

Boundaries Of Silence



Acknowledgements

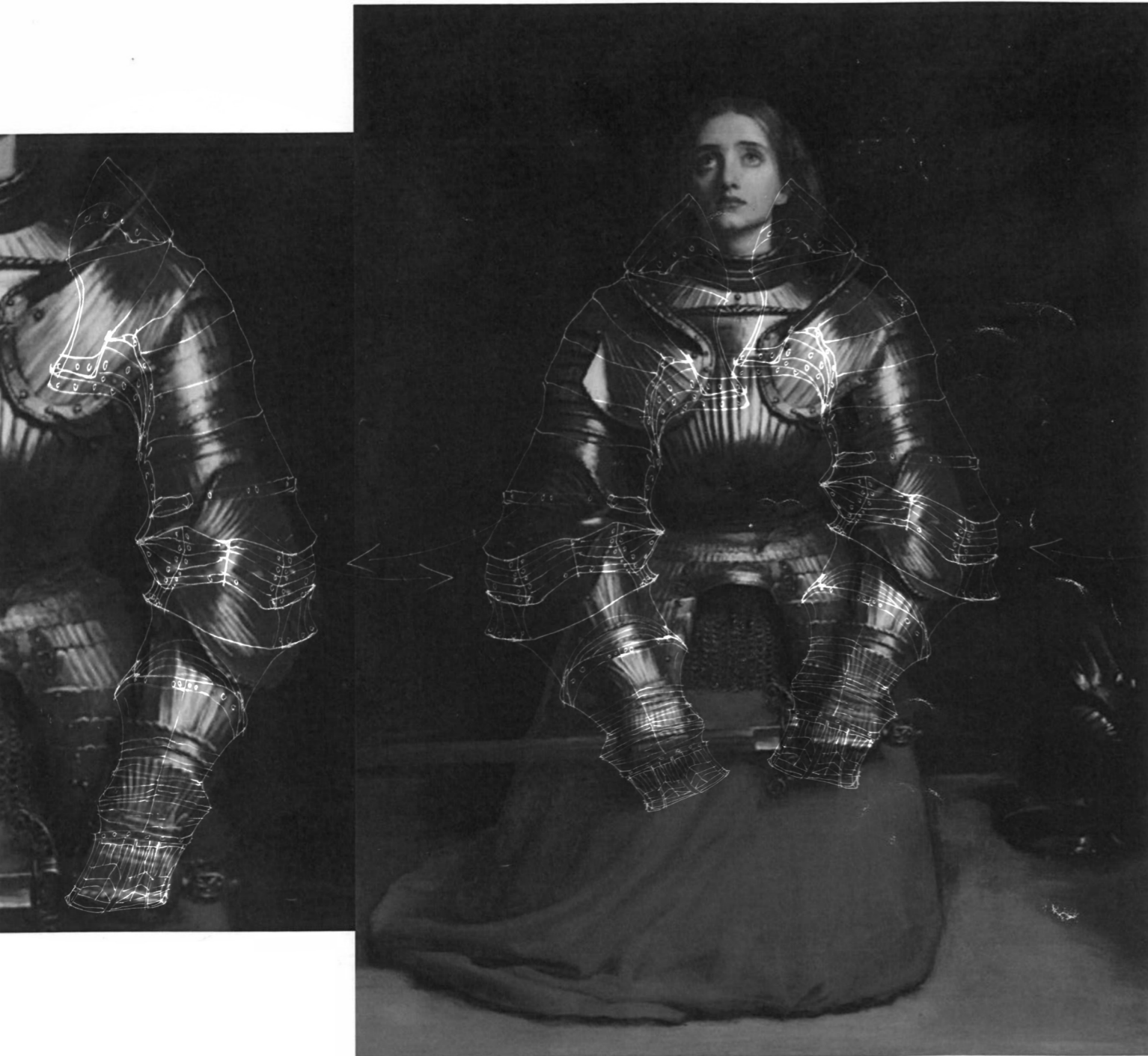
I would like to sincerely thank my tutors Nabil, Olivia, Navin and Jessica for their invaluable guidance, critical insight, and unwavering support throughout this project. Their feedback consistently challenged me to go further—both technically and conceptually.

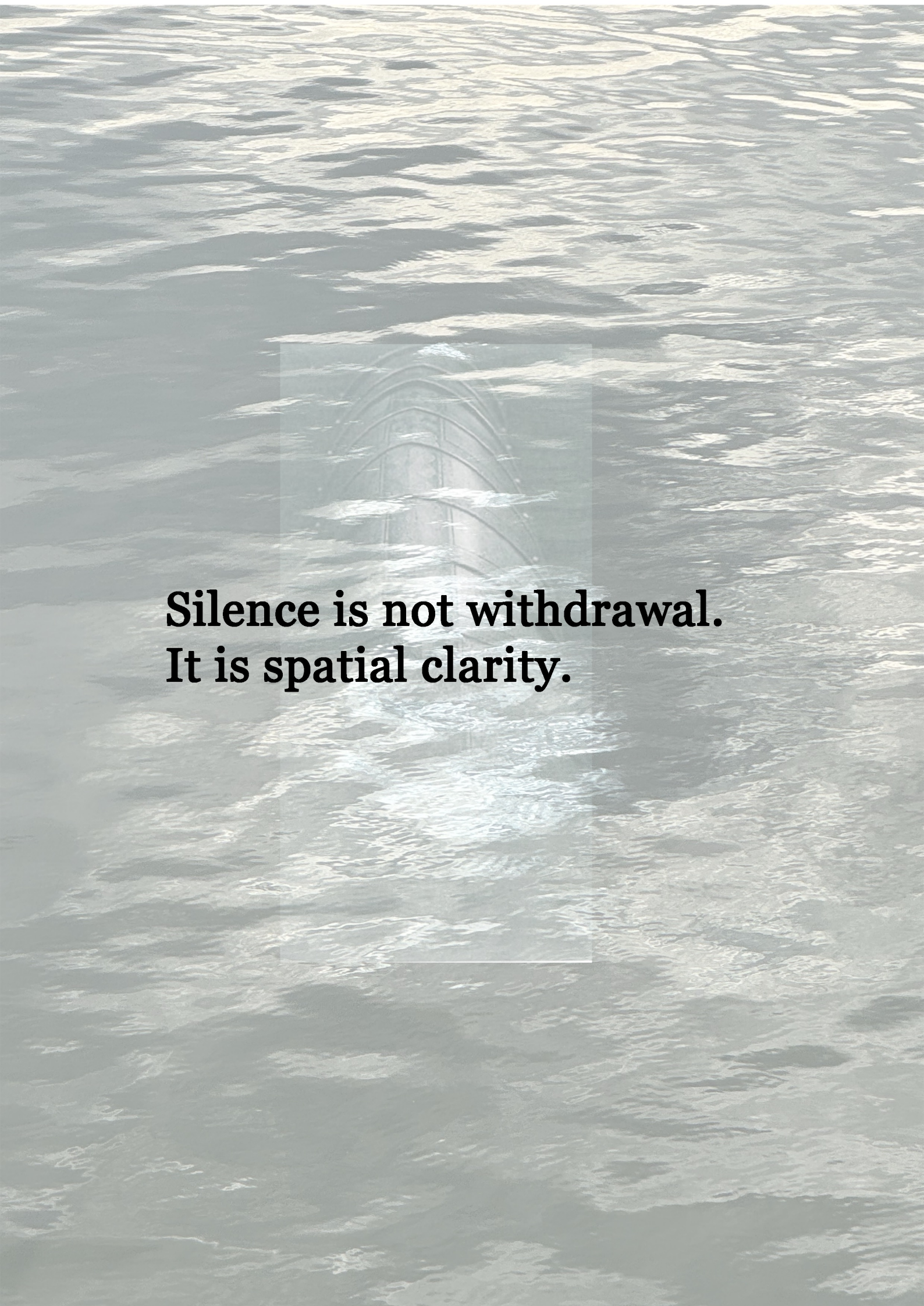
I am also deeply grateful to the sewing technicians at LCF, whose expertise and patience helped me overcome many practical hurdles during the making process.

