

***Bleeding Garments:***  
**A magical and poetic approach to the phenomenology  
of intensely evocative garments**  
by  
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for all the poetic souls who have crossed my path

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## Abstract

I have a black dress that has been hanging dormant in my wardrobe for nearly a decade. I say dormant to suggest that the dress is not in active use but is nonetheless part of my wardrobe. What the dress looks like has become irrelevant. What matters is the way its presence brings back feelings of summer rain, the rough texture of pavement under bare feet, and that feeling of how love sometimes seems to stop time. The dress, however, is more than an anecdote; there is something very particular about how I feel in the presence of the dress. It stirs something deep within me and somehow seems to expand beyond its physical materiality.

There is nothing unusual about emotional attachment to clothing and the phenomenon has not gone unnoticed by academics and artists. Existing research, however, tends to focus on cognitively produced anecdotes and there is a gap in research that considers how evocative garments actually make us *feel*. This research is concerned with the *experience* of evocative garments that evoke particularly intense emotions (intensely evocative garments) and proposes that it is our encounters with the garments in the moment that makes them meaningful as a phenomenon. The aim of this research is twofold: it seeks to explore what intensely evocative garments are and can be like as an experience and what a methodology for exploring these garments might involve.

This research draws on a practice-led, interdisciplinary methodology that is underpinned by phenomenology, magical awareness, and poetry in its broader meaning. This involves exploring intensely evocative garments by applying the phenomenological attitude of wonder to practice-led experiments and to participatory workshops that invite people to ‘uncover’ poetic fragments from garments. Rather than taking the form of a traditional phenomenological text, this research also seeks to inspire phenomenological insights through practice-led outputs, such as photographs, poems, and installations. Through this in-depth exploration, this research seeks to contribute to the growing discussion on clothing and emotion and to inspire more meaningful engagement with clothes as material culture.

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## Preface

This thesis is of a philosophical nature, it is a process of discovery, and therefore I suggest that it be read not as a task of understanding but as a journey of contemplation. Find a comfortable spot on the sofa, in the garden, on a quiet train, or on a beach, and let yourself be led not only by intellectual thought but also by wonder; this is now your process of discovery.

## **Introduction**

### The experience of intensely evocative garments

Imagine that you are looking through your wardrobe, a drawer, or a storage box in the attic and you encounter an item of clothing - or some other material thing - that causes you to briefly pause and contemplate its existence. Perhaps it is connected to a person, a past moment, or to a specific time in your life. Perhaps it evokes a specific memory or maybe it just affects you in a way that you cannot quite explain. If I were to ask you about this garment, your initial response might be to tell me a story about it; what it looks like, where it came from, what it makes you think of, and how long you have had it.

One of the most enriching aspects of this research is the way it has inspired people to share stories about their personal garments. I rarely get to describe my research in detail because as soon as I mention that it is concerned with evocative garments people are eager to tell me a story about a garment that is meaningful to them. What makes these moments particularly powerful and unique is not so much the story itself but the vigour with which it is being told and the look in the person's eyes as they are talking about this magical thing that has become intertwined with their life story. It is not the narrative, or facts such as what the garment looks like or what it represents that makes these moments meaningful, it is the person's experience of the garment as they are telling the story that makes these encounters extraordinary.

It is precisely our *experience* of evocative garments that this research is concerned with. I argue that it is our individual experience of evocative garments that hold their meaning; that it is our encounters with the garments in the moment that makes them significant as phenomena. Even if the garment is not physically present, it is ultimately our experience that matters, not the facts about it. This is not an attempt to devalue the stories connected to evocative garments but to highlight that things are always more than what we assume, and to direct awareness to an aspect that has traditionally been neglected in studies on clothing: affect and emotion. The stories are an important part of the garments and our experience of them but there is more to evocative garments than their assumed and obvious meaning and the aim of this research is to engage in an in-depth exploration of intensely evocative garments that reaches beyond anecdotes and facts.

Although most garments evoke mild contemplation about people we know or have known, cherished moments, and places we have been to, some garments come to have a more agitating presence, evoking intense and complex feelings that may be difficult to describe. This research is particularly concerned with garments that stir something deep within us, i.e., intensely evocative garments.<sup>1</sup> As a result of my research, I have named these types of garments as *bleeding garments* to reflect their particularly evocative presence that almost seems to expand beyond their concrete materiality. *Bleeding garments* form a distinct phenomenal group that is different from most other garments and unlike other evocative garments, they cannot be thought of but can initially only be known by being encountered.

Sherry Turkle (2007: 5) has defined evocative objects as a bringing together of 'objects as companions' and 'objects as provocations to thought'. Although, according to Turkle, 'this underscores the inseparability of feelings and thought in our relationship to things', it does, however, also distinguish the object as separate from the person. Defining material things as provocations of thought indicates that they can only ever be mere representations of something that exists within the person. As I argue in this thesis, defining material things as 'objects' impairs our understanding of their possibilities and therefore the term 'thing' will be used to refer to garments. Furthermore, Turkle's definition does not say much about what evocative objects are really like as a phenomenon, which is precisely the gap that this research seeks to fill. By using the phenomenological approach and acknowledging their complex entanglement with the world, this research moves beyond the idea of intensely evocative garments as objects *of* or *as* something.

Rather than focusing on the anecdotes or facts that we might feel inclined to share about evocative garments, this research seeks to understand how intensely evocative garments appear to us as a phenomenon. It addresses the following questions: What are intensely evocative garments like as an experience? And what might a methodology for exploring intensely evocative garments as a phenomenon involve? This echoes the two questions that philosophy is concerned with according to Heidegger (2009: 11): 'What is it that really matters' and '[w]hich way of posing questions is genuinely directed to what really

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<sup>1</sup> In this research, 'evocative garments' are used to refer to all emotionally meaningful garments, whereas the term 'intensely evocative garments' refers to garments that evoke particularly strong emotions. *Intensely* evocative garments are not merely garments that we are fond of, but garments that stir something deep within us.

matters?’ This research, then, is of a philosophical nature and the aim is to reach a richer understanding of our emotional attachment to clothing by exploring what our encounters with intensely evocative garments feel like.

The overall aim of this research is to go beyond what we commonly consider rational and objective to discover anew things that may often be taken for granted. Rather than taking a traditional sociological, anthropological, or psychological approach, this research draws on a practice-led methodology that builds on phenomenology, magic, and poetry. Through this interdisciplinary methodology, the research challenges conventional analytical approaches and reaches beyond the immediate and obvious by proposing a shift in awareness that embraces the emotive and intuitive aspects of our experience. Influenced by Heidegger’s philosophy, the phenomenological attitude of tending to things as they present themselves in the moment forms the overall method of inquiry, whereas magic is considered as a mode of consciousness that allows us to attune to the interconnectedness of the world, and poetry is approached as an awareness, a quality, and as an expression that enables us to grasp aspects that we may otherwise not be able to reach. Both magic and poetry are thus referred to in their broader meanings and are considered as ways to connect with a heightened affective awareness.

