

Title: *Dichotomy*

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Design Statement

Dichotomy is one of the creative outcomes of a research project that aims to examine the physical and conceptual relationship between dress and body in various socio-cultural contexts and ultimately to define the ways in which dress is established based on different concepts/perceptions of body in terms of meaning and form. *Dichotomy* is part of a forthcoming solo exhibition of my designs resulting from this research.

Sociologists have defined the body as an imperative component for human activity and have argued that it is constrained by the society in which it is situated (Helman, 1992; Shilling, 1993; Elias 1991). Entwistle (2004) introduced the concept of “the dressed body” which recognized both body and dress as socio-cultural embodiments and phenomena. It is natural to think that perspectives toward the body have been determined in a particular socio-cultural context and only accepted within that context. Eastern and Western cultures had established substantial disparity in their understanding of the body. The Western body is a substantialized form consisting of body parts, organs, muscles and skeletal structure and separated from the outside world, whereas the Eastern body sits at the interface where the inner and external world meet (Zito, n.d.). Consequently, each culture, with such different perspectives toward the body, has constructed a distinct dress-body relationship. In the West, the dress and body are interrelated and integrated. Hollander (1993; 85) who reads the body shape in close relation to the clothes argued that western dress is a “visual arrangement” created by a combination of body shape and clothing shape. Dress physically framed the body and reflected the perpetual changes of ideal body shapes that occurred in the western costume history. On the contrary, the Eastern dress and body displayed an independent relationship, since neither form is dictated by each other. The body became invisible within the clothing (Hay, n.d.) and there is no physical resemblance found between dress and body.

Inspired by the distinct ‘dress-body relationship’ established in the Eastern and Western cultures, the design of *Dichotomy* captures the visual dynamics and formative balance created by a marriage of antithetical design elements in one garment. These dichotomies include: 3-dimensional body-conforming vs. 2-dimensional body-defying shapes, fixed vs. transformable, revealing vs. concealment, and West vs. East. Rather than giving the impression that the large rectangular shape concealing half of the body outweighed the other side, which was much smaller in scale and more body-revealing, the imbalance was subdued by a manipulation of visual weights. Symmetrical balance was achieved by juxtaposing extremely asymmetrical shapes. The over-dress transforms into variety of shapes and sizes by adjusting the volume of gathers with a drawstring inserted on the top edge. This tasseled string is a waist cord more commonly worn with the Korean traditional men’s coat. In order to emphasize formative uniqueness of this design, other design elements, like colors or motifs, were purposefully not introduced. The main materials used for this design project were Korean traditional silk satin (18” width), two types of mesh fabrics, and linen. Two different woven black and white mesh fabrics were layered on top of each other to create interest in texture and pattern. Garment patterns were designed

and cut to reduce fabric waste; mesh fabrics cut in squares using their full width and small pattern pieces were strategically marked on silk satin. Old scraps of linen left from the previous collection were recycled for parts of the dress hidden under the mesh layers.

This design project resulted from an innovative approach to realizing different dress-body relationships established in the Eastern and Western cultures and demonstrated how new technology can be applied to broaden the spectrum of creativity and feasibility through the design process.

References

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