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Finally—and most importantly—I want to thank myself, for the perseverance, late nights, self-questioning, and quiet resilience that carried me through this





**Silence is not withdrawal.
It is spatial clarity.**

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Introduction

The research was guided by the question:
How can womenswear articulate silent power and personal boundaries through structural and material decisions?



Figure 1

Boundaries of Silence explored how womenswear could express silent power — a restrained yet assertive form of strength — through sculptural structure, controlled volume, and the reduction of seams. The project stemmed from my observations of women in daily commuting spaces, particularly in crowded stations, where subtle gestures — turning shoulders, adjusting posture, or choosing silence over confrontation — revealed a quiet negotiation of personal space. As Iris Marion Young (1980) observes, women are often socially conditioned to occupy less physical space, limiting gesture and movement in ways that reveal how bodily restraint becomes a learned form of spatial negotiation. I became interested in how this invisible strength could be translated into material and form.

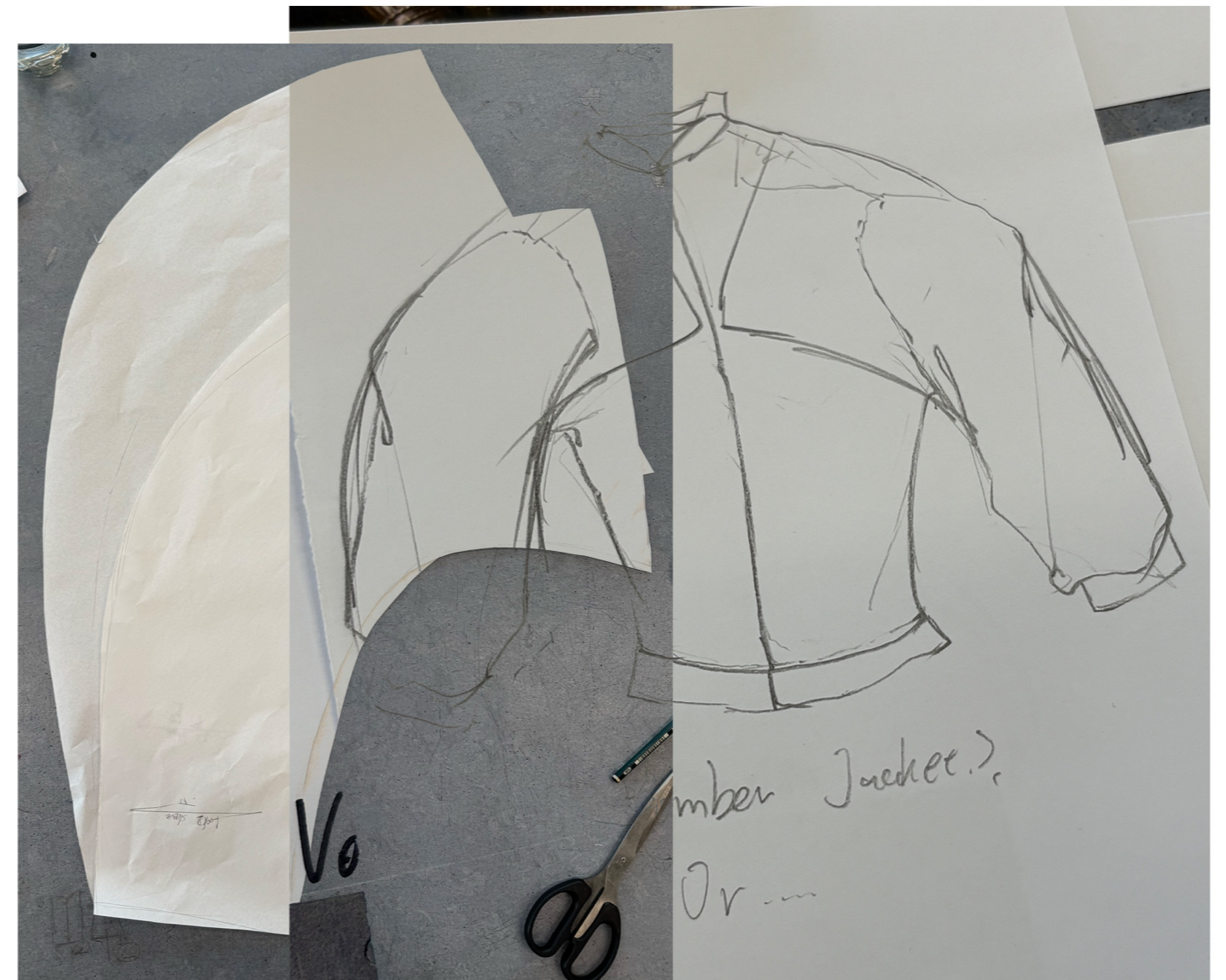


Figure 2 Sketch and pattern test: author's own, 2025.

In this context, silence was understood not as absence but as an active form of agency — a way of controlling visibility and asserting boundaries without aggression. This perspective drew upon feminist readings that frame silence as resistance and self-possession (hooks, 1989; Butler, 1990). Sara Ahmed (2006) further argues that bodies gain orientation through repeated spatial practices, suggesting that silence itself can function as a directional gesture — an embodied way of turning away from confrontation and toward self-possession. Within this framework, silence became a conscious form of empowerment rather than a passive state, shaping how the wearer occupies and commands space. The project therefore examined how pattern cutting could construct such psychological and spatial boundaries around the body, using structure itself as a language of empowerment.

Contextual Review

Situating my project within contemporary womenswear and the silent language of structure.



Figure 3A



The project was informed by a range of designers whose work re-defined how structure and silence could coexist within womenswear. I looked closely at Yohji Yamamoto, Rick Owens, and Ann Demeulemeester, whose approaches each revealed different ways of articulating strength without overt display.

Figure 3 — Yohji Yamamoto Fall/Winter 2023. Photograph by Filippo Fior / Gorunway.com. Published on Vogue Runway.

Their designs challenged conventional ideas of femininity by using form and restraint as expressions of presence.

Yohji Yamamoto's use of asymmetry, volume and black fabric suggested a kind of meditative strength—an elegance that resisted attention yet commanded space. As Wilcox (2011) observed, Yamamoto's philosophy of "clothing the body in thought" created silhouettes that exist between protection and freedom.