The combination of the phenomenological attitude, magical awareness, and poetry creates a shift in awareness that invites us to move away from the traditional view of clothes as objects of aesthetic, symbolic, and functional value and embrace a more holistic view of clothes as *things* with possibilities. This thesis aims to inspire a reflective state where the phenomenological essence of intensely evocative garments can be reborn in the reader through an affective awareness. It does not provide a neatly packaged recipe approach but rather gradually maps out a methodological framework that is conducive for a deeper understanding of intensely evocative garments. As Pratt *et al.* (2022: 214) argue, applying a methodological template or formula to qualitative research can diminish the quality of the study by limiting ‘the theoretical stories that can be told’. A simple template may make ‘the process appear less messy and more apparently predictable, [but] it can mask the complexity of qualitative research and the potential of the [research insights]’ (Pratt *et al.*, 2022: 215). This research seeks to explore potential methodological approaches and methods conducive for a deeper understanding of the complex nature of intensely evocative garments as *things* with possibilities, and therefore the methodology

emerges throughout this thesis and alongside the research insights. The methods used are mixed and include practice-led experiments, participatory engagement, exhibitions, and observations and discussions that weave together to build a methodology that provides phenomenologically rich insights of intensely evocative garments.

To explore what the experience of intensely evocative garments is and can be like I have used my transdisciplinary art practice as a method of thinking through my own experience in relation to the philosophical ideas that this research builds on. The process-led and intuitive nature of my art practice complements the open-ended and serendipitous nature of phenomenology, enabling meaningful research insights to emerge through a contemplative and explorative process. To complement the practice-led process, this research also uses participatory workshops to understand how other people experience intensely evocative garments. The workshops invite participants to explore garments that are meaningful to them through a process of creative deconstruction. The material discovered during the workshops provides further insights about evocative garments by offering subjective insights as well as suggesting certain recurring themes. The poetic fragments discovered during the workshops provide a rich material that helps to confirm insights discovered as part of my own practice-led contemplation.

When I refer to my practice, I use the word *art* because my practice is not so much about producing original or unusual ideas but about revealing the extraordinary that is already there. Considering Heidegger's (1971) views on art as 'the truth of what is' (1971: 39) art as a way of knowing can be understood as a process of discovering ways to see things anew and as they truly are. Art as a revealing of truth does not reproduce the factual existence of a thing but rather reveals its essence through its involvement with a world. Art 'is not the reproduction of some particular entity that happens to be present at any given time' but a portrayal of a 'thing's general essence', (Heidegger, 1971: 37). I am, then, not concerned with truth as 'the agreement or conformity of knowledge with fact' but truth as 'unconcealedness' (Heidegger, 1971: 51). Considering Heidegger's argument that art shows the true being of things, my art practice becomes a process of revealing what *bleeding garments* are and can be like as a phenomenon, i.e., a way to reveal their phenomenological essence and the possibilities they hold.

It is important to note that this research sits within material culture and philosophy, not fashion theory. It is not about fashion, style, or appearance but about clothes as material culture and their metaphysical possibilities. 'Clothing' and 'fashion' are often used interchangeably, especially in colloquial conversation, but in the strictest sense, fashion is a sociocultural system of dress and is defined as a style that is popular at a given time, whereas clothes are primarily defined as tangible garments that are worn to protect or decorate the body. Fashion theorist Yuniya Kawamura (2005: 3) defines clothing as 'the generic raw materials of what a person wears' while 'fashion' is a term that can refer to several different social practices. Similarly, fashion theorist Malcolm Barnard defines fashion as a form of communication that signals things such as cultural identity and social status, whereas clothing has a more 'practical' function (Barnard, 2014: 42). I agree with the differentiation between the two terms; however, to conclusively state that clothes are simply the generic raw material worn on the body ignores our complex relationship with material culture. I therefore propose that clothes should be regarded both as material things intended to be worn on the body and as 'complete phenomen[a]' (Barthes, 2006: 21) of material culture.

It should be noted that this research is not of a scientific or empirical nature but rather about shifting awareness so that we can better explore what our *experience* of intensely evocative garments is and can be like. It is important to establish from the very beginning that I am at no point opposing science and magic, science and poetry, or science and art but rather proposing a different perspective that embraces the subjective, emotive, and nuanced aspects of our experience. Magic in this research does not refer to a belief in the supernatural but to an intuitive and emotive mode of thinking where one senses the interconnectedness of the world. Similarly, poetry is considered in its broader sense as a heightened affective awareness that is not limited to written poems but can manifest in all art forms and aspects of life. I am not arguing against the scientific method but proposing magical awareness and poetry as complementary ways of knowing that can contribute to a richer understanding of the world.

Beginning by surveying the current academic context within which this research sits, the first chapter of this thesis places the research within the relevant context by looking at existing academic and artistic work. The approaches that underpin the methodological framework are further defined and discussed in detail in the second chapter. The first two chapters thus form the starting point for the rest of

the thesis, which explores the phenomenological nature of intensely evocative garments as discovered through my practice and participatory workshops. Chapter III provides a detailed overview of the practice-led process while Chapter IV explores the meaningful insights that emerged from the practice-led experiments and workshop outcomes. The concluding chapter considers the insights discovered during the research process in relation to the research questions and proposes a shift in how evocative garments are approached both in academic contexts and everyday life.

Providing a comprehensive overview of the research process, this thesis seeks to lead the reader on their own journey of reflection and discovery by mirroring the actual process through which this research emerged. While gradually shifting the awareness to a more expanded, imaginative, and magical mode this research seeks to inspire an expansion of consciousness. It is not intended to be merely intellectually understood but to also be approached as a wondrous and imaginative journey of contemplation, an adventure of sorts. It is indeed my intention to lead you down the rabbit hole and I ask only one thing of you: to keep an open mind to the world as a place of possibilities that can contain a little more magic than we might normally assume.

## **Chapter I - Contextual Review**

### **From objects of representation to *things* with possibilities**

This chapter looks at common approaches to clothing and emotion to highlight the relevance of a different approach. By considering academic approaches that challenge the conventional Western dualistic mindset, the definition of clothing is expanded to that of *things* with possibilities. This expanded definition of clothing is then considered in relation to examples of academic and artistic work that explore the emotive aspects of clothing. As mentioned in the introduction, this research is not concerned with fashion, but with clothing as material culture and therefore this chapter mainly draws on theories in material culture and explores clothes as material companions that form an intimate part of our being and experience of the world.

