

Agency through symbolic communication: employing spiral pattern principles

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Contextual Review and Concept Statement:

The power of clothing as a device of overt or passive communication is an important leitmotif throughout history. An individual's appearance and dress can transmit information without verbal intercourse (Goffman, 1975). However, the possibility of ambiguity in meaning exists between the receiver and the sender of the transmission (Kaiser, Nagasawa, & Hutton, 1991; Stone, 1975). In the early 20th century, the Suffragettes employed the symbolic ambiguity of white garments to affirm social equality (Wahl, 2018). The concept of this design was to acknowledge the hundredth anniversary of the Suffragette movement through the use of all white and ambiguous symbolism in a contemporary garment using a spiral draping technique (Bernardoni & Ruppert-Stroescu, 2017). The ambiguity of design is twofold, in the symbolic characteristics of the color and in its technical appearance. Technically, the design appears to initially resemble a traditional skirt suit with pleating and seaming details. However, when examining the patterns (Figures 1 and 2), the complexity of the design is revealed. The jacket and skirt patterns are engineered to have only 3 seams each, with the pattern piece moving around the body in a continuous spiral, excluding the detachable collar. The seemingly passive and pure white color is intended to echo the political movement of the Suffragettes toward recognition of feminine agency. The detachable collar, with its spiral that can also be interpreted as a question mark, subtly prods the viewer to question how we might use white to recognize agency for oppressed people today.

The spiral is the second concept for this design. The spiral technique used was based on an earlier study in which the unconventional pattern design techniques of Fabrègue and Döring were investigated. These designers created their intended garments by the circuitous manipulation of fabric on the body (Bernardoni & Ruppert-Stroescu, 2017). Spirals have been engaged in clothing and textiles design scholarship by inspiring surface design (Hahn & Hahn, 2019, Carrico, 2018, Overy, 2017), cutting techniques (Orhn-McDaniel, 2017, 2018, Orzada, 2018) and guiding weaving (Hongyoun Hahn, 2018). Indeed, the spiral shape has also been the unique purpose of making a garment (Moretz, 2018). The spiral application in this piece builds

on our body of work, expanding the concept of draping by moving the muslin in a spiral motion around the body (Bernardoni & Ruppert-Stroescu, 2017).

Aesthetic Properties and Visual Impact

The color white was chosen to echo the timely importance of today's struggles for equality. Congresswomen at the 2020 State of the Union address chose to wear the white suit as a symbol of solidarity (Lang, 2020). The duplicity of white as "purity" and simultaneously as "parity" and "unity" illustrate the significance of color in dress (Wahl, 2018). The visual impact of "line" in the drape plays a significant role in the spiral effect of the suit, as seamed pleats maintain continuity, symmetry and carry the eye around the body in continuous movement.

Process, Technique, and Execution

The design process began as an exercise in class during studies at the École de la Chambre Syndicale in Paris, France. The exercise guidelines required students to develop their own designs based off of inspiration from three designers: Vionnet, Fabrègue and Döring. Development of both garments utilized the draping criteria developed from the study of Fabrègue and Döring. The primary components of the criteria were to use a continuous piece of fabric and to return to straight of grain by "spiraling fabric around both the x and y axis, maintaining one pattern piece, avoiding traditional shaping, and engineering with bias (Bernardoni & Ruppert-Stroescu, 2017)." After completing the jacket in half scale and analyzing the design, a full-scale drape of the jacket was developed. Experimentation with spiral skirt designs on the half scale led to a full-scale drape of the skirt in the design presented here. The jacket was tested in three fabrics by assembling the right half to evaluate the effectiveness of the fabric and the design details, and the skirt was sewn in two different fabrics. A white pinwale 100% cotton corduroy was chosen. To subtly accent the spiral seaming, candle wicking embroidery was added at 1" intervals.

Significance, Rationale, and Contribution

The significance of this design scholarship lies in recognizing dress as a symbolic device to communicate meaning that advocates for agency. A concept as relevant today as it was one hundred years ago. This research also further develops previous work on spirals as a medium of innovative pattern making for fashion design.

Originality and Innovation

This project introduces new ways of pattern development through draping. Figure 1 is the pattern for the jacket, and Figure 2 shows the pattern for the skirt, which uses nearly all the fabric. The inherent sustainable qualities contained in spiral patterns is enhanced by the use of all-natural unbleached fibers (cotton corduroy) and mother-of-pearl-buttons. Remaining pieces of fabric from the spiral cut was used to augment the design by adding a detachable collar, pocket bags, and a skirt placket.

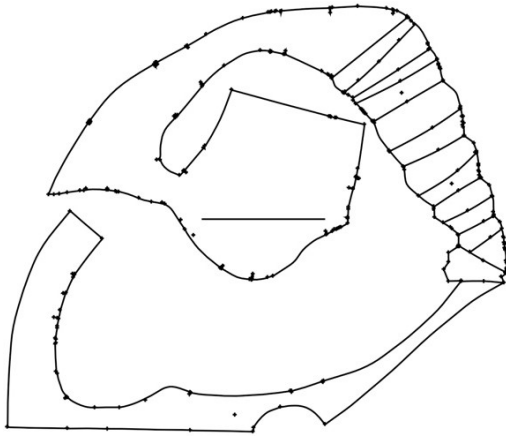


Figure 1: Jacket pattern piece

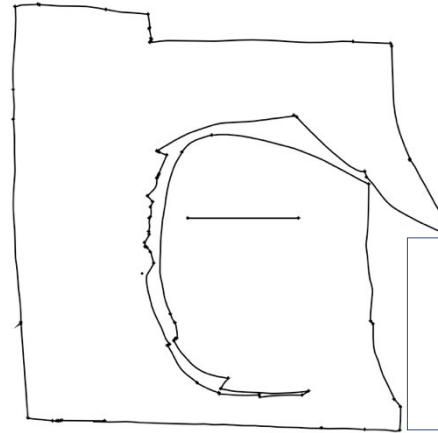


Figure 2: Skirt pattern piece



Front

Back



Side

Detail

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