

# **Designing Fashion with Qi Energy**

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## Abstract

This practice-led research explores the significance of Qi energy for fashion by materialising the East Asian culturally-specific concept of Qi. Qi features prominently in the traditional philosophy of everyday life in East Asia and my research aims to show how this philosophy can also provide an understanding of the relationship between body, garment and making, which is new to more Western concepts of fashion culture. This reflective journey unravels fashion practice in this context, focusing on the making process and the methods that were developed during that process.

I engaged in significant handwork in the field of contemporary womenswear, integrating concepts of the body and garment as a circulatory system for Qi energy. It is the objective of this research to realise garments which help the understanding of Qi as a communication tool in relationships that arise in fashion, namely those that exist between the material and the maker during the making process, the body and the garment, and the wearer and the viewer.

My research question originates from a desire to find a way to materialise Qi in garments through the making process. To pursue this, I explore a range of fields including anthropology, material culture, psychoanalysis, literature, cultural theory, and language. Apart from contextual studies, I adopted conversations and filming as methods to develop my research further. In practice, I investigate the meridians (as seaming which constructs garments), the finishing and the openings of the garment, all of which amount to a transitional interface. I view this as a concrete way of injecting Qi energy into the garment on a material level.

I have reflected deeply on my making experience; this reflection has led the entire process and also given me a much better understanding of body and garment. Through my making process, aimed at materialising Qi in the garment, I essentially tried to establish a *better connection* between body and garment.

This thesis oscillates between practice and theory. My research suggests Qi energy as a new perspective on fashion making; it offers a new understanding of the body in fashion and tries to fill the gap between practice and theory through embodied knowledge.

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## Author's Declaration

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification.

The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 26 September 2014



## Introduction

A major philosophical concept in East Asia, Qi is crucial to an understanding of East Asian culture. As the original impetus in the creation of the universe and the power that activates the world, Qi is present in all animate and inanimate beings and objects, interconnecting them all.

My research explores the relationship between the principles of Qi (embedded in East Asian philosophy, culture, and lifestyle) and the practice of fashion (including making, viewing, and wearing) through the creation of a collection of garments where Qi energy is used as a principle of design as a method of practice, and where Qi is transmitted in the garments. In this research, I aim to integrate some of the paradoxical elements of craftsmanship and, in particular, the traditional culture of Qi, into fashion as a culture of modernity.

My research question originated as the way in which I could materialise the East Asian-specific concept of Qi energy in my garments through the making process. Through contextual studies and conversations with Qi practitioners, I surmised that Qi is particularly concerned with relationships. For this reason, I became more focused on the fact that, as a maker, I am linked to the material through the making process; the material and, in turn, I myself, are also linked to both the wearer and the viewer of the garments.

My argument is that there is an intimate and dialectical relationship between the maker's effort and the injection of Qi energy into the garment. By focusing on the materiality, I can make the finishing unconventional, whilst aiming at producing a *well-made* garment. I have attempted to provide a demonstration of this hypothesis through my making process.

Whilst Western science regards Qi as a supernatural concept, and the Western canon of art and culture considers fashion to be a superficial art form, my research aims to explore the potential and meaning of Qi and fashion when these are brought into alliance. Therefore, the title of this thesis, 'Designing Fashion with Qi Energy' is deliberately ambiguous. It refers to both the energy that flows through creative practice and the energy that may be transmitted through fashion design.

For the purposes of this research, I am both a designer and a reflective practitioner:<sup>1</sup> namely,

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<sup>1</sup> This term was first introduced by learning theorist Donald Schön. His book *The Reflective Practitioner* (1984) points out that 'He [the practitioner] reflects on the phenomena before him,

I make garments and reflect on each stage of the making process by describing it. This description appears throughout the thesis as left-indented text with a different font as the format of subjective texts. The two voices of subjective and more generic observations set up a dynamic tension or dialogue within the thesis, echoing the dialogue between making work with materials, and making sense of it through thinking and words. This is practice-led research, for which studio practice was the method. Christopher Frayling (1993, p. 4) explains that practice-led research 'is concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice.'<sup>2</sup> For me, this means drawing the East Asian concept of Qi into a Western fashion environment. Frayling further describes different ways of thinking in art and design research, namely for, through and into art and design. Through practice-led research, I have tested my hypothesis. I have kept a journal of my studio work, reflected on my making process and reported the results (cf. Frayling, 1993, p. 5). This is what Frayling calls "action research" and describes in the following terms: 'a research diary tells, in a step-by-step way, of a practical experiment in the studios, and the resulting report aims to contextualise it. Both the diary and the report are there to *communicate the results*, which is what separates *research* from the gathering of reference materials.' (*ibid.*)

This thesis thus maps my research journey and is compiled from sketchbook notes, diaries and journals, with subjective thoughts juxtaposed with selected quotations from relevant literature. Wholly dependent on my personal practice, the text is written in my own voice, as an autobiography, including a description of my emotions, especially at challenging times during the making process.

Wholly led by my practice, I have established my own methodology, using film because it would enable me to reflect my making movements and emotions, conversations with wearers/ viewers and collaborative making with Qi believers, the exhibition of garments and work-in-process, a description of my making, a review of the relevant literature; Qi in everyday Korean language and life, Gothic, Magic. Diary and sketchbook are also used as sources for my research. The methods can be viewed as autoethnography<sup>3</sup>. Differently from

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and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behaviour. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomena and a change in the situation' (Schön, 1984, p. 68). Through reflection, the practitioner learns and moves forward to developing.

<sup>2</sup> 'Research could be FOR practice, where research aims are subservient to practice aims, THROUGH practice, where the practice serves a research purpose, or INTO practice, such as observing the working processes of others' (Rust et al., 2007, p. 11).

<sup>3</sup> "Research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political. Autoethnographic forms feature concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection portrayed in dialogue, scenes,

ethnography, I use my subjective experience and thoughts to reflect on the making process or distance myself from it. Through this, I begin to make the garment and get to know more about the triadic relationship surfacing between the wearer's body (the bodily self) in tandem with the emotional self, the cloth (and its apertures) and the maker.

When looking into the relationship between material and maker in the making process, my main focus was the making itself. A garment, however, is a social object, and Qi always happens in relation with others. Thus, I carried out three collaborative projects: wearer conversation, viewer conversation and collaborative making. I included the wearing experience in order to know what the wearer thinks about Qi, a Qi garment, and the comfort and feeling of the finished product. However, as it is unavoidable for wearers to try and comply with my original intention, I started to focus on the physical, tactile feelings inside the garment, which only wearers can feel. For visual emotion and information, I asked viewers what they saw and felt when seeing my garments. This appeared to be different from my making emotion (including frustration) and their general impression was warm feeling of comfort and relaxing.

Through the making process, I define my Qi garment as injecting affective Qi. To know about others' opinions about Qi, a Qi garment and sharing Qi during the making process, I invited a group of TCM practitioners from the Middlesex University School of Health and Social Science, who share a faith in Qi energy as applied to garments, to collaborate with me in designing further clothes. Qi energy also arises from communication and interaction; thus it was helpful for me to utilise their understanding of the body and the Qi energy circulation system in terms of meridians, organs, conduits, colours and garment structure. Making is usually a solitary process. Carrying out research on the manifestation of Qi in garments in a Western context has made me feel even more isolated. This environment has made it hard to share my idea of Qi with like-minded others. However, collaboration with some Qi believers and practitioners has encouraged me in thinking that I am doing something meaningful.

This thesis is designed to accompany an exhibition of my garments contextualised by the process through which they were made, as the two combined can better illustrate the progression of my work over four years. This exhibition is made before the viva, and enables me to revisit the research journey in its entirety, as well as allowing me to reflect both during and after the viva.

Starting from the position of a fashion designer with a specialist interest in Traditional Chinese Medicine<sup>4</sup>, I set out to explore the possibility of making a garment that would integrate the concept of Qi energy (in East Asian thinking and TCM) with the structural understanding of garments and style in contemporary Western fashion.

My early experiments were concerned with the explicit, technical integration of materials to construct a garment that would take advantage of acupuncture pressure points to suggest therapeutic properties. The experiments suggested solutions, such as developing heating devices to be inserted inside the garment, but they also highlighted a number of problems. These problems constituted a design challenge: to confine the subtle, unconstrained concept of Qi to a tight garment by accurately mapping acupuncture points on it. Even if this might help Qi circulation inside the body, it hardly fosters the natural flow between the body and garment, on the one hand, and external circumstances on the other. Further, my chosen method was far from the holistic approach typically used in TCM: in fact, like a scientist or an engineer, I used an electronic heating device to stimulate acupuncture points with the intention of testing its efficacy. This urged me to pay more attention to the metaphysical relation that Qi has to the garment. There was thus a spiral movement behind my iterative design thinking: toile, reflection, adjustment, final garment, reflection again, and a new design.

My thesis comprises three parts. Based on practice, it follows in a broadly sequential way the personal journey to materialise Qi in my garments. The first part (Chapters One and Two) is about Qi and Qi-injecting movement. The second part (Chapters Three and Four) is focused on materiality and liminality in the making process. In the third part (Chapter Five), I have included the relationship with others within fashion practice (wearing, viewing and making together). Some of the chapters include the 'transitional stage' which led me to the next stage of making, therefore reflecting the iterative movement between thinking and making.

The first chapter starts with the notion of Qi in East Asian philosophy and TCM. I made a talisman-like garment, which, unfortunately, did not succeed in expressing the inner meaning of Qi energy; this led me to pursuing a more implicit meaning of Qi in the next stage. I turned to Chinese calligraphy, believed to be the visualisation of Qi, to provide viewers with a more intense feeling of it. Starting from a philosophical concept, my practice came to refer to Qi by its everyday meaning: garments are worn daily, so it seemed natural to approach Qi as something ordinary. Following this everyday association of Qi, I did not

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<sup>4</sup> Hereafter referred to as TCM.

consider Yin and Yang, one of the major tenets in Qi philosophy, until I started to work with my collaborators. For this reason, I have looked at different interpretations of Qi as reflected in Korean culture, particularly in relation to making and the maker's effort.

The second chapter is about lines. Qi flows along meridian lines: these are pathways, or 'breathing holes', through which the inside/outside of the body, the garment and the outer space all interact. To better understand the constant circulation of Qi, I use Tim Ingold's notion of 'threads' and 'traces', as well as his idea of 'shaman's lines', 'anatomist's lines' and my own adaptation of tailor's lines. 'Threads' and 'traces' are left on the garment; however, there is no visible sign of the maker's effort and its materialisation in circuits of energy flow; what is left is, rather, an invisible 'indexical trace' (Pajczkowska, 2010, p. 1).

The third chapter is about my journey to find a way of containing Qi in my garments. A number of failed experiments led me to deforming the fabric; its newly-acquired surface quality subsequently led me to exploring Gothic fiction. The outer surface of the Gothic body reveals the true nature of the individual inside; in the same way, the state of the fabric reveals my difficult making process. The ambiguous boundary between garment and skin, in the sense that the former is both a container and a threshold, can be explained here through the concept of surface quality. This shifts my attention to the garment's surface boundaries: that is, its edges: neck, sleeve finishing and hemming. Finally, I believe that the best place for storing Qi (effort) is within these boundaries.

The fourth chapter is mainly about the interaction between, and transformation of, the material and myself as a maker in this liminal space. In this transitional space, accidental and unintentional making leads me to finally focus on drawing in Qi energy in a materialised form.

The fifth chapter focuses on making with others, the wearers, the viewers and the collaborators. The garment is finished, but the making process will not be complete until the garment is actually worn by the wearer. This is because the making process involves both the maker and the wearer, and, finally, the viewer. The three are interconnected; in fact, the wearer and the viewer are crucial to the Qi experience. This has encouraged me to develop the final garment of this research. Finally, I started a collaboration project with TCM students. Given our totally different perceptions about Qi and fashion, there were two different outcomes: visualisation and materialisation of Qi in garment. The reflection about the exhibition highlights some aspects of my work, inviting a comparison between the violence in my making process with the art of Lucio Fontana and the Slasher film genre.

In the Appendices I have included a summary of my conversations with the wearers and viewers taking part in my current practice. The final Appendix deals with the

collaborative work carried out with colleagues and fellow-researchers.





## Chapter One. Defining Qi

'The magician heals a sick person by the laying on of hands; the surgeon cuts into the patient's body. The magician maintains the natural distance between the patient and himself; though he reduces it very slightly by the laying on of hands, he greatly increases it by virtue of his authority. The surgeon does exactly the reverse; he greatly diminishes the distance between himself and the patient by penetrating into the patient's body, and increases it but little by the caution with which his hand moves among the organs. In short, in contrast to the magician – who is still hidden in the medical practitioner – the surgeon at the decisive moment abstains from facing the patient man to man; rather, it is through the operation that he penetrates into him' (Benjamin, 1968; 1999, p. 233).

In *Illuminations*, Walter Benjamin uses the difference between surgeon and magician as a metaphor for the difference between photography and painting in terms of vision;<sup>5</sup> however, this can also be extended to thinking about the difference between Eastern and Western concepts of the body and the garment. Medicine deals with the body. In TCM, practitioners inspect the whole body and the circumstances in which the body exists before controlling the manifestation of a symptom, while Western doctors deal directly with the point at which the symptom occurs. If the approach of the former can be considered synthetic, as it focuses on 'the relation of the symptom to the whole body' (Kaptchuck, 1983, p. xix), the latter approach can be viewed as analytical because of its focus on individual organs. It thus follows that Western medicine should have developed anatomy, which dissects the body.

As a garment maker from the East Asian tradition of South Korea, my understanding of the body and the garment is different from that in traditional Western thinking. In the case of tailoring, where several panels of pattern pieces are involved, the body is seen as a three-dimensional construct, to ensure that the garment will fit its shape. Non-Western traditions of dressmaking have frequently developed techniques that are different from the cutting and fitting typical of tailoring. The Asian techniques of draping, folding and hand-stitching using pieces of rectangular woven cloth pieces to make loose-fitting garments have been influential to my own practice. I am especially interested in the differences between the concept of the body as deployed in TCM, in which the body becomes meaningful in

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<sup>5</sup> Benjamin's metaphor of the surgeon and the magician describes film-making as a surgical process, in terms of editing, cutting, zooming. However, a painter, by contrast, has a holistic approach; he/she interprets what he sees in a subjective way and transfers it onto the canvas (Benjamin, 1968: 1999, p. 233).

relationship, and the traditional Western way of thinking of the body as the approximation to an ideal form (Jing, 2008). In the former, the aesthetic quality is found within the relationship, so harmony and balance are important; in the latter, there are set criteria regarding ideal aesthetics (such as the golden ratio), although these have been slightly altered, historically speaking. Having grown up in Korea, but educated in the West, I find my way of thinking influenced by both cultures, and feel a need to integrate the two in the body and garment. This may bring about a unique approach to the making of contemporary and fashionable garments as distinct from the convention of idealist aesthetics, taking account of the interaction between body and garment. Using my own experience of garment making as a method of investigation, I shall attempt to explicate what is 'implicit' in a garment.

The holistic way of thinking which lies at the heart of East Asian philosophy centres on Qi as vital energy and life's very essence (Dazhao and Xiaolong, 1991, pp. 14-15). Qi is the life force of the universe, encompassing the living and the non-living alike. Every single activity in the universe can be understood through the activity of Qi energy. This enigmatic concept has always been rooted deep within East Asian culture, and a unique lifestyle (based on philosophy, medicine, art, architecture, traditional costumes) has developed around it.

The reason why I have attempted to produce garments based on the culturally specific concept of Qi is to gain an in-depth understanding of the body and the garment, as well as the garment-making process. Before beginning to address the body and the garment, I shall investigate the Qi that is specific to me as a maker, and the influence it can have on my making process.

## The notion of Qi

In the three major East Asian philosophies, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, the concept of Qi refers to an invisible and intangible life force, the circulation of which is critical to all forms of living and inorganic matter. It has been defined as 'the circulating life force whose existence and properties are the basis of much Chinese philosophy and medicine'.<sup>6</sup> It is analogous to spirit, or *mana* (the supernatural power in Austronesian culture).

'Spirit' comes from the Latin *spiritus*, meaning 'breath, blow of air', which, in turn,

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<sup>6</sup> Oxford Dictionaries. 2014. Oxford University Press. [online] Available at: <<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/chi?q=qi#chi-2>> [Accessed 22 March 2014]

stems from *spīro*, ‘to breathe’). This can be understood as an essential requisite for a living body, a vital force. Further, it indicates a supernatural power that ‘blows’ life into things: the Holy Spirit is, in fact, one of the three forms of God in Christianity. French linguist Alexandre François suggests that the spirit can be mapped together with Qi in terms of ‘breathing’ and ‘breath’ and their derivative meanings (François, 2008, pp. 196–7).

The notion of *mana*, expounded in *A General Theory of Magic* by structural anthropologist Marcel Mauss,<sup>7</sup> has many similarities with the concept of Qi. More particularly, *mana*, as defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, means ‘an impersonal supernatural power which can be transmitted or inherited in Polynesian, Melanesian, and Maori belief’.<sup>8</sup> For Mauss, *mana* is ‘power, par excellence, the genuine effectiveness of things which corroborate their practical actions without annihilating them’ (Mauss, 1950; 2005, p. 137). The understanding of *mana* as a mystical phenomenon in magic, which empowers the magician and renders rituals effective, as well as its use as an everyday word in the Melanesian and Polynesian languages, has led me to speculate on the parallel notion of Qi in East Asian culture. Like Qi, both the animate and the inanimate (indeed, everything) can possess *mana*. Mauss explains that ‘mana is not simply a force, a being; it is also an action, a quality, a state’.<sup>9</sup> *Mana* is explained as ‘being powerful or heavy’ (*ibid.*, p. 134) and as ‘transmissible and contagious’ through contact. At once personal and social, *mana* is as ambiguous a notion as Qi. It can be used ‘to make people healthy and ... to kill’, and is an ‘activity, or spiritual force’, enabling magic. (*ibid.*, p. 133-135)

The concept of Qi may best be visualised through the Chinese character 氣 (qi)<sup>10</sup>. A logogram of Qi, ‘(rising) steam (气) from rice (米)’ is an effective representation of the idea of Qi (cf. the 氣 entry in the *Naver Hanja Dictionary*, 2014)<sup>11</sup>. Steam is neither tangible nor clearly visible, but people can smell it and feel its warmth when rice is being cooked, for instance. In

<sup>7</sup> Mauss drew attention to the universality of *mana* as found everywhere (as *talamatai* in the Banks Islands, *orenda* in North America, *manitou* among the Algonquins, and so on.). This universality, however, has been widely criticised and, in this research I do not deal with the pervasiveness of Qi, but rather look at Qi as culturally and regionally specific.

<sup>8</sup> Oxford Dictionaries. 2014. Oxford University Press. [online] Available at: <<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/mana>> [Accessed 22 March 2014]

<sup>9</sup> Unlike Qi, *mana* also means ‘wealth’ and, on some islands, ‘money’ in a material form. In death, Qi does not disappear but rather simply disperses, whilst *mana* is said to linger after death only in a few very powerful people.

<sup>10</sup> Qi is pronounced differently in different languages. The Chinese pronunciation of *chi* (as in the English ‘chisel’) is used internationally, whereas it is *ki* in Japanese and *gi* in Korean.

<sup>11</sup> Naver Hanja Dictionaries. 2014. Naver corp. [online] Available at: <<http://hanja.naver.com/hanja?q=氣>> [Accessed 23 April 2014].

Also see an illustration of the character Qi in Hempen and Chow, 2005, p. 14.

most parts of East Asia, rice is, in fact, a staple food, a food that provides the energy for sustaining life. When greeting each other, Koreans often say, 'have you had a bowl of rice?', meaning, 'how are you?'. There are various reasons for this salutation, but the point here is that having a meal is thought to equate with physical and psychological wellbeing and, for a Korean person, a typical meal is exemplified by a bowl of rice. Qi, as the essence of life, is symbolised by a bowl of steaming rice.

The energy of life is as fundamental as the most basic of foods, but is understood to be something other than matter. For example, steam from a freshly cooked bowl of rice symbolises the energy that the body derives from nutrition. I believe this abstract, not yet quantifiable, fascinating energy has much to offer to the understanding of the body and the garment.

The Taoists Lao-tzu (570-479 B.C.?) and Chuang-tzu (369-289 B.C.?) first considered the birth and subsequent development of the universe as a phenomenon of Qi, thus establishing the concept in East Asian philosophy (Lee, 2012. p. 48). In fact, the letter *qi* (氣) emerged from the idea of respiration. Its basic meaning is 'breath' or 'air'<sup>12</sup>, as with the word 'spirit'.

However, not only living creatures, but also inanimate objects, contain Qi. Through the flow of Qi, they all interact and communicate with each other. The resulting harmony is integral in maintaining the relationship between the living and the non-living.<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, the boundary between the personal and the social body is ambiguous: the body is simultaneously an individual biological organism *and* a social structure operating in harmony with others, in the same manner as air circulates in and out of, and between, bodies. 'Surfaces [are] not impenetrable faces of geometric solids, but palpable interfaces through which the structural values of interiority [interact] with the environment. Thus not only body organs, but bodies themselves [are] such phenomena. The body [is] the environment of the viscera and [is] itself within an environment at a higher level' (Zito and Barlow<sup>14</sup>, 1994, p. 66). This description of the principles underlying TCM is in keeping with

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<sup>12</sup> Oxford Dictionaries. 2014. Oxford University Press. [online] Available at: <[http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american\\_english/qi](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/qi)> [Accessed 16 April 2014]

<sup>13</sup> Scientists such as J. Baird Callicott and Fritjof Capra use a variety of terms to refer to a similar energy connecting people and things. Callicott and Ames also note that 'an individual organism, like an elemental particle is, as it were, a momentary configuration, a local perturbation, in an energy flux or field' and, in terms of the energy flow 'which is transferred from organism to organism', 'organisms are moments in this network, knots in the web of life' (1989, p. 59). They go on to state that this scientific theory of energy flowing in a natural system is strongly related to the Chinese concept of Qi or 'vital force'.