## 1.1 Anecdotes about clothes

‘I keep it because I wore it many times on my honeymoon in San Francisco, and I love the look of it and it reminds me of a lovely time’ (Bye & McKinney, 2007: 495)

Dress historian Elizabeth Wilson (2003: 2) has observed that worn clothing has an uncanny nature that ‘can affect us unpleasantly, as if a snake had shed its skin’. Speaking about clothes in museums she notes that ‘clothes are so much part of our living, moving selves’ that when displayed in museums ‘they hint at something only half understood’ (Wilson, 2003: 2). However, by stating that clothes are not only objects but also images, Wilson (2003: 2) nonetheless seems to suggest that clothes are predominantly understood as representations of the present or absent self. Despite their uncanny and ghostly quality, worn clothes are often considered as merely representing the body - rather than being ‘of the body’. When clothes are not seen as representing the body itself, representation manifests in relation to identity, ideals, dreams, or memories. Clothes, then, are traditionally regarded as symbolic representations *of something*, rather than phenomena in and of themselves.

Responses, such as the one that introduces this chapter, where a woman reminisces about a meaningful garment that reminds her of her honeymoon, are common in studies on evocative garments. By focusing on facts of time and place, the anecdote captures the garment as a representation of a moment in the past. In their study on why women keep clothes that no longer fit, Elizabeth Bye and Ellen McKinney (2007: 484) interview women about their wardrobes and apply quantitative methods to categorise garments into themes, such as weight management, investment value, sentimental value, and aesthetic value. Though they recognise that some garments hold emotional value and that a deeper understanding of the individual relationship between self and the contents of the wardrobe is important (Bye & McKinney, 2007) their study provides an objective and representational account of different ways in which garments may reflect meaningful relationships or events. The responses they collect from women about cherished garments only provide superficial accounts of when and where the garments were worn and whom or what the garments are connected to. These responses may show that the garments have meaning beyond the aesthetic and

the functional, but they do not explore what the garments feel like as an experience.

The phenomenon of clothing that is no longer worn but kept nonetheless has also been studied by Maura Banim and Ali Guy (2001) who divide the wardrobe into categories based on the themes of continuing identities, discontinued identities, and transitional identities. Although Banim and Guy (2001: 207) observe that 'the story of clothing and the self becomes entangled with people and times', their study focuses on clothes as representations of certain memories, and it does not provide further insights into any feelings evoked by the clothes. By noting that the clothes themselves are often less important than the ways in which the garments remind women about relationships and people (Banim & Guy, 2001: 208) the authors seem to create a subject-object opposition that ultimately suggests that the garment's meaningfulness belongs to the person rather than to the garment or the encounter between the person and the garment. This separates the garments from their meaning, suggesting that they are merely symbolic representations of memories and emotions. Banim and Guy (2001: 204-5) do however make some important observations by noting that it is 'not always favourite clothing that [is] kept' and that 'women still have an ongoing relationship with' items that are kept but no longer worn.

Our clothes, whether part of an active wardrobe or no longer worn, do not simply represent the self but are an intimate part of our being, and therefore the garments themselves are as important as the feelings they evoke. In their study on performance costume and remembrance, Rosie Findlay and Natalia Romagosa (2018: 129) note that clothes are 'an integral aspect of embodied experience', thus making them particularly conducive for evoking memories and emotions. Findlay and Romagosa acknowledge the importance of the garments themselves as part of the process of remembering and although they use photographs of costumes being worn as interview prompts, they recognise that ideally the actual costumes should have been used but since these are often in the possession of companies or lending facilities, this was difficult to realise (Findlay & Romagosa, 2018: 132-3). Although Findlay and Romagosa (2018) do not explicitly mention representationalism, their study does show that worn garments relate to our sense of self and experience of the world as more than mere representations.

As mentioned in the previous section, the actual feelings involved in our relationships with clothes tend to be left unexplored because of a preoccupation with rational and cognitive thought. Most existing research also tends to analyse

the emotional aspects of clothes in relation to identity or consumption habits by focusing on how and why emotions are present in our interaction with clothes and how this influences our sense of self (see Banim & Guy, 2001; Bye & McKinney, 2007; Cwerner, 2001; Mellander & McIntyre, 2020; Simpson, 2017) or how emotion influences our clothing choices and practices (see for instance Kwon *et al.*, 2020; Platania *et al.*, 2019). Both approaches place emphasis on the person as an agent, which creates a boundary between person and garment and ultimately defines clothes as static objects. In studies that specifically consider the evocative potential of clothing, garments are often seen as mnemonic devices, as in Sandra Weber's (2011: 240) study where she notes that an item of clothing can become a 'springboard' for storytelling and remembering. Weber observes that clothes may inspire 'anecdotes that start out ostensibly about clothes' but that eventually lead to reflection on aspects such as life events, relationships, body image, feelings, and aspirations. Weber acknowledges that clothes can become emotionally meaningful and that this meaning is complex, but by considering garments as inspiration for storytelling the garments are ultimately reduced to mere tools for reflection.

In a sociological analysis of the wardrobe, Saulo B. Cwerner (2001: 87) comments on how clothes can be 'read as particular biographies that emphasize significant moments [such as] birthdays, engagements, various relationships and rites of passage'. Although Cwerner does recognise that clothes are about more than aesthetic value, that they have a history, his study still takes a representational approach by suggesting that clothes are merely associated with life events and can be read as biographies. I am not dismissing Weber and Cwerner's approaches but rather pointing out that applying a representational approach will result in an incomplete understanding of intensely evocative garments as a phenomenon because it assumes that we already know what they are.

At an early stage in my research, I too considered the potential of evocative garments as access points for storytelling, as portals that could lead on a journey of self-reflection. Although this can provide valuable insights about our relationships with clothes, I realised through further contemplation and research that it is in our encounters with these garments that their meaning happens and that exploring our *experience* of evocative garments requires an approach that places emphasis on how we feel in the presence of the garments. As sociologist Lucia Ruggerone (2016: 577) points out, the affective experience of clothing [that is, the felt meeting between our embodied being and the garments as material

things] requires an approach that transcends semiotic, structural, and sociological boundaries. This also means that words that suggest that garments are simply devices for cognitive reflection, such as *represent* and *associate*, should be questioned or even eliminated.

Although many studies focus on cognitive aspects and on analysing how and why clothes become meaningful, there are also scholars who have contemplated the phenomenon of evocative clothes through their personal experience of specific garments. Peter Stallybrass (2012), for instance, muses over the ability of a leather jacket to evoke the presence of his friend, Katalin Medvedev (2007) has written about her personal ritual of evoking her father's spirit by opening his wardrobe, and Karen de Perthuis (2016) has explored her intimate relationship with her deceased partner's jumper that is imbued with both love and grief. In contrast to representational approaches, the above scholars begin to provide a better understanding of what our relationships with evocative garments are like as an experience. However, these scholars use personal experience as an example within a wider theoretical framework rather than engaging in further inquiry into the garments as phenomena. They acknowledge the emotive power of the individual garments and succeed in capturing part of the evocative impact of the garments, but they are not explicitly concerned with the phenomenology of evocative garments, that is, what the experience of these garments is and can be like as a phenomenon.

