works has not one, nor two, but many "authors." The grammatical difficulties many scholars have had in writing about the pair are quite telling. Scholarship before 1994 attributed the works to Christo alone, as per the desire of the artists. Charles Green argues in The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism that "Christo" then functioned as a sort of brand name; it represented the pair under the single name Christo (129). Thus, Vaizey and others could comfortably call an artwork by the pair "a Christo" (8). When the duo changed their brand name to "Christo and Jeanne-Claude," the grammatical structure necessary for discussing their work became yet more complicated, leading to possibly awkward and confusing pronouns, and moreover to the misleading phrase "the Christos" (Donovan 14).

Proper verb tense further complicates the issue, for in 1985, "Christo wrapped the *Pont Neuf*" or "*The Pont Neuf Wrapped* is an artwork by the artist Christo" were true statements. Yet, writing about the work in the twenty-first century, one must find a way to reconcile quoting from earlier scholarship or even more recent interviews where Christo uses the subjective "I" in discussing his/their work with grammatical consistency in discussing the pair (For example, see Donovan's interview with the pair in Christo and Jeanne-Claude in the Vogel Collection).

Michel Foucault argues in "What is an Author" that an author's name (or in this case the pair's name) is a mere term of convenience. It serves what he calls the "author function" – it helps categorize and classify a body of works, grouping them together under a single

name. For Foucault, even the concept of a “work” is an unstable one, one requiring an author to validate it (302). He questions whether everything an ‘author’ has written constitutes part of his or her body of work, up to and including marginal notes, appointments and addresses. In Derrida’s terms, Foucault’s question would become: are such notes *parergonal*, or can they be separated out from the ‘intrinsic’ body of work. Similarly, many have struggled to classify the work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude: where does the work begin and end? Is the ‘work’ the physical, visible byproduct of their labor, or of those they hire to help realize the work? Are all the engineers also authors of the work? If the work includes all the context up to and including the creation of their own image as artists, how is one to classify it?

In a postmodern world where images themselves become commodities to be possessed, the very image of “Christo and Jeanne-Claude,” despite the supposed death of the author, becomes a commodity. When one goes to see *The Pont Neuf Wrapped*, one goes to see the physical bridge, but perhaps also to see ‘a Christo and Jeanne-Claude.’ This name (these names) attached to the work is a part of its packaging and thus a part of the production of the *parergon*. It is all the more fitting that for more recent works it is not the artists as individuals who fund their own works, but the corporation they created. This, too, is part of their performance of identity, a performance which becomes a part of the wrapping of the *Pont Neuf* if not of the work *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* itself.

How, then, are the artists wrapped and framed? The scholarship on the pair is enlightening here. In *Christo and Jeanne Claude: A Biography*, Burt Chernow undertakes the difficult task of writing a single biography on two people. On the first page of the first chapter, Chernow tells of Christo’s escape from the Iron Curtain, linking a childhood in war-torn, Communist Bulgaria to Christo’s acuity with boundaries and borders which would

influence much of his later art. By the second page, Chernow returns to his birth on June 13, 1935 and a more standard chronological account. In the second chapter, he writes on Jeanne-Claude's childhood. Within the first few pages, the structure of this biography is quite telling about the reception and scholarship of these artists. That is, one starts with Christo, not Jeanne-Claude, and not the pair. One starts with the fall of Communism during his childhood. One discusses *his* life in regards to *his* (their?) artwork, and vice versa.

What role does Jeanne-Claude play in the authorial entity "Christo and Jeanne-Claude," then? Perhaps like the parergonal fabric around the bridge, she is stuck on at the edges, a supplement to but not intrinsic part of the artistic identity. For such innovative collaborative work, the division of labor between the two artists is surprisingly traditional. Christo, classically trained as an artist, creates the drawings and preparatory sketches. Because of his artistic training, they claim, they put his name first when they decided to change their name to "Christo and Jeanne-Claude." Jeanne-Claude, on the other hand, deals with public relations and manages their taxes (See <http://christojeanneclaude.net/errors.html> 19 September 2006). The role Jeanne-Claude fulfills in the pair's collaboration is rather like that of a studio assistant or even a business manager. This is a role which many have played for artists throughout history without the claim to collaboration or co-artist status. Yet, the artists claim that all their works, and in particular, the ideas for their work, are collaborative.

