

# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CLOTHING: EMOTIONAL DESIGN FOR HEALING



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Clothing has evolved across various fields. In recent years, there has been a growing focus on garments designed for psychological adjustment. Design is shifting away from merely showcasing technology; a 'human-oriented' approach is increasingly becoming the focus. This approach places the body and mind at the core of design.

## *Abstract*

Denne abstrakten omhandler et klesdesignprosjekt som ble til under et vinterbesøk i Vigeland Skulpturpark. Observasjonen av hvordan skulpturene forandret seg under et lag med snø, inspirerte til en dypere refleksjon rundt livets flyktige byrder. Prosjektet fokuserer spesifikt på områder av antrekket—hodet, nakken, armene og føttene—steder hvor snø typisk akkumuleres, og reflekterer hvordan livets utfordringer oppsamles, men er bestemt til å forsvinne. Designene integrerer tunge materialer som ren bomull og tykk plastduk med lettere stoffer som tynn gas for å illustrere dualiteten i livets utfordringer: de er betydningsfulle, men forbigående.

Designprosessen involverte utviklingen av fem unike antrekk, med en tydelig vekt på stoffakkumulasjon mot kroppens nedre deler, som etterligner måten snø legger seg på. Denne metodikken produserer dramatiske, virvlende silhuetter som simulerer bevegelsen til fallende snøflak. Ved å benytte tyngre

stoff nederst på plaggene, representeres visuelt snøens opphopning og symboliseres samtidig vekten av livets utfordringer. Kontrasten fremheves gjennom overdimensjonerte hansker og ermer, i motsetning til tettsittende overdelers, noe som styrker det visuelle temaet om balanse mellom byrde og letthet.

Det primære målet med dette prosjektet er å formidle et budskap om håp og motstandsdyktighet gjennom motedesign, ved å oppmuntre tilskuere til å anerkjenne den flyktige skjønnheten i utfordringer og det vedvarende håpet i motgang. I det prosjektet nærmer seg sin avslutning ved avgangsvisningen, inkluderer neste skritt å designe tilbehør som komplementerer og utdyper narrativet om flyktige strabaser og vedvarende styrke, demonstrerende at selv livets tyngste byrder er av forbigående natur.



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## ***Defining Healing and Its Integration with Design***

Healing involves comforting individuals and purifying emotions, fostering a sense of warmth and belonging. It primarily focuses on individuals who overthink, are susceptible to stress, and experience mental fatigue. The aim is to improve their well-being, alleviate stress, and enable them to confront and understand themselves better, ultimately achieving emotional purification.

Owing to the rapid development of modern society, an overly stressful work and living environment has emerged. In this context, people often face psychological issues of various degrees. The article discusses the role of healing, drawing parallels to the concept of 'art therapy.' Utilize painting, literary appreciation, music, and other forms to soothe the soul and release inner emotions. For instance, calming music can alleviate anxiety.

Healing-based design, a novel concept, has shown promising research in advertising, animation, filmmaking, and environmental design. This approach is also feasible in clothing design, as explored in design circles. The healing-based clothes described here do not represent a distinct category or a subcategory within clothing design. Nor are they unique to any designer's creative method or style. Instead, these garments embody the broadly defined societal characteristics of 'healing.' Individual responses to healing vary based on personal sensitivity to different symbols, influenced by culture, education, and individuality. For instance, some may have a unique fondness for certain fabrics, as illustrated by the villain's obsession with blue velvet in David Lynch's 'Blue Velvet,' or the male lead's fur fixation in 'Venus in Furs,' a Franco-Polish co-production. In these cases, specific fabric elements in clothing can offer emotional satisfaction and healing. Such healing experiences can be personal or communal, depending on the sensory experience's level of privacy or public nature.

Regarding the cultural origins of healing, Japanese scholar Mitsuho Ikeda in 'Cultural Anthropology of Healing' investigates the term's etymology. Ikeda differentiates between therapy and healing: healing liberates individuals from illness and distress, while therapy employs modern medical knowledge for recovery from these states. Moreover, healing design also encompasses the study of emotional design, as illustrated in Donald Arthur Norman's 'Design Psychology - Emotional Design.' Norman highlights the significance of aesthetically pleasing products for personal and social development, outlining principles of instinctive, behavioral, and reflective design levels.