Karen de Perthuis is one of a few who succeeds in capturing a certain deeply felt experiential quality when she reflects on her experience of a garment that evokes intense emotions. In her article, *Darning Mark's Jumper*, de Perthuis (2016: 60) contemplates her personal experience of a moth-eaten old jumper that she recovered and began mending as an act of love when her partner became terminally ill. Through her personal reflection she implicitly suggests that it is in the encounter between her and the jumper that the garment's meaningfulness resides and emerges. De Perthuis, then, recognises that it is her experience of the garment that makes it significant and unique as a material thing; the garment is not a mere representation but a thing that cannot be separated from its meaningfulness. This, however, is where de Perthuis' inquiry ends, and this is precisely where this research begins; in the acknowledgement that it is the encounter between person and garment that meaning arises, and that the garment itself is as important as the feelings it evokes.

It seems that scholars who engage in a more intimate exploration of evocative garments to some extent downplay the abstract and uncanny nature that evocative garments can possess by rationalising and over-analysing their experience of the garments. However, as I argue in this thesis, only by embracing the abstract and the uncanny can we genuinely understand what intensely evocative garments are like as a phenomenon. The uncanny quality of intensely evocative garments is born from a tension between their metaphysical beyond and their concrete ordinariness and this is central to our experience of these garments. To fully acknowledge the uncanny nature of intensely evocative garments it is therefore also worth further unpacking the word 'uncanny' to establish a definition suitable for the purposes of this research.

As a concept, the uncanny has been subject to many interpretations and approaches (see for instance Bernstein, 2003; Gineprini, 2022; Withy, 2015), of which Freud's definition of the uncanny as something that is familiar to the mind but has become repressed and therefore manifests as alien (Gineprini, 2022: 88) is likely the most popular one. According to philosopher Lorenzo Gineprini (2022: 96-7) the 'conceptual core of the uncanny' is constituted by 'the appearance of something familiar in a new, unfamiliar light'. The uncanny disrupts and unsettles 'because it challenges habitual and apparently self-evident mechanisms of experience' and in doing so also brings about a new awareness of the ordinary (Gineprini, 2022: 95). The uncanny, then, fascinates and demands our attention; it reaches towards us, making us question the seemingly ordinary. It is a sense of disruption that reveals something that is hidden from visual perception (Gineprini, 2022: 97).

Deriving from the German word 'unheimlich' - which brings together the words 'home', 'secretly', and 'unfamiliar' - as a word uncanny is 'always falling away from itself into its opposite, yet affirming itself in doing so'; it comes about 'as a violation of the law of non-contradiction'. As Susan Bernstein (2003: 1113) puts it: 'Like a ghost', the uncanny both "is" and "is not". It is this idea of a tension between the familiar and the strange and hidden, what is there and what is not there, that I seek to draw attention to when I refer to intensely evocative garments as having an uncanny presence. As I will argue in this thesis, intensely evocative garments present us with a metaphysical beyond that is born from our inherent tendency for magical thinking, and it is the tension between this metaphysical quality and the ordinariness of the garment that manifests as uncanny - intensely evocative garments are and are not. To embrace this tension,

I suggest attuning to a more expansive and open-ended awareness, one that embraces the possibilities and the interconnectedness of the world. I will return to this later, but before I consider the value of a different way of being aware of the world, I will further consider the idea of representation in relation to the traditional Western approach to the material world.

## 1.2 Objects of representation

‘...clothes choose us as much as we choose them’. (Ruggerone, 2016: 582)

The trouble with approaching the material world through a representational mindset is that it creates a divide between us and the world and gives the impression that things have value and meaning because *we give* them value and meaning. If we consider Heidegger’s views, it is, however, not representation in itself that is the issue but rather the type of thinking that creates a representational mindset:

‘Representation is not an outcome, but rather a mode of thinking and a relationship to the world that involves setting the world before oneself as an object in relation to oneself as a subject’ (Bolt, 2011: 180).

This way of thinking, which is grounded in the notion of boundaries, has long been prevalent in the Western world and belongs to a dualistic worldview that separates the animate from the inanimate and the mind from the body. In addition to stating that the world can be understood through fixed boundaries, Western scholars have also tended to place more value on the mind and rational thought, suggesting that the mind is more important than embodiment, affect, and emotion (Boivin, 2008: 15). As archaeologist Nicole Boivin (2008: 15) puts it, there has been an ‘intense preoccupation’ with the mind and ideas, often at the expense of the body, emotions, and materiality. The obsession with the cognitive and the analytical mind has resulted in a long and persistent tradition of regarding the rational mind as the only valid source of knowledge and dismissing embodied and subjective experience as trivial or irrational. This is so ingrained in Western thought that the mind still often takes centre stage and anything that is not a product of the rational mind and objective analysis is dismissed as secondary, irrelevant, or irrational.

By valuing the mind above everything else and opposing the animate and the inanimate, the boundary-affirming Western tradition has created a world where objects are acted upon by subjects. Cognitive and conscious people act, while static objects are created, controlled, and modified. However, defining inanimate things and matter as separate entities and substances that humans as subjects act upon, creates the illusion that the material world is passive. Passive objects have no agency of their own and therefore any form that they appear in is assumed to be produced and controlled by a subject. If we were to apply this approach to the experience of intensely evocative garments, we might simply conclude that certain garments become imbued with emotions and memories through a cognitive process of association, i.e., the garment evokes thoughts about memories and is therefore considered meaningful. This draws a line between person and garment, ultimately defining the garments as objects of representation.

However, as the quotation that introduces this section suggests, our relationships with clothes are reciprocal; we choose our clothes, but they also choose us. The practice of getting dressed and wearing clothing is ‘an encounter between a human body [or human being] and [material things] that initiates a process of mutual belonging’ as Lucia Ruggerone (2016: 580) contends. This notion of mutual belonging is difficult to understand through a traditional mind-versus-body approach, within which ‘the relationship between people and clothes cannot be regarded as other than an intellectual liaison’ (Ruggerone, 2016: 579).

Representation does not capture our *experience* of evocative garments and as I argue in this thesis, it is precisely our experience that makes intensely evocative garments significant as a phenomenon. Approaching intensely evocative garments as mere representations of certain relationships and events will necessarily impair our understanding of the true nature of these garments because it fails to recognise that the significance of these garments manifests in our experience of them and not merely in our cognitive understanding of them.

In modern Western anthropology, clothing has long been considered as a language of signs and symbols, something that represents our identity. A ‘kind of pseudo-language that could tell us about who we are’ (Miller, 2010: 12). As Miller (2010: 13) has argued, however, clothing can be about far more than a ‘surface that [merely] represents’. Clothing is a dynamic extension of us that plays a far more significant role in how we experience ourselves than Western scholars have been inclined to think. Clothing plays an ‘active part in constituting the particular

experience of the self (Miller, 2010: 41). Although this research is not specifically concerned with how we experience ourselves clothed, but rather with the experience of *encountering* intensely evocative garments, it is crucial to note that clothing is not simply a surface that represents or hides identity through a language of signs, but a complex relationship between the embodied self and materiality.