What makes Jeanne-Claude an artist? How does she produce art – not just the idea of art, but a physical byproduct recognizable as such? The key to these questions is in the 'context.' For the physical wrapping of the bridge, the addition of the *parergon*, would have been impossible (or at least much more difficult) without permission from the French government and without someone to organize finances for the work. So all the politics and

context that made that wrapping possible are a part of the production of the *parergon*. Then Jeanne-Claude's share of the work is indeed intrinsic to the work. Perhaps the government officials who gave the pair permission to wrap the bridge, as well as all the engineers and architects who helped them design and realize their wrapping are also authors/creators, or moreover actors and enablers. Or perhaps they are the medium of the artwork. Once the concept of art is expanded to include performance art and social context, it becomes even more difficult to pin down a creator or creators.

As the boundaries of the artwork itself shift, anyone and everyone involved – including the spectators of the work – can be seen as art and artist alike; as an important part of the production of the work. The collaborative nature of their work is one more reminder of this. For though it initially seems simple enough to separate out the tasks of each in the creation of the work, when the concept of 'work' itself is destabilized, the concept of 'authors' or 'artists' quickly follows. The action of physically wrapping the bridge, the performance of artistic identity, and Parisian culture in 1985 may not be the artwork or *parergon* themselves, but even as *milieu* or context they are an important part of understanding the production of the work and its boundaries.

## Chapter 4: Conclusions

These difficulties of pinning down the artwork or the artists of *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* are more than just coincidence. Far from being a minor grammatical annoyance in writing about or discussing the work, they rather have critical potential for the way they force the spectator and critic alike to grapple with these issues. These difficulties are ones *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* shares with discourse on fashion, and as such the work makes a statement for fashion theory about the necessity of accepting and taking strength from the transient, ornamental nature of fashion. There is something to be gained from juxtaposing the existing scholarship on *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* with that on fashion.

The fashion industry problematizes authorship in similar ways to the collaborative work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude. For a garment too often comes with a brand name or label that can never fully represent the roles many different people have in its production. The name is usually the name of the designer or a company name representing a specific designer, even if that designer is not the one who actually designed the individual garment. The patternmakers and seamstresses remain absent from this label. Moreover, if a garment is, as many writing on fashion and gender identity have argued, an integral part of one's own construction and performance of identity, then it is an identity performed in a language constructed and authored by others.

The garment framing the body commodifies the projected image of identity just as the frame around a picture commodifies the art object within. Just like the Derridean frame or *parergon*, the garment both sets apart and becomes a part of its wearer. Similarly, the fabric around the *Pont Neuf* simultaneously became a part of the bridge, or at least the bridge's history, and set apart the bridge, marking it as an art object and drawing attention to it. In



setting apart or marking out the body, the garment makes the body a commodity for Veblen, implicated in the consumer capitalist system he denounces. The rapidity of changing styles and the habit of throwing out garments before they wear out Veblen points to is one fashion shares with *The Pont Neuf Wrapped*. One response *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* offers to Veblen's critique is that this transience is not merely wasteful frivolity but rather a point of strength for fashion and artwork alike. The work celebrates the boundary and the in-between, the transient and the ornamental. The artists purport that

The temporary quality of the projects is an AESTHETIC decision. In order to endow (donate, make a gift) the works of art with the feeling of urgency to be seen, and the tenderness brought by the fact that it will not last. Those feelings are usually reserved for other temporary things such as childhood and our own life, those are valued because we KNOW that they will not last (See <http://christojeanneclaude.net/errors.html> 19 September 2006).

The work's temporary status gives it a sense of urgency and importance for the artists.

The choice Barthes makes to study the written garment in order to avoid the difficulties of writing about a transient object, then, is not only an impossible choice but also one which misses the very strength of ornament and of dress. Derrida responds to Kant's choice of disregarding finery in a proper judgment of taste by problematizing the concept of the *parergon* as a boundary between within and without that can be located. He writes: "We think we know what properly belongs or does not belong to the human body, what is detached or not detached from it – even though the *parergon* is precisely an ill-detachable detachment" (Derrida 59). The wholeness of the body, like that of the artwork, is illusory. For Derrida, there is no center and no periphery; no intrinsic whole complete body and separable, extrinsic clothing. Thus one cannot discuss the garment without considering the body. Reformulated, one cannot consider *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* without considering *The Pont Neuf*.