<sup>14</sup> Angela Zito is an anthropologist of religion and Tani E. Barlow is a historian of Chinese history and culture.

the contemporary understanding of the body in material culture studies, where the body is viewed as a container of organs on a personal scale, as well as a boundary enabling contact with the outside world on a social scale. Material culture anthropologist Jean-Pierre Warnier refers to the ambivalent values of the human body, 'itself a container, with its skin as a surface, with its openings conjoining an inside and an outside. ... [B]y acting in a material world, the human body supplements itself with innumerable surfaces and containers by means of which it extends beyond its own physical limits' (Warnier, 2013, p. 186). If I add my understanding of Qi to Warnier's theory, Qi acts inwardly by penetrating into the container, as well as spreading outwardly, to interact with other containers. Typically, material culture anthropologists regard the orifices of the body-container as pathways connecting the inside with the outside. However, Qi-based philosophy and medicine have long found and used special pathways of their own, namely the meridian lines, investigated in Chapter Two. As a designer, I found commonalities between the two systems of thinking of Qi and the body, especially in the idea of flow and movement and the circulation of energy between 'inner' and 'outer' spaces and economies of being.

When understood in connection with the complex notion of the body as an ambiguous container, the concept of Qi extends to the vague realm that encompasses both the personal and the social spheres. The *Neijing*, regarded as a fundamental text for TCM practitioners, does not separate external changes, such as changes in geography, climate, weather and season, from an individual's emotional changes, or from the circulation of Qi. Thus, TCM practitioners treat various diseases not only by dealing with the patient's bodily Qi, but also by themselves exchanging Qi with the patient at the moment of treatment by acupuncture or moxibustion, to balance the patient's Qi (Hongtu, 1998, p. 26).

The idea of Qi bringing the individual into contact with the social realm is reflected in a number of Korean words containing the letter *gi*. For instance, the Chinese word 氣分 (기분 in Korean), which means 'mood', or 'emotional state', is comprised of the letters 氣 (*gi*) and 分 (to share); literally translated, this is 'the sharing of Qi', which implies the existence and acknowledgement of others.

There exists no stronger instance of the sharing of Qi (in a literal sense, which is different to the word meaning 'mood' above) than the mother-child relationship. Traditionally, in Korea, a child's upset stomach is calmed by the mother's 'healing hands', as she rubs the child's belly while singing soothing songs. The effectiveness of this treatment is believed to come from the rubbing of the warm hands, something that improves digestion

and circulation in the body. Regardless of any underlying scientific reasons, however, this healing process illustrates the sharing of Qi between mother and child, initiated by the mother's wish to cure or soothe the child.

This concept of Qi, which derives its strength, power and emotion from the relationship existing between two or more people, is nowhere more appropriate than in fashion, where the garment is significant to the wearer in so far as it is seen by others – whether or not they are really *looking* at the garment. Garment wearing is an individual and private experience but, at the same time, it is also a shared experience in which viewers can be said to participate. Fashion is thus hyper-social, reciprocal, intimate, and yet public, affecting an individual's mingling with others. The hyper-social character of fashion is stronger today, as the subject's identity is influenced by mass media and new technologies, so that the sense of self and society is ambiguous, being partly individual and partly public.<sup>15</sup>

Here, I want to define fashion and the garment in my practice. Fashion is 'popular or the latest clothing, hair, decoration, or behaviour and a manner of doing something'.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, a garment is 'an item of clothing' which originates from the French word *garnement* meaning 'equipment'.<sup>17</sup> Garments worn in everyday life need to be appropriate to external circumstances, such as natural surroundings and social factors. Fashion and garments do not coincide exactly, but there is a crossover between the two.

As a garment maker, I am deeply involved in the contemporary world, and fashion is a major commodity of post-industrialisation. As mentioned earlier, the notion of the garment views both garment and wearer as social objects; fashion and garments are not wholly distinct and independent objects in post-modernity. Thus, I want to (focus on) the overlap between fashion and the garment.

These issues pose paradoxical questions for my research project, which combines a traditional, pre-industrial philosophy with a modern, post-industrial fashion culture. My previous garment experiments were bespoke couture designs (a practice which pre-dates

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<sup>15</sup> People feel involved with others through encounters that may be either physical or virtual (e.g., social networking), the latter tending to occur in private spaces such as bedrooms: here, individuals are able to show not only their appearance, but also their thoughts and opinions, to others online.

<sup>16</sup> Oxford Dictionaries. 2014. Oxford University Press [online]. Available at: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/fashion?q=fashion> [Accessed 16 July 2014].

<sup>17</sup> Oxford Dictionaries. 2014. Oxford University Press [online]. Available at: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/garment?q=garment> [Accessed 16 July 2014].

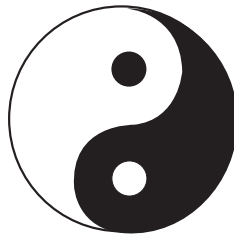
industrialisation), in keeping with the idea that a TCM diagnosis is always specific to the individual. Qi energy is transformable according to its relationship with the material, with other people, and with their surroundings. I am interested in this broader relationship; thus, establishing accurate acupuncture points is not crucial for my work. Instead of made-to-measure garments, I intend to target ready-to-wear garments to fit individual sizes in the context of a post-modern culture; this, however, involves time-consuming work carried out by hand, which cannot be replaced by machine work involving mass-manufacturing and mass-dissemination; my method includes scratching and taping. This connects the old to the modern, TCM (dating back to over 2000 years ago) to contemporary fashion.

## **Yin and Yang**

Nature (and the Qi energy that runs through it) is divided into Yin and Yang, two opposite (negative and positive) concepts amounting to a cosmic dual force. The Yin and Yang principle is the first and foremost in East Asian philosophy because it explains every principle of nature and the universe. Yin and Yang both have 阝 radicals in Chinese letters. 阝 means 'hill or mountain', which means that Yin and Yang literally refer to the North and South slopes of a mountain, where one (Yin) is in the shade and the other (Yang) is in the sun. In other words, they are opposite forces of nature: Yin represents the female, negative and passive energies, which are represented by the moon, water, cold, night, earth, dampness, deficiency and interiority; Yang represents the male, positive and active energies, which are represented by the sun, fire, heat, light, day, heaven, dryness, excess and exteriority (Dazhao and Xiaolong, 1991, pp. 20).

According to TCM, Yang is active, so it excites and ascends. On the other hand, Yin is passive; it calms and descends. The Yang energy lies on the outer surface, outside the meridians, and protects the skin and flesh, while Yin nourishes them because they lie deeper within the body and are determined by the condition of the pulse (Macdonald, 1984, p. 89). This principle can be applied literally anywhere and, hence, to fashion. An A-line dress draws the viewer's eyes to the lower part of it, and looks more feminine (Yin). In contrast, a Y-line silhouette focuses on the upper part (Yang) and looks more masculine. In addition, the garment is the container of the body, with the outside being Yang and the inside Yin. In fact, things will typically mean more of one or the other; with the garment (container), however, the composition is unclear.

In Taoism, Tao means 'to turn back', in the sense that everything moves towards its extremity, only to return to its origin. This maintains balance in the universe, as well as in human life, and constitutes a background for treating patients in TCM; indeed, a healthy person has Yin and Yang, Qi and blood in balance and in harmony.



The Symbol of Yin and Yang

This idea is clearly depicted by the Yin and Yang symbol, a circle made up of two spiral halves, one black, one white, flowing into each other, each half containing a small dot of the opposite colour. The two spirals represent continual movement and interaction. Indeed, according to TCM, the Yin and Yang symbol does not hold any meaning if it is thought of as two separate elements. What makes each significant is their relationship, since they are inter-consuming, inter-supporting, inter-dependent, and inter-transforming (Dazhao and Xiaolong, 1991, pp. 25-26). This continuous movement to maintain balance means that Qi is constantly changing.



## Transitional Stage 1. Talisman Garment



Talisman Garment experiment with sketch

The first experiment focused on the *visualisation* of Qi flow, rather than ‘the act of making as the movement of Qi flow’, which I only came to realise in the later stages of this research. In my sketchbook I wrote a number of adjectives which reminded me of Qi: fluid, loose, flowing, curved, rhythmical, dynamic, comfortable, soft, gentle, tender, warm, worn-out, old, mystical, magical – I wanted to express these characteristics in garments.

The importance of Qi in TCM led me to first think of the healing power of Qi. The practice of medicine has long been considered the exercise of a mystical power in Chinese culture, to the extent that some Chinese writing characters are believed to possess magic powers (Kraus, 1991, pp. 4-5). In Taoism as a religion, creating a talisman (*fulu*) itself is considered an important part of ritual. The *fulu* is believed to possess magical powers, such as healing the body and protecting it from evil spirits, attracting luck or wealth. However, Richard J. Smith (1992) suggests that some Chinese writing characters might have life and power beyond this. In Qing popular culture the character *sha* (‘to kill’), *bing* (‘disease’), or *po* (‘destruct’) is believed to have the potential to harm people (p. 202). These characters, usually written in red ink on paper, are hung on the wall, or carried around close to the body. For my first experiment, I adopted this idea of a talisman or amulet: using the body and garment notion as a transmittable container of Qi, I produced ‘talisman garments’, containing the maker’s wish for healing or magical power. I used the Korean letter 기 (*gi*) and other words containing this letter: 생기 (liveliness, vigour), 원기 (energy, vitality) and 정기 (spirit, vital force). These words include circular graphic units, which I have used as the shape for the neck and arm openings. As wearers can creatively choose any of the garment’s openings for their neck or arms, they play a part in the ultimate shape and silhouette of the garment. Although using the same holes, it looks different according to wearers.

This idea can be seen in Rei Kawakubo’s ‘lace jumper’ for the Autumn/Winter Collection 1982. The holes randomly placed in the garment take on a particular shape depending on the body inside it. Thus the appearance of the jumper differs significantly between wearers. This challenged everything that was generally accepted about clothing at that time. According to fashion and textiles theorist Jonathan Faiers, knitting is ‘an operation that makes something from nothing’. Kawakubo’s jumper is particularly interesting because it is ‘a ‘formless’ garment structurally – it is full of holes that position it as a piece of clothing on the verge of imminent dispersal or collapse, and it is also formless in relation to how it might be worn’ (Faiers, 2011, p. 78).

My function as the designer of the Talisman garment was thus limited to creating individual panels with Korean calligraphic letters and connecting them. The physical qualities of the wearer and the material, such as weight and fabric flow, would complete the design and appearance of the garment, whose shapes would be multiple and unpredictable prior to its being worn.

This experiment actually proved unsatisfactory, as I felt the resulting silhouettes and space created by the garments were somewhat artificial, unlike the 'Qi-flow garments' I had in mind, which would evoke natural movements and the implicit beauty of the wearer.

## Everyday Qi





Experiments imitating the free flow of Qi movement

Qi is central to practices such as TCM, *qigong*, *feng shui*,<sup>18</sup> and Chinese calligraphy, painting and architecture. These aspects of Qi are familiar to, and even popular within, contemporary Western culture. In East Asia, and especially Korea, on the other hand, the notion of Qi permeates the language and everyday life of the people. In the Korean language, Qi has multiple meanings, which are hard to categorise or define: energy (vitality, vigour and strength), sense (air, feeling, virtue, temper, appearance, time and aura), substance or matter (breath, air, smell, wind, climate, weather, or natural phenomena)<sup>19</sup> or

<sup>18</sup> TCM applies particularly to the body, while *qigong* concerns the relationship between bodies, and *feng shui* the relationship between the body and its (natural) surroundings.

<sup>19</sup> Many of these employ the letter Qi: climate (氣候), air (氣體), heat (熱氣) meaning heat and excitement, appearance or expression (氣色).

activity (effort, devotion and affection) (cf. the 氣 entry in the *Naver Hanja Dictionary*, 2014).<sup>20</sup>

In everyday Korean expressions, Qi can also describe the physical or psychological qualities of a person, as well as financial or business-related situations, thus proving that its very notion thoroughly permeates Korean ways of being and thinking. For instance, an obstinate person who does not easily listen to others' opinions is described as someone who has 'strong Qi'. This could be interpreted as the person's inability to balance his/her own Qi with others'. Following the same logic, possessing 'insufficient Qi', when applied to a person, suggests ill health, poor constitution, or a general lack of physical energy. Another expression, 'my Qi is blocked!', is used in response to totally nonsensical situations, or conversely, a surprisingly positive one, enough to influence the flow of Qi.

Amongst the expressions containing the letter Qi, one of the most appealing to me as a garment maker is to 'embody Qi'— i.e., to give someone or something one's affection, devotion, or sincerity, to put it somewhat reductively – which here apply to me as injecting my Qi into the garment I make. Another popular expression, to 'exhaust Qi', means to 'do one's best, to a full extent, using up one's Qi'. When we put all our energy into our work we sometimes feel that we have little left to give at the end, and that we are actually exhausted. To be 'endowed with Qi' is to be provided with positive qualities from other persons, objects, or abstract entities such as celestial bodies: for example, it is believed that by rubbing one's body against a 'healing stone', situated at a place replete with Qi energy, some of the strength of the stone can be transmitted to the person. Also, there exists a popular belief that, by carrying around an object that once belonged to the mother of male offspring, a woman can also give birth to a boy, thanks to the transmitted Qi.<sup>21</sup>

There exists another example specific to Korean culture, regarding the two-way transmission of affective Qi — between humans and the objects they have made, as well as between humans *through* the objects they have made: a special bedding set embroidered with a mandarin-duck couple. Traditionally, the bride's mother would embroider and present this bedding to the newly wed couple, wishing them a lasting, happy marriage. The mother's wishes materialise through the movement of her stitching hands, covering most of the surface of the cloth. Once finished, this bedding set, delicate to handle and to launder, requires special care on part of the daughter. This daily carefulness and time-consuming

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<sup>20</sup> Naver Hanja Dictionaries. 2014. Naver corp. [online] Available at: <http://hanja.naver.com/hanja?q=氣> [Accessed 1 July 2014].

Also see an illustration of the character Qi in Hemen and Chow, 2005, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Until recently, Koreans have strongly preferred the birth of male offspring in the interests of patrilineage.

maintenance remind the daughter of her mother's good wishes and unending devotion in bringing her up until adulthood. Users treasure the objects by which a maker's affective Qi is transmitted to them.

This approach can be adapted for my making process. At every step of it, from research and design to finishing, I embody my Qi, whilst pouring affective Qi into the garment – to make it look better, so that its recipient will be happy wearing it. As mentioned above, Qi energy is exhausted during the making process. Hopefully, it will be transmitted through the garment to the wearer, who will feel and receive Qi, thus experiencing a sense of wellbeing. When my affective Qi is so endowed to the wearer, the latter will treasure the garment and treat it as a favourite object.



Sidepiece of Pillow (Mandarin duck bedding)  
*(Ja Su Mun Yang ( Embroidery Patterns), 2003)*

Thus, the act of making is the flow of Qi intermingling with the personal and social spheres. Material making, commonly understood as the work of human agency over a supposedly inert material, is only part of the story. The human and material agencies influence each other through the invisible flow of Qi.<sup>22</sup> This takes making to a further level: the finished garment, i.e., the by-product of an emotional (satisfying, as well as frustrating) process, arguably turns the wearer or the viewer, through the eliciting of their personal memories, emotions, and a sense of ownership, into the work of Qi-flow.

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<sup>22</sup> I will expand on this in the following chapters.





Experiments imitating the free flow of Qi movement

## Chinese Calligraphy and Garment Making



Close-up of Chinese calligraphy

It is widely assumed that engaging in Chinese calligraphy will lead to the materialisation of Qi.<sup>23</sup> Anthropologist Yuehping Yen explains, ‘calligraphy is the embodiment of the energy flow that circulates between the universe and the body’. Thus, viewers considering calligraphy experience ‘a line of energy materialising through the brush into the ink trace’. (2005, p. 78) I therefore thought that a better understanding of Chinese calligraphy would help my practice and, in particular, help materialise Qi through my making.

In the words of English art scholar Nicolette Gray, ‘a line that is drawn, is one that *moves*’ (1971, p. 9): by one rapid brush stroke, a calligrapher’s Qi is traced onto a piece of paper. Angela Zito, a religious studies anthropologist, considers that the ‘brush which the calligrapher’s hand holds is an extension of the calligrapher’s body’ (1997, p. 42). Calligraphy

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<sup>23</sup> In the 5<sup>th</sup> century the Chinese painter and theoretician Xie He distinguished six fundamental principles of Chinese traditional painting (which includes Chinese calligraphy, since calligraphy and painting were not separate) and these are still in use. The first and most important principle is that of ‘Spirit Resonance’, through which the artist’s Qi is transmitted to the work. Chinese painting (calligraphy) is thus regarded as typically containing Qi. (Wong, 2006, pp. 75–6)



is thus the act of linking the calligrapher's body to the work through the energy flowing between them. The 'penetration of Qi' through the hand, the brush, and finally the paper, is the process of materialisation. As mentioned above, the calligrapher transfers his/her Qi energy onto the paper through his/her calligraphy by using a brush.

Likewise, a large part of garment making consists of the maker's bodily movements: hands holding a needle and a pair of scissors, then encountering the surface of fabric. Occasionally, during the making, when my hands touch the material, my skin intuitively perceives *the moment of Qi penetrating*. This confusing, yet magical, moment is when I need to negotiate with the materiality of the fabric before following with the next step. One of these moments happened while I was making a felt hat as an experiment. The desired shape of a hat is achieved by steaming the felt material and then manipulating it over the mould (block) by sheer force of the hands. This is a seemingly impossible task at first; but after a while came this moment of 'penetration' between the material and my making hands: the material and I seemed to become one, as our intentions appeared to coincide. This feeling might be similar to the moment when I find a dress that is just right for me, as it feels as if the dress automatically wraps itself around my body. This 'penetration' seems to be tacitly recognised by anyone as part of the experience of wearing garments.

I wanted to explore the analogy between the 'magical', as a moment in the maker's creative process, and this same concept in the art of Chinese calligraphy. In other words, calligraphy relies on 'the fleeting moment of its production [which] can on no account be repaired or retouched' (Yen 2005, p. 89). Indeed, the high level of absorption of the rice paper used by Chinese calligraphers allows no second chance. A corollary of this is the irreproducibility of accidental results. On this point, I wanted to replicate the dye-effect on a piece of cotton fabric, which I accidentally achieved by using the fabric as a bedding to dry other dyed fabric samples on. When I tried to imitate this effect on another piece of fabric, I was unable to reproduce the same aesthetic quality.

Design historian Ann-Sophie Lehmann expresses interest in 'how the complex interaction between humans, materials, tools, and technologies shapes the possible meanings and usages of the resulting artefact' (Lehmann, 2012, p. 12). It is commonly believed that garment makers are in control of what their creations will ultimately look like. In fact, materials, tools and technologies all play a fundamental role in the making process: it cannot always be determined exactly how they will act and interact with each other; thus, the result is uncertain.

For this reason, each garment is unique, and makers are necessarily fascinated by this uniqueness. Contingencies have played an important part in my making process. For example, when I applied taping to the seams and finishing lines to hems and sleeves, the taping accidentally went over the finishing lines, creating more variety. The materialisation of movement, together with the 'corporealisation' of the work in the form of Qi penetrating the body in action, is the aspect that I will focus on in the next chapter.



## Chapter Two. Permeating Qi: Lines

'In the healing ceremony the shaman 'sings' the design, but as the vocal sound meanders through the air he sees it transformed into a pattern that sinks into the patient's body. It is a transformation, however, that is visible only to the shaman himself. In this vision the lines are seen to be spun by the spirit of the humming bird.... For the patterns he writes, far from being inscribed across the surface of the patient's body, are said to drop down upon it and to penetrate it. ... it is the very surface of the body that is dissolved, allowing the lines to penetrate its interiority where the cure becomes effective' (Ingold, 2007, p. 60).

'So the human body becomes translucent to the skilled anatomist ... Thus the anatomical gaze, not unlike that of the shaman, resolves bodily surfaces into their constituent threads. But whereas the shaman heals by dropping lines into the body, the Western surgeon proceeds in the opposite direction, stitching up the lines he already finds which the body and whose ruptures are the cause of the malaise, so as to reconstitute the surfaces of the whole' (*ibid.*, 2007, p. 61).

Tim Ingold observes that the skilled shaman and the anatomist both see the patient's complicated body through, and as, simplified lines. In this chapter I intend to examine the meridian lines, a maker's 'traces' or 'threads' and the lines created by my bodily movement as I make garments, as well as the elements shared by all of them.

Both the shaman and the doctor focus on and see only the relevant part of the body; in this way, they are able to diagnose and treat the patient. However, the shaman and the doctor differ in the ways they see the body in front of them. The doctor's anatomical gaze sees the organs of the body and attempts to treat them through medicine with physical intervention. The shaman, on the other hand, 'sings' a kind of design, which is 'transformed into a pattern that sinks into the patient's body'. The shaman alone is able to see this transformation. As the lines penetrate the patient's body, the cure becomes effective. In fact, a person is to be marked with many such designs that he or she acquires from birth through various healing sessions with the shaman.

A skilled tailor may possess similar skills as the anatomist's or the shaman's. In bespoke tailoring, this is known as the 'rock of eye' system.<sup>24</sup> British master Savile Row tailor,<sup>25</sup> Thomas Mahon, explains that this is a 'trained freehand based on an experienced artistic eye

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<sup>24</sup> The 'rock of eye' approach is part of the Savile Row terminology used in the close community of the bespoke tailoring business, meaning a 'rule of thumb: using instinct born of experience, rather than a scientific cutting system' (Walker, 1988, pp. 186-187).