Clothing practices and our relationships with garments are often analysed and dissected based on the assumption that clothing signifies or represents identity, values, status, belonging, and even memories. Although representational or semiotically inclined approaches may offer some sociological and psychological insights into how people communicate through clothes, these approaches ultimately reduce clothing to static objects that have little value beyond the aesthetic and symbolic. As anthropologist Webb Keane (2013: 198) notes, the representational tradition regards the physical world as ‘a nature created by and for humans’ that is produced through human interaction and understanding and is then reflected back to the human subjects through their experience of the world. In this approach material culture becomes nothing more than a medium through which we communicate and understand concepts (Keane, 2013: 198); however, as fashion scholar Rosie Findlay (2016) argues in an article on the feeling of being dressed, our relationship with clothing reaches beyond representation and cognitive thought. Our sense of self in relation to the world is partly ‘constituted in the encounter between cloth and sense perception’ and these encounters emerge through a complex intermingling between ‘perception, imagination, desire, and materiality’ (Findlay, 2016: 80).

There has been an increased interest in the affective and emotive aspects of clothing within academia in the past two decades, but even in studies specifically concerned with our emotional relationships with clothing, it is not uncommon that clothes are predominantly regarded as passive objects that we act upon. This is suggested with the use of words that signal subject agency, such as *imbue*, *ascribe*, and *confer*. By using such words, some academics implicitly or explicitly argue that *we* imbue objects with meaning, suggesting that material things become connected to memories through a conscious process that we are in control of. Sociologist Tim Dant (2005: 62), for example, writes in the book *Materiality and Society* that ‘[w]e can become deeply attached to heirlooms or personal objects that *we imbue* with something of the character of a person, a place, or an experience’ (emphasis added), suggesting that we control which

things become meaningful and how. However, we do not imbue things with memories, things *become* imbued with residues of moments, people, and places. As Freeman *et al.* (2016: 5) note, material things are not repositories that can be activated by human desire to ‘pour memory into their material form for retrieval, reminiscence, or forgetting’.

Dant’s comment on our relationships with meaningful things is echoed by Sandra Weber (2010: 239) in relation to clothing when she writes that ‘we imbue clothing with the power to recall and reinterpret the past’ and that

‘it is in the interpretation of clothing, in ascribing social and personal meanings to the wearing of certain garments by ourselves and by others, that we reveal just how much significance we can invest in pieces of cloth’.

Here too the emphasis on the agency of the person is substantial and rather than considering that the relationship between the person and the garment is reciprocal, Weber seems to suggest that we can somehow consciously and actively make garments meaningful. Similarly, textile practitioner Emma Peters (2014: 75-6) writes in an article on heirloom textiles and memory that objects become associated with memories when we ‘confer our personal stories and experience on them’ and that this happens only if their uniqueness and authenticity meets our demands. Although Weber does recognise that these meanings may shift throughout time and context, both Peters and Weber seem to give little thought to the serendipitous, complex, and reciprocal nature of our relationship with the material world. Rather than being consciously imbued with meaning by us, clothes become meaningful through a reciprocal process of interaction within a world that is complex, fluctuating, and serendipitous. We may be able to expose garments to the possibility of becoming connected to certain people or moments by involving them in our lives in meaningful ways, but which things become imbued with memories or emotions and how is always partly subject to serendipity.

If we draw a boundary between us as rational, thinking beings and material things as passive, physical entities, the processes that material things are involved in - including our personal memories and narratives - easily become adjunct rather than integral to our relationship with the material world. The notion of alive may not apply to inanimate things in the same way as it does when it comes to living organisms, but they are nevertheless in a constant process of becoming that is influenced by the flows and transformations of the cosmos. Animacy, as anthropologist Tim Ingold (2011: 68) proposes, is not a property that we project

onto the things we perceive, but rather ‘the dynamic, transformative potential of the field of relations’ to which beings of all kinds belong. We do not give the world life as agents; life already exists in the world as a result of its relations. We should therefore, as Boivin (2008: 231) argues, stop treating the material world as if it were neutral, like the natural sciences tend to do, or only in terms of representation, like the humanities and social sciences are inclined to do.

Trying to understand our experience of the world by identifying boundaries may seem as though it provides a straightforward approach, but the world is not straightforward. The world - in all its different guises - is complex, in constant flux, and any perceived boundaries are blurred. The trouble with the traditional Western subject-vs-object view is that it fails to recognise the complexity of the world (as scholars such as Deleuze & Guattari, 2007; Ingold, 2010; Malafouris, 2013 have noted). It assumes that the material world has clear boundaries, and can be controlled by us, while failing to consider the more intimate and dynamic relationships that we have with material things.

### 1.3 Entangled things

‘Everything lives, everything acts, everything corresponds: magnetic rays emanating from myself or others cross without hindrance the infinite chain of created things’ (Nerval, 1959: 194 translated and cited by Warner, 2006: 253)

Echoing the notion that life happens everywhere, the above quotation by poet Gérard de Nerval captures the interconnectedness of the cosmos and his own being in the world. Nerval describes the world as covered by a transparent network of loose strands that communicate with the stars and the planets through which he ‘converses with the choir of the heavenly bodies, who take part in [his] joys and [his] sorrows’ (Nerval, 1959: 194 translated and cited by Warner, 2006: 253-4). Nerval’s description may be bursting with poetic abstractness, but he has a point: ultimately, everything is connected and in a constant dialogue with each other. Such a world is no place for passive objects, this is a world of *things*.

The Cambridge Dictionary (2023) defines *object* as ‘a thing that you can see or touch but that is not usually a living animal, plant, or person’ in other words, ‘a solid/material/physical object’. Objects then are commonly regarded as static and solid and are assumed to have clear borders that can be determined by sight and

touch. To regard the material world in terms of static objects means to neglect the possibilities of the world and therefore I propose that instead of using the word *object*, we should think of the material world as consisting of things. *Thing*, according to the dictionary is ‘used to refer in an approximate way to an object or to avoid naming it’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). This suggests that even in colloquial language, *thing* denotes a certain abstract or mysterious nature, which may be why the word *thing* has become popular among academics and philosophers who seek to challenge the traditional Western approach to material culture.