Instinctive design impacts through visual and tactile first impressions, echoing human evolution where conditions and objects providing food, warmth, and protection elicited positive emotions—traits embedded in our genetic programming. Behavioral design addresses functional needs, establishing a link between the designer's concept and the user's psychological model through observed habits and behavior patterns. Known as the 'system image' in behavioral design, this is the communicative bridge between designer and user, ensuring the user comprehends the designer's intentions. Reflective design touches the audience's heart, extending beyond the product's use to incorporate impressions as a key design element. While instinctive reactions are guided by the user's inherent system, the reflective system offers a more substantial reaction basis. A well-established reflective system in design enhances a product's appeal.

### ***Transforming Sensory Experiences into Healing***

Emotions, immeasurable and beyond quantification, require direct feeling and experience by the human mind. Preferences, cherishment, disgust, or hatred are not solely evoked by appearance and behavior. They play a crucial role in connecting people with objects and in the interactive experience process. Direct interaction with objects allows people to perceive their properties and attributes, generating corresponding emotions. These emotional experiences, in turn, influence further interactions between people and objects. During these interactions, shared values and spirits can provoke emotions and memories. Since the industrial revolution's onset of mass production, there seems to be a loss of something intimate and personal, like the cherished, casually made cotton-padded jackets sewn by a grandmother. Thus, designers should shift focus from promoting consumption to valuing users' emotions and experiences.

Different colors, fabrics, and silhouettes create diverse sensory experiences and associations, often evoking memories and personal satisfactions. When these sensual elements collectively influence the conscience, they produce unique emotions, evoke associations, and stimulate recollections. For example, in Japanese culture, wearing black mourning clothes at a funeral conveys respect and can bring comfort to the

bereaved family. Mourning attire, with its symbolic elements, can also evoke antique memories for the attendees.

Healing can be dissected into 'purification,' as defined by Aristotle, and 'sublimation,' as defined by Freud, to better analyze its process. Purification involves transferring emotion through the descriptive power of attire, transforming it into a conduit for stimulating memories and emotions. In psychoanalysis, transference is seen as the projection of significant people and emotions from one's past onto another individual. In the realm of design, this concept can be extended to designers defining images that bridge the gap between people and objects through vision, hearing, and insight, thereby curing negative emotions. Sublimation, on the other hand, involves creatively shaping clothing into a vehicle for the imagination, like allowing the audience to perceive an ideal world through the artistic immersion offered by clothing. This evaluative process in clothing design bestows awareness upon garments and other design elements. Healing-oriented design utilizes these two methods, leveraging changes in various perceptual languages to trigger positive sensory experiences and psychological feelings, thereby achieving healing outcomes.



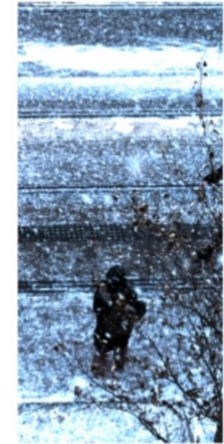


# Fleeting Threads: Costume's Dialogue with Transience



## Meet Vigeland Park in China

Vigeland Sculpture Park is located in Oslo, Norway. I first knew about this place when I was taking a Western Art History class in Beijing as an undergraduate. I fell in love with this place when I saw the pictures that Leturer showed us in class. This is also one of the reasons why I applied to study for a master's degree at KHiO. Yes, I want to say that Norway is my favorite country besides China from beginning to end.



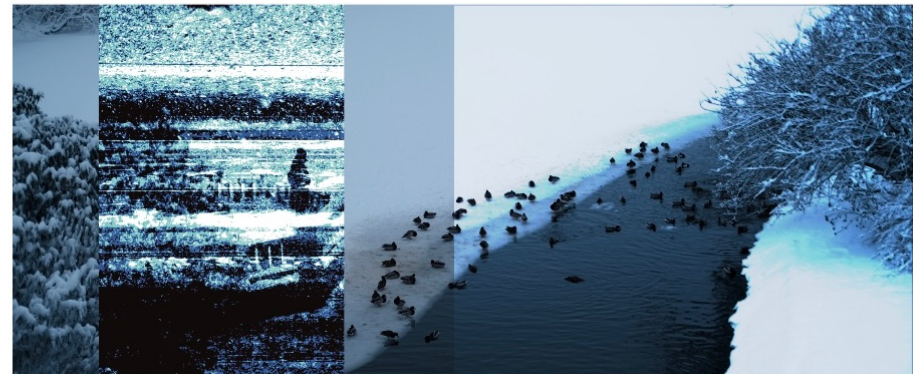
Me and Miss Coco Zhou  
Photographed in December 2022  
Oslo, Norway

When I first arrived in Norway in the summer of 2022, I was surprised by the vitality of Vigeland Park, and it became a place where I lingered. However, with the arrival of winter, I felt such long nights and continuous heavy snow for the first time. The language, weather and culture are all very different from the world I lived in before.