<sup>25</sup> Savile Row is a London street known principally and historically for its traditional bespoke tailoring practices.

to match the item to the wearer, trusting the eye over unyielding scripted approach' (2005). Through the years of experience of fitting garments on various bodily shapes, skilled bespoke tailors perceive the body as its constituent lines, observing the asymmetrical or less regular aspect of the shapes just by looking. In so doing, they are able to translate these lines onto the pattern paper, thus achieving an ideal balance between aesthetics and comfort.

The lines tailors see would be mainly focused on the bodily silhouette and posture, i.e., the outward bodily lines; but the lines that the anatomist and the shaman see would be the combination of external and internal lines: the tailor's lines are physical, almost tangible and definitely observable, whereas the shaman's lines are implicit and a combined result of the physical and non-physical 'seeing' and 'being'.

## Meridian



Meridian practice on dummy



Experiments using meridian lines for seaming

Qi flows through special lines called *meridians* (經脈). These lines are ‘pathways’ in the body that are intimately related with specific internal organs (Kaptchuk<sup>26</sup>, 1983, p. 77). Qi concentrates on, and gathers around, particular points located on a meridian: these are called *meridian points*, or *acupuncture points*. Through the long history of TCM, practitioners have identified meridian lines and points which, when stimulated by acupuncture, or moxibustion (heat therapy), can enhance the flow of Qi, alleviating the ailment as a result.

Kaptchuk (*ibid.*) explains that *jing* [經] means ‘to go through’ or ‘a thread in a fabric’; and *luo* [脈] means ‘something that connects or attaches’, or a ‘net’. In fact, the original meaning of meridians was ‘pathways’, or rather the long connected roads across the Chinese territory. In this way, they were more related to transportation than geographical location; similarly, acupuncture points are junctions, though these are dynamic rather than static.

When TCM became modernised and westernised in the 1950s and 1960s, there had been no fixed points or meridians, each school using different ones (Macdonald, 1984, p.

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<sup>26</sup> Ted J. Kaptchuk is scholar of Oriental medicine and a professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School.

14).<sup>27</sup> There are some landmarks, such as where different muscles meet, but they are not easy to find. Their measurements are approximate, and the practitioner still has to ‘feel’ the point before beginning acupuncture.

The main role of meridians is to enable Qi energy to flow throughout the body and to ensure that each organ communicates and connects with the others. Beyond connecting with the internal organs of the body, meridians also connect the internal organs with the outer surface of the body. ‘The invasion of the body by the outside evils usually proceeds from the exterior to the interior with the meridian as the transmitting passage’ (Dazhao and Xiaolong, 1991, p. 96). Acupuncture, in fact, works with points on the surface of the body, affecting what goes on inside the body through the activity of the substances travelling through the meridians (Kaptchuk, 1983, pp. 77–78). Not only does the outside affect the body but the body affects the outside too. In the same way, the different parts of the body affect one another, again, because of the passage of Qi: ‘A disorder in the Stomach Meridian, for example, may cause upper toothache because the Meridian passes through the upper gums, while lower toothache may be the result of a disorder of the Large Intestine Meridian’ (*ibid.*, p. 78).

One of the interesting aspects of meridians is that the invisible Qi and its pathways are concretely located on, or in, the body, as Qi flows out of the inner organs to the outer surroundings. It is this aspect of meridians that I want to adopt in my practice, focusing on their role as the effective medium that materialises Qi activity in the body.<sup>28</sup> Meridians may be used as potential channels enabling the flow of Qi, connecting the body’s internal workings, its surface, the garment, and their outer surroundings, thus facilitating the interaction between the personal and the social body. This important line is used as a style line, which constitutes seaming, which is crucial to constructing a garment. Through seaming, the fabric shapes the garment. Conveniently for me as a garment maker, meridian lines are located more or less near the common placement of the darts and seams in garments, so it may be possible for the meridian lines to be used instead of conventional style lines.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> In 1993, the World Health Organisation integrated and regulated 365 standard acupuncture points and meridians. (WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific, 2008, p. 3).

<sup>28</sup> A tailor’s lines are more like those of an anatomist than those of a shaman, although the tailor sees the outside lines and the anatomist the internal ones. On the other hand, the shaman’s lines, which run along the surface of the body but also penetrate the body, are akin to the meridians, which are situated on the skin and also penetrate it.

<sup>29</sup> Meridian lines and style lines run close to each other, though this is mere coincidence. Both are outwardly lines on the surface of the body. Meridian lines map the invisible inward and outward

## Thread and Trace

Ingold focuses on the relationship between lines and surfaces. The garment covering the skin, i.e., the surface of the body, as well as the garment-making process, involving both significant bodily movement and the surface of the fabric, draws lines and is, in turn, drawn by lines. Likewise, Qi movement occurs on and through the surface, as mentioned above.

Ingold gives his own definition of ‘threads’ and ‘traces’: ‘A thread is a filament of some kind, which may be entangled with other threads or suspended between points in three-dimensional space. At a relatively microscopic level threads have surfaces; however, they are not drawn on surfaces.’ Further, ‘threads’ can be seen in ‘a ball of wool, a skein of yarn, a necklace, a cat’s cradle, a hammock, a fashion net, ...’ (Ingold, 2007, p. 13). In contrast, ‘the trace is any enduring mark left in or on a solid surface by a continuous movement. Most traces are of one or other of two kinds: additive and reductive.’ Traces can be ‘drawn with charcoal on paper, or with chalk on a blackboard’ or ‘scratched, scored or etched’ (Ingold, 2007, p. 15).

If *threads* are obviously used in garment making, *traces* are left by the maker’s repeated bodily movements; both penetrate in and out of the fabric. More particularly, the stitching penetrating the surface of the fabric amounts to ‘threads’; however, the thread running in and out of the fabric and thus producing a pattern forms ‘traces’. Ingold sees the interaction between threads and traces. ‘Threads may be transformed into traces and traces into threads. It is through the transformation of threads into traces, I argue, that surfaces are brought into being. And conversely, it is through the transformation of traces into threads that surfaces are dissolved’ (*ibid.*, p. 20).

The changing status of lines from threads to traces, and vice versa, in forming a surface, is a crucially important aspect of the use of meridian lines in my practice. If I apply Ingold’s theory, meridian lines are invisible ‘traces’ on the outward bodily line, located on the skin — but they are also invisible ‘thread’, i.e., pathways for Qi flow to penetrate the body. My garment uses meridian lines as style lines (traces) to direct Qi flow; at the same time, Qi dissolves on the surface, turning lines into threads by permeation. Thus, Qi connects the ambiguous personal body (inside) to the social body (outside) through meridian lines.

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Qi movements on the body (flow on the body and penetrate through the body), such as a shaman’s drawing lines. However, style lines are the outwardly bodily lines making flat fabric fit around the three-dimensional body shape.

From this viewpoint, what then do the ‘lines’ of my garment represent at each stage? As well as reflecting my repeated bodily movements as a maker, the lines indicate the movement of material and tools. They start forming the moment my hands touch the surface of the fabric, pin it onto the dummy, and determine the style lines while draping the fabric on the dummy. Also, at the pattern-making stage, I trace the style lines from the toile onto the pattern paper, adjust them, and re-trace them on a piece of fabric, repeatedly cutting and joining fabric, until I secure the seams and edges by sewing. The maker’s touch involves both the inside and the outside of the garment. My making movements (lines) oscillate between ‘traces’ and ‘threads’ at different moments of the process. In this respect, my garment-making process is that of *traces turning into threads* and *threads turning into traces*. The lines I make are thus the combined result of penetrating the surface and tracing *on* the surface, just like the shaman’s lines and the Qi activity in and out of the meridian lines.

## Indexical Trace



Making images from my documentary

‘The semiotics of ‘the textile’ is needed in order to show how the specifically material meaning in textiles is founded on embodied knowledge and affect, and that these exist as indexical traces of the touch, handling and holding that are the presence of an absence of the body’ (Pajczkowska, 2010, p. 1).



In the article 'Tension, Time and Tenderness: Indexical Traces of Touch in Textiles' (2010), visual culture psychologist Claire Pajaczkowska points out an interesting aspect of the notion of trace. In textiles, the movement of the maker (through touching, handling and holding) is not explicitly revealed in the end result; however, a trace of this movement is, in fact, left on the material as an index. In this way, the wearer experiences the maker's (significant) efforts and work, but this aspect is often overlooked.

This prompts me to pay attention to the movements I make while making. For the person actually making the traces it is often hard to actually perceive them. *Seeing* the traces requires a certain distance, not easily achieved whilst in the flow of making. My tactile experience of making may be tacitly recorded somewhere within my body and my garment. As I wondered whether I could actually unpack these silent records, I decided to film myself while making. This filming experiment also acted as the thread directing me towards Chinese calligraphy; namely, the idea of Chinese calligraphy as the traces of the calligrapher's movement.

## Transitional Stage 2. Chinese Calligraphic Garment Practice



Freehand stand-work experiment imitating a calligrapher's movements

Chinese calligraphy is acknowledged as visualising the invisible and intangible Qi as a force or energy (Yen, 2005, p. 111). Calligraphy is, in fact, an extremely intense, yet subtle, practice demanding a great deal of concentration and physical energy by the calligrapher, to the extent of depleting and exhausting the practitioner's Qi: so much depends on a single brushstroke.

I first approached this 'visualisation' by imitating the calligrapher's movements and adopting these in garment making, which eventually led me to move from making garments that made explicit use of Qi energy to embracing the idea that clothes can be understood as a form of calligraphy whereby the designer 'writes' or 'paints' the garment onto the wearer's body in ways that unite aesthetics with meaning or function.



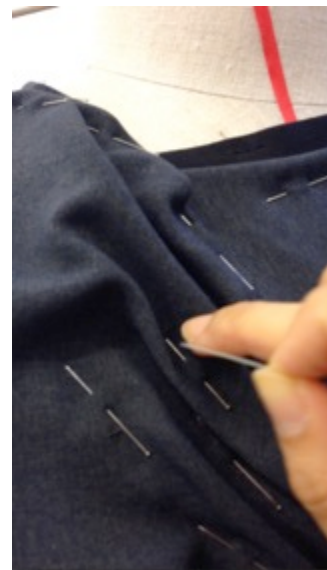
Freehand stand-work experiment

I intended to start this trial by doing stand-work on a dressmaker's dummy, imagining myself as a calligrapher and using fabric and hands as if they were paper and brush, paying attention to the tension of the fabric between my holding fingers.

First, I gaze at the dummy for a while, roughly gauging which meridian lines I might use as style lines, and also considering which fabric to choose. Then I mark

the chosen style lines on the dummy with thin adhesive tape. I unfold a roll of fabric and roughly cut, or tear off, the required length. I wrap the fabric about the dummy. I mark and pin various points on the fabric, cutting off any surplus length.<sup>30</sup>

Watching the recorded film<sup>31</sup>, I realised that making garments involves a significant amount of movement of arms and fingers. I also noticed that I keep touching and stroking the fabric surface, as if reading Braille. It is satisfying when the lengthwise grain coincides with one of the meridian lines. During the stand-work my hands are continuously occupied with holding and manipulating the fabric, marking it and pinning it onto the dummy. Also, when I work on the machine, one hand pushes the fabric while the other adjusts the sewing speed. I was taken aback by the significance of the hands and touch in my making. I only realised at this point that when I see fabric in a shop, I feel as if I am touching it.



Close up of pinning

My cautious handling of the fabric surface resembles the touch of an acupuncturist locating the meridian points: I once saw this happening in a documentary. The visceral quality of inserting the dressmaker's pins into the fabric is akin to introducing the needles into the skin. Even my movements in the film seem to resemble the acupuncturist's movements, despite the different materials used. Another similarity I found while watching

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<sup>30</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction (page 14), the detailed description of my making is printed as left-indented text with a different font as the format of my subjective texts throughout the thesis.

<sup>31</sup> Watching my filmed self was interesting, though having to face an unfamiliar version of myself (i.e., one not mediated by a mirror) was an uncomfortable experience.

myself at work is the fact that I often use the long phalanx of my thumb as a measuring unit when a tape measure is not at hand: in TCM, *cun* (the knuckle length of the person's thumb) is used for finding acupuncture points, something which is difficult to do with standard measurement units.

This drew my attention to the fact that I am using a standard dressmaker's dummy and to how this might influence my practice; on the other hand, this should be counterbalanced by the 'rock of eye' approach so crucial to any bespoke making. Fashion is an invention of modernity to the extent that it is typically a product of industrialised manufacturing and mass production. I originally intended to make bespoke garments, as I considered this essential for directly stimulating the acupuncture points on a particular individual, in the same way as TCM diagnoses are always individual-specific. Moving towards a subtler way of expressing Qi flow, I think that how Qi relates to other things and other people is more important than its presence inside the body and its organs. This approach is related to the idea of the garment as a body container (and as an interface for meeting the world) that also contains, sends and receives Qi. I decided to use the meridian lines – which are differently situated on each individual – as the style lines around which Qi circulates.

Further, the meridian lines act as pathways, rather than being fixed topographic features. Using the meridian lines in loose-fitting garments implies a more symbolic than functional use of the pathways of Qi flow. Thus, in my current research focusing on the materialisation of Qi meridian lines are important, but not as crucial as in my previous experiments to develop tight, therapeutic garments. This time, I do not feel I need to make a made-to-measure garment and can, in fact, produce the usual range of standard sizes, because Qi is mobile and transformable with each situation; what is more important is how a garment relates to the wearer and the viewer, and the Qi that flows in and between them. Besides, although ready-made garments are mass-produced in standard sizes, they become unique according to the particular wearer's habitual movements, body shape/figure, odour and so on. Thus the standardised garment no longer exists.



Making images from my documentary

As well as imitating a calligrapher's movements, I also tried to emulate calligraphic techniques, namely, 'inversion, withholding, and sluggishness' (Yen, 2005, p.86), by folding or overlapping layers of fabric, and experimenting with its varying translucency. Lehmann emphasises the importance of movement in calligraphy by citing socio-cultural anthropologist Fuyubi Nakamura: 'the process is as much valued as the result, and the ability to recreate brush movements from written signs and decorative patterns in the mind was probably high, adding a further kinaesthetic layer to the image' (Lehmann, 2012, p. 16).

However, my belief that I could imitate a calligrapher's movement in order to materialise the Qi flow in the fabric turned out to be mistaken. Before I saw my movements in the film I assumed that they would be dynamic, bold and fluid, resembling a calligrapher's powerful brushstrokes. What I witnessed, however, was segmented, over-cautious movements of my fingers, hands and forearms. The film experiment merely proved the impossibility of imitating the movements of skilled practitioners – be it calligraphers or couturiers – without the experience of practice of the art. This frustrating experience, nevertheless, led me to developing a perception of my own movements, as well as those of others.

My failure to produce a garment by using a calligrapher's movements was due to a lack of know-how or 'tacit knowledge'. Michael Polanyi describes tacit knowledge as knowing more than we can tell, or knowing how to do something without thinking about it; this can be exemplified by the ability to ride a bicycle (Smith, 2001, p. 314). Compared to explicit knowledge, which is easily proven, tacit knowledge is hard to verbalise because its extent is hard to assess. In the case of riding a bicycle, resuming cycling after a long break requires

only a little practice. It can be explained that this knowledge is acquired and remembered through repetitive bodily movements and is accumulated through time. As Polanyi points out, 'we are relying on our awareness of a combination of muscular acts for attending to the performance of a skill. We are attending from these elementary movements to the achievement of their joint purpose, and hence are usually unable to specify these elementary acts' (Polanyi, 1966, p. 10).

An interesting example of this is alphabet learning, commonly regarded as explicit knowledge. However, children learning Chinese letters trace them repeatedly until they come to instinctively remember them in terms of the movement required to produce them. Linguist and sinologist John DeFrancis (1984, p. 163) explains that, by focusing on the movement that their body makes, children can learn a vast number of characters. The explicit knowledge acquired by Chinese alphabet writers is thus mingled with a tacit knowledge akin to garment making.

I am aware of a kind of explicit knowledge, which Polanyi calls 'knowing what', when I do freehand work on the stand, i.e., to fit the grain line onto the centre-front line on the dummy, to use a bias grain for creating better drapes, to pin, to mark on the fabric, to trace on the pattern paper, following the manual. However, what I miss is the tacit knowledge of 'knowing how', accumulated through time (cf. Polanyi, 1966, p. 7). Tacit knowledge is difficult to judge; in fact, I had misjudged my ability.



Pin work re: the free flow of the calligraphic brush stroke

Reflecting on the difficult journey I have undertaken, it is uncomfortable for me to look at the film that documents the way this went downhill. My face is in despair; I start to become more intrigued by my facial expressions than by the bodily movements that initially prompted me to make the film. However, I was trying to focus on making, and remained unconcerned with the fact that I was being filmed. I put on a grim face, with wrinkled brow and pursed lips. My apparent frustration obviously results from unrealistic expectations; on the other hand, it is a reminder of the importance of always trying to do my best and maximise the potential of my Qi energy. Although all these feelings are not actually visible, the finished garment is an indexical trace of the process I have gone through. This leads me to consider the relationship between the maker's effort and the notion of Qi, and how it can be best utilised to make a garment that 'contains Qi'.

## Chapter Three. Containing Qi: From Surface to Edge

My previous attempts to depict the free flow of Qi movement materialised in the practice of Chinese calligraphy were unsuccessful because I had overlooked skills and practices that can remain hidden as the expert practitioner's tacit knowledge. During this journey, my focus shifted towards the maker's 'traces', and since then I have become more interested in how these traces can be materialised in my garment. However, my experiments did not provide a clear answer and I experienced a period of frustration. In this chapter I will explain my ambivalent emotional state in relation to making and trying to find a way to contain Qi in my garments.

### Transitional Stage 3: Unintentional Making Practice



Cutting on fabric



Sometimes I feel an urge to purposely damage the experiments I have made. This is, on the one hand, obviously in order to destroy the evidence of failure; on the other hand, it is an attempt to release 'blocked Qi' through stimulation. I scratched the surface of the fabric with sharp tools in the hope of releasing blocked Qi and moving to the next phase. However, as my action has become more brutal, the results have been significantly different; releasing blocked Q heals, while scratching destroys.

My (cutting) action progressed from timid, repetitive movements to bolder, multidirectional slashes. In this way, I was emulating artists who tear paintings, or potters who smash pots when they are unhappy with their efforts: I damaged the fabric surface with scissors or knives.

As a maker, I feel persecuted by my practice. I can neither abandon it nor completely control it. Materials resist my imagination and will. They seem to do what *they* wish, not what I wish them to do. At its worst, my practice becomes a nightmare and I wonder if the whole idea of my research has been sheer folly. I sometimes feel a prisoner of my own research project, rather than its mistress. So, I think there is an analogy between demonic possession, or haunting, and the way a maker relates to material. If research is a journey, the process is similar to making one's way through a dark maze or labyrinth.

Through these 'destructive' intentions and acts, I discover a fascinating 'depth' in the damaged surface of the fabric. At first, it feels irritating to the touch and the scratches only remind me of my difficult journey. Indeed, stroking the fabric makes me shudder in response, but it then also provokes my curiosity and encourages me to keep touching. Emerging from my dark psychic condition, this communicates in the same way as horror films, simultaneously evoking revulsion and intrigue. I started to wonder about taking this idea and pursuing it to its extreme. Horror, or the Gothic, emerges as another possible element in garment making, urging me to investigate the characteristics of this genre. This, in turn, opens up some interesting theoretical perspectives for my creative process. Valerie Steele's study of the Gothic as a fashion trope offers many examples of how this has been used to subvert fashion codes (Steele, 2008). However, my Gothic approach demonstrates the emotional relationship between maker and material, and how it can change the making process.

## The Scratched Surface



Close-up image of scratched fabric

Gothicism mirrors the individual's uneasiness in a rapidly changing world, in which they are anxious to redefine what 'being'(existence) is. Historian Kelly Hurley proposes that Darwinism seems to have demolished 'human centralism, positing a similar anatomical structure between human and animal' (1996, p. 4). Gothic literature displays this transitional stage in a rather brutal and violent way by depicting grotesque, horribly deformed bodies that provoke revulsion and curiosity in equal measure. The horror genre emerged in the eighteenth century, a time when, in Western culture, science was challenging the supernatural (Lévi-Strauss, 1978; 2001, p. 1). The Gothic can, in fact, be seen as the antithesis of the Enlightenment, rationalism and intellectualism. It is a genre that interests me because of the way it explores the mythology of the body and its forces as a dark material. This ambivalent sensation runs parallel with the aggression that goes into fabric scratching as a result of my blocked and frustrated state, the 'hairiness' that results from scratching the fabric prompting a creepy uneasiness and captivation in me. Despite this ambivalent feeling, my anxiety may still create an unusual fabric.

The attraction for me of the unplanned results of this scratching and cutting led me to perfect a way of pulling long threads out of the material.

The scratches on the fabric are made by pulling one strand (pile) of woven fabric at a time: the warp and weft disappear under the resulting tangle. When tugging with a cutter, I try to unwind as much of the strand as possible. When the force of my pulling becomes too great for the strand to withstand, it is cut and detached from the fabric. Whilst the surface of the fabric is progressively destroyed, it also becomes more textured. In order to pull a longer strand, I use my left hand to hold the fabric flat while continuing to use the cutter with my right hand; this better counteracts the force of pulling or tugging. The longer the strand, the more shirred the result; sometimes it even creates holes. Then I will have to iron the fabric in order to be able to work with it.

Because of the scratched nature of the fabric, I have to negotiate with its materiality. Ironing causes it to lose some of its interesting texture and liveliness; on the other hand, laying it flat makes it easier to trace the pattern pieces and sew the corresponding seams. Totally different results result from either ironing the fabric or leaving it unironed. Besides, I have no great control over its materiality. The scratched fabric will look different each time. Because the material has shrunk as a result, I cannot determine exactly what size it will be. I attempt to use a larger piece of cloth to counteract this effect but keep underestimating the size I need, so the scratched fabric is ultimately much smaller than I intended.