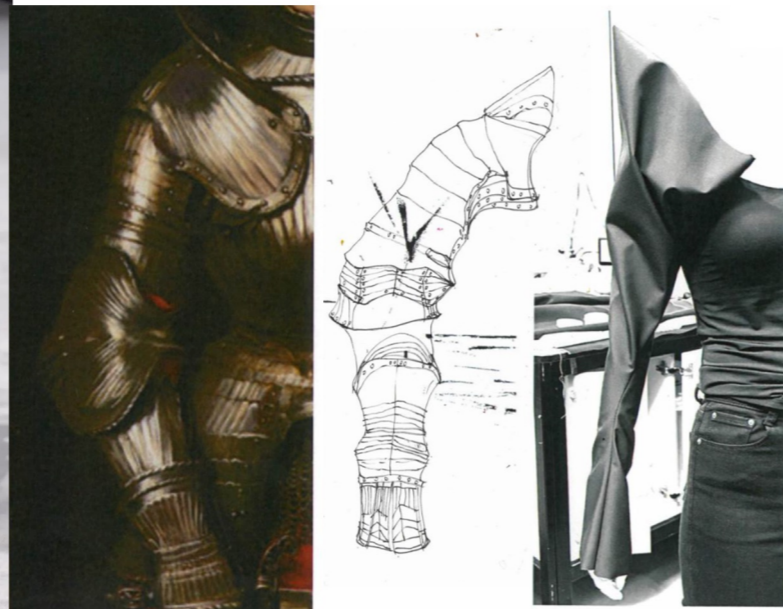


Figure 4

His garments often blurred the line between body and garment, which inspired my own exploration of how pattern cutting could dissolve physical boundaries. Rather than emphasising the female form, Yamamoto's silhouettes offered space, allowing the body to move and breathe within protection. This idea aligns with Sara Ahmed's (2006) concept of bodily orientation, where space is not neutral but shaped through how the body turns and moves within it. In Yamamoto's work, clothing becomes an extension of spatial negotiation—a wearable redirection of attention.



Similarly, Rick Owens demonstrated how structure could become both armour and expression. Evans (2003) discussed how his sculptural silhouettes and outward-expanding planes extend the body's presence while creating distance. I interpreted this as a strategy of defence transformed into elegance. The way Owens manipulated scale and proportion informed my own experiments with enlarged shoulder and hood panels—forms that extended beyond the body yet remained integrated within it. As Evans (2003) also notes, such sculptural exaggeration doesn't merely dramatise the body—it redefines its boundaries, projecting internal emotion into spatial form.



Figure 5. Rick Owens Fall 2021: Sculptural outerwear extending the spatial presence of the wearer. The exaggerated shoulders and voluminous forms create a visual armor that asserts non-verbal boundaries. Source: Vogue Runway (Accessed: May 2025)

While my references include sculptural approaches to womenswear, my own work does not seek to manifest power through rigid surfaces or overt structural weight. Instead, I am drawn to the kind of soft power embodied in Demeulemeester's work—where strength emerges not from hardness, but from quiet tension, from presence without confrontation. This softness is not passive; it is a deliberate withdrawal, a controlled distortion that resists interpretation. It is precisely this unspoken, unreadable force that I try to translate into garments—structures that protect without enclosing, and move without announcing.



Figure 6 Ann Demeulemeester Spring 2014: Elongated layering and deconstructed tailoring create a psychological distance through softness and restraint.

Ann Demeulemeester's work offered a contrasting softness. Through elongation, layering and subtle deconstruction, she constructed distance without aggression, shaping a poetic tension between exposure and concealment. As Evans (2003) also noted, her designs translate emotion into material fragility and strength, an idea that resonated with my project's emphasis on silent empowerment. This resonates with Trinh T. Minh-ha's (1989) observation that silence and non-confrontation can act as powerful forms of refusal—strategies that challenge dominant visibility by withholding legibility. In Demeulemeester's garments, such refusal becomes materialised: distance is shaped not through violence, but through quiet formal distortion.



Figure 7. Garment from *Boundaries of Silence*, designed and made by the author.

Together, these references provided a foundation for understanding how silence, structure and agency intersect in fashion design. They also highlighted how womenswear can communicate autonomy through form rather than decoration. By situating my work within this lineage, I was able to translate the concept of silent power into a personal language of pattern, volume and restraint.

In the context of contemporary urban life, I often find myself observing how women move through public spaces—how they protect their own presence without needing to speak. These silent negotiations between exposure and restraint have always resonated with me, as they mirror my own experiences of occupying visibility with caution. Grosz (1994) describes the body not as a sealed entity, but as a surface that negotiates and is negotiated by space. This perspective supports the idea that clothing, as a second skin, can embody psychological thresholds and moments of refusal. *Boundaries of Silence* therefore became a way to translate these personal feelings into design, turning subtle gestures into structural language. Through the process, I began to understand silence not as withdrawal, but as a conscious choice—a form of power that exists quietly within the everyday.

Methodology

The making process for *Boundaries of Silence* was grounded in a pattern-based methodology, where cutting and re-cutting became a way of thinking through structure. Rather than sketching garments in isolation, I began with existing archetypes—such as the Cooper jacket, parka, hoodie, utility vest and wide trousers—and used these as reference points to test how everyday garments could be reinterpreted through new logic. The aim was not to replicate them, but to intervene structurally in their anatomy in order to generate quieter, more introspective forms of strength.



Figure 8. Basic two-piece sleeve pattern. Front sleeve panel (left), back sleeve panel (right).

Figure 9. Reverse-worn toile exploring asymmetrical volume. Image: author's own.

Following Aldrich's (2015) notion that pattern cutting can function as an analytical framework, I treated the flat pattern as a research tool. Each version of a pattern was translated into a toile and evaluated through fit, movement, and silhouette. At times I reversed or inverted toiles—wearing them inside-out or backwards—to explore unexpected proportions or spatial effects. This process created a feedback loop between the technical and the conceptual, where the form itself became a way of asking questions: how can fabric restrict or release the body? When does structure feel protective, and when does it become oppressive?



Material trials were conducted in parallel. I tested a range of fabric weights and finishes, including soft drape wovens, mid-weight cotton twills, and waxed or coated canvases. These tests tracked stiffness gradients across the body—e.g. firmer structure at the shoulder cap and looser fall at the hip—and recorded fabric compositions, interlinings, finishing methods and steam/press reactions. Through this, I explored how material resistance shaped the garment's tension, and how subtle shifts in weight could express protection or exposure.



Figure 10. Sleeve toile experiments showing early structural trials. Variations tested volume control, pleat positioning, and curved seam shaping. These prototypes informed the transition from segmented forms to unified silhouettes. Images by author.

Importantly, this methodology was not conducted in isolation. Fittings and iterative critique sessions became integral to the development process. Feedback from tutors acted as critical inflection points. In the early phase, my understanding of 'armour' remained too literal—resulting in a segmented sleeve constructed in three parts to mimic plated protection (see Fig. X). Nabil encouraged me to start instead with minimal interventions—"a 0.1 fold"—and pushed me to investigate structural unity rather than fragmentation. This helped shift my approach from symbolic mimicry to abstract translation. During a mid-project session, he even demonstrated a partial drape of a transcoat, which helped me envision a more sculptural and integrated silhouette.



Figure 11. In-progress fitting session with tutors Nabil and Olivia. Their hands-on input was essential to testing proportion, movement, and structure during iterative development. Photograph by author. With permission.



Figure 12. Development of the wide trousers through early toile fitting sessions. From left to right: B-shaped front cut prototype; back view highlighting integrated volume; simplified drape study exploring soft spatial boundaries. Photograph by author.



Figure 13. Fitting session with Navin, refining waistband alignment and silhouette flow. His input helped resolve structural distortion in early versions and guided technical improvements. Photographs by author.



The wide trousers developed from a hybrid toile where I explored merging skirt and trouser archetypes. I was interested in how garments associated with exposure and containment could be fused into a single form—mirroring the emotional ambiguity of occupying public space. One early prototype featured a diagonal B-shaped front cut, which created an off-centred sense of visual weight and introduced subtle motion across the body. This asymmetric line became a structural motif in the final piece, offering quiet disruption within an otherwise stable silhouette.