Things are ‘not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them’ Bennett (2010: 5), they do not begin or end with the thing itself, but rather shift, move, and expand while being in constant interaction with other things. A thing has endless possibility whereas an object is bound by its ‘objectness’. Arguing for an acknowledgement of ‘thing-power’, a vitality shared by animate beings as well as inanimate things, Jane Bennett (2010) observes that objects have ‘a preconceived identity’ whereas things constitute a reciprocal encounter, they look back at us (Mitchell, 2005: 156-7 cited in Bennett, 2010: 2). The notion that all things have a certain vitality is also central to magical belief, which sees all things, whether animate or inanimate, as containing a kind of ‘spirit’ - a notion that I will return to in Chapter II.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold (2010: 2-3) argues that it does not make sense to refer to the material world as consisting of objects and passive matter that are subject to the actions of agents since it is difficult if not impossible to identify any fixed boundaries. Similarly, archaeologist Carl Knappett (2005: 16) proposes that we should think of the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate as ‘decidedly fuzzy’. Ingold (2010: 2-3) pushes these fuzzy boundaries further by proposing an environment entirely without objects where things happen through ‘processes of formation’ and ‘flows of material transformation’. He argues that the world does not consist of objects but rather of occurrences in which ‘the threads of life’ come together (Ingold, 2010: 4). This echoes 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (2004: 4), according to whom things are neither subject nor object but rather assemblages of various phenomena that flow together. These assemblages, which Deleuze and Guattari (2004: 23) liken to a rhizome, do not

really have ends or beginnings but rather a centre which grows and overflows.<sup>2</sup> Thus, if we define a boundary as a type of meeting point between an ending and a beginning, *things* do not have boundaries.

The idea of gatherings and assemblages can be traced back to philosopher Martin Heidegger (1971), who argued that it is not the physicality of a thing that gives it its 'thingness' but that things manifest through an interplay between the concretely manifested and the metaphysical. This gathering of forces, which Heidegger (1971) calls *the fourfold*, consists of *the earth, the sky, the mortal, and the divine*, all of which contribute to the thing through a mutual mirror play. Scholarly analysis on Heidegger's fourfold is limited and some scholars interpret the individual parts of the fourfold in a very literal sense (Plebuch, 2010). However, as Daniel Plebuch (2010) also argues, the four elements of *the fourfold* are all forces that contribute to the nature of things rather than literal entities or beings.

The earth 'describes beings according to their nature' (Plebuch, 2010: 17), it 'is the building bearer, nourishing with its fruits' (Heidegger, 1975: 178), while the sky encompasses the 'possibilities in which beings may or do presence' (Plebuch, 2010: 17). These are closely entangled with the mortals (i.e., human beings) who are called so because they are 'capable of death as death' and 'the beckoning messengers of the godhead' (Heidegger, 1975: 178) who are 'determined...by a mode of revealing' (Plebuch, 2010: 120). It is the divinities that reveal to us the poetic and the magical. To borrow Plebuch's (2010: 120) words, the divine 'opens a space' where these aspects 'become possible as the meaningful practices that they are'. Heidegger's fourfold provides a definition of phenomena in the most expanded sense, which acknowledges that while things 'do not [simply] appear by *means of human making*...neither do they appear without the vigilance of mortals' (Heidegger, 1971: 181, original italics). This essentially means that although things do not cease to exist outside our perception of them, things are not *things* unless they are encountered by us. This is echoed by Bennett when she notes that things constitute the moment...when the object looks back and 'the subject experiences the object as uncanny and feels the need for what Foucault

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<sup>2</sup> Bruno Latour's (1996: 370) actor-network theory also draws on a similar idea by considering the world in terms of networks of 'nodes that have *as many dimensions* as they have connections' (original italics).

calls...“a metaphysics of that never objectifiable depth from which objects rise up toward our superficial knowledge” (Mitchell, 2005: 156-7 cited in Bennett, 2010: 2).

When we encounter the fourfold, we do not only perceive the emergence of things as a process of becoming and acknowledge their connection to the forces of the natural world, but we also understand them in relation to our own being in the world - as alluded to in the quotation that introduces this chapter. In other words, we encounter the entanglement of the physical and the metaphysical, we perceive things in the most expanded sense. As Plebuch (2010) shows, an entire thesis can be written about the fourfold; however, the intention here is not to engage in an in-depth philosophical analysis of the fourfold, but to provide a suitable starting point for understanding the entanglement of the physical and the metaphysical. My intention is to highlight that when we perceive things, we encounter a complex entanglement of forces that do not only constitute the physical presence of the thing but our philosophical, magical, and poetic experience of it.

The notion of entanglement in this research extends beyond physical movements and becomings and *the fourfold* provides a suitable starting point as it introduces the metaphysical aspect as inherent to our experience of things. Ingold and Deleuze and Guattari contribute with excellent theories for thinking about the material world, but their theories do not explicitly consider the metaphysical possibilities of things to the extent that Heidegger does. Although Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome illustrates the complex and fluctuating nature of things and Ingold notes that life *gathers* in things, Heidegger's fourfold elevates our understanding of things further by emphasising that things are never only *earth* and *sky* but that the *mortal* and the *divine* are always present in things and as soon as we think of one of the four, we are already thinking about the other three (Heidegger, 1971). By defining the four constituents as separate forces that always presence together, Heidegger suggests that things are always somehow intertwined with our being and our experience of the world. In my interpretation, then, it is through *the fourfold* that things come to have magical and poetic possibility; it is through *the fourfold* that we experience a metaphysical beyond.

*The fourfold* reflects a world where things that are present in the world belong to and with each other and by realising this belonging they also realise themselves (Heidegger, 1971: xx). In other words, it is through interaction and partaking that things are and become, and there is always an element of transience present in things. According to Heidegger what constitutes a thing is the 'gathering of the

onefold fourfold into a single time-space, a single stay' (Heidegger, 1971: 174). *The fourfold* is not a static concept, but rather an encounter which can only be understood by partaking in the moment that *the fourfold* gathers its stay. This is the moment when 'its while' or its moment of Being is gathered 'into something that stays for a while [and becomes] this thing, that thing' (Heidegger, 1971: 174). Things are not separate entities or substances but gatherings of forces that stay for a while before they shift and become something slightly different. They are a kind of meeting point, occurrences 'where several goings on become entwined' (Ingold: 2010: 4).

In the introduction to *A Second Skin*, author Kirsty Dunseath (1998: vii) writes that '[s]ome would argue that clothes are just "things"'. It is perhaps not so much a question about whether clothes are merely things or something more but about embracing clothes as the *things* they actually are at any given time. I argue that clothes indeed are things but not in the sense of 'frivolous, trivial products', as Dunseath (1998: vii) puts it. A garment as a thing is not just pieces of fabric stitched together or an aesthetic concept but rather everything that shapes and influences its existence, however briefly. The origin of the material, the way cloth drapes on the body, the softness of a T-shirt against the skin, the movement of a coat in the wind, the way a garment drops to the floor, and all the ways in which garments connect us to certain feelings, moments, and people. Clothes are not passive objects that we act upon and impose our minds on, but part of a world of processes and possibilities and it is through an involvement within this world that certain garments come to have a particularly evocative presence. It is clothes as *things* that makes them more than just practical or frivolous commodities.

