

How do Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo use deconstruction to challenge traditional notions of fashion and identity.

Submission Date: 07/01/2025

Word Count: 4124

1.Introduction

1.1 Overview of Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo

The single culture and traditional system are constantly challenged, and the fashion field is full of paradoxes everywhere, because the war, revolution and economic crisis in the 20th century led to the adjustment of the world economic structure, but at the same time, it also promoted the intersection and collision of different cultures. In the 1960s, Japanese designers, who broke the centralization of the European "fashion overlords" at that time and promoted the development of diversified clothing design, continued to enter the international fashion design stage. At this time, with a very individualistic color of anti-fashion design into the public vision, and triggered a strong reaction of Japanese fashion design pioneers Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto.

Rei Kawakubo is known around the world for her avant-garde, asymmetrical, curved clothes and is beloved by many people in the fashion industry. Since then, she has been working on fashion, and she hopes to create more archetypes and concept clothes that are far ahead of the fashion world today.

Yohji Yamamoto is famous for his simple and charming design style, smooth lines and be good at men's wear. He designs clothes mainly in black. He is a designer and a new leader of the Japanese fashion in the world. He presented his designs to the public in a borderless and gender-neutral manner.

1.1.1 Life of Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo

Rei Kawakubo was born in Tokyo, Japan in October 1942. She graduated from Keio University in 1964. Soon after graduating from college, she joined Asahi Kasei's advertising department. Two years later, she left Asahi Kasei to work as a freelance designer. In 1969, she rented a studio in Tokyo with two assistants and released the Comme des Garçons collection. Rei Kawakubo showed her rebellious heart at the beginning of her design, trying to break the traditional clothing design of social norms, traditional constraints and gender restrictions, and designed clothes that were

anti-fashion and deliberately blurred femininity. She is opposed to the Western fashion industry deliberately catering to women's curves, and she believes that clothes are an expression of women's self-esteem and self-assertion. In the early 1980s, she was known for her asymmetrical, curvy avant-garde clothes and loved by many in the fashion industry, but she was very low-key, rarely giving interviews, and she wanted people to know her work through her clothes. In October 2013, *Business of Fashion* published the Creative manifesto, written by Rei Kawakubo, which attracted wide attention. Kawakubo says she doesn't pay attention to "new stores, silly magazines or what people are doing on the street" because those existing things don't lead to new ideas. What Kawakubo wants is "the birth of something new inside" and in order to do this, she tries to "think, feel, and observe as if she were not making clothes" (Kawakubo, 2013). In addition, among well-known Japanese fashion designers, Rei Kawakubo is one of the few special designers who never studied abroad and never majored in fashion design.

Yohji Yamamoto was born in Tokyo and graduated from the Faculty of Law at Keio University in 1966. Because of his mother, he developed a strong interest in the profession of tailoring, so after graduation, he traveled around Europe and lived for a short time in Paris, France. It was at this time that Yohji Yamamoto realized that making and designing clothing could be as creative an art as painting, so he insisted on studying fashion design at Tokyo Culture Fashion Institute after returning to Japan, despite the opposition of those around him. Y'SForwomen and Y's Formen were created by Yohji Yamamoto in 1972 and 1979, respectively, and the Y's collection carries out Yohji Yamamoto's design philosophy. In 1977, he participated in the first fashion show of a Japanese designer in Tokyo. In 1982, he was awarded the 26th "Fashion Editorial Award" held in Tokyo. In 1982, he won the 26th Tokyo "Costume Editorial Board Award". In 1984 Yohji Yamamoto first published the "Yohji Yamamoto Paris menswear Collection". In next year, he opened his own design studio in Tokyo and his first ready-to-wear store in Paris. In 1998, a collection of clothing themed on French clothing from the 1950s came out, which delighted the visitors. Yohji

Yamamoto is known for his simple and charming design style, smooth lines and anti-trend style. His design is not in accordance with common sense regardless of gender, generally based on the concept of men's clothing to design women, especially like to use its exaggerated proportion to cover female bodyshape, so he proposed the aesthetics of hermaphroditism.