When I stepped into this park again in the December blizzard, the scene in front of me refreshed my memory of summer. Thick snow covered each sculpture, their appearance seemed to be completely changed, darkness enveloped the earth, and I felt heavy in my heart: "What is the difference between the burden of life and this heavy snow?"

However, the night will always pass, and the snowflakes will eventually disappear. All these scenes in front of me are "temporary and light". When I fully understood this truth, I chose the art practice project Clothing Psychology to explore the possibility of costume as a medium to heal the human psychology. I hope that each piece from this project is an encouragement to the audience - to recognize that even in the coldest and darkest moments, hope and beauty still exist.

## The inspiration for the Master Project also started from here



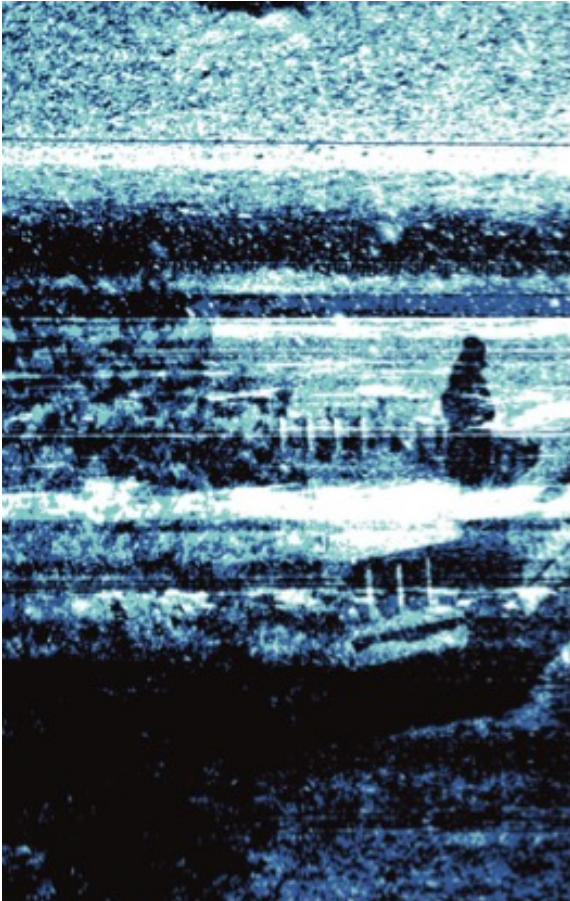
THE VALE TO YOU,

Masterprosjekt; KK DE543 2024

TO ME THE HEIGHTS.

## ***Touching healing***

### *Textile and Texture*



The body, as a sensual subject, gains a unique healing perspective when placed inside clothes. The wearer's interaction with the garment involves various elements such as weight, temperature, texture, and the sound produced by movement, all of which elicit a range of emotions. In the act of wearing, the body becomes the primary subject of perception, with touch being the central sense.

Touch, triggered by skin stimulation, allows humans to discern the smoothness or roughness of surfaces, as well as the length, size, and shape of objects, directly influencing their experience of the external world. The softer the touch, the more pleasant the mood; conversely, a harder touch can evoke feelings of aggression. Touch is a vital sensory pathway for humans to explore the world, with understanding rooted in tactile experiences. Common phrases like 'tough attitude' or 'soft heart' in daily language indicate the significant impact of touch on psychological activities, containing psychological information linked to emotional experiences. Different materials and textures provide varied visual and tactile sensations, such as soft and hard, smooth and rough, cold and warm, glossy and transparent, elastic, and textured.

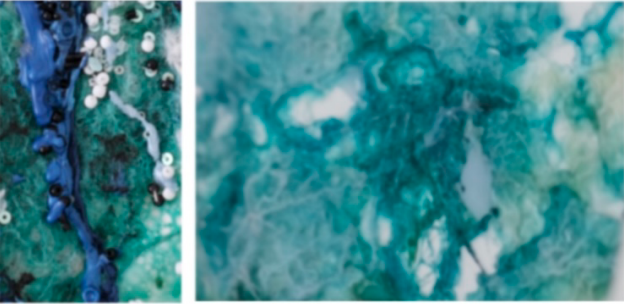
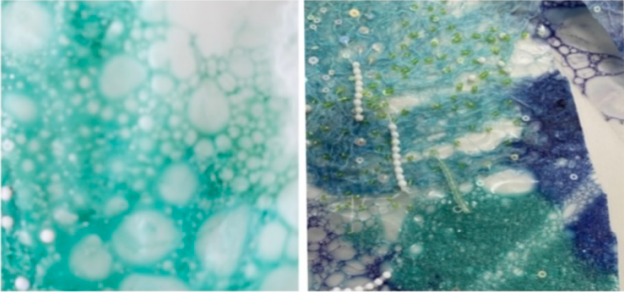
Touch is also the simplest and most direct means for humans to express love. It enables a person to feel a lasting and stable connection with the touched object. Soft and smooth textures, characteristic of children, or furry and round textures, a,

foster a durable bond. Biologically, it is believed that touching releases oxytocin in the body, reducing pain, easing nervous tension, and fostering feelings of love.