A piece of fabric pattern for a garment after scratching

I have created a new fabric, but my creature no longer seems to follow my will or even belong to me. The next step of making finds me no longer a decision-maker, as the material starts to display its own will. The creature gains a life, like Dr. Frankenstein's, which eventually ruined him. So the scratching will ensnare my making if I do not negotiate its materiality: There seems to be no option except to iron out the wild new pile, although the result will be a less textured effect.

What does this surface effect tell me, and how does it inform my making? Once I related my making to Gothic literature, I started to identify this question with this genre: specifically, this scratched fabric, which is so hard to control, seemed to relate to a Gothic literary character. The grotesque and abject elements of Gothic horror narratives emphasise the distorted, unnatural appearance of its characters. Gender theorist Judith (Jack) Halberstam argues that Gothic abjection indicates that the self is nothing more than a surface, and that its outer state explains the terrible inner quality of the subject by brutally exaggerating and emphasising its outward appearance: 'the hidden self subverts the notion of an authentic self and makes subjectivity a surface effect' (Halberstam, 1995, p. 64). The grotesque appearance of the creatures of Gothic fiction emphasises not only the imperfection of human existence within society but also the need to conform to a certain ideal in order to be accepted by wider society. Emphasising the dual nature of a particular character, i.e., a man who appears to be docile and passive but is a villain at heart often turns out to be a kind of red herring, in the sense that, typically, he is ultimately revealed as a monolithic character simply trying to conceal the evil within (Spooner, 2012, p. 5). Thus, Gothic literature reveals that the surface explains the self.

The scratched fabric constitutes traces of my making. Although I would like to deny my earlier failure by simply throwing it away, here it is: an undeniable journey. It also reveals the fact that I handle the material and, in turn, I am handled by the material. The surface of the material thus reveals the nature of my making process, including its emotional journey, and this is something that I have been encouraged to explore further.

## **Scratching Quality**

The surface of my scratched fabric bears traces of my making and damaging. In fabric making, the focus is on the creative aspect, for instance weaving, knitting or felting. Whilst

the material is transformed, there is no destruction *per se*. Conversely, the scratching that I do actually deforms the integrity of the surface of the fabric in order to create new fabric. In garment making, however, it is possible to see both destruction and creation, the former being, typically, the result of cutting and seaming. Pajaczkowska explains seaming as an action involving simultaneous destruction and creation: 'the stitch pierces, punctuates, penetrates, as it unites the separate edges, and within a single gesture it combines both aspects of the paradox of destruction and creation' (Pajaczkowska, 2010, p. 10). My textile making has produced a new type of fabric, one that involves destruction.



Scratched and non-scratched areas on fabric

This destruction creates a kind of 'impurity' in the fabric. Likewise, the materialisation of Qi injects impurity, so to speak, into modern fashion culture. Fashion is, in fact, often considered a form of 'impurity' within design itself, as it is affected by productivity and marketability. Impurity as a positive quality emerges from Mary Douglas's anthropological concept of dirt as 'matter out of place'. Douglas recognises both the destructive and the productive aspects of pollution: 'Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment' (Douglas, 2001, p. 2). In other

words, pollution leads to 'a highly organised system' and also 'serve[s] to delineate more firmly the taxonomies [it violates]' (Douglas, 2001, p. 41).

This impurity is an impetus for the activity of the universe, according to Qi logic. Qi is comprised of both Yin and Yang. The spiral shape of the symbol for Qi implies both distinction and complementarity between its two components, whose movement is constant and harmonious. Each symbol contains opposite components within it. Since everything in nature contains both Yin and Yang (there is no pure Yin or Yang), it could be said to be impure. The characteristics of gathering into one's character makes Yin and Yang move continuously, which means that it is alive.<sup>32</sup> This living, energetic quality of impurity is fascinating. I realise that the grain of sand in the oyster that generates the pearl is a necessary irritant. Yet when the materials refuse to do my bidding, it leaves me irritated and, for the time being, without pearls.

This creation of impurity leaves traces on the fabric, which means that the scratched fabric reveals my presence, especially since it holds my scent and sweat. Garments made with mass production and distribution in mind bear hardly any signs of their makers. My garment, on the other hand, does not aim at mass production: it is a unique piece involving significant hand work and a focus on the transformable character of Qi, whose presence would be much attenuated if the garment were mass-produced.

When wearing a garment, chafing (friction) produces piling and fluff, which differs according to the material; hairy fabrics such as acrylic or wool will suffer more than cotton or linen. Repetitive movements will cause rubbing of a garment – against, for instance, a desk, when the wearer is sitting at a computer, typically chafing the sleeves. Besides, certain areas of the body, such as the armpits, elbows or knees, will naturally rub against the corresponding parts of garments, causing them to become threadbare and even forming holes over time. Continuing to wear the garment regardless may indicate poor financial circumstances; however, it can also evoke familiarity or nostalgia, and the garment can take on the connotations of a favourite teddy bear or a comfort blanket. Because of the destruction caused by scratching, the end result, i.e., the finished item, looks like something that has been worn for some time. This demonstrates the presence of both a new garment (commodity) and the wearing experience.

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<sup>32</sup> For more detail on Yin and Yang, see Chapter 1, Page 25-26.



Scratched Dress worn by a wearer

Reflecting on the making process, I see that scratching was a transitional phase, leading my journey in the direction of new ideas and developments. Viewed from an anthropological and psychological perspective, in transitional rites scarification is typically performed as a symbolic action to cut ties with an existing group. This can take the form of severance, in terms of male and female circumcision, tattoos, hair cutting, teeth extraction or body piercing. My destructive activity, to break or escape from a blockage, ultimately represents scarification. However, I was not aware of this meaning when I was scratching the fabric; I was simply trying to move on and escape from a period of dissatisfaction. Bruno Bettelheim explains that 'initiation ceremonies are intended to cut off the youth from his negligible past as if he had died and then to resurrect him into an entirely new existence as an adult' (Bettelheim, 1955, p. 14). It was only by breaking the fabric that I could finally dare to experiment with opening, taping and layering, which became crucial details for my garments.

Anthropologist Terence Turner includes scarification within the context of 'social skin', similar to Western dress (Turner, 2012, p. 503). There is no object more like social skin than the garment: through wearing garments, the physiological human body becomes a social entity. By covering the biological body, garments work like skin, namely, *social* skin.

Through wearing garments, humans become a part of society (this is more clearly seen in uniforms: through these, people feel a strong sense of belonging to a group.) Scarification and the wearing of garments are alike in that they both make an individual presentable to, and accepted by, society. Through scarring, my experiments, which had once had to be thrown away, revived and regained the opportunity of being a garment.

## **Skin as Boundary**

The metaphor of garment as a social skin leads me to focus further on the skin. According to Hurley, 'the skin is a border between the outer world and the inner world, the environment and the personal self' (1996, p. 10). In physiology, the skin is the only fully exposed bodily organ, and the body's largest and most sensitive one; its purpose is to cover and protect the body, support the muscles, register information and hold a sensory motor function. As the surface organ of the body, it is the one that essentially meets the outside world, therefore acting as a transitional place where the natural body becomes the social body. There are thus ambiguous physical boundaries between nature (personal) and culture (social). In *The Book of Skin* (2009), Steven Connor suggests that 'the skin must be understood as a powerful and ubiquitous 'milieu' in which all of our complex relations with self and other take shape' (p. 27).

Warnier emphasises the liminal quality of the human body, particularly the skin, and the idea of the human body as a container. His view of the skin is very similar to my idea of the Qi-based body, as defined in Chapters One and Two: 'The skin is provided with openings through which the inside and the outside communicate and through which things, substances, information, and emotions enter or leave the body and the psyche.' (Warnier, 2013, p. 188). Skin as a covering (container) of the inner organs and a border (membrane) meeting the outside is a medium (threshold) for transferring information. Similarly, the meridians on the skin are a kind of conduit for Qi energy to be carried in and out of the body. The idea of skin as a visible and tactile interface between self and society is important to all cultures, where clothing is worn over the skin as a social skin. So the complex meanings of skin are also central to my creative practice as a place for situating the meridian along which Qi flows and permeates the skin.

Once worn, a garment meets the skin inwardly and the world outwardly. The



individual and personal body becomes the cultural and social body when it wears a garment: wearers are thus made decent and presentable, whilst conveying personal and/or social information. Returning to the idea of the container, liminal spaces can be identified when a garment is being worn. As the body's container, the skin includes a surface that interacts with others and the environment. The garment also acts as a container for the body, like a kind of membrane covering the skin. A garment is still a garment, even when it is not being worn, but its real function lies in it being used as clothing. Without the body, however, the meaning of the garment diminishes. As a liminal site, the garment connects with the body ambiguously, by dividing the interior from the exterior, demarcating the boundary of the body and raising its surface in discourse. It is ambiguously located in an intermediate position between the self and the environment (Hurley, 1996, p. 5). As surfaces, garment and skin share significant commonalities: in fact, the garment looks like a 'second skin'.

Following on from the notion of fabric as skin, I began to think of the scratched fabric as disfigured skin, and the layering experiments as skin layers: these are further elements connecting my work to the grotesque appearance of the monster in Gothic literature, which emphasises the skin (surface):<sup>33</sup> certain characters display gruesome and distorted bodily features.




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<sup>33</sup> Halberstam sees the skin as a major element in 19th- and 20th-century Gothic fiction. 'Skin houses the body and it is figured in Gothic as the ultimate boundary, the material that divides the inside from the outside. .... The outside becomes the inside and the hide no longer conceals or contains, it offers itself up as text, as body, as monster. The Gothic text, whether novel or film, plays out an elaborate skin show' (Spooner, 2004, p. 9).

Scratched silk on one of toile



Opening experiment resembling scarred skin

If a garment is a kind of second skin, then my experience of layering reminds me of the multiple strata of ectodermal tissue: epidermis, basement membrane, dermis and hypodermis. Thinking about it in this way, the thread coming in and out of the fabric looks like hair on the skin.

This changes the way that I look at the fabric. The scratched chiffon resembles peeling skin with a fresh new layer waiting to emerge from underneath. It also looks like a bandage that has been pulled off a wound and tossed aside. This, in turn, suggests injured skin in a sort of graphic, Gothic way. Eventually, my mock garment is not a garment anymore. When I put it on, I think of it as another layer of skin.

## Openings on Meridian Lines



Opening on the meridian style line

The cutting idea suggests aligning the seams with the meridians. I use toiles I have previously made but discarded because they were too tight; in this way, I am hoping to revive them. I cut openings in the middle of the seams. The open seams on the dummy form a space, allowing the toile (the skin), and myself, to breathe. Having created these openings my work develops more quickly, and I then consider applying draping of sash or knots to them. Thus the openings have become a milestone, leading to the next phase of my work.



Various openings on garments

Openings along the meridians allow Qi to run along the bodily surface and to penetrate and permeate through the body, thus enhancing the flow: seaming and opening of seams takes place in this area, making it more vibrant.

As well as garments, Warnier also looks at the use and the importance of openings in material culture. 'Containment in itself is of little value unless things, substances or people can be put together inside the container by passing through the opening cut into the surface of the container. This is why the openings of the body, of pots, houses and cities are so important and receive much attention. This is also why the surface of the containers is usually treated with much care' (Warnier, 2013, p. 193).<sup>34</sup> An opening identifies an ambiguous interface, connecting inside with outside; at the same time, it separates them, connoting continuity and discontinuity within which transformation, both personal and social, can happen.

Not only do the openings such as a bodice fastening or a neck opening physically involve the body in passing through, openings (slits) on meridian lines also allow air to flow from the outside to the inside and circulate between the garment and the wearer's skin. In this way, air (Qi) can be said to connect the outside with the inside through these openings.<sup>35</sup> The openings also partly reveal skin that is usually covered. It raises the question about garments as social objects developed to hide portions of skin considered private in a given culture. Thus, the distinction between the social and the private skin (that which is hidden underneath the garment) becomes blurred; the two surfaces (fabric and skin) become intertwined. The knot and sash I have applied to the garment come from one opening, flow outside and go back into another opening. It gives a sense of movement to the inside-outside connection, and thus gives more interrelation between the skin, the garment and the exterior surroundings.

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<sup>34</sup> Warnier also points out surface decorations emphasising the opening or neck of the pot and the surface of its walls for identification and aesthetic satisfaction (p.193).

<sup>35</sup> In fact, idea of airflow was mentioned by one of the wearers I spoke to.





Sash from meridian to meridian

The stitches are sufficient to hold the garment together with openings on the seams. Since wearers are unfamiliar with openings placed in unconventional areas, i.e., they are different from necklines, armholes, or bodice fastenings, I am hoping that they will think of the garment as something delicate, and handle it with care – just as a Korean woman would handle her mandarin-embroidered bedding.<sup>36</sup>

## Liminality in a Garment

*Liminality* is the quality ‘relating to a transitional or initial stage of a process’ and ‘occupying a position at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold.’<sup>37</sup> There is an inside and an

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter 1, pages 31-32.

<sup>37</sup> Oxford Dictionaries. 2014. Oxford University Press. [online] Available at: <<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/liminal?q=liminal>> [Accessed 30 March 2014].

outside, and a point at which the two meet; it is at this point that the transitional stage occurs. There is a parallel in human existence, which positions a liminal state between the personal and the social being.

Liminality was first developed as a concept by Swiss folklorist Arnold van Gennep in 1938, in his famous essay on rites of passage. Van Gennep proposes that all cultures have rituals demarcating changes in social status: for example, from child to adult. These rites can delineate social spaces as geographical ones, enabling a journey to be made. This journey has three stages: preliminary, liminary and return (post-liminary). Returning to the child/adult example, adolescents may be sent on a journey or subjected to an initiation rite in a liminal space before being accepted back into their own society, now as adults (Van Gennep, 1960). The liminal has, in fact, been much used as a concept to describe transitional stages in a range of different contexts, which could include my making. It is especially relevant in fashion, as the culture of fashion is associated with the hope of transformation. Garments, in particular the fetishist or talismanic kind, are used to signal special powers of defence, aggression, seduction, power, and purity. Fashion is also associated with the liminal stages of life (youth and early adulthood), where individuals experience intense bodily changes and peer group socialisation.

This concept of liminality can be applied to my making process, particularly to the way it merges with, and emerges from, my materials.

‘The collar of a coat is a frame for the face that manages the transition from the clothing to the body,... The collar-like cuffs, hems and turn-ups speak of the civilised surplus of cloth that frames the edge of a garment by doubling back on itself rather than ending abruptly with an unfinished, frayed or selvedge line. The transition from garment to skin is especially meaningful as a line for demarcation between nature and culture. ... signified by donning an excess of cloth in the form of a fold’ (Pajaczkowska and Curtis, 2008, p. 63).

Pajaczkowska and Curtis explore this liminal interface between nature and culture insofar as it relates to material. The collar, hem and turn-up become more culturally relevant through the use of surplus fabric, double folding involving tools and extra labour: measuring, stitching, and ironing.

Liminality in a garment is materialised through the edges and ‘ends’ of a garment, where body and garment are seen to meet. Edges are very visible as lines, the symbolic places where nature (body) and culture (clothing) meet. The neck finishing, hemming and bodice fastenings are all surfaces and spaces where the garment meets the body. In addition, seaming, which turns flat fabric into a three-dimensional garment and creates a Qi-

permeating place, can be a liminal place. Open slits on meridian lines also form a liminal interface where body meets garment. Liminality is also experienced by the wearer when putting the garment on the body, as this is also a kind of transition where the biological meets the social, the individual meets the social, the natural meets the cultural, the self meets other people.

As an intermediary, transitional place, liminality is strongly related to magical rituals, typically in rites of passage. A shrine, for instance, is the way that a particular deity makes contact with others around it; this is often the case in powerful Korean folk beliefs. A *Seonangdang* is a place where, according to traditional Korean culture, a memorial service takes place for the *genius loci* of the village. It is normally located at the village entrance, acting as a boundary. This liminal space connects the villagers with the outside; at the same time it separates them, offering a kind of protection. A boundary as a transitional stage is also connected to life and death. In some healing rituals, a shaman makes contact with the boundary to bring something from one side to the other and, by doing so, heals a sick person in an intermediate stage between life and death. Liminal space is full of Qi energy for transition; it is an invisible place in which Qi transmission happens. In a garment, this can lie at the point of finishing and seaming; it can be compared to the opening of a container, or the outskirts of a village.

A maker's labour or effort that can be transferred into Qi energy – to embody Qi, to exhaust Qi and to be endowed with Qi – is *affective Qi*. As mentioned in Chapter One (pages 31-32), this is generated to a greater extent in the liminal interface, given the presence of the more personal and more social, more natural and more cultural self. My garment-making can display this in the finishing and hemming at the edges and openings and seaming on the meridian style lines. The garment itself shows the designer's effort: how much thought has gone into each detail, including research, choice of material, design, making, finishing, and even how it is displayed. As in Gothic literature, this outer state explains the inner quality. The garment will obviously reveal its inner qualities on the surface.

These edged interfaces of finishing and seaming are not clearly visible, unlike the fabric, silhouette and external details such as embroidery or beading. This lack of visibility means that they tend to be ignored by manufacturers to reduce labour costs. Among the myriad factors people consider when purchasing a garment, are design, silhouette, colour and fabric; the edges, seams and fastenings are, arguably, minor concerns. This is why garments in which these aspects have been carefully considered could be acknowledged as



being truly well made, as this effort lies above and beyond what is usually expected. Assuming that wearers recognise this, their attitude towards the garment and how they treat, wear it and move in it will change. Thus, affective Qi coincides with this liminal space.



## Chapter 4. Transmitting Qi: Magical Making Process

### Transformation in a Liminal Space

The sleeve is one of the openings allowing the body to enter the garment. As a place of transition between the corporeal and the social body, sleeve finishing demands functional properties, as well as aesthetic ones: it must produce a comfortable feel (it touches the skin, and wearers should be able to get on with their everyday lives whilst wearing the garment) and allow sufficient space for the garment to be put on and taken off easily. In addition, armholes should allow freedom of movement of the arm as well as a good garment shape when the arm is relaxed and down.<sup>38</sup>

Instead of conventionally double folding on the finishing, I want to concentrate my efforts on this edge, which I consider to be one obvious place where Qi can be materialised. I consider which finishing method I am going to use. I begin with the traditional technique of double folding, to familiarise myself with the fabric, i.e., assess how far it stretches, what it will look like when folded, and how this will affect the outer silhouette. Although novelty is not my priority, serious consideration can produce originality. Further, fabric finishing such as overlocking or frayed edges can only hinder the liveliness and comfort of a garment. I add more fabric inside the sleeve and use taping as a finish. Now the inside of the sleeve opening has more variety in layering than an ordinary finishing. I then exaggerate this variety by adding different coloured fabrics to the inside to accentuate the dynamics of this liminal space.

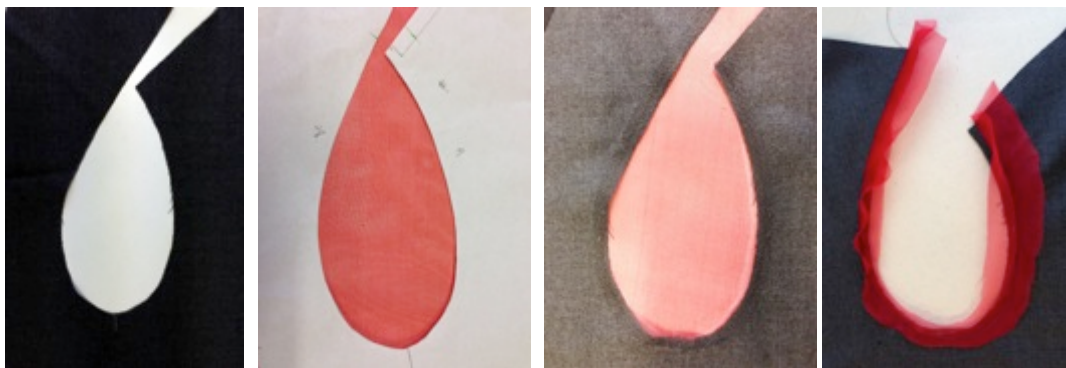
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<sup>38</sup> There are functional, social and/or cultural reasons why it must not reveal too much of the body.



Shoulder layering in contact with skin

As I watch the documentary of my making (including the layer making), I am surprised at how many times I cross over this liminal space. I am constantly turning the garment over at the openings to finish it. This process is also applicable to the wearing of the garment and the socialisation of the individual. In order for the garment to be worn, the wearer must pass through the opening (neck opening, bodice opening and sleeve), at which point they become a social being crossing this liminal interface. Throughout their lifetime, people cross the individual-social boundary every day when they put on a garment at home to go outside and change back when they return. As babies and young children, we are dressed by our parents; we let this practice happen until we learn to take care of it ourselves. Each time we put on or take off a garment we cross and re-cross the boundary. This significant place, as liminal and transitional interface, should be dealt with carefully, according to the points Warnier has noted.<sup>39</sup>



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<sup>39</sup> See chapter 3 and page 63.



Inside layers of work-in process of sleeve layering

## Realisation of Imagination through Making

The making process starts from sensing. If Qi energy is considered (in particular, Qi Gong practice), *watching* (focusing) equals *sending* Qi, and the objects being watched receive Qi energy. In Qi gong practice, bodily activity leads the flow of Qi, so training involves exercising this movement in order to balance Qi (Mingwu and Xingyuan, 1985, pp. 48–9). The activity of observing one place or object through sensing thus indicates channelling Qi into it, which sends and receives Qi energy.<sup>40</sup> Through sensing (including watching and touching), Qi energy circulates between the maker (subject) and the fabric (object), which triggers an exchange of information, so that the maker gets to know the materiality of the fabric and is therefore able to manipulate it effectively.

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<sup>40</sup> This is frequently mentioned by one of my collaborators, a Qi gong instructor. He mentions that this understanding has been passed down orally by Qi gong practitioners and works as one key element for practising.