Unlike conventional tailored bottoms, the final trousers were constructed as a single, clean form, emphasising fluid volume and a sense of openness. I intentionally kept the shaping simple and expansive—allowing the garment to hold space around the body rather than cling to it. This decision reflected my interest in designing soft boundaries: garments that don't scream for attention, but gently assert presence.

Navin supported me on key technical refinements—particularly around the waistband, where an early version distorted the flow of the trousers due to poor alignment. He adjusted the cut to allow for a lower, more ergonomic fit, and offered suggestions such as integrated slit openings and multi-pocket layering that enhanced the structural logic of my pieces without inter-

Informal peer collaboration also played a central role. I worked closely with three classmates—Yuting, Xiaozhuo and Corina—in a studio exchange system. We would rotate between each other's workspaces, identifying issues, offering suggestions, and mapping out alternative construction solutions. When I struggled with colour sequencing across my grey and white palette, they helped reframe the tonal transitions, balancing weight and flow across the lineup. These collaborative exchanges were not just technically productive but emotionally grounding. They reminded me that making is not only an act of individual authorship, but a social and dialogic process.

As Schön (1983) and Gray and Malins (2004) suggest, reflective practice in design emerges through a conversation with the materials, the context, and the people around you. This project unfolded as such a conversation—between flat and sculptural form, concept and construction, solitude and dialogue. The methodology became not only a way of building garments, but a process of thinking, failing, and reorienting—ultimately shaping a collection that embodies both critical reflection and emotional intuition.

Main Body

Following the material trials and iterative fittings, the design process evolved from structural experimentation into a cohesive five-look collection. Each look developed from a rotational logic that explored how the body could be partially enclosed, protected and revealed through the twisting of pattern pieces.

The process was guided by the same intention that shaped the project's foundation—to express silent power through structure rather than ornament.

Across the collection, volume became a form of communication: folds and seams extended or curved to define invisible boundaries, while the manipulation of cotton weights introduced a quiet tension between rigidity and softness.



Figure 14. Structural folds and tension in the final trousers, captured in Polaroid to reflect the project's tactile and intimate quality. Photograph by author.

Look 1:

Look 1 Copper jacket, jersey vest and trousers

Look 1 established both the visual and conceptual language of the entire collection. I intended it to be the most grounded and wearable design, drawing directly from everyday garments—a corporate-style jacket, a jersey vest, and wide trousers.

The upper-body construction developed from early toile experiments where I exaggerated shoulder rotation to explore spatial balance. However, the initial outcomes were overly restrictive around the armhole and visually flat. After physically wearing the toile, I realised that the volume on the front bodice was insufficient. I enlarged and twisted the front panel, merging it into the curve of the back sleeve, which helped create a natural, protective arc around the upper arm. This became a key structural feature of the final look, where the shoulder and sleeve function as a single, rotational unit.



Figure 15. Early Cooper jacket toile exploring collar volume and shoulder shaping. This prototype informed later developments in silhouette and structural restraint. Image by author.

Figure 16. Cooper jacket prototype from earlier EPT project.
Structural layering and asymmetry explored in this piece later informed my final collection.
Image by author.

~~Bolero Jacket~~ (prototype). Cropped Jacket.

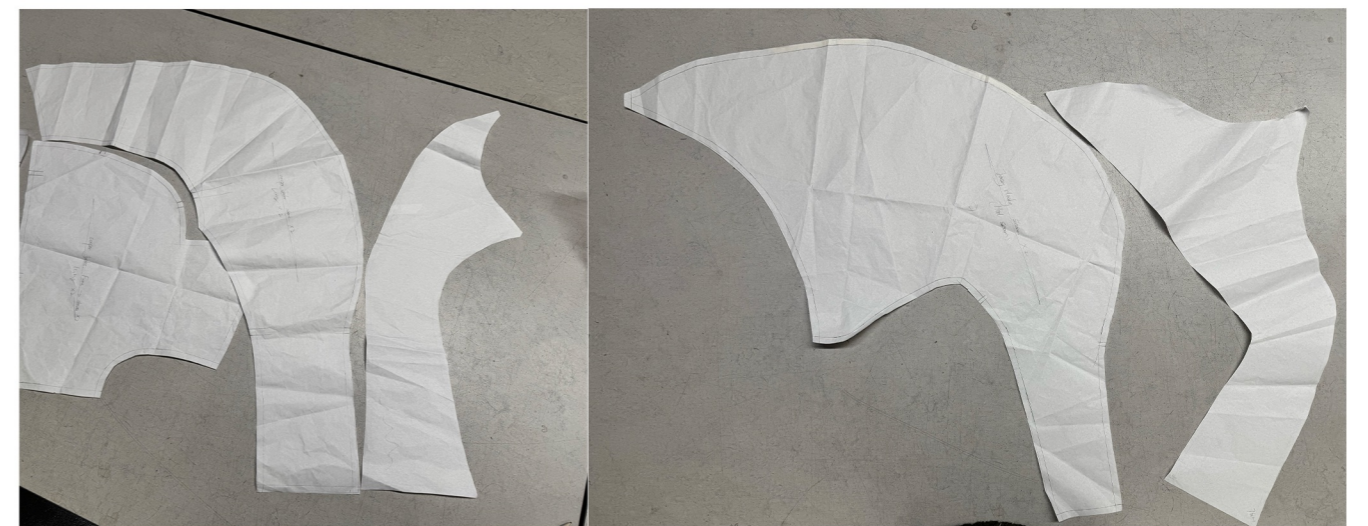


Too easy!!!

This rotational system did not emerge all at once. Its foundation came from a sleeve study I previously developed during the EPT project, where I experimented with large shoulder volumes using firm, waterproof outdoor fabrics. Although that earlier outcome was unresolved, it raised a crucial question for this project: could twisted pattern pieces—when enlarged or reversed—physically express psychological protection?

My first version used a conventional two-piece sleeve, but I reversed the lower panel's direction so it rotated backward against the upper sleeve—creating a subtle spiral structure. At first, I only twisted the upper section, but the silhouette appeared too weak. It was only after extending the twist throughout the entire sleeve and enlarging the outer panel that the volume began to curve dramatically around the arm. This sense of movement gave the jacket its defining sculptural tension.

Figure 17. Sleeve toile experiments showing early structural trials. Variations tested volume control, pleat positioning, and curved seam shaping. These prototypes informed the transition from segmented forms to unified silhouettes. Images by author.



However, when trialled in various materials, this method also revealed failures. Softer fabrics caused the twist to collapse, while stiffer ones made the seams crack under stress. The structural rotation needed support—but not at the cost of flexibility. After multiple trials, I selected a heavy cotton that offered the right balance of resistance and adaptability. This process of trial and failure became essential in refining the sculptural identity of Look 1.

One of my main failures with this look was that I initially assembled the pattern pieces in a very rigid, conventional way, which made the outerwear appear stiff and lifeless. After discussing this issue with my tutor Navin, I decided to soften the structure by framing the entire edge with ribbed knit—running along the collar, hem, and front opening. This detail allowed the jacket to feel more open and elastic, almost like a Cooper-style outer layer, and better reflected the collection’s theme of protective openness.

The jersey vest came out of drape experiments using leftover jersey scraps. At first, the soft material collapsed and failed to support the tall collar I envisioned. I resolved this by interlining the collar with a firmer off-cut, enabling it to gently rise and partially cover the lower face—subtly symbolising controlled concealment and quiet resistance. Even though Look 1 was designed to be the most straightforward, it ultimately demanded significant creative and technical problem-solving. These early missteps helped define the structural logic for the more sculptural silhouettes that followed in the collection.



Figure 18. Final toile of Look 1, showing structural modifications after early failures. Ribbed knit framing softens the silhouette while a raised jersey collar evokes quiet resistance. Photograph by author.