Thus, regardless of whether the person touching is irritable or anxious, they can experience immediate calm and relief.

In my project, the interplay of textile and texture is not just about physical comfort but also about creating an emotional dialogue with the wearer. This interaction is an active engagement where each piece of clothing is designed to not just dress the body but to communicate with the soul, fostering a deeper sense of wellbeing and emotional healing. The tactile experience becomes a language of its own, narrating stories and evoking feelings that go beyond the visual appeal of the garment.

Through this exploration of textile and texture, my project seeks to demonstrate that touching healing is a multifaceted experience, deeply rooted in the sensory interaction between the wearer and the garment. It underscores the potential of clothing to be more than just a fashion statement, but rather a medium of emotional and sensory communication.



### *Texture Profiling*

Continuing the theme of integrating nature into textile design, a variety of fabrics have been selected for their ability to mimic natural environments. These include soft, plush materials that evoke the softness of fresh snow, alongside more structured, resilient fabrics that reflect the sturdiness of ice. Each material has been chosen for its aesthetic appeal and sensory impact, allowing wearers to experience a tactile connection to the natural world.

### *Sensory Detailing*

To deepen the sensory interaction, elements such as the gelatin-based sequins are augmented with additional features like embedded scents and temperature-responsive fibers. These innovative textiles adjust their properties according to the wearer's environment, enhancing comfort and emotional resonance. For example, fabrics may release a calming scent when heated by body temperature, or change texture in response to external weather conditions, simulating the ever-changing nature of a landscape influenced by climate.





## *The Psychology and Emotion of Color*

Color, much like music, can evoke compulsory emotional responses. For instance, the melancholic tones of a cello often induce feelings of sweet sadness, while upbeat music naturally lifts spirits. Similarly, color wields this influential power. It's interesting to draw parallels between music and color, using musical concepts as metaphors for color. Bright, pure colors inherently possess a cheerfulness akin to a musical allegro, whereas darker hues resonate more with the somber tones of an adagio.

The colors perceived by humans are a product of the visual system. Perception of a single color is subjective and can be unstable, as it is influenced by various factors. The essence of a color is not inherent to the color alone; it is determined by the relationships and interactions with other colors. This interplay between colors is fundamental, as it significantly shapes our perception and understanding of color. The way colors influence and interact with each other plays a pivotal role in how they are ultimately seen and experienced.

However, it's important to note that healing through color is not limited to just euphoric and relaxed sensations. Melancholic

and profound emotions can also facilitate healing, a concept rooted in the symbolism of cultural contexts, as previously discussed. Cheerful colors instinctively and directly elevate human emotions, reminiscent of the joyous and lively nature of most children's songs. These hues are commonly found in children's products, ranging from clothing and accessories to snacks and confections. A prime example is Disney, the world's largest fairy tale enterprise, which extensively uses such vibrant colors in its products, including animations, theme parks, and merchandise, to cultivate an atmosphere of joy and enchantment.

Beyond the inherent qualities of these colors, nostalgic memories of a joyful childhood—filled with colorful candies, toys, and carefree moments—also play a crucial role. They have the power to transport adults back to the simplicity and freedom of their early years, thereby alleviating stress and anxiety. This dual influence of color—both as an immediate emotional stimulant and as a conduit to cherished memories—demonstrates its profound impact on human psychology, offering a spectrum of emotional experiences from uplifting joy to reflective melancholy.

## ***Visual healing***

The healing experience people typically perceive transcends the conscious arrangement of objects in a specific order or merely the combination of colors, shapes, and symbols. In the human brain, rational thinking is not the primary or most crucial form. While it serves as a fundamental aspect of human life, there's another form of thinking: the perceptual. People recognize its existence and rationality when it stands apart from direct experience and the universal laws governing objects. In this mode of thinking, vision is often initially influenced by a directional tension. This sensation does not stem from the viewer's personal experience but is inherent in the sensory perception of shapes, colors, symbols, and other elements of the visual language. Healing is facilitated through the magnitude and direction inherent in these elements.