In addition to his personal works, Yohji Yamamoto also has a lot of experience in the production of costumes. During a period of time, he accepted many offers from artists. In 1990, he was costume director of *Madame Butterfly* at the Opera de Lyon. In 1991, he was awarded the 35th "Fashion Editorial Award" held in Tokyo. At the time, most of the people who wore Yohji's clothes were writers, artists, architects, or others involved in artistic creation, who admired him and chose his clothes. In 1996, Yohji Yamamoto released his first fragrance in France and named it after himself.

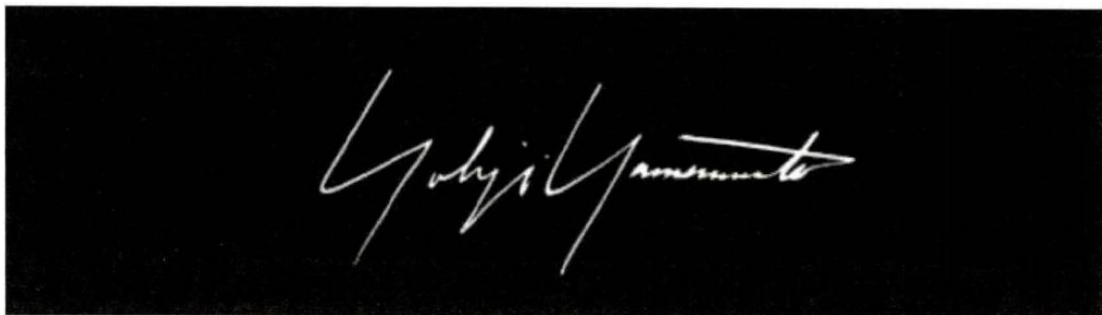


Figure 1: Yohji Yamamoto's own brand logo

In terms of brand naming and logo design, Yohji Yamamoto adopted a simple and casual style consistent with his clothing design, and he named his brand "Y's". He said he didn't want to scatter too much energy on other things, so he could focus more on the design and make it better.

2. Formation and development of "deconstruction"

2.1 The proposal of deconstruction

"Deconstruction" emerged in the 1960s. Deconstruction under the background of postmodernism is different from the calm and restraint of modernism, and deconstruction under the background of postmodernism is deviant. The concept of

"deconstruction" was first proposed by French philosopher Jacques Derrida, which made him the most controversial figure in the 1960s. The beginning of his deconstruction thought was his criticism of western "dualism". The thinking of binary opposition is characterized by opposition and distinction between good and bad. Jacques Derrida is opposed to this fixed structure and thought, because he is inclusive of everything on the surface, but in fact there are primary, secondary and subordinate relations. Derrida tries to break this inherent deconstruction by means of deconstruction. Therefore, he built an open and diversified system to free our minds and provide more possibilities and creativity for the subsequent design.

2.2 Deconstruction on the stage of clothing

In the inclusive and diversified 1980s, a group of emerging designers came to the stage of Paris fashion. Their design was bold and arbitrary, and they created their own unique style in the structure of their clothing design. Among them, Japanese designers Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo showed the audience a non-gender deconstructive style of clothing. However, at that time, the West still advocated the more rational form-fitting dresses that could highlight the beauty of the female body under the structuralism. At that time, most of the clothes were wrapped and bound, and they were some designs that could reflect the aesthetics of the human body. Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo draw from traditional Japanese clothing culture, break the old aesthetic, and create a new series of asymmetrical works through arbitrary cutting, disassembly and reconstruction, which not only has a futuristic color, but also allows the audience to see the pursuit of freedom of eastern and Western clothing and modern clothing, freeing the human body from clothing, and unwilling to be constrained by the disorderly cutting design. Since then, the figure of understanding constructivism has gradually appeared on the mainstream stage of design.

3. Analysis of Yohji Yamamoto's deconstructive works

3.1 Yohji Yamamoto's clothing style

Yohji Yamamoto is especially fond of black, and most of his clothing designs are based on large areas of black, with other colors slightly embellished. The clothes he designed had loose and fat contours, asymmetrical designs, and no gender, which was against the mainstream aesthetic views of the West at that time. At that time, black was an unlucky color in the West, representing death. Black clothes existed like mourning clothes in the West at that time, and the mainstream design aesthetic at that time remained in the fashion design style with bright colors and tight wrapping. However, Yohji Yamamoto chose a different and free world of pure black, and the fashion industry regarded him as a fashion pioneer. But, he says, "I'm not interested in fashion, I'm only interested in how to cut it." (Phillips, 1991) He made the fabric old, torn, and destroyed the balance, challenging everyone's idea of "beauty", but his anti-fashion attitude attracted the attention of the fashion industry and became a sensational fashion designer in Europe in the 1980s. This also laid the foundation for him to go further and further on the road of deconstruction style in the future.

