



Optimal Anxiety

Cheyenne Smith, University of Delaware

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Contextual Review and Concept Statement

Apparel Industry professionals estimate that approximately 15-20% of textiles are wasted during garment manufacture, due to the irregular shapes of traditional pattern pieces (Rissanen, 2005). Orzada (2017) states that many creative approaches can be taken to pattern cutting that focus on sustainability, such as zero-waste design. Zero-waste design, which aims to produce little to no fabric waste during the design and/or construction process, can be achieved using draping techniques that use cuts, pleats, and folds, by manufacturing garment pieces to the exact shape needed, and working with geometric shapes (Orzada, 2017). Designer Julian Roberts has developed one such method of zero-waste design, which he calls “subtraction cutting.” Subtraction cutting is a method of “hollow construction” (The Cutting Class, 2013), in which the resulting garment is created by the removal of fabric instead of the addition of fabric. Subtraction cutting is thought to be a combination of traditional pattern making and draping techniques that makes the most of the negative spaces that can be opened in fabric to create space for the body (The Cutting Class, 2013; Roberts, n.d.).

Although the subtraction cutting technique can be used with careful design consideration, the zero-waste technique also lends itself to a process of completely random experimentation, with a great potential for different garment designs to emerge (The Cutting Class, 2013). The purpose of my Optimal Anxiety garment was to experiment with the subtraction cutting method as a means to produce a zero-waste garment, while drawing inspiration from WGSN’s Spring/Summer 2019 report, “Creative Manifesto” (WGSN Vision Team, 2017).

Aesthetic Properties and Visual Impact

Optimal Anxiety takes inspiration from WGSN’s Spring/Summer 2019 Trend Report, “Creative Manifesto.” This report mentions that “in times of extreme uncertainty, the best strategy can be to push outside the comfort zone” because “real innovation and maximum output comes from ‘optimal anxiety’—a state outside of our comfort zones” (WGSN Vision Team, 2017, p. 4-5). This design aimed to create a state of “optimal anxiety” for the designer, wearer, and viewer. According to McQuillan, Rissanen, and Roberts (2013), the subtraction cutting approach “results in forms that are difficult to predict, requiring an intimate relationship between designer, hand, cloth, and body” (p. 41). As a designer, I am typically very particular about producing the exact design I seek out, therefore, simply using the subtraction cutting method created anxiety in the design process and brought me outside my comfort zone. Not knowing exactly how the execution of the garment would result visually, a sense of optimal anxiety was created within me.

The selected fabric for this garment was chosen to elicit a state of optimal anxiety in both the wearer of the garment and any viewer who comes across the garment. The colorful print with shades of yellow, red, blue, and purple was chosen as a bold juxtaposition to a sheer royal blue fabric. The stand-out silhouette of the resulting garment includes an asymmetric hem, pocket on the front hip, and bulkiness at the back waist.

Process, Technique, and Execution

The design process for Optimal Anxiety started with fabric selection. Two yards of each fabric were selected, and then sewn together to create a large rectangle. From there, the neck line, armholes, and several other circles were cut out of the fabric and then sewn together, according to Julian Roberts' subtraction cutting guidelines. The resulting garment included very interesting shapes that were tacked down and styled to create the final silhouette. With several different paths inside the garment for the body to follow, it was also necessary to choose the path that created the optimal final silhouette. The execution of the garment ended up with an asymmetric hemline, a pocket on the front hip, and bulkiness at the back waist.

Cohesion

Optimal Anxiety combines a bright color palette, stand-out silhouette, subtraction cutting technique, and design experimentation to create a state of optimal anxiety for the designer, wearer, and viewer, who are pushed outside their comfort zones.

Significance, Rationale, and Contribution

With the sustainability of the fashion industry in question, in part due to large quantities of textile waste, the exploration of sustainable design techniques, such as zero-waste subtraction cutting, are necessary to drive industry-wide change and bring the textile waste issue to its root cause—irregular pattern shapes.

Originality and Innovation

Due to the fact that the final execution of subtraction cut garments is hard to predict, Optimal Anxiety provides an original take on the concept of zero-waste garment design. Subtraction cutting is an innovative design technique that explores taking away fabric rather than adding it from the beginning. The technique explores the innovative concept of “designing with patterns rather than creating patterns for designs” (Roberts, n.d., n. pag.).

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