### *Silhouette*

The foundational concept in vision is shape, understood initially through the outline's grasp. A shape is an area distinct from others in the field of vision, usually following a certain direction and tending towards a closed outline. When differences such as brightness or color gradients are absent, the brain's central system sometimes enhances and completes these outlines. Academics attribute this to non-logical thinking, which makes perceptual assumptions based on sensory information. For instance, in central perspective art, though the convergence point of lines is invisible, its location is still perceptible. This perceptual process is distinct from logical reasoning. The scale, proportion, and composition of a shape imbue it with emotional characteristics, eliciting instinctive emotional responses in people.

In clothing design, the structural shape, or style, includes the garment's outer contour and internal structure. This internal structure can be further subdivided into dividing lines, local structures, and dart changes. Structural modeling primarily offers a visual experience. Different structures and silhouettes impact this experience in varied ways. Large and arc-shaped silhouettes, especially when combined with fluffy, soft fabrics, evoke a sense of warmth. Partially enveloping styles, like turtlenecks and long sleeves, provide physical warmth and a comforting emotional sensation.

The wearer is also an observer. When wearing a garment, one can directly see parts of it, such as when lowering the head, raising the arms, or looking in a mirror. In the wearer's mind, there's always an observer. This 'imaginary other' allows the wearer to examine and dress themselves according to perceived expectations, finding satisfaction in imagining the other's approval.

Therefore, the wearer is a complex fusion of observer and author. Discussions about the observer can extend to this duality. Seeing a garment also involves a 'visual touch' of its material, prompting one to imagine its tactile sensation and the experience of wearing it. This imaginative touch triggered by visual perception allows the observer to conceptualize the wearer, who achieves healing through the act of wearing. This process mirrors the direct healing experienced by an actual wearer. For example, seeing someone in a thick fleece jacket during a cold winter can make the observer feel warm.

The enveloping silhouette offers a sense of protection, especially for those who feel self-conscious about exposing parts of their body. Thus, garments that wrap around the body are often associated with safety and healing. Different silhouettes in clothing bring varied perceptual experiences to both the viewer and wearer. Styling techniques significantly influence these silhouettes, with four primary manifestations in contour structures: overall size contour, partial arc shape, large size contour shape, and large part.







### *Visual Exploration*

Colors elicit strong and direct emotions in people. The capacity of color to convey emotions is undeniable. Its natural properties offer diverse sensory experiences. Moreover, the color of clothing predominantly influences one's overall personal image. Recognition starts with the face, followed by the perception of the individual, where color plays a crucial role.

It reflects the authority and inevitability of the natural environment, symbolizing seriousness, while also representing absolute impartiality, detached from personal emotions. Transparent materials are also extensively used, as they accentuate the natural characteristics of color in providing varied sensory experiences. The emotional and sensory dimensions are further enriched through contrasts in area, shifts between cool and warm hues (with occasional warm colors as accents), and the interplay between virtual and actual colors.



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## ***Aesthetic Experience and Meaning***

Roland Barthes, in his 'Popular System', posits that clothing has three forms of existence: written clothes, image clothes, and dressing clothes. This perspective suggests that clothing can be viewed as a system where details serve as symbols expressing specific meanings. Clothes, with all their nuances, symbolize certain feelings and meanings in the world, which humans perceive through intuitive vision.

Aesthetics, a concept rich in meanings, offers a perceptual experience of pleasure and satisfaction. Beauty, a characteristic found in animals, plants, ideas, objects, people, or spaces, is integral to aesthetics, culture, psychology, and sociology. It embodies visual integrity and harmony, aligning closely with emotional needs.

Objects brimming with beauty invariably capture attention. Beauty enables people to experience pleasure while appreciating or using such objects, enhancing their enjoyment.

In the aesthetic process, items regarded as 'good-looking' or 'charming' are typically defined as beautiful. However, when connected with emotions, aesthetic experiences also allow for the redefinition of 'ugly,' 'ridiculous,' and 'strange' things as beautiful, even drawing deep attraction. This is because emotions reflect external stimuli and can imprint on the subconscious, embodying personal experiences, connections, and memories. When something stimulates a response, it resonates emotionally, becoming special due to its ability to evoke memories and revive unique emotions.

In 'The Meaning of Things' by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg Halton, the authors delve into ordinary families, interviewing individuals about their special possessions. One housewife shared, 'These are two chairs my husband and I bought together. Though worn, they are our first chairs. Sitting there reminds us of our home and children, enjoying afternoons with them.' This shows how people cherish unique items that evoke pleasant associations or fond memories, reflecting life experiences and fostering positive self-understanding by reminding them of family, friends, experiences, and achievements.

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