Figure 19. Failed oversized hood toile revealing structural instability. Fabric lacked sufficient weight, leading to collapse at the hood–sleeve junction. Olivia offered fitting support and material advice during this trial. Images by author.

Other tutors contributed different types of insight. Olivia provided material direction, encouraging me to trial hoodie-weight cottons. Though these weren’t ultimately included due to quality concerns, the process clarified how fabric softness can destabilise a garment’s silhouette. A failed oversized hood prototype (see Fig. X) also revealed the structural instability caused by poor integration between hood and sleeve, reinforcing the need for calibrated fabric choice.

Look 2

Look 2 comprises: Hoodie and trousers

Look 2 expanded on the concept of 'silent armour' by shifting the focus from spatial containment to movement and imbalance. After constructing Look 1 with a strong sense of enclosure, I felt it was important to explore the opposite—how a garment could still communicate protection without relying on rigid structures.

I wanted to challenge the assumption that strength must always be heavy or controlled. Instead, I asked: can protection be expressed through lightness and mobility?



Figure 20. Final Look 2: Hoodie and trousers ensemble exploring soft protection through draped silk jersey and fluid form.
Photograph by Yusongthings, 2025.

This led me to develop a hoodie-based silhouette. The hoodie, often associated with anonymity and urban softness, became a key site for reinterpreting armour through comfort. As Rahman (2016) observes, the hoodie holds symbolic meanings beyond practicality—it signifies anonymity, social withdrawal, and emotional shielding. Building on this idea, I sought to understand how garments can meet contemporary psychological needs for subtle protection in public space. I reworked the structure to include a partial hood and exaggerated sleeve panels that extended into the front body—an idea that originated from a failed toile where the hood was too tight to function. That mistake revealed an opportunity to split the hood open and let it fall more loosely, introducing a fragmented but intentional softness around the neck and head.



Figure 20. Fitting images of an early hoodie prototype exploring integrated sleeve-hood structure and garment volume.
Photographs by author, 2025.



Figure 21. Revised hoodie fitting after structural adjustments: split-hood construction introduced to create soft fragmentation around the head and neckline.
Photographs by author, 2025.

Figure 22. Early toile development for Look 2 trousers: exploring diagonal cuts and asymmetry to merge skirt and trouser archetypes. Photographs by author, 2025.



The wide trousers developed from a hybrid toile where I explored merging skirt and trouser archetypes. I was interested in how garments associated with exposure and containment could be fused into a single form—mirroring the emotional ambiguity of occupying public space. One early prototype featured a diagonal B-shaped front cut, which created an off-centred sense of visual weight and introduced subtle motion across the body. This asymmetric line became a structural motif in the final piece, offering quiet disruption within an otherwise stable silhouette.

Unlike conventional tailored bottoms, the final trousers were constructed as a single, clean form, emphasising fluid volume and a sense of openness. I intentionally kept the shaping simple and expansive—allowing the garment to hold space around the body rather than cling to it. This decision reflected my interest in designing soft boundaries: garments that don't scream for attention, but gently assert presence.

The trousers were initially designed as shorts, but I found the proportion too abrupt when paired with the voluminous upper body. The silhouette felt disconnected and lacked visual flow.



After trial fittings, I re-extended the leg to create a more balanced vertical line, which restored continuity between upper and lower halves. This iterative process reminded me how even minimal gestures—lengthening a hem, softening a sleeve curve—could significantly shift the emotional register of the garment.

While Look 1 explored stillness and boundary, Look 2 allowed me to test how motion could create new types of boundaries: not through resistance, but through evasion. Protection, here, became less about stopping external force and more about moving around it—like water flowing past an obstacle.

Figure 23. Development process for Look 2. Top: Initial trouser prototypes began as shorts but were extended after fittings to achieve greater visual balance. Bottom: Hoodie silhouette refinement through exaggerated sleeve volume and shoulder adjustment. Photographs by author, 2025.



Emotionally, this led me to develop the idea of soft armour: protection that does not rely on hardness, but on adaptability and calibrated distance. Rather than fortifying the body, these forms create boundaries that are flexible and responsive. This perspective aligns with feminist discussions on agency and spatial autonomy. As bell hooks (1989) argues, silence and withdrawal can function as modes of resistance and self possession rather than passivity. Similarly, Braidotti (2022) conceptualises subjectivity as fluid and relational, negotiating its boundaries rather than defending them through rigidity. These theories helped me understand softness not as fragility, but as a form of resilient presence—an idea that guided the shaping of Look 2.



Figure 24. Overlay of fitting photograph and armour sketch to explore the emotional translation of 'soft armour'. This image visualises the tension between structural protection and embodied softness. Photograph and digital overlay by author, 2025.