Through sensing, which involves the corporeal body feeling the objects and materials, the ritual of garment making commences. Sensing is not just a mundane process: it leads from the imagination (designing) to the materialisation (making) stage, as our senses inform us about reality. In this research, my creative ideas typically started from Taoist talismans, the flow of fabric, calligraphic brushstrokes, unexpected outcomes from experiments and, sometimes, actual making.<sup>41</sup>

I draw my idea on a piece of paper and make notes next to the image, or take photos of the dummy work. Even this 'imagination' stage cannot take place without the actual making, which always involves negotiating the fabric's materiality. Before moving into sewing, there seems to be endless development. Each stage of physical making involves thinking of 'what if?' and 'how about?'; for instance, despite using a similar style line and the same finishing techniques (taping), because of the different materiality of thick and thin fabrics my making approach is different for each. My finishing idea (what if) needs to be tested against the thickness of the fabrics I want to use, and is challenged by real fabric (how about) after experimenting with test garments. When handling thin fabric I fold the edge of the seam and press the fabric tape on with a hot iron. To better fix the folded edge and tape it to the body of the garment, I use a fell stitch for the hem and stab stitch for the seams<sup>42</sup> to sew the thin fabric by hand, and to ensure that the stitching remains invisible. As folding thick fabric looks awkward and taping does not help to secure each fold to the body of the garment, either, stitching is unavoidable. It would not be able to sustain a temporary fixing. Because of the thickness and texture of the fabric, it is easier to make the stitching invisible. Between imagination and realisation, and through layers of work (stand work, taking photos and drawing over the images), the garment takes shape.

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<sup>41</sup> More particularly: 1. I touch the fabric and sometimes hold or drape it on the dummy to see how it flows, drapes or creases by its own weight. This gives me ideas about the design. 2. Calligraphic brushstrokes and natural phenomena such as wind, rain, waterfalls, which calligraphers want to imitate, are other sources of inspiration. 3. Without a specific idea in mind, I sometimes start directly with stand work, and this can provide inspiration for my design. 4. The making itself produces other ideas.

<sup>42</sup> A fell stitch is for joining two pieces of fabric by penetrating through only two layers out of four when folding the fabric, normally used for hemming. A stab stitch is to hold two fabric parts together, putting the needle through all the layers, normally used for fixing interfacing, making shoulder pads, or fixing interlinings. This looks similar to a running stitch but is used for heavier fabrics (Caulfield and Saward, 1989, p. 204).



Experiments using different kinds of taping



Various colours of tape applied onto seaming

Therefore, the reality of the garment cannot be known until it is actually made; sensing comes and goes between the reality of the fabric and the imagination of the maker. Lehmann draws on John Dewey's theory, explaining that 'Dewey envisioned this production as an exchange between two different material spheres. During making, he wrote, 'inner material' (everything commonly ascribed to the embodied mind; thought, observation,

memories, imagination, emotion) and 'outer material' (the physical stuff the artist employs) interact. As 'physical process develops imagination, while imagination is conceived in terms of concrete material, this exchange creates a purposeful back and forth movement, which results in an art object'(2012, p. 11).

After working with the material for some time and sensing (touching, seeing) it, I become confused about where I end and where the material begins, and vice versa; both influence each other and the boundary becomes increasingly blurred.

I touch and stroke the fabric I have scratched. Feeling it with my hands and fingers, at first I feel revulsion, but later I come to draw some comfort from it. I start to feel a wax-like stickiness but as I keep touching and stroking, my hands and fingers become moist and I realise it is sweat that I am sensing. The fabric starts to warm up. It is the warmth of my hands. What I am experiencing is not just related to the fabric but to the feeling and condition of my hands and fingers in contact with it.

Constant involvement with material making also obscures the very activity of making. My vision too becomes blurry: I am not sure of what I am seeing any more. As this feeling increases, I begin to forget whether I am making the garment or the garment is making me. I feel like an automaton. I repeat the same action over and over again; am I actually making or am I simply going through the motions? The sense which makes me recognise my corporeality and reality, has ceased to function. Even time seems to stand still, separate from me. Everything disappears around me and the fabric: so intense is this union that I wonder, am I permeating the fabric; or is it the fabric permeating me?

This experience feels intimate, but it is not necessarily peculiar to me. This phenomenon, in fact, has been described in both psychological and physiological terms. It is interesting that this confusion in the activity of making is not only due to the repetitive physical work but also to the act of observing. The former happens between maker and material, the latter between observer and actor (maker). In *Seeing Making*, Ann-Sophie Lehmann explains: 'a familiar act triggers (the same) neurons that would fire if we were to perform the act ourselves' (Calvo-Merino et al., cited in Lehmann, 2012, p. 14).



## Magic and Making

Magic can be aptly compared to garment making in that both go through a transitional stage, characterised by confusion between subject and object.<sup>43</sup> 'what has seemed to be a fundamental feature of magic – the confusion between actor, rite and object.' (Mauss, 1950; 2005, p. 134). Both occur in the transitional space between reality and fantasy (or the real world and the spiritual world). Magic comes and goes through this liminal space; it is the same with my making, right up to the finished garment. The magical and making processes both involve the use of the body, in particular, the hands, to manipulate the fabric, as well as tools such as needle, scissors, rulers, measurement tape, sewing machine and iron, in the case of making; these perform repetitive actions straddling imagination and reality, and the tools required by both activities become an extension of the body.

Ritual objects also have a transitional quality. Michael Taussig's anthropological approach to magical ritual in *Viscerality, Faith and Skepticism: Another Theory of Magic* describes the ritual process as a transitional status based on bodily occurrence (Meyer and Pels, 2003, pp. 272-306). The objects employed in rituals have an intermediate quality that is between inert and alive, together with curious, sacred, unusual characteristics. They possess a transitional, transformable quality, such as stretching or shortening. They can be semi-solid or semi-transparent. When an object comes out of the magician's mouth, it is also a 'transitional object', 'acting like extensions of the human body and thus capable of connecting with and entering into other bodies, human and nonhuman' (*ibid.*, p. 277).<sup>44</sup>

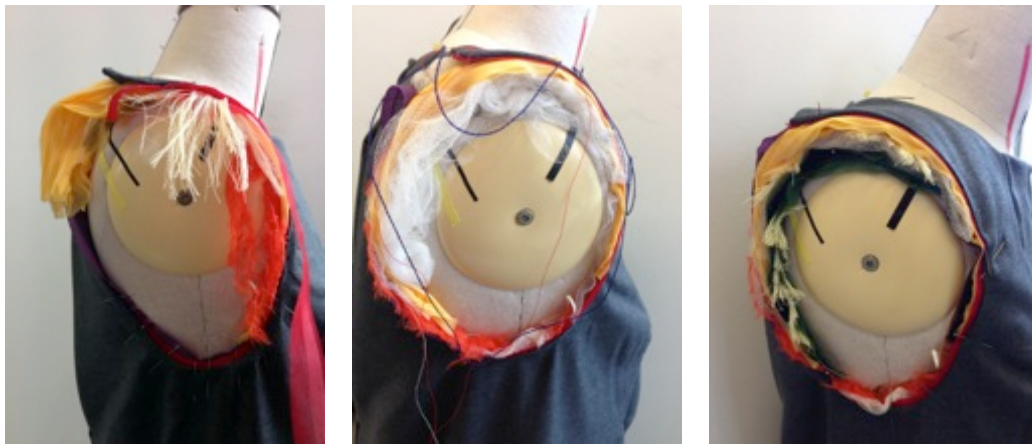
An ambiguous object is crucial for completing the ritual, as is fabric for completing the making of a garment. Fabric, in fact, is transformable from flat into three-dimensional, according to its seaming; this, as we have seen, turns the wearer from a physical into a social being.

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<sup>43</sup> Generally cloth and clothing have also been used as magical materials throughout history up to the present day, to cover objects or subjects through certain phases for transition in a ritual, or to symbolically represent their owner.

<sup>44</sup> 'Curious object that is said to be a spirit belonging to or to be actually part of the body of the medicine man; it appears to be alive yet is an object all the same; it marks the exit from and reentry into the body; it has a remarkably indeterminate quality—the fluffy puppy of down, the weird elasticity of the guanaco strip, the semitransparent dough or elastic revolving at high speed' (Taussig, 2003, p. 277).

Finally, my making connects with the wearer's body. I try the toile on to check comfort and silhouette. I inspect the sleeve opening I have just finished, and see how the added thickness affects the silhouette. The lack of a clear line around the sleeve opening is because of the presence of (variously coloured and some irregularly extruding) frayed edges: it is not obvious where the garment ends and the body (skin) begins, as the two seem interwoven and continuous. Although the garment actually lies on the body (skin), it looks as if it has been melted onto it; this ambiguity suggests Qi energy permeating the skin through the meridian lines. After checking the toile, I add more layers, until the inside of the garment becomes visible, which confuses the notion of inside and outside.



The part of shoulder making process

## Unexpected Results

In this transitional stage, where the transmission of Qi energy and transformation occur, things sometimes happen which I have not intended. It is difficult to explain these occurrences.

The original scratching has turned into cutting. After this intentional 'destruction', I just started to play with scratched, cut or holed fabric on a dressmaker's dummy without a particular design in mind. The maker typically tries to control the material, and this is certainly what I have done so far, but I am now more open to the idea of letting things happen automatically. With this in mind, I continue my experiments on the dummy through cutting without any preconceived ideas; this leads me to discovering the character of the material in

terms of flow, heaviness and tension. The combination of slits and the varying weight of the fabric create unexpected silhouettes and effects as I repeat the stand-work. At this point, I start to concern myself more with aesthetic aspects and with making the garment wearable, i.e., I start to control the experiments again.



Experiments using cutting for neck openings



Experiments using sleeves and open slits as neck opening

I also put my previous toiles on the dummy differently with the sleeves and open slits as neck opening, trying to remove all traces of my original intentions. To experiment with the style lines of the garment, I apply ivory-coloured masking tape where appropriate. The masking tape, in fact, highlights the meridian lines. Then I realise that this experiment can be developed further, with the style lines indicating the pathways presumably followed by the vibrant activity of Qi: the meridian lines used as style lines on the garment's surface show where Qi dissolves and penetrates.

Taping has become one key element of my garment design. As well as the meridian style lines, I have applied this taping idea to the finishing. Originally intended to follow the finishing line, taping has accidentally covered it. As this unplanned result looked more dynamic, I developed it in my next garment.



Taping over the finishing line

As I like the accidental effect of cutting and wearing out the fabric, I develop it further by twisting and knotting some parts of the fabric, and watch how the increased concentration of weight influences the garment's shape. One of these experiments, double knotting at the bottom of the fabric with a closed end, seems to provide a particularly bold, energetic embodiment of Qi. Unplanned, the knotting in this experiment could represent the unconscious attempt to restore and gather my strength, as well as my emotional state.



Knotting detail

The bold, sturdy-looking knot reminds me of a similar one that was once used by Korean women during childbirth, when they would hold onto a knotted cotton rope hanging from the main traverse beam of the house, in order to aid the painful process of labour through pulling the fabric. The fact that the traverse beam was such a crucial part of traditional Korean architecture<sup>45</sup>, together with the fact that childbirth used to be a life-threatening process, led me to wonder about trying to draw the Qi from the house and its surroundings through the sturdy knots and finally into the labouring woman's body, not unlike passively receiving Qi from the 'healing stone'<sup>46</sup>.

Van Gennep explains the use of knots in rituals: 'In rites of incorporation, there is widespread use of the 'sacred bond', the 'sacred cord', the knot, and of analogous forms

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<sup>45</sup> The term 'traverse beam(대들보)' also describes an important person in a country or family, by analogy with its significance in architecture.

<sup>46</sup> See Chapter 1, Page 31.

such as the belt, the ring, the bracelet, and the crow' (van Gennep, 1960, p. 166). In Korea, this knot can act as a kind of 'sacred bond' during a woman's labour to give birth and bring life to the baby in one of the significant rituals in life.

This is very meaningful because I draw Qi from the meridian lines in my garment into my body and, in turn, use that Qi to create the garment. Similarly, the labouring woman draws Qi from the house (and the outside world) into her body, in order to produce life when she gives birth.



Close-up image of Knot on the garment

To draw Qi into garment, I paid attention to the sailor's knot: bold, mannish, powerful, untamed, and strong. Knots, in general, were devised to attach objects to each other or to allow an object to be lifted or hung – as in the case of sails. A rope has no function until it is



tyed.<sup>47</sup> The connectivity of knotting represents a marriage (as in ‘tying the knot’) and has been used as a motif in garments and jewellery (e.g., the reef knot), as well as in art and literature. (Compton, 2013, pp. 22-24).<sup>48</sup>

I make a knot to better ‘connect’ the garment to myself, since this allows Qi energy to pass from the garment to myself, and vice versa. Sustaining connectivity between two tied objects requires balance. If the rope is pulled on and there is not enough counteracting force, the object will move in that direction.<sup>49</sup> Taking my making and the material as the two objects, to create balance the base garment must sustain the weight of the knot. Further, the knot must be strong, and this requires the use of my whole body as I pull and tie the fabric. By pulling the garment, I am drawing the Qi energy from it into myself and, when I tie the fabric, the energy is transferred to, and is concentrated in, the knot.

In sailing, knotting used to provide entertainment for sailors, especially on long voyages. Modern forms of entertainment such as radio, TV, and now the Internet, and newly developed rope and equipment have contributed to a move away from the art of knotting (*ibid.*, p. 15). Many crafts have gone through similar experience in the name of new technology, efficiency and productivity. Lately, however, there has been a renewed interest in traditional crafts, including knotting.

Modernisation meant that the concept of Qi might also follow the fate of craftsmanship: it was interpreted as a kind mystical energy, impervious to Western science, which caused a decline in its popular appeal in East Asia; this understanding, however, has now changed due to the realisation that science does not always have the answers, and that TCM using Qi energy can cure. So, the meaning of Qi (and of traditional crafts) has come to be re-valued by practitioners and users.

While experimenting with sailing knots on a mock garment, I found it was not easy to achieve the form of a masculine knot. However, in the base garment (mock garment, at the

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<sup>47</sup> Nautical writer Nic Compton clarifies that ‘when rope is tied to another object, it is known as a *hitch*. Similarly, when two ends of a rope are tied together, this is known as a *bend*. When the ends of the strands of the rope are used to tie the rope to another rope, it’s a *splice*. Anything else – including a loop – is simply a knot’ (Compton, 2013, pp. 22-23).

<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, knots have been said to have magical properties and also feature in a number of religions. For instance, Deuteronomy 22:12 in the Jewish Bible states: ‘You shall make yourself twisted threads, on the four corners of your garment with which you cover yourself.’ This has been taken as an instruction by devout Jews, who attach precisely crafted lanyards, called *tzitzit*, to the four corners of their prayer shawls’ (Compton, 2013, p. 14).

<sup>49</sup> Sail knots haul the sails up: the knots are sustained by poles on the ship. Thus a ship is a base or a platform allowing the sails to draw power from the wind.

experimental stage) the base of the knot should be tied as tightly as a sailing knot, which is difficult to do. Also, the thickness or stiffness (texture) of the fabric makes the knot look different in a calico test garment from the way it does in a real wool garment.



Sailing knot making experiments



Sailing knot experiments with jersey





Sailing knot experiments with calico

How can I maximise the pulling (drawing) of Qi and the storing of it into a knot and, finally, the transferring of it to the garment, in the same way as power is drawn from a traverse beam to give birth to a baby? The pulling power comes from the top, from the traverse beam, and moves through the fabric to the body; but a garment that people move around and live in cannot be fixed to one object, so I start from the right side and pass the fabric around the neck as a kind of axis from which to draw power.

I first take a separate piece of fabric which is around 2m long, fold it in half, sew it shut along the side and then turn it inside out (the top and bottom remain 'open'). I then fix one end to the right of the toile as a standard point for drawing energy from the meridians. Then, I pass the fabric from right to left

around the back of the neck. To make a loop to make a knot, I insert the fabric into the opening in the meridian style line, take the fabric out again at the other meridian and pull down and up to fold. This, in fact, naturally produces folds. Then, I twist the fabric and make a knot and pull up again with the rest of the fabric. After tying firmly, I pull down on the fabric again and put it into the opening on the meridian, making it disappear into the outer surface. I finish this one together with the seams inside.



Garment with knotting

A knot is made, drawing energy from the base garment in and out through the meridians and the sleeves and the edges of the garment. Further, the knot begins to draw energy,

starting from one meridian and finishing at another, so Qi transcends from meridian to meridian (right to left and shoulder to abdomen). Further, the knot starts from the meridian inside the garment and, therefore, touches the skin. It then goes out and then back inside the garment, to touch the skin again. Therefore, the inside and outside of the garment are connected.

The process of making a knot by twisting, inserting, pulling out, pulling up and pulling down all adds complexity to these knotted parts. When seeing my knots – in particular, the double knots – it is not easy to imagine how they might be unknotted. The best way is perhaps just by cutting. This alludes to the metaphor that a knot is a hard and even impossible problem to solve, as seen in the mythological Gordian knots.<sup>50</sup> R.D. Laing, regards a knot as an ‘emotional impasse’ (*ibid.*, 2007, p. 149). The complexity is, in fact, created through the crossover of many things; as such, the knot contains a great deal of energy ready to burst out. The fact that the fabric is folded during the knotting means it has the potential to be unfolded, and therefore expanded.

Knotting transforms flat fabric into a three-dimensional object. This concept of knotting is found in Sigmund Freud’s idea of the Oedipus complex as a ‘nodal point’ in the mind. The knot is what ties the external reality to the unconscious mind and its desires and fears. ‘We see the enfolded twists of thread, which create three-dimensional mass by folding back on themselves, creating a gap through a loop and passing through the centre. The knot is three-dimensional and can only be seen from a single perspective so that its core remains invisible and unseen, intuited.’ Structuralist psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan used the mathematics of topography to describe the mind as a knot, a Borromean Knot, in fact, or as a series of interconnecting circles (Pajaczkowska, 2007, p. 150). The knot thus shows the integration of exterior and invisible structures into the visible world that we live in. This ‘nodal point’ can constitute energy (Qi) or the libido in psychology.

All the unplanned knotting, taping, scratching and openings have been crucial to my garments. These visible objects are largely influenced by the invisible world: in my case, explained by Qi. I can now see how the making process can be affected by Qi energy connecting material and making in the transition from flat fabric to three-dimensional garment. In the next chapter I will deal with the way that the garment shares Qi with people, the wearer and viewer.

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<sup>50</sup> This metaphor appears in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*: ‘Turn him to any cause of policy, The Gordian Knot of it he will unloose, familiar as his garter’ (Act 1 Scene 1. 45-47 p. 8).



The part of design (imagination) process on my studio wall

## Chapter Five. Sharing Qi: Conversations

I have defined the manifestation of Qi in garments according to my understanding as a maker, i.e., in terms of affective Qi.<sup>51</sup> Trying to materialise this everyday aspect of Qi onto the fabric was far from easy, until I scratched the fabric and I cut opening slits along the meridian lines; these are extra openings, in addition to the functional ones shared by most garments. This gave me a chance to breathe and work in a more fluid way. In addition, by means of the extra openings, Qi travels from the wearer's body through the garment, flowing from the inside to the outside and vice versa. The implication of this movement is that it involves the wearer's surroundings, including other people, particularly the viewers, i.e., those focusing their gaze on the garment. This shared Qi energy correlates with the social aspect of fashion.

A contemporary anthropological study by Sophie Woodward describes garments as reflecting the self regardless of any personal interest in fashion; this is supported by case studies of three women's wardrobes. For two of the women, Rosie and Mumtaz, their clothing is fundamental to their self-conceptualisation: identity, age, and social status; on the other hand, Vivienne, who claims that fashion is an epidermal phenomenon unable to represent the interior, intangible and invisible self, does indeed convey her genuine self through her clothing (whilst convincing others of her lack of interest in her own appearance). In fact, Vivienne cares enough to want other people know that she does not care. Through this case study, Woodward reiterates the fact that clothing mirrors the self: clothing is not only an experience of the body, it is a way of translating identity into a social context.<sup>52</sup> (Miller, 2005, pp. 21-39)

Garments are thus social objects, put on by wearers and seen by viewers. In Qi terms, the energy moving around them changes to a greater or lesser extent every time it encounters a new subject. The Korean word *기분* means 'the sharing of Qi', as well as 'emotion'. Qi is transmitted through bodies and objects, like a mother's 'healing hands' on her sick child, or through the gift of a mandarin-duck bedding set to a newly married couple.<sup>53</sup> Even when just standing alone, a person shares Qi with the ground he or she stands on.

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<sup>51</sup> See Chapter 2, page 49.

<sup>52</sup> However, there is not always a correspondence between what wearer thinks about the self and how viewers regard it. It exists merely in the imagination until the wearing, viewing and reflecting make this imaginative idea come to realisation. There is an analogy here in that making happens from imagination to realisation.

<sup>53</sup> The sharing aspect of Qi is discussed in Chapter 1, pages 22-24 and 31-32.

My making practice has been solitary and independent in terms of defining and considering Qi during the process, since I intended to focus on both material and making; my Qi journey was thus driven by the making process. However, once the garments are finished and submitted to viewers and wearers, the solitary process comes to an end, and Qi is shared with others. In fact, a garment is not truly complete until it is worn: at this point, the wearer connects not only with the garment but also with its maker. The viewer experiences a similar connection when observing. In this case, seeing a garment being worn connects the viewer to both the wearer and the maker: the transmission of Qi also takes place at this time; watching means sending Qi. Sharing is, in fact, an important aspect of fashion.