As a result of my research, I became increasingly convinced that referring to material things as objects significantly impairs our understanding of the material world. By not acknowledging the interrelatedness of the world and the complex nature of material things we fail to fully understand their possibilities and our experience of them. If we insist that the world is comprised of 'brute physical objects' we fail to recognise how everything we are and do is influenced by a world and we will end up with a distorted understanding of ourselves (Wrathall, 2005: 21) and the material world. To understand what our experience of intensely evocative garments is like, I propose that we should consider clothes as gatherings where *the earth, the sky, the mortal, and the divine* flow together (Heidegger, 1971). Approaching clothes as things in this expanded sense can provide a more holistic understanding of the true nature of clothes as material

culture and the multi-faceted relationship between garment and wearer. Most importantly it provides a better point of departure for exploring intensely evocative garments as a phenomenon because it helps us suspend our assumptions about these garments.

#### 1.4 Inhabiting

‘Sometimes I feel like I’m digging in my own ashes’,

says a woman in the film *Prince Avalanche* (2013) while searching through the remains of her house that burned to the ground in a wildfire. She is sad, not just because the fire obliterated her material possessions, but because it also disrupted her sense of self and her sense of belonging by erasing parts of her experiences and memories. A similar sentiment is suggested in an episode of the TV series *This is Us* (2018), when an electric cooker starts a fire that within minutes devours a family home in flames. Despite the common knowledge that one should leave everything behind in case of a fire, the father decides to grab ‘the important stuff’ when he runs back in to save their dog (*This is Us*: Season 2, episode 14, 2018). He emerges like a hero from the flames carrying the dog and a pillowcase containing a necklace he once gave to his wife, family photo albums, and other emotionally meaningful things.

The reason I am drawing on such general examples of our relationship to material things is to set the scene by drawing attention to just how intimate and emotive our involvement with the material world can be. As these scenes from *Prince Avalanche* (2013) and *This is Us* (2018) so aptly and evocatively suggest, our being in the world is closely entwined with material things. Contrary to what the traditional Western view might have us believe, the material world is not a separate ‘other’, but rather an important part of our everyday experience of the world. It is partly through and with material things that we feel, remember, maintain connections, and realise ourselves. The tendency to identify with and through material things is inherently human, as Harris & Sorensen (2010) note, and it is thus something we as human beings share across time, place, and culture. In other words, part of being human means having an intimate relationship with material things.

In an essay on book collecting Walter Benjamin (2009: 262), suggests that we inhabit the things we surround ourselves with. As collectors, we come alive in the things we collect (2009: 262). Similarly, anthropologist Jean-Sébastien Marcoux (2001: 71) has observed in a study on moving and relocation, that people could almost be said to ‘inhabit their belongings as much as their place’. The idea of inhabiting that Benjamin and Marcoux are referring to is not to be understood in the literal sense as the physical staying in a place, but as an involvement. This is perfectly illustrated by Tim Ingold (2010: 5-6) who considers the definition of inhabiting by drawing attention to the difference between the words *occupy*, which he defines as regarding one’s environment as static, and *inhabit*, which is about partaking ‘in processes of formation’. An occupant sees the world in terms of objects ‘already locked into their final form, closed in upon them selves’ (Ingold, 2010: 5) whereas an inhabitant takes part in the processes and possibilities of the world. Ingold raises a valuable point when he notes that rather than regarding the world as a static place that we control, we should understand our involvement with the material world as a reciprocal relationship of partaking.

Inhabiting as a partaking requires a certain amount of effort and attention, it is not a passive state. In his earlier writings, Heidegger (2009: 68) argues that “to live” means to care’ and uses the term ‘caring’ to describe the basic mode of life. Care can be defined as devoting close attention and effort to something and according to Heidegger (2009: 68) ‘[t]he world and worldly objects are present in the basic mode of life as relational, namely caring’ and it is the ‘act of caring [that] encounters them, meets them as it goes its way’. When we inhabit - whether it is in the literal or in the conceptual sense - we devote a certain amount of effort and attention to our partaking. Unfortunately, in modern capitalist societies there is a tendency to occupy and rather than recognising that we are involved in a partaking, we are inclined to take the world for granted and oftentimes treat things as trivial, disposable, and replaceable. This is particularly relevant in relation to clothing, which due to fashion’s obsession with appearance and vanity has long been considered to have little value beyond the aesthetic and the symbolic. This is not to say that aesthetics does not matter, but to highlight that the obsession with appearance to some extent disconnects us from the more intimate and affective elements of clothing.

There is perhaps no material thing more intimately inhabited or inhabitable than our clothes - or what is often aptly referred to as our ‘second skin’. The things we wear are literally and figuratively intimate dwelling spaces for our bodies and our

souls. Academic and writer Shahidha Bari (2019: 123) has called the suit a 'habitable structure', comparing it to a house or other type of dwelling in which 'life takes place'. The suit may have a certain architectural structure that makes it appear particularly structural, but if we follow Ingold's definition of inhabiting as a process of partaking, inhabiting involves more than simply being surrounded by a physical structure. Thus, it is not only tailored garments such as suits that are inhabited. Life, in its most expanded sense, takes place in and with all our clothes while we engage with them in mutual processes of formation.

To understand what the experience of intensely evocative garments is like, I argue that we must first take a few steps back to consider the nature of our relationship with the wider material world. I want to acknowledge from the beginning that our clothes are intimately intertwined with our sense of self and our broader experience of the world. Thinking about the material world in terms of things and redefining our relationship with clothes as a partaking helps us move away from the traditional approach of regarding clothes as mere aesthetic or symbolic representations of something. Clothes can represent many things but as I will explore further in the following sections, there is more to our relationship with clothes than their visual, symbolic, and mnemonic qualities and a preoccupation with boundaries and representation risks undermining the intimate, affective, and emotive aspects of our encounters with clothes.

## 1.5 Feeling clothes

'...it hardly needs to be observed that textiles have a particularity which cannot be replaced by say a tractor or a needle' (Attfield, 2000: 126)

A large part of our engagement with clothing and cloth is embodied, affective, and emotive, and while being worn our clothes become intimately entangled with our personal narratives and our experience of the world. Writing about her own experience of a pair of black leather trousers that make her feel like she is dressed in the qualities of Patti Smith, Rosie Findlay (2016: 88) observes that 'the materiality of the pants *changes* [her] experience of [her] legs' (original italics). Traditionally, our relationship with clothing has been regarded as predominantly aesthetic and functional, but as Findlay (2016) highlights, our dress practices are not simply about visual aesthetics but rather a complex affective process that

involves sensory experience that does not depend on appearance. This intimate relationship with the body gives clothing a particularity that few other material things have.