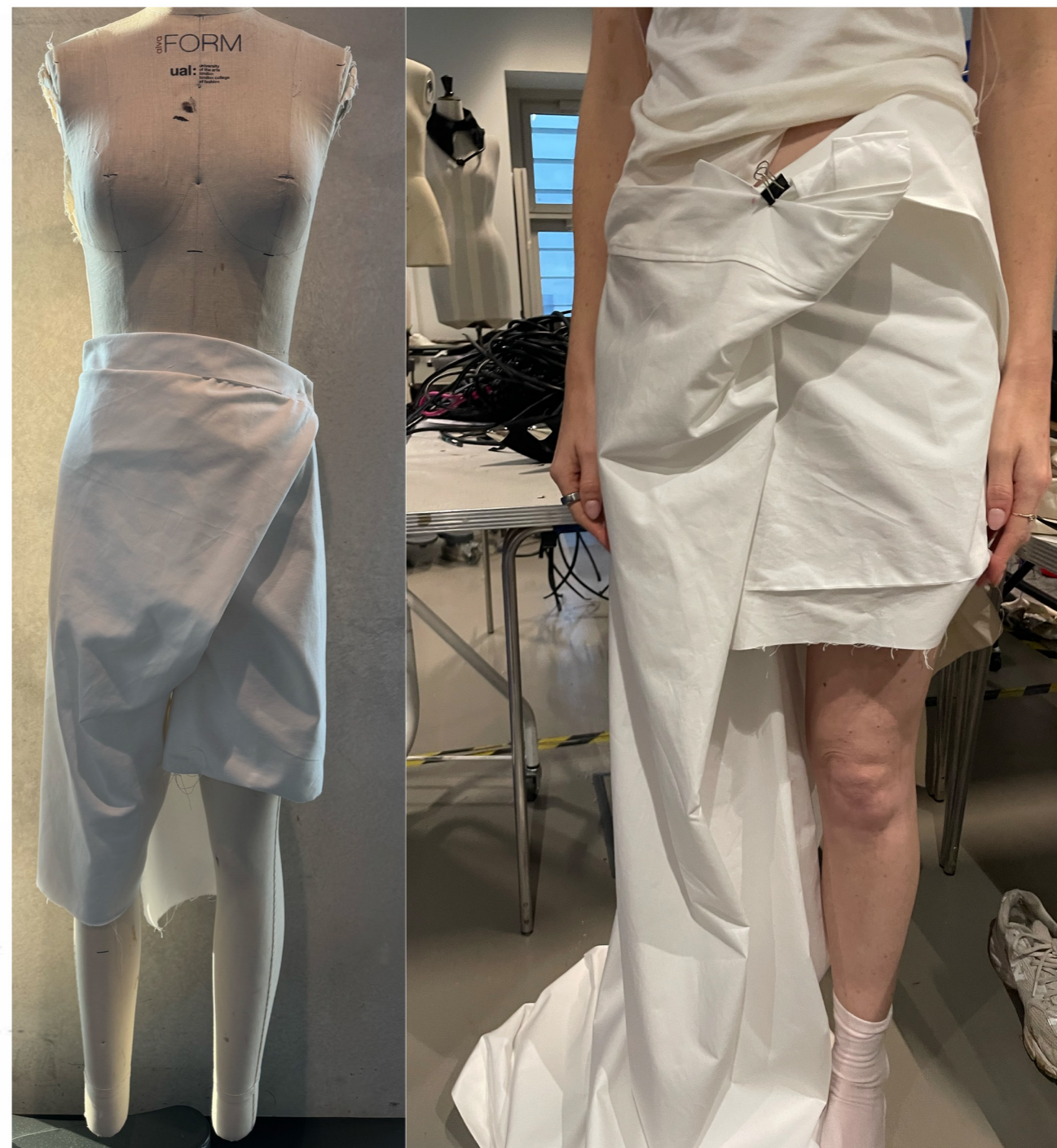


Figure 25. Early asymmetric short prototype developed from the hybrid trouser silhouette in Look 1. The draped right panel retained volume and softness, while the sharply cropped left side introduced asymmetry and bodily imbalance. This fitting explored how proportion and rhythm could affect how garments mediate physical stance and social interaction. Photograph by author, 2025.

The lower silhouette reinterpreted the hybrid trousers from Look 1 into a short form. I wanted to carry forward the idea of asymmetry, but push it further in both proportion and rhythm. One leg retained the oversized, draped panel from the earlier pattern, while the other was sharply cropped above the knee. This created a visual contradiction—almost like the garment was caught mid-movement—introducing tension between stillness and distortion. The asymmetry was deliberately exaggerated to make the body feel slightly off-balance, encouraging a different kind of posture and interaction with space. This aligns with Feinberg et al.'s (1992) findings that clothing can influence both the wearer's body language and how they are perceived in social settings. By altering balance and rhythm, the garment subtly reshapes behaviour—prompting shifts in how one occupies and negotiates public space.

(Insert fitting photo here: asymmetric short prototype)

The shorts were cut in a mid-weight cotton drill, which provided enough body for the longer leg to maintain structure while allowing the cropped side to fall with ease. I initially tested a lighter plain-weave cotton, but the shape collapsed too easily and the short side lost definition. Switching to drill fabric solved this, as its diagonal weave offered both strength and subtle flexibility—qualities that supported the architectural silhouette without compromising comfort.



Figure 26. Material comparison between early cotton muslin toile (left) and final shorts in mid-weight cotton drill (right). The switch to drill fabric provided both structure and flexibility—qualities that allowed the silhouette to hold form without sacrificing movement. Photographs by author, 2025.

Figure 27. Back view of Look 2 showing the fluid hood structure and asymmetrical silhouette. The soft folds around the head and shoulders evoke a sense of withdrawal and quiet motion—expressing protection through adaptability rather than rigidity. Photograph by author, 2025.

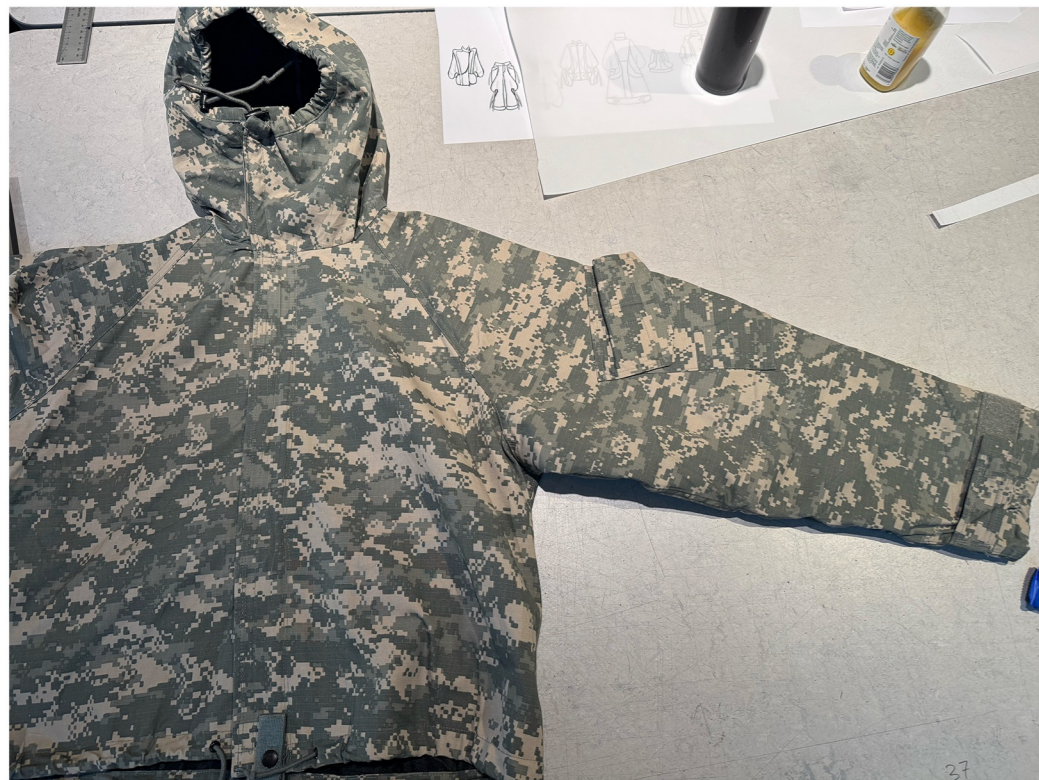


This look marked a transition from the stability of Look 1 toward something more experimental. The imbalance in lengths and volumes reflected the emotional undercurrent of the collection: the desire to loosen control without fully surrendering it. When I described it as a ‘moment of release,’ I meant a release from rigidity—from the psychological tightness and spatial containment explored in Look 1. Here, protection was reimagined not as a static boundary, but as a moving, shifting presence—one that adapts rather than resists. In that sense, this look was a conceptual hinge within the series: not a rejection of the previous logic, but a soft expansion of it—opening up space for alternative expressions of strength through fluidity and motion.

Look 3

Look 3 comprises: Parka

Look 3 began with the parka archetype—a garment historically rooted in military and survival contexts, designed to shield the body in extreme conditions. I was drawn to its embedded logic of protection, but wanted to reinterpret that through a quieter, more intimate lens: as a form of soft armour.



Rather than using the parka structure literally, I focused on its key elements—such as the raglan sleeve and hood—and began to merge them into one continuous flow. This decision came from a simple observation: that the hood and sleeve, when no longer separated, could form a seamless line that softly wrapped from head to wrist. It was a design move that preserved the silhouette of defence, yet stripped it of rigidity.

Figure 28. Early parka toile prototypes exploring the hood-sleeve merge through a camouflage fabric. By fusing the raglan sleeve and hood into one continuous flow, the garment began to express protection as a seamless, fluid envelope—challenging the conventional rigidity of military silhouettes. Photograph by author, 2025.



The result was a sculptural form that echoed the protective shell of armour, but without aggression. It didn't shout power—it carried it. This approach aligned with my broader intention: to express contemporary female strength not through hardness, but through structure that holds space—quietly, resiliently, and without compromise. As bell hooks (1989) suggested, power need not imitate patriarchal aggression to be real—silent power can be equally transformative.



Figure 29. Development toile for Look 3 exploring an integrated hood-sleeve structure. This sculptural form emerged from merging the hood and raglan sleeve into a continuous protective shell, offering a soft yet resilient silhouette. The exaggerated volume around the head and arms evokes the shielding quality of armour without visual aggression—an embodiment of silent power. Photograph by author, 2025.