The idea of 'sharing Qi' leads me to reflect on others' perception of Qi in garment: Qi is invisible and hard to define, because of its various meanings; the concept of Qi is ingrained in East Asian culture as a form of tacit knowledge (this is discussed in Chapters 1 and 2). This means that people will have different ideas about Qi as applied to fashion. In my case, my own Qi garment practice started with the therapeutic aspect of Qi, moved to its flowing aspect, as seen in the analogy with Chinese calligraphy, and then arrived at everyday usage, particularly in its affective form.

At this point, I began a collaborative project in order to elicit the opinions of TCM-aware students from Middlesex University, who have a strong belief in Qi energy.<sup>54</sup> Despite this shared general belief, their specific views on Qi in garments actually varied, and their opinions could be divided into two areas: the visualisation of Qi and the directing and storing of Qi through, and in, garments.<sup>55</sup>

## **Conversations with Wearers**

Wearing is an experience of the body when it touches the garment and senses fitting and comfort in terms of size, tactility and the wearer's freedom of movement. It also takes place outside the garment in terms of aesthetics (mirroring the wearer's tastes), with colour and size/fit appropriate to the body and its complexion. These experiences between body and garment are both reciprocal and simultaneous. The external aspect, however, can also be

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<sup>54</sup> I was planning to conduct conversations with wearers and then start the collaborative process; however, because I realised I first needed to finish the garments, I decided to start the collaboration earlier.

<sup>55</sup> This collaborative project has significantly influenced my making process towards Qi and Qi garments, both emotionally and physically. Details can be found in Appendix 5.

viewed by other people, whereas the feeling of being inside the garment is unique to the wearer. To understand whether wearers were conscious of this relationship, I asked four people to describe their feelings when wearing the garment, especially in relation to the inside as opposed to the outside. I filmed the wearers while walking and moving, to think about the wearers' movement and activity as related to the garment.

Rather than conducting formal interviews, I adopted a casual, semi-structured, conversational approach. I asked all the wearers the same key questions, letting their answers steer the rest of the conversation. The four wearers were all art and design students at the Royal College of Art: Jessica from Animation, Joanna from Architecture, Erika from Industrial Design Engineering and Isabel from Critical Writing in Art and Design. They therefore had some experience and understanding of the making process: it was therefore easier for them to express their feelings and emotions verbally. That the wearers should be familiar with the concept of Qi was actually irrelevant: in fact, I did not want to explicitly alert them to my focus by mentioning it before or during our conversation. They were all asked to wear the four garments in the same order in which I had made them: the *knot dress*, the *back sash dress*, the *scratched dress* and the *layered dress*.



The *knot dress*





The *back sash dress*



The *scratched dress*





*The layered dress*

In the semi-structured conversations I ascertained their feelings about wearing each of the four garments, particularly when walking/moving inside them. After this, I asked them to guess the concept behind the garments. I then explained what my intention had been: materialising Qi in the making process. Although all the women were somewhat familiar with the concept of Qi, they did not have a deep understanding of it, which emerged from their answers. Finally, I explained my interpretation of Qi in this research, as well as that of affective Qi, and asked what their idea of a well-made garment or product was, according to their particular area of study. Because the aim of conversation was to share my experience with others *through* the garments, I spoke openly about how I felt during my making.<sup>56</sup>

The conversations revealed the importance of a number of aspects I had neglected or missed altogether, those relating to what only the wearer can feel and experience when wearing a garment. A summary of my conversations with the wearers can be found in Appendix 3.

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<sup>56</sup> This method is widely used in art and design research 'to understand something from the subject's point of view and to uncover the meaning of their experiences'. This is a form of everyday conversation. The key is 'intersubjective interaction' (Kvale, 1996, p. 1). Cultural psychologist Carl Ratner explains that in qualitative methodology researchers are encouraged to reflect on the values and objects they bring to their research and how these affect the research project (Ratner, 2002, p. 1).

## Inner Lining and Wearer Movement



The movement by a wearer

Jessica, one of the wearers, pointed out something interesting with regard to the lack of an inner lining: when she moved her body, the garment spontaneously followed her. If there had been a lining, the movements of the garment would have been affected. This is because when the body moves, the lining follows, but sometimes the outer surface of the garment moves separately. Not being lined, my garment is in direct contact with the wearer, whose feeling of movement is, therefore, enhanced.

A lining finishes a garment neatly, and conceals materials or elements beneath it, such as interlining or pads; it also serves to secure the raw edges of the seams. It can sustain the structure of the garment by holding its outer shell together, especially in tailored jackets and coats. The extra layer makes the garment warmer and can also protect the skin from irritation through direct contact and friction with the layer underneath. A garment that is considered to be 'neatly' finished is, culturally and socially, more likely to be one that is lined.

In garment construction, an inner lining can solve many problems, such as securing and hiding raw edges or finishing. Instead of adding a lining, I could have addressed seaming and finishing separately; this would have been more laborious, but it would also respect the individuality of each element, such as the neck finishing, shoulder, seams, hem and bodice fastening. This would be more intimately related to the concept of Qi, where the individual is valued through the harmonisation of different elements rather than a random combination of them. Thus, instead of a lining, I used taping for finishing. This, together with the wearer's report that even without the lining the fabric felt nice against the skin, encouraged me to continue in the same way. Thus, wearers (and especially their movements) are able to connect more closely with my garments without an inner lining.

### The heaviness of the Knot Dress



The heaviness of the knot dress

Heavy knotting on a garment affects the wearer's movements; leaving aside the wearers' comments, as I viewed the video I noticed that the wearer was leaning towards the knotted side on the left. Fashion sociologist Joanne Entwistle (2000, p.334) explains that when we have a 'normal' experience with a garment, it simply becomes an *extension of the body* or a

*second skin*. However, when the garment is uncomfortable, such as when wearing tight jeans, we develop something that is called ‘epidermic self-awareness’. In other words, the discomfort allows the wearer to experience more of the garment, as seen with my knot dress. With this in mind, I can ‘design’ a greater connection between the wearer and the garment. In fact, the feeling experienced with my knot dress is not totally unfamiliar (being akin to wearing a shoulder bag strapped across the body), and the wearer quickly adapts and ceases to feel any discomfort.

### **Back: Physicality and Tactility**



Back Sash on opening

Erika mentioned feeling air on her back from the slits in that area, as well as the layering providing a nice cushioning effect. Isabel, too, reported a similar sensation. Wearers can easily see what the front of their garment looks like in the mirror; however, it is hard to see the back. Further, it is the front of the body that is the more active; sense organs such as the eyes, nose and mouth and the customary direction of the hands (for touch) are all located there. For these reasons, garments are typically more decorated at the front, for the enjoyment of wearer and viewer alike.

However, garments wrap around the body, and the back can still be sensed by the

wearer even though it remains unseen. It can be said that the front of a garment provides more of a visual experience, whereas the back is concerned more with physicality and tactility. Since the wearer is not distracted by seeing it, sensing the back becomes a heightened experience, in the same way that a blind person will develop an acute sense of hearing and touch. Qi is present all around the body and is not just focused on the front. Like garments, Qi wraps and circulates around the body. Decorations or details representing the materialisation of Qi in the garment can be everywhere; in particular, they could focus more on interior tactility on the back.

### **Openings as Breathing Space**



Opening on garment

Openings provide space for the flow of air and breathing. Because some of the openings in my garments are situated in unconventional places, they create unexpected pleats or creases, so the wearer is more aware of the openings and experiences more air flow as a result. On this point, Isabel's comments on the openings at the front of the garments and, in particular, the abdomen, are interesting, as she feels they allow the body or, in fact, the skin, to breathe.

When watching the video that I recorded of Isabel trying on the garments, I noticed

that she seemed to like to put her hands inside the openings; in fact, in conversation, she explained that being able to touch her skin made her feel comfortable and relaxed, and provided a more intimate experience and a closer connection with the garment. Indeed, the openings provide a liminal space for the inside and outside to connect. I had hoped to create this close connection between the body and the garment, although the openings, at first, emerged somewhat by accident.

Further, I noted that Isabel played with the sash on the back sash dress. Again, she seemed to be comfortable and relaxed when doing this. Indeed, I saw that she was in harmony with the garment; perhaps her Qi energy was also in harmony with the garment.

### **The Concepts Identified by the Wearers as Related to Qi**

My focus on finishing was difficult to detect by the wearers. They may not have perceived my garments as well finished. Nevertheless, I had put a great deal of effort into their finish, although one garment had not been completed by the time it had to be worn.

Because my questions about comfort and feeling were too general, the wearers did not provide detailed answers. They focused on the actual garments and did not seem concerned with either the maker or the making process. This is, in fact, a typical consumer attitude: when the average person considers a product, they do not put much thought into what has gone into producing it. In addition, although when I asked directly about taping, my finishing method, they said they 'liked' it, I wondered whether a desire to be polite and respectful perhaps drove them to be rather too unadventurous in the responses they gave me.

Apart from affective Qi focusing on the finish, the making process elicited a number of Qi-related meanings, such as air flow, breathing and (knot) power. The concepts the wearers themselves recognised included *movement*, *hidden underneath*, *air flow*, *the expression of invisible (internal) things*, and *marking as texture as a maker's trace*.<sup>57</sup> Regardless of whether I was successful in conveying my intention to the wearers, they could all feel the diverse manifestations of Qi.

Through my conversations with the wearers, I verified for myself that a garment induces a

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<sup>57</sup> To review the characteristics of Qi, see pages 30-31 in Chapter One

certain style of movement or activity in its wearer. For instance, a long tight skirt causes the wearer to take small steps because the garment allows little space to move in. My knot dress affects the wearer's movements, causing them to lean towards the knotted side, and it makes them perceive the garments more acutely. This experience enhances the connection between the wearer's body and the garment. Openings allow the wearer to experience greater air flow, and layering further enhances this feeling on the back. Similarly, the wearers touched and stroked the surface of my scratched garment. In addition, the fact that the openings on the garments encourage the wearer to put their hands inside offers a more intimate connection. With my back sash dress, the wearer's hands tended to play with the sash. I can plan for this and incorporate it into my future designs for garments. In this way, the maker can effectively 'design' a better connection between the body and the garment, as well as taking account of the wearer's activity, movements and perception.

## Conversations with Viewers

Typically, fashion is concerned with pricing, based on productivity and marketability; this is a capitalist approach prevalent in the contemporary world. Added to this are issues of practicality and comfort, sociability (formal/casual), aesthetics (whether something is fashionable) – all of which are relevant to garment design and production today.

Although I have been practising modern Western fashion, my understanding of TCM and Qi energy naturally leads to a more holistic approach to the body and the garment and, as a consequence, to the creation of something different. As part of wanting to approach fashion from a holistic perspective, I asked two viewers who practise Qi training and experience Qi in daily life their opinion of my garments: Alex, who is a Qi Gong instructor, GP, and TCM student, and Geo, an artisan and long-standing Qi Gong practitioner.<sup>58</sup> My collaborators' interpretation is based on Yin and Yang theory, one of the major tenets in East Asian philosophy and practice, including TCM and Qi Gong.

Qi is divided into Yin and Yang, its passive and active characteristics. To the Qi practitioner, the principle of Yin and Yang is fundamental.<sup>59</sup> However, my approach towards Qi had been more focused on everyday Qi energy. I had thought I did not need to include Yin

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<sup>58</sup> These are two of the people involved in the collaborative project I mentioned on page 88 of this chapter.

<sup>59</sup> For more details, see chapter one, pages 25-26.

and Yang in my garments, but could now see it was certainly something worth considering in terms of designing a Qi garment.

### Reading a Garment in Terms of Yin and Yang

Yin	Female	Material	Left	In(side)	Dark	Low
Yang	Masculine	Function	Right	Out(side)	Bright	High

The characteristics of Yin and Yang used by my viewers to understand my garments

According to my viewers, the Knot Dress is a good representation of the Yin and Yang principles. As seen in the table above, the left of the garment is the female Yin and the right the male Yang. I was more focused on the left side, placing the knot (material aspect) here, whereas the right side contains the opening and fastenings (functional aspect). In fact, the knot occupies a large part of the garment; this conveys the idea of an excess of Yin (female).

Although the design is Yin (female), the fabric itself is Yang (male) because it is made of wool, which is sheep's hair (the exterior covering of the sheep). Yin and Yang can, therefore, be said to be in harmony. In this way, wool can be seen as a channel for active Qi flow from Yin to Yang and Yang to Yin (material to garment), and this also transfers energy from the raw material, the sheep's hair, to the garment and the wearer. The same material is used for the whole garment, including the knot. This material homogeneity causes the viewer to look closer, in order to distinguish the different shapes. Attention thus focused on one point sends Qi to the wearer. This means that the person being watched receives Qi from their viewer, thus entering into a sort of relationship with them.

Because the taping is on the seams inside the garment, only the wearer is aware of this. Each meridian corresponds to a vital organ in the body, and is associated with a particular colour (e.g., the liver meridian is represented by red). However, my way of using the meridians is more flexible, so I do not follow this colour scheme; my viewers do not believe it is important for the taping to respect this. They are more focused on attracting Qi by drawing the viewer's attention to the taping; in fact, this had also been my intention when I used variously coloured tapes on a grey garment. Besides, by mentioning that tying a knot around the abdomen indicates the storing of energy, Alex confirmed my intuition.





Taping on meridian lines different from conventional and corresponding colours to organs

According to Yin and Yang principles, the Back Sash Dress is the opposite of the Knot Dress. In the former, more material (the scratching, the silk sash) is located on the right, and function (slits) is concentrated on the left side. Compared to the previous Yin-loaded dress, this garment is active and empowering, rather than calming and soothing. This area could be researched further in relation to fashion psychology, as Yin and Yang elements can influence the attitudes and emotions of the wearer and the reaction of the viewer. For instance, women can wear Yang-type business dress to feel and look more proactive and professional.

The scratched dress focuses more on the materiality of the (Yin) garment. Fluff from the scratches creates a more voluminous look (in terms of texture and silhouette). Besides, fluff or pilling on a garment typically means that it has been worn for some time and that the wearer has thus enjoyed wearing it; such a garment is likely to be, or have been, a favourite. In this way, fluff can be equated with a sense of familiarity, comfort and even nostalgia, all of which one might feel towards a favourite teddy bear or a comfort blanket. Thus the wearer is able to feel a special connection with the garment.



Inside of the opening of a layered dress

A layered dress enhances continuity between garment and wearer, especially if threads come out of the frayed edges, creating a visual connection between the two. Multi-coloured layers of fabric make it look 'as if there is a party going on inside'. This emphasises the two contrasting worlds, the plain outside and the bright and colourful inside. Energy flow is, therefore, concentrated inside the garment following the meridians and edges; the garment contains, rather than expresses, the energy flow. This is, therefore, a Yin garment, as Yin is concerned with both containment and the interior. The opening invites the viewer to look inside in the same way as a wrapped present would.

The straight silhouette of all my garments is something neutral, that is neither Yin nor Yang because it is neither ascending (Yang) nor descending (Yin). The colour grey, too, lacks its own distinct character, as it can be made by a mixture of black (Yin) and white (Yang) or a mixture of all colours, although it may vary in terms of brightness and saturation. Both the silhouette and colour correspond with my intention to create a blank canvas on which to highlight the meridian lines and the finishing details.

## Collaborative Project

The concept of Qi is individual and, at the same time, social, in that it is shared with others. During the garment-making process, Qi flows between the material and myself. The garment is, in turn, shared by me (the maker) with its wearer and viewers. Thus there is a natural circulation of Qi as a by-product of the making process between maker and wearer, wearer and viewer.

The togetherness involved in collaboration, which is another style of making, implies an active interchange of Qi between collaborators during the making process. In order to gather others' opinions about how Qi is materialised in a garment, I established a collaborative project with three students from Middlesex University: Tina and Alex from TCM (Alex is also a Qi Gong instructor), and Fotini from Fine Art. We were then joined by Geo, an artisan in jewellery and crochet, who is also a Qi Gong practitioner.

What experiments are possible in collaboration? How can people influence and exchange Qi as they communicate and work together throughout the process? I hoped to stimulate a considerable Qi exchange between all of us.

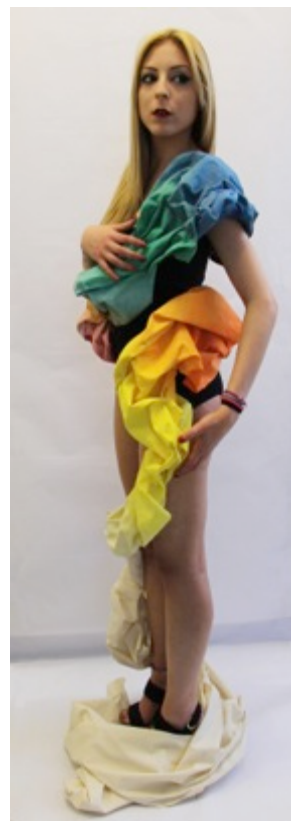
The collaboration started with the sharing of ideas about Qi and Qi materialisation in garments; there was also some freehand work on a dressmaker's dummy. In the same way as Qi is interpreted in different ways, my collaborators' ideas about Qi garments also differed; garments should be colourful, splendid, flowing or changeable. Broadly, their focus on Qi garments can be distinguished into two categories: one is involved in the visualisation of Qi (Tina and Fotini) and the other in the direction and storing of Qi (Alex and Geo).

More particularly, Tina and Fotini viewed fashion in terms of abundance, radiation and visualisation, something that requires, and is full of, energy. This naturally led them to focus on 'powerful Qi'. Their thoughts and ideas led to the production of a performance-like showpiece with a bulky silhouette; this is not appropriate for everyday wear, but can be displayed at a catwalk show. Abundance manifests itself as a colourful, circular shape. When wearing the actual garment for filming, they posed and moved, all the time imagining the flow of Qi about them.

To Alex and Geo, on the other hand, fashion is about wellbeing or a better quality of life; indeed, they think the practices of TCM and Qi Gong have the same purpose. They thus

focused on everyday wear and everyday aspects of Qi, which changes and transforms, and on enhancing Qi through the garment. For these reasons, they decided to design a garment that could direct and store Qi. As mentioned before, both Alex and Geo practice Qi Gong, which actively draws outside Qi into the body and, in turn, sends it outside the body and to others. Similarly, my five garments are based on the idea of storing my own Qi as a maker in the garment, the latter being viewed as a container. The Knot Dress draws energy from both me and garment and stores it in the knot. The Layered Dress does this in its layers, and the Scratched Dress on the fabric's surface. In the Back Sash Dress, Qi is in the finish and the scratched surface. Our collaborative garment is crocheted by Geo. Crochet is made by knotting a single thread into three-dimensional fabric and finally a garment. This type of knotting can be considered similar to my Knot Dress in its storing of the maker's Qi. Red coloured details on the white dress direct external Qi from the viewer. Further, the wearer's Qi Gong movement can draw Qi from outside surroundings and, at the same time, can send her own Qi to the exterior. The movement of the Qi Gong instructor in the dress is filmed and photographed.

Our different perceptions about Qi and fashion have developed significantly different outcomes in relation to garments and how to display them. A summary of the meetings and photographs can be seen in Appendix 5.



Work with Tina/Fotini



## Reflective Practice

Reflection on my making experience and conversations with wearers and viewers led to the production of a garment, the second Knot Dress, where special effort was put into finishing as a privileged area for injecting affective Qi, in order to enhance the relationship between the body (the maker, the wearer and the viewer) and the garment. This second Knot Dress possesses the Qi-storing attribute of Yin; at the same time, the back opening enhances the wearer's physicality, allowing them to feel the vibrant flow of Qi. In particular, I drew Qi energy from back to front through knotting, like dragging a heavy object; thus the garment is used as a kind of pulley. Through the whole process, a strong connection is formed, linking the material to me as a maker, maker and wearer, and wearer and viewer, through the garment.

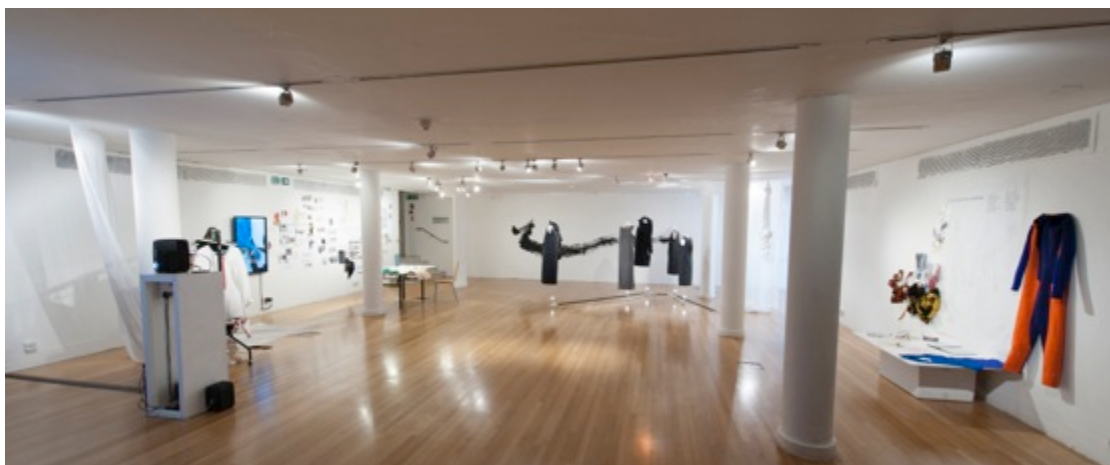


### The *Second Knot Dress*

However, this kind of connection can be explained in different ways: by me as a maker, by the wearer and by the viewer. The conversations with wearers confirmed that there are multiple ways of interpreting a garment through their physical experience. Of course wearers and viewers may be attracted to the garment to different degrees. Regardless of their awareness of my intention of transmitting affective Qi by producing *well-made* garments, the success of my making is hard to discern. The idea of scratching came to me out of frustration, as a way of escaping the 'designer's / maker's block'. However, neither wearers nor viewers observed this perverse underlying intention: on the contrary, they perceived the result as cosy, warm, soft or pleasant, like the feel of a favourite teddy bear.