Without the structure of the bridge, the frame would be merely a mass of synthetic fabric, rope, and steel chains. The bridge as work gives the frame form. Symbolically, too, the work takes its shape and meaning from the bridge – from its cultural significance and history. And, once the work was removed, a bridge which before was just a bridge, seems to be lacking something. Like Hollander's nude, it is in fact dressed. It is dressed in the cultural memory of its wrapping, and in all the history that wrapping exhumes. Like the reciprocal relationship Baudelaire sets up for woman and garment, the fabric around the *Pont Neuf* moved with the wind, seeming to take on life. But does Baudelaire's formulation really translate to *The Pont Neuf Wrapped*? Can an inanimate object (the bridge) be said to need another? Did the bridge need this renewal in the form of exhumed history? A bridge cannot be said to have a sense of subjectivity in the same way, but this does not invalidate the parallel to fashion.

Admitting the irony of attempting to understand the relationship between body and fabric Baudelaire sets up with a similar relationship between two inanimate objects, there remains something useful about this parallel. For there is no question of the bridge's constructedness. The sexed body, too, is a construction and not a naturally existing category as Butler argues. Then the need of understanding *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* in terms of the construction and history of the *Pont Neuf* carries over to a need of considering the construction of the sexed and gendered body in and through fashion. Butler's notion of gender as performative allows for a new way to understand how fabric acts on bridge. Derrida characterizes the *parergon* as an "ill-detachable detachment" (59). Even if the *parergon* may be physically removed from the object underneath/inside as for the garment and the frame, the *ergon* is irrevocably transformed by the *parergon*. The perception of

bridge and body alike as social constructs is transformed by the fabric wrapped around each.

Appendix



Figure 1: *The Pont Neuf Wrapped, Paris 1975-1985*

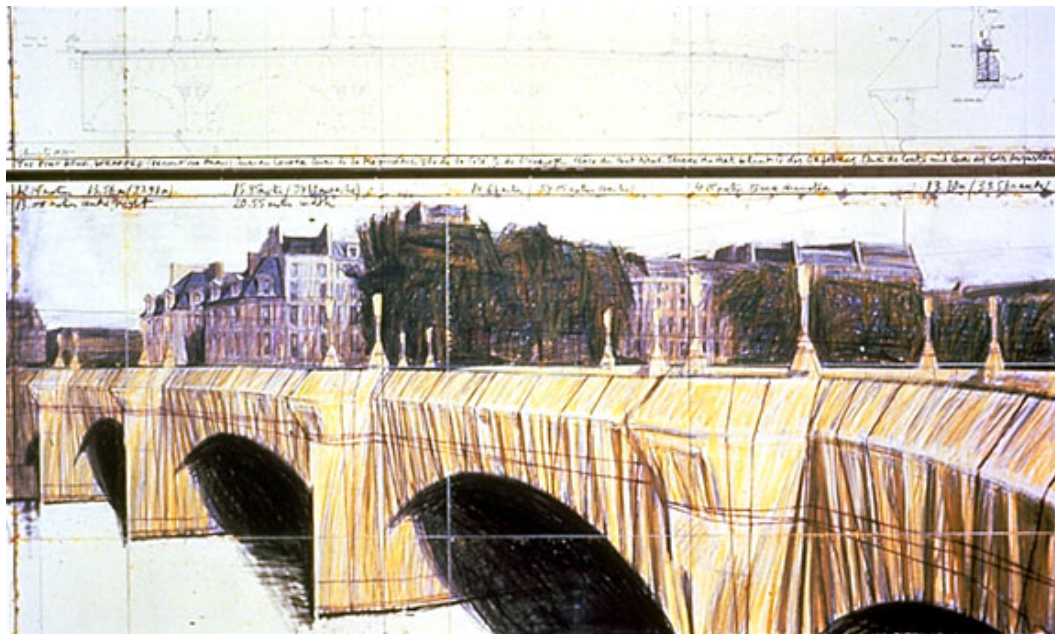


Figure 2: *The Pont Neuf Wrapped, Project for Paris 1985*



Figure 3: *The Pont Neuf Wrapped*, Paris 1975-1985

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