During the mid-term fitting, Nabil and Navin observed that the garment risked becoming too much of a surface gesture—an aesthetic move lacking structural depth. That critique stayed with me as a guiding principle. I began reassessing the proportion and weight distribution throughout the piece, especially how different pattern lines intersected and transferred visual gravity. As Collet (2015) notes, garments are shaped not only by form but by how material weight and structural intersections choreograph bodily movement and presence.

Instead of relying on superficial form, I started prioritising connection points—places where the garment could ‘hold’ its logic silently yet powerfully. The neckline and sleeve junction became a key focus: how could their integration express containment without constraint? This rethinking didn’t just refine Look 3—it also reshaped my approach to earlier designs, especially Look 1, where I revisited the shoulder twist to make it less decorative and more spatially coherent.

Figure 30. Mid-term fitting adjustments for Look 3: responding to tutor feedback about surface-level aesthetics, I reconsidered pattern intersections and material weight. These images document the critical revision of the hood and neckline connection to deepen the garment’s internal logic and spatial coherence. The process not only refined Look 3 but informed structural edits across the collection. Photograph by author, 2025.

Initial drape experiments for Look 3 used stiff canvas, aiming to emphasise structure and volume. However, the rigidity of the fabric caused unintended collapses around the shoulder and neckline, particularly as the integrated hood-sleeve structure lacked internal support. The silhouette lost fluidity and appeared awkwardly heavy. This failure made me realise that protection does not require hardness—it requires controlled structure. I gradually shifted toward a softer material strategy.



Figure 31. Initial toile for Look 3 using stiff canvas. The attempt to emphasize volume through rigidity led to structural collapse around the neckline and shoulders, particularly where the hood and sleeve were integrated without support. This failure highlighted the limitations of hardness and prompted a shift toward controlled softness as a protective strategy. Photograph by author, 2025.

Eventually, I selected a wool-cashmere blend (50/50), which offered both sufficient weight and pliability. The fabric allowed the large pattern pieces to maintain volume without appearing rigid, creating an enveloping form that felt both strong and supple. The change in material was not just technical, but conceptual: it helped reinforce the idea of soft armour—an outer structure that holds and protects without suppressing.



Figure 32. Final silhouette of Look 3, constructed in a wool-cashmere blend (50/50) to balance weight and pliability. The sculptural hood and enveloping proportions reflect the collection's central theme of "soft armour"—a protective yet non-restrictive structure. This version embodies the shift from rigid defence to controlled softness, allowing volume without visual heaviness. Photograph by author, 2025.

Reflecting on the development of this project, my understanding of "armour" evolved from a literal to an atmospheric reading. Initially, I relied on sharp visual cues—angular shoulders, plate-like structures, and costume-inspired layering—to convey protection. But through material failures and design iteration, I realised these gestures felt performative rather than grounded. Gradually, I moved toward a softer, more psychological interpretation: armour as distance, silence, and spatial sovereignty. It became less about what was seen, and more about what was felt. As Ahmed (2014) argues, emotional atmospheres construct boundaries that shape how bodies relate to others. My garments, too, began to express protection through absence—through restraint rather than confrontation. This shift introduced a deeper sensitivity to the work, allowing protection to appear as presence, not performance.

From a commercial perspective, this collection is designed for women who navigate public environments with intention—especially during commuting, where the body must subtly claim its own space. These are women who do not seek visibility through loud gestures, but through garments that support presence, privacy, and emotional autonomy. As Woodward (2007) suggests, what women wear is often less about fashion and more about control—how one moderates exposure, safety, and expression within social settings. The imagined wearer values structure that does not shout, but supports. My customer is not defined by trend cycles, but by her spatial sensitivity and her desire for clothing that quietly protects. While not mass-market, this project aligns with the ethos of brands like Jil Sander, Hed Mayner, and early The Row—labels that build resonance through proportion, not spectacle.

Figure 33. Final presentation image of Look 4. This look inverted conventional structures by exposing seam allowances and internal construction, reinterpreting strength through transparency. Drawing from the integrated parka of Look 3, it turned protection inside-out—suggesting that vulnerability itself can be a form of control. Photograph by author, 2025.



Look 4 :
 Look 4 marked a moment of inversion—both conceptually and structurally—within the collection. While earlier looks constructed protection through layering and enclosure, this look asked what happens when boundaries are turned outward. Drawing from the integrated parka of Look 3, I began to deconstruct the surface, revealing seam allowances, facings, and structural elements typically hidden. This reversal aimed not to dismantle strength, but to suggest that power can also reside in transparency. By turning the interior into exterior, the look reframed vulnerability as a form of control.

The development began by reworking the paper pattern from Look 3, with a focus on reversing key seams along the shoulders and side panels. In early toile experiments, the exposed seam allowances and visible topstitching introduced a new visual rhythm—one that turned the garment inside out while retaining its sculptural presence. These alterations shifted attention from silhouette to construction, suggesting that the act of making could itself become an aesthetic gesture.



By treating construction as surface, this look transformed technical elements—normally hidden from view—into part of the visual language. Exposed seam structures and shifted volumes became aesthetic decisions, aligning with the collection's ongoing interest in how vulnerability and control can coexist.

Subsequent experiments focused on partial inversion rather than complete reversal. The hood and right sleeve were rotated and attached externally, while the torso remained traditionally assembled. This asymmetry created a garment suspended between two states: structured yet open, protective yet transparent. The result was a silhouette that evoked both tension and release—like a soft boundary being redrawn in real time.



Figure 34. Structural development of Look 4 through reversed construction and partial inversion. Early toile tests experimented with visible seam allowances, rotated sleeves, and inverted pattern pieces, treating construction as surface. These iterations shifted visual emphasis from silhouette to structural transparency, aligning with the collection's theme of vulnerability as a form of control. Photographs by author, 2025.

To develop the balance between structure and softness, I tested a combination of materials: heavy cotton provided the sculptural body needed to hold the silhouette, while a softer jersey interlining was inserted to introduce flexibility. Rather than concealing this inner layer, I allowed the jersey to remain visible along the edges—intentionally blurring the line between interior and exterior.

This material contrast inverted conventional hierarchies of protection: strength was no longer hidden beneath the surface, but expressed through the layering itself. The softer fabric, usually considered secondary, became the visible boundary—suggesting that resilience can emerge from exposure, not concealment.



Figure 35. Final presentation of Look 4: material inversion and spatial exposure. This look used a combination of heavy cotton and exposed soft jersey to visualise both structure and vulnerability. By allowing interlinings and internal structures to emerge, the garment blurred the boundary between inside and outside—conceptually reinforcing the idea of silent power through visibility. Photographs by author, 2025.

This look represented a moment of exposure within the collection's narrative. While previous garments contained and protected, Look 4 allowed the internal framework to become visible, proposing a new form of silent power—one that accepts imperfection and transparency as part of control. This shift echoed Judith Butler's (1990) view that identity is not fixed but enacted through repeated gestures. By inverting the garment's construction, the look performs a new kind of presence—quiet, deliberate, and embodied.

As Goffman (1959) suggests, the self is often staged between “front” and “back” regions of presentation. Look 4 blurs that boundary, exposing the “backstage” of garment construction not to relinquish protection, but to reclaim agency over what is seen. In doing so, the garment resists the notion that power lies solely in concealment. Instead, as Ahmed (2004) writes in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, marginalised subjects often reconfigure visibility to assert spatial autonomy—choosing when and how to be seen. Look 4, therefore, reframes exposure not as a loss of boundary, but as a chosen act of silent control.