The garments were evaluated in different ways: materially, functionally, culturally and philosophically (according to the Yin and Yang principle). Moreover, I had in mind a masculine knot for the Knot Dress and a long, slim, feminine silhouette for the Back Sash Dress. Viewers, in fact, saw the Knot Dress as a feminine Yin garment and the Back Sash Dress as an active Yang one. Further, the collaboration project confirmed that the mutual relationship of making, wearing and viewing can be diverse.

### Retro Reflective Practice (After the Viva)



Gallery: panorama view





Floor Plan

The exhibition was primarily intended for the public. However, it also gave me a chance to reflect on my fashion creations and making process in a context of totality. The five final garments were shown together with the imagination process that preceded their realisation. This allowed me to distance myself from my four years' work whilst taking a wider view of it.

The exhibition also turned my practice-based research work into a series of physical, three-dimensional, tactile and visual encounters of written work and flat images. This transition to tangibility reflects that from imagination to making process (it can be also imagination looking through image and words into reality). This visual experience made me revisit my research.

In particular, the display changed my relationship with work. By shifting the focus, I could see my research journey and actual work more effectively unfolded.<sup>60</sup> Incidentally, this also caused me to notice things I had overlooked during the making process. This reflection process started during the exhibition for my PhD examination, the first showcase of my four years' journey.

<sup>60</sup> The origin of 'display' means 'unfurl, unfold' and comes from the Latin *displicare* 'scatter, disperse' ('unfold' in medieval Latin)(Oxford Dictionaries.2014).

Oxford University Press [Online]. Available at:  
<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/display?searchDictCode=all>  
 [Accessed 16 December 2014].)





Exhibition (public)

I wanted to create a space to express the free flow of Qi energy establishing a relationship between object and subject, or object and object, by filling an empty space through design. Of course the various meanings of Qi, such as affection and effort, or power, are manifested through the garments. In particular, I made a hollow dummy with plaster. This was intended as a manifestation of Qi activity inside and outside of the body with lights illuminating from the floor to the inside the dummy and spreading to the outside throughout it.

The exhibition space included the starting point of my research, that is, developing therapeutic garments, my workspace, and films of conversations with wearers and of the wearing experience (i.e., the way wearers moved with the collaborative project garments on) and my five finished garments. Workspace was made more personal and focused by the adjustable lighting of an Anglepoise lamp to stress the solitary journey. Thus, the exhibition showed fashion practice starting from making (including concept formation) through to wearing and viewing (personal, social and public).



Starting point of the research: therapeutic garments development



Workspace (personal)



Patterns, toile on a rail & conversations and movement films (social)

The drawings, photographs, samples representing the various design stages were attached to the wall in a way as to make them almost merge with it (because of the white paint on the edges), since making is a continual dwindling between imagination and realisation. Imagination sometimes seemed to be absorbed into the wall, and lack of success made me want to delete this journey. Making is the accumulation of layers of work, so I overlapped sketches with other sketches or samples.



Design stages on the wall

Five garments were the outcome of this bumpy journey. A documentary of close-ups of cut/slash and knot making, which I made in order to see my movements and emotions, was a tale of destruction and violence. There was a dramatic effect when a bright blue green fabric slash was shown in a large portrait-screen monitor with a black TV frame (separating it from the white background wall), as opposed to the small laptop screen I used to watch it through. The aligned display of film on the wall and the five garments in the gallery space connected the process and garment, thus highlighting the violence. The cut fabric in the documentary brought to mind Lucio Fontana's *Concetto spaziale (Spatial Concept)* series, where his canvases display vertical slashes. Fontana's simple, bold cut on a monochromatic painted surface is analogous to cutting fabric on the dummy in the film, as well as the openings on the meridian seams of my garments. Grey colour and straight silhouette, by which I intended to create a blank, characterless background, worked like Fontana's canvases, as the flat colour gave the cuts a sudden and obvious character. The materiality of tailor fabric, normally used for men's suits, gave the garment the quality of unpainted canvas because of its lack of creases or drapes and because it does not tend to adhere to the body,

nor is it slippery, furry or glossy..



Cut on fabric and opening on garments

If making openings reminded me of Fontana's work, I did not develop this relation any further. Through slashing the canvas, Fontana seems to question the nature of art, or what culture has made of it; my destructive action, however, has not resulted in challenging the concept of garment. Nevertheless, when my work was shown in the gallery space, its formal analogy with Fontana's spatial concept became more obvious. His *Concetto spaziale* suggests new possibilities in art. He denies painting within a canvas and tries, instead, to create space *around* the canvas. The new concept of pictorial space thus includes not only the surface of the canvas but also the holes inside and the area around it. Viewers imagine the invisible space behind the canvas, which has never been art space before. Through invading the canvas, the shadow of ripped cloth becomes artwork in itself. Fontana's late work, in fact, emphasises the shadow by attaching to the canvas different materials on the cut edges, such as ceramics. The holes connect the outside to the inside and blur the difference between them. Likewise, through cutting along the meridian, my garment openings worked as breathing space to connect the skin inside the sheath and the outer space through the mediation of the garment.

Fontana's work also creates ambiguity between painting and sculpture, flat surface and three-dimensional artwork. It challenges traditional ideas about the canvas support, itself a symbol of high art, a sphere far above the lives of ordinary people. Also, by invading

the non-canvas area, it questions the boundaries of art.

By destroying, a similar issue was raised by the openings in my dressmaking practice: by showing skin areas that are usually concealed, I challenged conventional ideas of the garment as a social object. So the merging boundary of garment and body was both physical and social space.

When focusing on violence, the fabric slashed on the dummy in the documentary looked like a still from a Slasher film. The act of slashing on the fabric felt to me like slashing human skin. The garment might be regarded as a second skin, as the body is always latently present when working with garments. Openings on the meridian and, particularly, red tape shown on the meridian look like blood on a wound or suture. In horror films, normally the victim is a teenager or a woman cut off from the social mainstream or playing a helping role in a traditional male-dominated world (Boyle, 2005, xiii). This has a great dramatic effect, as violence is enhanced by the fragility of the victims' appearance and/or the precariousness of their situation. The contrast between slash/cut and the plain fabric of my garments emphasised the violence. I highlighted the meridian and opening seams with colourful fabric contrasting with the grey garment. In a feminist interpretation, the slash in my garments, like Fontana's slash in the canvas, looks like the female genital organ, slashed by violence, in particular, man's violence in Fontana's canvas (the artist's cutting act) ([www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk), 2014).

As the opening provided a vibrant place for my garment-making emotion, through the display the viewer's emotion too was meant to be projected more vibrantly, suggesting the energetic area of Qi activity. Like the mixture of curiosity and repulsion evinced by horror literature and films, my garments are more attractive to viewers because of the contrast between inside and outside: the curiosity to look inside is a vehicle for sending Qi energy. Thus, through making, wearing experience, collaboration and exhibition, I have tried to establish a better connection with my garments.





## Conclusion

This reflective journey has explored, and hopefully revealed, the materialisation of the East Asian culture-specific concept of Qi within fashion practice. In this thesis, wholly led by me, I have concentrated on my practice process and the methods I have developed during this process. Throughout this journey I have focused on relationships, which are crucial to the nature of Qi. More particularly, I have focused on those relationships that take place within fashion practice, namely between material and maker, maker and wearer and wearer and viewer.

The original research hypothesis was to make garments that might embody some of the curative power of TCM. This literal approach was unsuccessful insofar as it attempted to combine tight garments with free Qi movement. Moreover, the project did not really concern fashion, as the garments necessarily had to be tight (to stimulate the exact acupuncture points), so little leeway for creativity was left. The research method required testing with random control trials and the scholarly apparatus of Western medicine. Here, Qi energy has not yet been proven, and TCM is usually regarded as having a placebo effect rather than amounting to effective medicine where evidential principles apply. I found the marginal status of TCM within science rather unsettling.

Thus, my research question was shifted towards examining the manifestation of the metaphysical concept of Qi energy in garments focusing on relationships fostered through the making process. I have reflected on the making experience and the visible or indexical 'traces' inevitably left on the garments as a by-product of the making. I aligned the seams (which construct a garment) with the meridian lines, as these act as pathways along which Qi flows and penetrates the garment. I also applied the finishing detail wherever I could see a concentration of the maker's traces. From my unsatisfactory emotional journey I drew dark materiality akin to the creatures of Gothic literature, which I then used for practical development and theory. After scratching the fabric, cutting slits along the TCM meridian lines gave me the idea of overlapping knotting, taping and layering with the meridian lines and the slits. Through the making process that aimed at materialising Qi, I tried to establish a *better connection* between body and garment. This was confirmed during my conversations with wearers and viewers. The wearers' comments prompted a reflection about these closer bonds. In fact, their interpretations expressed different definitions of Qi energy. My Qi-Gong-practising viewers did not simply evaluate the garments on the basis of their functional value

and sociological meaning; their interpretation was useful in that it led me to apply the concept of Yin and Yang to fashion practice. The collaborative project also confirmed the multiple meanings of Qi and Qi garments.

I made five prototype garments using the concept of Qi. Not only has this materialising practice led me to develop methods for the next stage; it has also expanded my knowledge of making. By focusing on calligraphic movement, I acknowledge that the maker's movement is ingrained in the final product as a trace, both visibly and invisibly. Focusing on materiality and relationship, I have learnt about transition and liminality in garments on the material, maker and wearer levels. The final exhibition has taught me to reflect on my work as a whole. This transition thus led on from imagination to reality, analogously to magical ritual. Through talking and working with others, I have learnt that there is a multiplicity of ideas about Qi and Qi garments. My focusing on individual materiality has led to privilege interaction and, thus, to a holistic approach involving Qi and East Asian philosophy.

My originality comes from my personal voice about this transitional journey in practice and writing as autoethnography. I adopted reflection as a key element throughout the process, which led me to explore various themes and methods, from therapeutic development to talismans, Chinese calligraphy, the Korean language, filming, seaming, opening and finishing, Gothic literature, magical rites, knots, conversations, collaborations and finally exhibition. Some were successful and others not.

Talisman practice led me to try an implicit way of expressing Qi. I dealt with the maker's movement as the evidence of making through the freehand stand work in Chinese calligraphy (which was unsuccessful because of my lack of skill and experience). I used filming as a tool to reflect on my making. This calligraphic failure, nevertheless, made me discover the maker's affective Qi through my facial expression, as evident on film. I related my difficulties in the making journey to Gothic fiction. Scratching and cutting introduced a more vibrant developmental phase. I found that knotting was a useful way of drawing and storing Qi energy, and looked into the 'materialisation' of Qi as magic and Korean folklore. Both successful and unsuccessful methods have contributed to of my iterative process.

However, I wonder whether I have fully developed my Qi garment yet. I have only used straight lines to emphasise the meridians. Although I believe that a garment expressing Qi energy should be simple, the surface design (as derived from scratching, for instance) could be developed further. Garment finish is another area with potential for development. Although my contextual research was followed by serious practice-based considerations, in



the interests of following the flow of Qi there were times when I let my thoughts wander aimlessly. I might have overindulged in marginal themes, such as the Gothic, skin, the grotesque, magic and sailor's knots, that were perhaps not entirely relevant. My earlier journey, which established a hypothesis based on theory and then tried to fit this into practice, was difficult: I sometimes came up with an idea which I tried to incorporate into my research, only to realise, later, that it was not in fact as connected as it appeared to be. Although my conversations with wearers were helpful for reflecting on my relationship with the garment and others, I did wonder whether my understanding of, and empathy with, Qi energy might have been too biased. Further, would those conversations have benefited from a deeper understanding of phenomenology or sociology on my part? Because I enjoyed each collaborative session so much myself, did I neglect something important along the way? I recognise that there is still scope to go much further with this collaboration.

As a result of this project, I have become interested in fashion practice from a more psychological perspective related to the Yin and Yang theory, as well as in engaging in peer-group dialogue as a method of benefiting from a more active and collective Qi flow from which I could make garments. These are some areas I would like to explore in the future.

This research has taken a different approach to the body and the garment than that commonly taken in contemporary fashion and has, in fact, presented a way in which fashion could be informed by Qi energy. Many people see fashion as a merely functional or utilitarian tool, and some even see it as a way of expressing self-indulgent, frivolous ideas. However, by reflecting on my making I have found myself increasingly committed to questioning the view that fashion is bound to be dominated by trade and commercial concerns. During the making process, by sharing my experience with others and focusing on the maker/material and wearer/viewer relationships, it has been the indefinability, multiplicity and inexplicability of Qi energy that has mostly interested me as a designer. On this point, I have come to believe that the role of fashion is to represent aspects of experience and knowledge that are not easily quantifiable or explained. Fashion is not only the system described by Structuralist Roland Barthes (i.e., a language or code); it also represents a kind of energy, and the understanding that energies need to circulate within and between people to bring them together and form a social culture. It is an ephemeral, transitional experience within the liminal space of the body. To attempt to describe this to others, I have found that there is no better concept to refer to than that of Qi energy, which is active in this interface. Through this, my research contributes a Qi perspective to fashion making as a whole and, more particularly, to the understanding of the body insofar as it

relates to fashion, which is new to more Western concepts of fashion culture.

In this research, my practice and theory are intertwined, as I have engaged in both simultaneously. I myself am both the one making the garments and the one transferring this experience, with the implicit and explicit knowledge I gain from it, to my thesis. As a maker, I work with relationships, materials, senses, and experiences; as a fashion designer, I focus on the body as a living, moving, sensual object. Before starting this research, however, I had little concern with meaning. Rather, I tended to passively receive information and knowledge. In a way, I felt as part of a tribe of pre-literate makers who existed and proceeded quite happily without needing any concept of 'meaning' (Lévi-Strauss, 1978; 2001, p. 5). In this research, however, I have tried to translate my concept (Qi materialisation) into a garment, paying attention to the seaming, the finish and the quality of the material. Like any researcher, I want to, of course, present my making process and experience as a form of knowledge and learning for others. This has not been an easy task. It has not been easy for me to write in a language which is not my mother tongue; besides, much of my making is hard to explain through logic, and there has been the challenge of translating one code or language into another (*ibid.*, p. 2). However, I must accept that in practice and thinking, it is the knowledge that can be, and is, expressed in writing that becomes the knowledge of authority.

This thought leads back to the proposition that has been troubling me since the start of my research, namely, that it is hard to prove the presence of Qi by applying conventional scientific principles. I am aware that TCM is typically seen, especially in the West, as superstitious and 'weak' because it dates back to a pre-scientific society; indeed, the blatant exclusion of it from Western definitions of 'medicine' intrigued me in that this seems to mirror the way that fashion is typically excluded from the core canons of art for being 'superficial' or not representing the genuine self; tacit or subjective knowledge has also been largely excluded from the conventional academic view of 'knowledge'. In fact, despite this apparent conflict between logic and non-logic, real and imaginary, science and non-science, superficial and genuine, it seems to me that Qi, fashion and making, and the maker's tacit knowledge, have indeed something to offer the somewhat limited scientific view of reality.

Structural anthropologist Lévi-Strauss offers the following thought (though it may not have been prompted by fashion considerations): 'I think there are some things we have lost, and we should try perhaps to regain them, because I am not sure that in the kind of world in which we are living and with the kind of scientific thinking we are bound to follow, we can regain these things exactly as if they had never been lost' (*ibid.*, p. 1). I have become

interested in the potential of fashion and Qi energy to the extent that I find myself reconsidering the qualities that have been somewhat 'lost' by this idealisation of science in modern society and culture.

Through the method of autoethnography as the format of my subjective texts, I have learned that the philosophy of Qi is what enabled me to break through the limitations of the Western theory that subject and object are qualitatively different. My innovation, through Qi practice as a fashion maker, is to suggest that this Eastern philosophy can help more traditional Western philosophy as described by Lévi-Strauss to redress its imbalance between 'science' and 'religion or magic'.

I would like to conclude with another quotation from Lévi-Strauss, as it is a good illustration of the relationship between fashion and making. Here, Qi activity is enhanced during the process of transition, leading me to 'embody Qi' and 'exhaust Qi'.

Unfortunately I forget what I have written practically as soon as it is finished. There is probably going to be some trouble about that. But nevertheless I think there is also something significant about it, in that I don't have the feeling that I write my books. I have the feeling that my books get written through me and that once they have got across me I feel empty and nothing is left.

You may remember that I have written that myths get thought in man unbeknownst to him. This has been much discussed and even criticized by my English-speaking colleagues, because their feeling is that, from an empirical point of view, it is an utterly meaningless sentence. But for me it describes a lived experience, because it says exactly how I perceive my own relationship to my work. That is, my work gets thought in me unbeknown to me.

I never had, and still do not have, the perception of feeling my personal identity. I appear to myself as the place where something is going on, but there is no 'I', no 'me.' Each of us is a kind of crossroads where things happen.

*(ibid., p. x)*



## Appendix 1: Conversations with Wearers

1. Email inviting participation

2. Questions

3. Summary of responses

Audio files of the conversations are on CD-Rom.

Research ethics forms were all signed by wearers.

### 1. Email inviting to participate

Royal College of Art Mail - RCA Notices: Looking for wearers and opinions for my garments (womenswear) 28/06/2014 08:52



Royal College of Art

Hye Eun Kim <hye-eun.kim@network.rca.ac.uk>

#### RCA Notices: Looking for wearers and opinions for my garments (womenswear)

1 message

Hye Eun Kim <hye-eun.kim@network.rca.ac.uk>  
To: Hye Eun Kim <hye-eun.kim@network.rca.ac.uk>

9 June 2014 13:55

[RCA Notices](#) » [Forums](#) » [Jobs and Opportunities](#) » [Looking for wearers and opinions for my garments \(womenswear\)](#)

**N** Looking for wearers and opinions for my garments (womenswear)  
by [Hye Eun Kim](#) - Monday, 9 June 2014, 1:43 PM

Hello!

I am a final-year Fashion womenswear PhD student.  
I have made four garments for my final project and want to hear about the wearer's experience and opinions of my garments (these are not functional wear or ordinary dresses).

So I am looking for wearers who can share their experience after wearing my four garments (with your consent, I will film and take some photos of you when you wear or comment about my garments, and this will be only used for my PhD thesis).

I have made garments for women who are between sizes 10 to 12. **If you are size 10 or 12 and around or over 167cm tall women and can spare one hour between 16th to 29th of this month, could you help me?**

If you are interested, could you email or call me?

We can meet for a few minutes this week to make measurements and arrange a time for the wearing/interviewing session.  
This will be taking place in the Fashion and Textiles research studio on the Kensington campus.

Best,  
Hye Eun Kim  
PhD candidate Fashion Womenswear  
mobile: 07778 655843

## 2. Questions

After questioning the wearers, I tell them a little about my experience of making each garment. About the knot dress, for instance, I explain that I intended to draw energy into the knot; that, like a sailor's knot, it looks rough but also powerful. I explain that I am not sure whether my intention has been realised or not.

### Knot Dress

- How do you feel when moving or walking? Is it comfortable when you move? Can you describe how you feel when wearing it?
- What do you think of this detail? [i.e., the knot.] How does it make you feel?
- [About the magnet closure:] Do you think it is secure?

### Back Sash Dress

- How do you feel when moving or walking – comfortable?
- There is a silk draping detail on the back. What do you think about this? Does it bother you when you walk or move? [i.e., the fact that it goes from inside to outside and inside again.]
- Do you have any thoughts about these scratches?

### Scratched Dress

- How do you feel, and could you explain the tactility of these scratches? Is it comfortable or itchy/irritating?
- If possible, can you associate this tactile feeling, or visual feeling, with any other object(s)?
- Can you tell me what you think or imagine about this red taping?

### Layered Dress

- How do you feel about the dress, in particular about the layering? Is it comfortable to move your arms in?
- How do you feel about the layering in terms of the other parts of your body? What are your thoughts, or what do you imagine?

### After wearing all four garments

- What do you think is my research theme?
- [I explain my theme is to materialise Qi energy in garments.] Could you now explain your

understanding of Qi?

[After these Questions, I tell that I am more focused on the Qi energy that appears in everyday language, in particular in Korean. I developed some garments based on an injecting effort; it requires a lot of time and labour to finish these garments. In addition, I used meridian lines as style lines, openings, etc.]

The maker's aspect in the wearer's area of study

- Because you are a designer and maker, you know what a great deal of time and effort goes into making things, even though you might not be able to see it. You may hope that the users (wearers in my case) will respect that, but how can they, if it is not visible? How do you think time and effort can be proven in garments? [In the case of knitting, people know that this takes a significant amount of time, but it might not be so clear in other cases.]

- While making, have you ever had the experience of feeling that you are connecting your work with future users or others?

### 3. Summary of wearers' responses

Name: Jessica

Nationality: UK

Age: 23

Discipline: Animation

Name: Joanna

Nationality: UK

Age: 23

Discipline: Architecture

Name: Erika

Nationality: USA

Age: 30

Discipline: Innovation Design Engineering

Name: Isabel

Nationality: UK

Age: 24

Discipline: Critical Writing in Art and Design (Theorist)

Knot Dress - all mentioned the heaviness of the knotted detail.