3.2 Yohji Yamamoto's deconstructive clothing

Yohji Yamamoto's design makes the structural style with aesthetic Oriental aesthetics and the early deconstruction style of the West interact and penetrate each other, gradually forming the modern deconstruction style of clothing. In today's clothing, deconstruction is not only the destruction of clothing, but also the restructuring of structure.

For spring/summer 2021, Yohji Yamamoto continues to adhere to the black style and showcases deconstructive designs. His clothing is simple but charming, often through folding, folding and other techniques to create a sense of space, emphasizing the interaction between clothing and the human body. In design, he integrates the calm of the East and the unrestrained of the West, pursuing the freedom of personality rather than fitting the body shape. Yohji Yamamoto breaks the coat and the interior in a deconstructive way in "Men's Clothes", which reflects the free and unbribed nature of the clothing itself. He adopts asymmetrical deconstruction, showing a unique

three-dimensional sense and free-spirited style. Yohji Yamamoto's designs emphasize the individuality of clothing rather than the curves of the human body, reflecting his unique deconstructionist philosophy.



Figure 2: Yohji Yamamoto in Man Dress

4. The formation of Rei Kawakubo's deconstruction concept and its design propositions

From the 1980s until the death of Jacques Derrida in 2004, deconstruction experienced a wide spread and heated discussion. And has been deeply permeated in political subfields of philosophy such as feminism and postcolonial studies. Rei Kawakubo introduced deconstruction into his fashion design concept, creating a new way to dress design. Kawakubo's understanding of the body is typical of the Spinoza approach, as Spinoza argued, pests or diseases are not inherently ugly or evil; They inspire the source of the human self, but that does not make them evil. In the same way, designers can present it as a form of beauty and remove its negative connotations.

In breaking down the concept of clothing, Rei Kawakubo did not ignore the normal function of clothes, but increased the function of clothes, increasing the function of clothes. She changed the meaning of clothing, confused the style and style of clothing, and used techniques such as stagger, offset, displacement, crossover and reversal to transform the part and meaning of clothing just right. Through replacement and refactoring, a new design was formed.

4.1 Analysis on the characteristics of Rei Kawakubo's deconstructive clothing

In the 1998 spring/summer series "TRANSCENDING GENDER", Rei Kawakubo disintegrated clothes and placed them in different positions, thus creating new designs. She saved fashion design from the limited choices of popular colors, materials, silhouettes, skirt lengths, etc., reflecting the liberation of self and the pursuit of freedom. Design and beauty break free.

Kawakubo's favorite color in the design is black, which is defined as "no color" in color, and black is different from all other colors. Black, white and gray is an eternal classic color system, it is classic without losing personality, it shows Kawakubo's unique aesthetic and her unique personality. Rei Kawakubo also adds color to the constant black, so her clothes can sometimes form a strong color contrast. The clothes she designs will also appear more atmospheric and coordinated in terms of color language and fabric cut.



Figure3: "TRANSCENDING GENDER"

Extreme asymmetries, unfinished garments, unorthodox fillings, plaid, hard ruffles,

cuts, slice cuts are some of Kawakubo's favorite design techniques, reappearing in the work of other designers and mainstream designers. As Harvey writes, "Fashion can overstate its point of view,"(Harvey, 2007) then Kawakubo exaggerates the normal workings of fashion. Moreover, the visual experience produced by different fabrics is completely different. Rei Kawakubo is good at closely combining fabric with modeling and deconstruction in clothing fabrics. Rei Kawakubo is different from other designers of her generation in that she is good at combining fabric and deconstruction closely.

5. Comparison of design styles between Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo

5.1 Bold and avant-garde tailoring

The three elements of clothing are style, color and fabric. Style is the most important point. Because the style of clothing directly affects the style of clothing, and the direct way to affect the style of clothing is cutting. There are three types of tailoring; Three-dimensional tailoring, plane tailoring and prototype tailoring. Although Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto were both leading figures in the Paris fashion industry in the 1980s and representatives of deconstruction and anti-fashion, both of them were good at breaking the traditional conventional design, but there were many differences in the design methods and cutting methods of the two designers.