Figure 36. Final line-up illustration.
 A hand-drawn line-up of the four final looks from the Boundaries of Silence collection. Each silhouette captures a distinct interpretation of soft armour—from structural restraint to spatial exposure—while collectively expressing a silent, sculptural strength grounded in material experimentation and protective layering.
 Illustration by author, 2025.



Figure 37. Final collection lookbook grid.
 Nine full-body photographs showcasing the complete Boundaries of Silence collection. Each look embodies a unique structural approach to soft armour, from sculptural outerwear to deconstructed innerwear, expressing a spectrum of silent strength and spatial autonomy. The progression across garments reflects the collection's conceptual arc—from concealment and protection to exposure and control.
 Photography by author, 2025.



CREDITS
Photography: Yusongthings
Lighting: ZAN
Assistant: Yoko
Hair & Makeup: Aria
Styling: Anastasia
Model: Madeline
Garment Design: XU FOQONG



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Photography: Yusongthings
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Critical Evaluation

The completed collection, *Boundaries of Silence*, reflects a journey of redefinition—moving from structural enclosure to a more nuanced understanding of spatial openness and self-possession. At the heart of this project is a question: how can garments express a silent kind of power—one that protects, defines, and empowers without dominating? Rather than relying on theatrical silhouettes or symbolic exaggeration, I wanted to explore a gentler form of resistance—something soft, structural, and deliberate.

In the early stages, my approach was quite literal. Inspired by armour and protective wear, I designed sharp, angular pieces with exaggerated forms, mimicking the language of visual defence. These designs had immediate impact but lacked adaptability. The shoulders collapsed, the hoods lost form, and the trousers stiffened movement. These failures were necessary. They taught me that garments intending to protect must also allow softness, flow, and flexibility—qualities often overlooked in conventional interpretations of strength. This process is illustrated in the fitting of Look 1's jersey vest (Fig. X), where adjustments to volume and seam direction allowed the garment to embody both containment and softness.



Figure 38. Fitting adjustments on jersey vest from Look 1. These images document the fitting process for the jersey vest in Look 1. During this stage, the garment underwent significant refinement to balance protection and softness. The adjustments informed a new understanding of how structural containment could coexist with fluidity and exposure. Photographs by author, 2025.

A significant shift happened during the development of Look 4, originally envisioned as a fully protective transcoat. The initial concept revolved around total concealment. However, a pivotal tutorial with Nabil changed my perspective. He proposed that exposure could also be protective—that revealing certain parts of the body, when done intentionally, could signal confidence rather than vulnerability. This led me to question the relationship between exposure and defence. Can a garment remain protective while leaving parts of the body visible? Can openness itself be a boundary?

This idea became central to my process. I began treating actions such as reversing, rotating, and folding pattern pieces as more than construction decisions—they became methods of critical questioning. These techniques often arose from problems in the fitting process. When a toile failed, the fix often revealed something new. These structural reimaginings allowed me to break habitual ways of thinking. By pushing past the expected, I was able to find unexpected outcomes—many of which became defining features of the final garments.

Design, for me, became a continuous dialogue between control and release. Each failure asked a new question, and each question deepened my understanding of what the project was becoming. The iterative process clarified the emotional and psychological space my garments needed to create. I realised I wasn't just designing shapes, but constructing atmospheres—spaces that communicate boundaries without needing to be explained.

This directly informed the way I now understand female spatial autonomy. I began to see clothing as a non-verbal method of boundary-making. In public spaces, many women navigate visibility with care—choosing what to show, what to shield, and how to hold themselves. My garments aim to assist in this negotiation. As I reflected more deeply on this dynamic, I began to believe that a woman shouldn't have to say, "I'm here." Her clothes should already articulate her presence. Clothing becomes a spatial declaration: "This is my domain."

This conviction reshaped my brand vision. While this MA project was rooted in personal expression and academic research, it also laid the foundation for a future womenswear label. My long-term plan is to develop a directional fashion brand under my name, one that operates at the intersection of emotional functionality and structural intelligence. The brand will explore "silent strength" as a core identity—using clothing to create psychological space, not through spectacle, but through restraint, balance, and material precision.

My envisioned customer is not defined by age but by mindset. She is independent, emotionally intelligent, and often navigating dense urban environments. She values personal space—not as a luxury, but as a necessity. She doesn't want clothes that shout; she wants clothes that hold. Her strength is in how she chooses to be seen—or not seen. She needs garments that adapt to her needs, protect her presence, and reflect her internal world without sacrificing comfort or sophistication.

The brand will adopt a primarily digital model—using online platforms to connect directly with this community. Capsule collections will be released seasonally in small batches, emphasising refined silhouettes, crafted finishing, and longevity of style. This strategy allows me to maintain quality while building an intimate, intentional brand culture. References such as The Row, Hed Mayner, and Jil Sander guide my thinking—not for aesthetic mimicry, but for how they communicate a presence that is understated, precise, and emotionally resonant.

From a methodological standpoint, this project also changed how I define "design research." My pattern-cutting practice evolved into a form of critical inquiry. Each toile was a hypothesis. Every fitting became a site of testing. Draping on the body, reversing toiles, rotating pieces—all of this was part of a feedback loop between concept and construction. These methods were not about perfection; they were about questioning. They revealed which structures restricted too much and which held just enough. The process helped me find softness not as weakness, but as a mode of power.

I also realised the value of collaboration and critique. Olivia's material suggestions helped refine fabric choices that could hold shape without rigidity. Navin's tailoring advice helped resolve trouser distortions, particularly around the waistband. Nabil's challenges, such as "Why not just rotate it?", forced me to stop overthinking and start experimenting. These conversations were as much a part of my design process as draping or sewing. The best outcomes always came from tension—between concept and wearability, structure and softness, solitude and confrontation.

Ultimately, this project has redefined how I understand power—not as something to impose, but something to carry. "Soft armour," as I now define it, is not a contradiction. It is a reimagining of protection: not walls, but waves; not barriers, but boundaries. These garments don't protect through hardness, but through precision. They don't hide the wearer, but give her room to breathe. Power, in this system, isn't loud. It's lived.

Through *Boundaries of Silence*, I have developed a clearer understanding of how design, research, identity, and emotion can intersect. The journey sharpened my ability to translate abstract feeling into tangible form. It also brought clarity to my future goals—not just as a designer, but as someone seeking to shape a fashion system that holds space for women's complexity, subtlety, and presence.

Conclusion

This project revealed that silence can operate not only as a theme, but also as a method and a message in fashion design. Through iterative making, failure, and recalibration, I came to understand that boundaries are not fixed edges—they are relationships: between body and cloth, between concealment and presence, between private intention and public interpretation. Each garment became a quiet negotiation, where control did not exclude softness, and clarity did not require loudness.

In this context, silence is not emptiness. It is authorship. It is how the wearer chooses to be read, or not read at all. It is how space is claimed not through noise, but through form. Working across toiles, fittings, and dialogue, I learned that subtle design gestures—like a fold, a rotated seam, a non-linear hem—can hold more power than overt expression. Silence, when intentionally constructed, becomes a protective atmosphere.

Boundaries of Silence is not a conclusion, but a beginning. It opens a trajectory toward a personal design language built on restraint, structure, and emotional intelligence. This is the foundation of a future brand—one committed to feminist spatial autonomy, grounded materiality, and quiet assertion. There is still much left unspoken in these garments, but that, too, is the point. Through silence, I have found not absence, but authorship—a new mode of expression that protects, empowers, and holds space.

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