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| Jessica | Knot pulls neck down (more weight) - more like a statement garment   |
| Joanna  | <p>Feels like being pulled sideways</p> <p>Feels like a snake around the neck or carrying a heavy bag</p> <p>Recalls a loop, a heavy knot</p> <p>Statement like dress</p>  |
| Erika   | <p>Being pregnant, a vine hanging</p> <p>Being pulled sideways</p>   |
| Isabel  | <p>Heavy, tilted body</p> <p>Recalls doing laundry/washing - wet, twisted, holding the washing</p> <p>Bound together</p> <p>Heavy left, light right (interesting balance) - the body works to create balance</p> |

Back Sash Dress

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| Jessica | Movement - garment follows according to body movement, sash also moves   |
| Joanna  | <p>Greek mythology or Roman Toga</p> <p>Compared to Knot Dress, movement is freer</p> <p>Looks like an evening dress</p> <p>Sash is light; do not notice it is there</p> |
| Erika   | Back: feel air moving and coming inside  |
| Isabel  | <p>Draped back</p> <p>Hammock - relaxing</p> <p>Do not notice silk sash – very light</p> <p>Hanging, swinging</p>  |



### Scratched Dress

- Jessica Interesting, very warm and friendly
- Joanna Recalls a 'map' (land and sea), opposites, contrast. Also, fishing net: dense or less dense.
- Erika Unusual places to feel air in  
Scratching - visual sensation of air flowing rather than physical sensation
- Isabel Variety - lots of different things  
Soft, friendly  
Could touch all day long  
Before touching - soft  
Red taping - enlighten  
Make less heavy - if all wool, looks heavy (control function, highlighting and at the same time making it light)  
Isabel – scratching - marking, untangling – recalls a landscape

### Layered Dress

- Jessica Enjoyable and fun and comfortable because of layering
- Joanna Feathery, like a parrot
- Erika Back layering - feel texture through back skin, air, pillowy – cushioning  
Frayed edges of fabric - gradual transition from body to the garment, blurred edge  
Block and contain air going through, visual for other people to look at this
- Isabel Layered details in the openings - adventurous, fun  
Bend – both hidden and shown - unfinished edge - makes think more about making process

### Theme

- Jessica Movement
- Joanna Hidden underneath/inner power  
Slit - releasing outlet

Erika        Airflow, breath  
 Isabel        Marking as texture, invisible thing

#### Maker's effort

I talked about 'pouring Qi' into my garments or, in other words, injecting my effort into the making process and, in turn, the garment.

Jessica        (Couldn't ask her)  
 Joanna        Detail with care - use with care  
 Erika        Except embroidery, it is hard to know  
                   Back air moving, air comes inside  
 Isabel        Can sense effort – unfinished - aware of maker  
                   Detail, and posit the dress as itself

#### Evidence of the Maker's Efforts on the Material (Traces)

When I asked the wearers their opinions about how effort and time can be revealed in making, their responses were based on their experience as makers themselves, explaining that they would look at every detail to establish whether the object was well made; hence, they would assume a certain amount of time and effort on part of the maker. In the case of Joanna, she said that, as an architecture student, she would frequently make scale models. She explained that everything, from selecting the materials for the model to constructing and presenting it, should be harmonised with the environment of the prospective building and finished accordingly; the time and effort become, in this way, extremely obvious. Although the wearers did not specifically use the words *time* and *effort*, they appeared to equate them with a well-made object that demonstrates attention to detail or finishing.

## Appendix 2: Conversations with Viewers

(The order of the conversations is modified according to their subjects)

- Knot Dress** Good representation of Yin and Yang principle transferring Yin into Yang and Yang into Yin. Details, which stress the material part (Yin), are locating the left part (Yin) of garment. Both details and location represent female parts (Yin); feminine, a woman's garment. It is natural to give more weight or mass to the left side because the material is Yin. In particular, the knot hangs heavily on the garment, meaning an excess of Yin. Opening/closure is for function, meaning Yang. (Function: Yang – right sides) Thus, this dress shows the standard Qi distribution of the human body.
- Vibrant colours of taping on the meridian lines can only be seen by a wearer when putting on and taking off the garment. This attracts the wearer's attention and a wearer sends Qi to the taped area, or garment as a whole (the eye leads the mind, the mind leads the energy).
- Alex- Sash is to hold the waist. Belt meridian (abdomen) is used to keep the energy inside.
- Wool** Wool works as a transportation system. Wool is a type of excess. Because it is cut and grows again: it favours natural circulation. To make cotton, linen and silk, plant or worms need to be killed.
- My reasons for using a wool fabric is that it signifies protection (warmth) and care for the body.
- For the Knot Dress, using excessive Yang (outside of sheep) to make an excessive Yin garment is to bring Qi from the sheep, and the garment to the observers.
- The same fabric and same colours for the knot and for the dress makes it more intriguing for the viewer. This catches the attention, as in order to see the detail, viewers should look closer so they send Qi energy.
- Back Sash Dress** Is the opposite of the Knot Dress. The material part of Back Sash Dress is on the right side and function is on the left side. Differently from the feminine Knot Dress, this is more aggressive and empowering than calming and soothing. The ambiguity of concentrating material on the functional side and concentrating function on the material side does not show the intention of garment clearly.
- When wearers of the Knot Dress and the Back Sash Dress go to a meeting, people listen more to the wearer of the Back Sash Dress because of its more outward Qi (Yang Qi).
- Scratch Dress** Geo personally prefers this dress and thinks it is the most approachable. The tactility of its fabric is material, feminine, mild and soft. The scratching creates a voluminous silhouette, and this makes Qi more active because the hairy texture (less density) contains more space. This means more energy is activated. This dress is

more marketable than the other ones, as Qi surrounds all around us; scratching is all around us. The scratched surface enhances the materiality of the Scratch Dress, just as the knot enhanced the materiality of the first Knot Dress.

My explanation of the Scratch Dress; destruction. Both viewers say it is interesting and it does not show my troubled state at all.

The hairy surface makes observers feel tempted to touch and stroke; it makes its wearer huggable like a teddy bear.

It shows *continuity*; it seems to have been worn for a long time because I like it so much.

Continuous wearing implies letting a garment go fluffy and worn out; passion and comfort. This means that the wearer feels more attached to the dress.

Openings with red tape let you to have a look inside. Alex says it is like opening a present: being curious of what it is inside.

The inside of garments is only seen when a wearer looks closely.

Regardless of the openings, the teddy-bear effect of this garment is that it contains Qi energy as Yin.

There is a contrast between outside and inside layering.

Layering contains the meaning of continuity and discontinuity.

## Layering Dress

Layering makes more continuity between garment and wearer. Threads coming out from the layers make the cut unclear. Layers are combined as part of each other.

Colourful layers surprise viewers as if there was a party going on inside. This shows two different worlds; colours inside and grey outside. Energy flows more actively inside the garment; containin grather than expressing: a Yin garment.

My explanation is similar, in that a garment is a separate object but it should involve a wearer. By wearing, an individual becomes social. The layering and threading blur the cut and create more connection between body and garment.

## Silhouette /Colour

Alex and Geo ask me about using the same straight silhouette for all my garments and I explain my intention of having a straight silhouette and a grey colour to be used like a blank, characterles scanvas to emphasise the meridian lines, openings and layering.

A straight line (H-line silhouette) is neither Yin nor Yang. (Y-line silhouette: Yang, A-line silhouette: Yin). Likewise, grey is neither Yin nor Yang. The mixture of Black (Yin) and white (Yang) is neutral; no absolute characteristics.

Both silhouette and colour show they lack character.

Grey is blank like a white canvas. Colours (layering, taping) highlight on this base to attract attention. Thus, colour, line and texture can attract, wherever a maker wants to attract the

viewer's eyes (eye-mind-Qi).

**Maker's  
effort**

As a maker, Geo tells me that in her mind it is same process to make garments for specific or for anonymous wearers.

I wondered how wearers or users can appreciate a making effort which takes a lot of time and labour, particularly if crocheting is involved. Geo says that a maker does not have to think about this. Users can enjoy the object from their own perspective, which is not necessarily the same as mine.

Alex adds that art is ambiguous to allow everybody to have their opinion; each has his or her own satisfaction.

## Appendix 3. Working Together:

### Collaboration with TCM students

#### 1. Collaboration Process

##### Participants

Alex Eftime	TCM student at Middlesex University, GP, Qi Gong instructor
Constantina Stylianou (Tina)	TCM student at Middlesex University
Fotini Michailidi	Fine Art student at Middlesex University
Georgiana Cojocar (Geo)	Artisan in jewellery and crochet, and a Qi Gong practitioner (Geo joined from the third meetings.)

This collaboration is more about “sharing” Qi. Therefore, I tried not to dominate the process and instead just talked about the thoughts I had had during my making process and during the designing and making stages. In particular, I explained that I saw my role as a garment maker as mainly that of assisting in the realisation of the items in terms of negotiating materiality and construction. With the aim of making one or more Qi garments, we discussed our ideas and negotiated these with each other. This process seemed to be even more important than the result. Just as Qi is changeable, we did not have a set plan as to what garment(s) we were going to make; rather, we intended to go with the flow and see where it took us.

For this summary, I modified the order slightly combining subjects and added some explanations in brackets for better understanding. Research ethics forms were all signed by wearers.

## 2. Summary of the Initial Meeting

Time	Wednesday 9th April
Location	Middlesex University, Hendon Campus
Participants	Hye Eun Kim, Dr. Claire Pajaczowska (RCA Fashion and Textiles research tutor), Professor Zhao (TCM course professor at the Middlesex University), Constantina Stylianou, Fotini Michailidi, Alex Eftime

### Brief thoughts about Qi and Qi garments

Tina	<p>Fashion is about aesthetics and beauty.</p> <p>Qi circulates around the body. For example, in the understanding of Feng Shui, Qi comes into the room, circulates and goes out. Qi garments should be somewhat circulating around the body and fabric choice is important in terms of textile, tactile feeling and fluidity.</p>
Fotini	<p>Energy relates to specific colours. (Five elements are related to corresponding colours.)</p> <p>Acupuncture points are related to each organ, so she suggests garments which focus on points.</p>
Alex	<p>Qi Gong practice for over 20 years.</p> <p>The mind is energy, as well as leading the energy.</p> <p>The mind leads Qi. Eye leads the mind. If we focus on something, energy is focused on this object. Watching is, from the viewer's point of view, to send Qi energy; people being watched receive Qi. (Watching leads the mind and the mind leads Qi, so to watch is to send Qi.)</p> <p>Fashion experience on the body is the wellbeing of wearers, just as TCM protects from disease. Both nourish life.</p>
Prof Zhao	<p>The colour and organ relationship can be used for designing garments.</p>
Claire	<p>Fashion as a product of modern culture makes people transform into being modern.</p> <p>Western tradition separates subject and object, but the Eastern tradition stresses relativity.</p> <p>In Fashion, <i>haute couture</i> is an individual diagnosis, like TCM.</p>

### 3. Second Meeting

Time	Tuesday 20th May
Location	F & T research studio at the Royal College of Art
Participants	Hye Eun, Tina, Fotini, Alex, Dr. Claire Pajackowska

#### What do you think a Qi garment will be like?

Fotini      Colours are important.  
Fashion is sometimes crazy and very energetic. Fashion creates new things and moves forward, so lots of Qi energy is needed.

Tina        Qi is circulation in the body, i.e. Chakra, balance, and flowing without any blockage.  
A garment should illustrate this circulation. To express the abundance of Qi and fashion, something in a yellow and gold-like colour would be best. In addition, to express flowing, a circular shape of a plastic-like material (to sustain shape). It should be creative.

Alex        Function makes organs in TCM and organs have a function in Western Medicine.  
  
A garment silhouette stressing, or weighing more on, the bottom part lowers the energy. Energy moves down, and this means a more feminine, Yin element. Conversely, with the pencil skirt - energy moves up meaning a masculine, Yang element. Yin and Yang should be considered in a Qi garment.

Qi circulation should consider a bigger unit than a meridian, e.g., a limb as a channel, or a torso as a channel. Through Qi gong practice, he has noticed that the bigger the channel unit, the better (e.g., torso, arm, etc.). In particular, it is important to remember that the mind leads the energy.

Qi energy and information mould each other.

The suggested design idea:

*Bian Lian* (Traditional Chinese performance of changing masks continuously) can induce a viewer's Qi to change by staring at this change of masks.

Fabric is important.

For instance, through the experience of using silk fabric for Qi Gong practice, silk reflects Qi (Qi-proof); keep Qi inside and protect Qi coming from others.

Hye Eun    uses wool fabric for garments for the research project. Wool has the characteristic of keeping wearers warm stopping warmth escaping from the body and outside heat from touching the body.



## What is Qi?

- Fotini Qi connects everything. The stimulation of one point affects different parts of the body.
- Tina Qi is everything, the most important and the last thing.
- Alex Chapter 42 in *Tao Te Ching* (a Taoist classic text written around the 6th century BC by the sage Laozi),  
 “The Tao begot one. One begot two. Two begot three. And three begot the ten thousand things. The Ten thousand things carry yin and embrace yang. They achieve harmony by combining these forces” (Feng and English, 1977, p. 84).  
 According to one of two basic principles in TCM, the Yin and Yang theory (the other is the Five Elements theory): Qi is divided into Yin and Yang. Yin and Yang is transformable: Yin to Yang and Yang to Yin. ‘Material’ represents Yin and ‘function’ is Yang. There is nothing wholly good or bad if seen through the Yin and Yang symbol.  
 The process of creation is the energy or force behind creation.
- Claire Qi is the kind of electricity that circulates in chemistry or physics.  
 In psychology, *libido* is the energy or desire of human unconsciousness or self-destructive energy.
- Hye Eun Qi is about relationship; everything is connected.

Additional talk from Alex – the Yin and Yang aspect of fashion and architecture

Material point of view, fashion and architecture - what they are - Yin

Functional point of view, wearing a garment and use a building - what they do - Yang

When an object exists without the function, it loses its life. For example, chair inside a room functions as a chair for sitting; however, when in the attic, it moulders because it has lost its function. (Function creates and completes the object.)

## About the planned Qi garment

- Alex suggests a garment which can change the flow of Qi by redirecting the energy.  
 also suggests considering the O-Ring test in garments. (The Bi-Digital O-Ring Test (BDORT) uses fingers to diagnose health condition or preference for a material.)

Through the O-Ring test, we can check the preference of wearers. According to the O-ring test, the shape of a garment can be dynamically changed. – All (Alex, Tina, Fotini) agree on this.

Designing idea

1. Something changeable, because Qi is transformative.  
2. Openings or holes on a garment are to receive viewers' Qi energy by their eyes being led to these openings.

3. One garment for different people, because Qi is always changeable.

TCM adopts different treatments for same disease and the same treatment for different diseases.

Likewise, one's Qi energy is not fixed because one Qi moulds (transforms) another's Qi. It is better to let one garment fit different people, which it will do in different ways.

My experience - My previous experiments of developing therapeutic garments were aiming at made-to-measure garments because each person has a different Qi energy flowing along the body in a different way, just as meridian lines are situated differently in different people.

Tina/ Fotini The silhouette or details of a garment should circulate around the body  
Qi radiates, so a garment has some radiating quality, dispersing and flowing. This radiation can be expressed by a different density of fabric or colour.  
After talking with other practitioners, they propose something shiny, of a yellow or gold colour.  
The silhouette will be big.

Things to consider and discuss for the next meeting

Should choose between comfortable (everyday Qi) and big, bulky silhouette (strong, abundant Qi).

There seems to be a conflict; is there any point at which these two opposites can meet?

What do I want to achieve through this project?

At this point after the second meeting, I should make my goal clear. My collaborators remind me of this and of my role of this project.

The expected final outcome will be a garment and some photographs or a film recording its movement when worn. However, what I mostly expect from this collaboration is to be able to discuss Qi and fashion, designing, making and, finally, showing (exhibiting this garment) to other people (from different disciplines, cultures, etc.), and to actually create a Qi garment with them.

This collaboration is open to everyone's ideas and opinions, although it aims to find a

consensus. Despite it being my PhD research, my preference and intention is just one element, not necessarily the dominant one (equal Qi distribution). By communicating with each other and working together, we are sharing Qi energy. Therefore, the process itself is very important and, although I would like the garment to be aesthetic, the outcome is perhaps secondary.

In the same way as Qi is always changeable, I do not think that we need to have a specific plan for the project. There will, of course, be time constraints, however.

#### 4. Third Meeting

Time	Sunday 25th May
Location	F & T research studio at the Royal College of Art
Participants	Hye Eun, Tina, Fotini, Alex, Geo Dr. Claire Pajaczkowska

Although we tried to combine two different ideas for directing and visualising of Qi energy, it is hard to negotiate them because Alex/Geo and Fotini/Geo have strong feelings about these ideas. Instead of combining and making something apocryphal, we decide to separate into two groups. This opposite seems to represent Yin and Yang. If so, which group can be Yin and which Yang? The direction of Alex and Geo seems the leading one, though containing and storing Qi, which signifies Yin; whilst Tina and Fotini are to visualise Qi, which is a Yang element.

##### 1) Tina/ Fotini - focus on the visualization of Qi

Tina	<p>Focus on abundance.</p> <p>Ask the opinions of practitioners at a TCM clinic; how can Qi be expressed in fashion?</p> <p>They agreed that fabric should silk for expressing “flow” or “feel strong”. They had different opinions about colours; some suggest white, but Tina thinks bright yellow and gold is good for representing abundance.</p> <p>Circulation is the best way to show Qi: this can be represented by a voluminous silhouette.</p>
Fotini	<p>Focus on the radiating and permeating aspects of Qi, such as light; printing would be one possible method to express this radiation.</p> <p>Qi recalls a kaleidoscope; everything connects and is connected.</p>

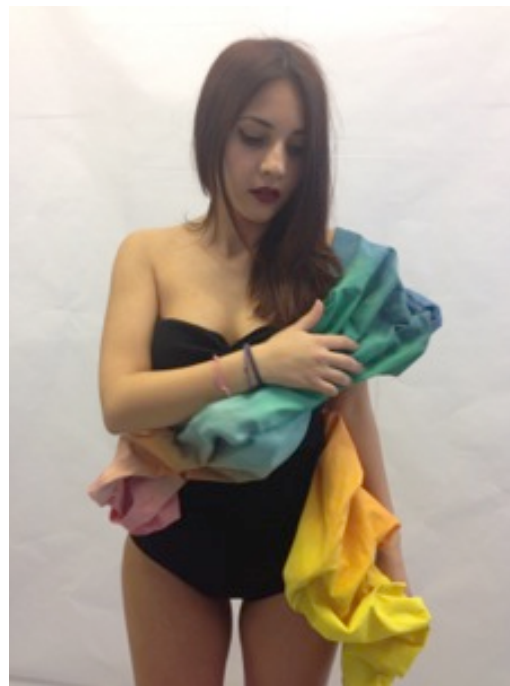
Considers the possibilities to express energy within the garment: a circular shape?

Qi does not have a starting or an end point, so it is better to visualise this on the garment.

- Design** Black base dress or body suit as a base to highlight the radiating detail.
- Suggestion and** We decided to make a big showpiece to express abundance with circular shape to express energy circulation and radiation.
- Decision** Choose a painting or a dyeing method to represent radiation. The first choice is silk for a better flow of Qi, but because of the time limit (my collaborators are due back home for the summer holiday), there is not enough time for these experiments, so we decide to use calico and paint with water colours (the easiest way to paint for a fine art student like Fotini) which implies that this garment is not for everyday wear, but as a powerful performance piece.
- Because the circulation movement is important, we will film this movement while the finished garment is being worn. The wearers for the filming are my collaborators, because they best know the intention behind the garment.



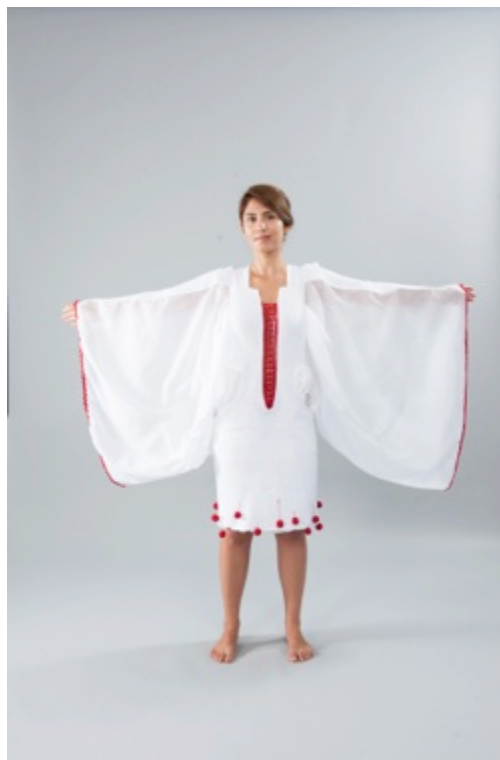
Toile



## 2) Alex / Geo - focus on directing Qi

- Alex      Focus on Qi movement and lines inspired by Qi Gong.  
 The important functions of Qi are transportation and transformation.  
 The openings idea can be adopted in pathway. (openings along the meridians are featured in my garments).
- In basic Qi Gong movement, there is an action whereby practitioners pulls Qi from below to gather Qi from their surroundings, and pull Qi from the top by making a circle and lowering their hands to push Qi towards the abdomen. This is a movement for storing Qi in the body.
- Other possibilities can be Qi-storing pockets and folding or pleating directing Qi flow. Cutting or design is possible along the meridian lines.
- In Chinese astrology and TCM, differently coloured symbols are used for representing different Qi movements. Different coloured patterns can be used for focusing attention. Garments can be used for Qi radiation and direction.
- Geo      A garment's silhouette should be natural and flowing.  
 Silk fabric is produced from silkworms and to produce silk fibre, the cocoons (larvae) should be boiled, which means to kill another creature to produce fabric. This is alien to the Qi concept.  
 In terms of fabric, light, shiny (light reflective) and transparent fabric will suit the flow of Qi. For a base garment, the fabric should be more rigid and stronger.
- Design      We decide on white for a garment consisting of a base dress and scarf. A fixed form of dress  
 Suggestion sustains the changeable scarf (its changes depend on wearers' movement).  
 For this, Geo suggests a crochet dress, because the maker's effort and energy can be stored in the loops. For the scarf, cotton satin will be good (something shiny, flowing and radiating with a very thin quality).  
 Slits or openings are planned for attracting the viewer's eyes. They also suggest coloured balls for this effect.  
 Transformation using scarf by raising the arm and, in this way, changing the shape and appearance of the sleeve. (This can be enhanced by a basic Qi Gong practice gesture, which draws even more Qi into the body.)







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