Yohji Yamamoto's clothes are often known for their minimalist, fluid design style. Yohji Yamamoto delights not in perfection, but in imperfect beauty, so his clothes are always unconventional and even genderless. In Yohji Yamamoto's clothes, it is hard to find a work that shows breast or back. He especially likes to design women's clothes with exaggerated techniques, and even designs women's clothes from the perspective of men's design. He explains: "When I started making clothes for my brand Y's in 1977, the only thing I wanted was for women to wear men's clothes. I'm excited about designing dresses for women. It has a special meaning for me - a garment that protects and wraps the female body. I wish to protect the female body - perhaps from the eyes of men. First of all, "The sketch does not determine the

costume," says Yohji Yamamoto, so his asymmetrical tailoring is not created on FORM, nor is he specifically designed Western three-dimensional tailoring or flat tailoring. Instead, he takes Japanese kimono tailoring as design inspiration, integrates clothing design with the wide body of the kimono tailoring and contours, and finally comes up with his own unique tailoring method that conforms to his own ideas. In the whole cutting process, folding, winding and other cutting techniques that do not require a high figure are mainly used. Secondly, there are many parts of clothes, such as sleeves, front clothes, back clothes, collar, among which Yoji Yamamoto is the most exquisite, but also the most attention to the design is the collar part of the design. Yohji Yamamoto has said: he will let it naturally droop, starting from the bottom of the neck, with the shoulders as the base point, such a design is very similar to the clothes hanging on the clothes line above the natural droop shape, so how to achieve the sense of harmony between the neck and the droop is Yohji Yamamoto's main interest. Yohji Yamamoto takes special care to create a sense of flow that sometimes loosens and sometimes tightens. Yohji Yamamoto wanted the feel of the collar to be free to change according to the mood of the wearer at the time.

Yohji Yamamoto is known as the "head of fashion" in the fashion industry, and Rei Kawakubo is known as the "godmother of fashion." She likes to draw inspiration from Western philosophy. Her anti-fashion is expressed in her love to break the structure of the human body. The space between the clothes she designs and the human skin is very large. The structural line of the clothes she designs is in a state of anti-body structure, and the whole clothes are loose and wide. For example, a lot of anti-body clothing can be seen in the 1966 show of Rei Kawakubo. The show was mainly inspired by Western architectural art, which believed that changing the structure of the human body and allowing people to develop a new aesthetic Angle. She enlarges the distance between the human body and the clothing, and fills it with fillers, which makes the human body no longer a beautiful human curve. In addition, for the neck design, Kawakubo does not like the neckline made of plain weave and splicing, she likes more to give people a well-designed randomness.

5.2 Unique fabric design

Fabric, as one of the three elements of clothing, is also very important. Fabric can often influence the style of clothing and the color of the presentation effect, fabric, style, color is complementary to each other. The choice of fabric is crucial because it also affects the final appearance of the garment and the experience of wearing it.

YamamotoYoshi has many unique insights and inspirations for clothing fabrics, some of which come from Japanese kimono fabrics, and some are inspired by the traditional culture of origami art. He prefers to use matte fabrics to design anti-fashion clothing, and has a special preference for fabric redesign. First of all, Yamamoto Yohji felt that western fabrics were not fresh to him, they were the same, and he was attracted by the kimono fabric. Kimono fabric has a very obvious feature, this fabric after multiple overlapping, in each overlap will have a different effect, which can give people a different surprise, this is the western fabric does not have the characteristics.

Secondly, Yohji Yamamoto uses the techniques of "folding" and "folding" in his works, which can turn the originally two-dimensional and flat fabric into three-dimensional, and this design will show different effects as the human body swings and changes between light and shadow on the show. Finally, Yohji Yamamoto also has his own unique views on the secondary design of fabrics. The most common of his design techniques is to "burn" and "tear" the fabric. In the early days, he used to wash a piece of fabric directly, take it out without any treatment, and directly air dry it, so that the fabric presents the most natural effect. In addition to the above mentioned modification of fabric techniques, he is also used to using matte fabrics, and fabrics for tie-dye, embroidery, dyeing, screen printing and other techniques.

Kawakubo Rei also likes incomplete beauty, but for the tattered sense of clothing, loose sense, incomplete sense, Kawakubo Rei has done the extreme, this point, she is different from Yamamoto Yoji. She likes to go against the mainstream fashion, while other designers are pursuing the perfect, delicate, gorgeous clothing effect, her

"beggar dress" in 1984 was incompatible with other gorgeous designs on the show, she used torn and exposed clothes seams and a variety of old fabrics, fabric splicing. All the clothes she designed in this show show a tattered, filthy effect. In addition, in the fabric Kawakubo is more the use of modern technology fabrics, reflective fabrics or metallic fabrics.

5.3 Consistent color expression

Color is also particularly important in clothing design, and color has a decorative role in clothing. For example, when two clothes have the same cutting method and fabric, different color matching can convey different feelings to people, so it also gives the two clothes different decorative effects.

Yohji Yamamoto is known as the "black poet" because of his love for the color black. Most of the clothes he designs are black, and there are few color combinations with strong visual impact effects. The Japanese writer Masatoshi Matsuoka once said after trying on his clothes: "Its black is very similar to the black of black pottery." The black of black pottery is black that is deeper than normal black, and the difference between the black of Yohji Yamamoto and the black of black pottery is that the black pottery is static, while the black of Yohji Yamamoto's clothing is dynamic. Yohji Yamamoto has his own unique view of black, he believes that black is an attitude that says, "I don't bother you, you don't bother me." (Yohji Yamamoto, 2002) The feeling. But in addition to black, you can also see a small amount of white in the clothes designed by Yohji Yamamoto, but this white is not the traditional sense of white, it is a special white, a retro white, it is more like the white of clothes worn for a long time, rather than pure white, because Yohji Yamamoto believes that pure white will make people feel shy.

Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto both love black, but the black expressed in Rei Kawakubo's clothing is completely different from Yohji Yamamoto, and her black gives people a feeling of calm and calm, but depressed and dull. Rei Kawakubo used to use colors with low brightness and saturation. Her usual color collocation can be analyzed in her works, which can be roughly divided into three ways. The first color collocation is black with the same tone, that is, mixed with a small amount of other colors in black, not pure black; The second way is the combination of advanced colors black, white, gray; The third way is to match black with color.

6. Contrast in cut, fabric and color

Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo, as leaders of the Oriental anti-fashion style of clothing, have unique insights and similarities in all aspects of clothing.

In terms of the way clothes are cut, both Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo are interested in anti-fashion, unconventional, gender-neutral styles. However, the differences between the two designers in tailoring methods are mainly reflected in the different sources of inspiration for tailoring, collar design and clothing structure design. Yohji Yamamoto's tailoring is inspired by the Japanese way of cutting kimonos, while Rei Kawakubo's tailoring is inspired by Western philosophy. For the collar part, Yoji Yamamoto will design the collar part of the clothing according to the overall style of the wearer and the overall feeling of the model, while Rei Kawakubo intends to make the audience look casual after carefully designing the collar part, which has the feeling of careful design inadvertently revealed. In terms of the structure of clothing design, the clothes designed by Yoji Yamamoto basically do not see the clothes with bare breasts and bare backs, most of them are loose. Rei Kawakubo likes to break the structure of the human body and clothing itself, and likes to use the anti-human structure to design clothes. In choosing fabrics, Yohji Yamamoto is more accustomed to using traditional, matte materials, while Rei Kawakubo uses more modern technology. In terms of color expression, Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo both love black, but their works give people a completely different feeling. The black color in Yohji Yamamoto's clothes gives a cool, casual attitude. On the contrary, the black in the works designed by Kawakubo is the expression of depression and melancholy. While Yohji Yamamoto's works are mostly black and white or white with black in them, Rei Kawakubo's color combinations are more varied than Yohji Yamamoto's, often with black in the same hue or with black and color in contrast.

7. Summarize

To sum up, although Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo were both pioneers of

Parisian fashion in the 1980s, and had many similarities in design style, such as their clothes were mostly unconventional and gender-neutral designs, and both preferred black as the main color. However, due to their different family backgrounds, educational experiences, personal interests, environmental influences, and understanding of color and clothing, there are still significant differences in their design styles.

Yoji Yamamoto's design pays more attention to the spatial sense and structural deconstruction between clothing and the human body, and he tends to reflect the hierarchical sense of clothing through simplification, folding and reorganization, emphasizing the freedom and randomness of clothing. His designs often have a calm and calm Oriental philosophy, but also integrate the rational and spatial sense of Western architecture. Although his use of color is not confined to a single, but the overall tendency to low-key, simple, emphasizing the independence of clothing and the wearer's personality expression.

Rei Kawakubo, on the other hand, shows more extreme use of black and breaks traditional aesthetics through a more abstract and minimalist design language. Her designs often have a strong rebellious spirit, exploring the relationship between the human form and clothing, and are more daring in the choice of fabrics and structural challenges. Rei Kawakubo's clothes are often strongly philosophical and culturally critical.

Both designers have made profound thinking and innovation on fashion, formed their own unique design language and style, and influenced the development direction of the global fashion industry.

Reference and Bibliography

Loscialpo, F, 2011. *Fashion and philosophical deconstruction: a fashion in-deconstruction*. In *Fashion forward* (pp. 13-27). Brill.

English, B., 2011. Sartorial deconstruction: the nature of conceptualism in postmodernist Japanese fashion design. *The International Journal of Humanities*, 9(2), pp.81-85.

Zaitseva et.al , 2020, April. An Architecture Clothing Correlation in Deconstructionism. In *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* (Vol. 459, No. 3, p. 032080). IOP Publishing.

Zborowska, A., 2015. Deconstruction in contemporary fashion design: Analysis and critique. *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, 2(2), pp.185-201.

Rusan, A.P., 2015. Japanese design in western fashion the three Japanese designers who changed the fashion world. *REVART*, 22(1), pp.127-136.

Spinoza, B., 2006. *The essential Spinoza: Ethics and related writings*. Hackett Publishing.

Zaitseva, T., Ivanova, O. and Kopeva, A., 2020, April. An Architecture Clothing Correlation in Deconstructionism. In *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* (Vol. 459, No. 3, p. 032080). IOP Publishing.

Ellis, J.M., 1989. *Against deconstruction*. Princeton University Press.

Sallis, J. ed., 1987. *Deconstruction and philosophy: The texts of Jacques Derrida*. University of Chicago Press.

Matsuoka, M., 2003. Two Types of Ditransitive Consturctions in Japanese. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics*, 12(2), pp.171-203.

Stephanov, M.A., 2007. Deconstruction of unparticles. *Physical Review D—Particles, Fields, Gravitation, and Cosmology*, 76(3), p.035008.

Lalloo-Morar, S., 2012. *A Study of Miyake, Kawakubo and Yamamoto: Identifying Their Success Factors as Revolutionary and Innovative Designers Since the 1980s*. University of Johannesburg (South Africa).

English, B., 2011. Sartorial deconstruction: the nature of conceptualism in postmodernist Japanese fashion design. *The International Journal of Humanities*, 9(2), pp.81-85.

Harvey, J., 2007. Showing and hiding: Equivocation in the relations of body and dress. *Fashion Theory*, 11(1), pp.65-94.

Kawakubo, R., 2013. Rei Kawakubo's creative manifesto. *Business of Fashion*, October, 31.

Montgomery, B., Henry, G. and Brotheridge, A., 2016. 'The White Shirt Project'(an exploration of the influence of geometrics and tactile knowledge in fashion pattern cutting). *International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education*, 9(2), pp.153-160.

Yamamoto, Y., 1983. Yohji Yamamoto defines his fashion philosophy. *The New York Times*, 23 October.

Obrist, H. U. 2013. "Interview with Rei Kawakubo." System, Autumn/ Winter 36: 45.

Phillips, K., 1991. 'Yohji Yamamoto: An Interview', *Vogue*, [online] Available at: <https://www.vogue.com> [Accessed 10 January 2025].

Chen, T., Li, L. and Zheng, J., 2022, November. A Study on the Brand Culture of Avant-Garde Clothing with Yohji Yamamoto as an Example. In *2022 International Conference on Science Education and Art Appreciation (SEAA 2022)* (pp. 88-95). Atlantis Press.