It is perhaps quite obvious that the physical proximity to the body contributes to the particularly intimate and sensory nature of our relationship with clothing. While being worn, our clothes quite literally absorb our smell and our sweat and become creased and worn from the movements of our bodies, thus taking 'on qualities of the wearer', as Elizabeth Wilson (2004: 379) puts it or becoming 'imbued with the essence of the person' as Juliet Ash (2012: 378) notes. Peter Stallybrass (2012: 69) believes that it is in this ability to receive our physicality that the magic of clothing lies; clothes 'receive us'. The physical proximity may be part of the reason our relationship with clothing is uniquely intimate, but there is also something about the nature and quality of cloth as a material that makes it particularly intimate and emotive; cloth as a material has a particular quality that other materials do not possess.

As the introductory quotation illustrates, unlike a tractor or a needle, cloth has a certain familiar and organic character. Cloth can take on many forms and often appears to somehow almost fuse with its surroundings; it takes the shape of and becomes part of the things it comes into contact with. Cloth can also be soft and comforting or it can seem hostile, it shapes itself when draped over a chair or dropped on the floor, and it has the ability to move with our bodies and mimic the adaptable yet fragile quality of our own skin. Cloth also needs care such as washing and mending and can become damaged and frayed in ways that resemble fractured skin, resulting in wear and tear that when darned almost becomes like a kind of scar tissue. As Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider (1989: 2) aptly note in *Cloth and Human Experience*, the 'softness and ultimate fragility of [cloth] captures the vulnerability of humans, whose every relationship is transient'.

The sensory, organic, and transient character of cloth is probably why cloth has had spiritual and emotional significance in cultural practices across time and place. 'Mystery...spiritual motivation, and sensuality are integral to material things, as anthropologist Jane Schneider (2006: 204-5) notes and there is something about cloth that makes it particularly prone to connecting people with each other and the spiritual. Schneider (2006: 204) argues that there is something inherently human about our emotional and spiritual connection with cloth. Although the spiritual aspect of cloth has mainly been the focus of

anthropological studies of non-capitalist societies, Schneider (2006: 204) argues that the entanglement of the spiritual and the material is universal, regardless of how a society has developed. Thus, spiritual engagement with cloth and clothing also occurs in contemporary Western societies although here it tends to surface more during a crisis such as a break-up or the death of a loved one. Spiritual and emotional connection can manifest for instance in the ritual of connecting with a loved one by holding an item of their clothing close to oneself, almost as if hugging the absent person - an effect often used in films and TV series to portray the overwhelming feeling of loss. Here the clothing creates a spiritual and emotional connection that due to the close relationship to the body and the soft and malleable character of the material itself may make the connection more accessible than it would through other materials.

There is a persistent tradition of regarding materialism in general as something that tarnishes our 'pure' experience of life, signifying an unhealthy attachment to objects - especially in the West - as anthropologist Daniel Miller notes (2006: 343). Emotion in relation to clothing has been further neglected because of its connection to fashion as a phenomenon that is commonly concerned with appearance, status, vanity, and newness. Fashion 'makes things less real' by removing 'substance through the homogenous cult of utility and novelty', as Lipovetsky puts it (1994 cited in Attfield, 2000: 237). The ways in which clothes are consumed in capitalist societies has resulted in a detachment from clothes as material companions and instead of valuing the things themselves, we value them as objects that are exchangeable and replaceable (Lipovetsky, 1994 cited in Attfield, 2000: 237). However, when we acknowledge that things have value beyond the functional, aesthetic, and symbolic we become sensitive to their affective and emotive potential, which is always present regardless of cultural context.

During the past two decades contemporary scholars have begun to acknowledge that subjective experience, affect, and emotion are inherent in our relationships with clothing. Despite this, a tendency to focus on cognitive processes and representation, which ultimately side-lines actual experience, is still not uncommon. Whether it is the way we feel while wearing something or the ways in which certain garments connect us to loved ones, the crucial role of affect and emotion as experienced by us is still underexplored in studies on clothing. Lucia Ruggerone (2016: 574) has also observed that there is a gap in research that considers the actual feelings involved in our relationships with clothing and that

‘the way we feel *about* and *in* our clothes’ when we are dressed is seldom investigated in-depth. I would add that there is also a lack of research that considers how we actually feel about clothes that are rarely or never worn, but still kept as part of the wardrobe. Most research tends to focus only on rational and cognitive aspects while experience remains largely unexplored, as Ruggerone (2016: 574) also notes. This tendency is not only an issue in sociological studies but in all studies that are concerned with clothing and emotion. Between sociology, psychology, and anthropology-oriented studies on our relationship with clothing few engage in deeper analysis of experience.

When feeling and subjectivity are ignored in the study of material things, the dynamic processes that things and persons are involved in are reduced to ‘generalised static symbolism’ (Attfield, 2000: 147). To regard our relationships with clothes as predominantly cognitive and symbolic, is to ignore that affect and emotion are always present in our encounters with the material world. As scholars (Ash, 2012; Boivin, 2008; Harris & Sorensen, 2010) have noted, our experience of the material world is subjective and emotive and this should therefore be acknowledged as an essential aspect of our encounters with material things, including clothing. In their paper on archaeology and emotion, Harris & Sorensen (2010: 145-6) note that our experience of the material world is affective and emotive in nature and that disregarding emotion in relation to material culture results in an incomplete understanding of our relationship with the material world.

Juliet Ash (2012) also advocates for more emphasis on subjective experience in relation to material things such as clothing. She argues that ‘it is important to relocate feeling within’ studies on clothing, and notes that clothes belong to us not only as material possessions, but as things that are part of us (Ash, 2012: 378). To understand what our relationship with clothing is genuinely like, we must recognise that clothes are much more than simply a façade between the self and the outer world and recognise that our relationship with clothes is primarily embodied, affective, and subjective. I also want to point out that there is more to how we experience clothing than the act of dressing, that our encounters with clothes are not isolated to moments of getting dressed or being dressed. Garments that are emotionally connected to people and moments, are not always worn yet our encounters with them are always embodied, affective, and emotive, and when they are worn the experience may feel different from other clothed experiences. In instances when these garments are worn as part of an everyday

wardrobe they are more about connection and less about looking good or representing identity.

## 1.6 A certain presence

‘No, I said, I will not trade...Not for the likes of that, I’d sell / The shirt of the lad I love well’ (Duffy, 2004: 24)

The above lines are from a poem written sometime in the 16<sup>th</sup> century about a woman washing her beloved’s shirt in a river. When the woman is approached by a knight who is interested in trading the shirt, the woman simply replies that she would under no circumstances part with the shirt because it belongs to the man she loves. The poem is not really about the woman, her love, or the knight, the poem is ultimately about the shirt and its meaningfulness that transcends any kind of trading value. This poem captures something universal and suggests that emotional attachment to clothing is something human beings share across time and culture and that the phenomenon of attachment and meaningfulness is probably as old as the phenomenon of dress itself. It shows that from an intuitive and poetic perspective, humans have probably always known that clothes can hold far more than functional and aesthetic value.

The emotional aspects of clothing may have historically been largely neglected by scholars, but poets, artists, and storytellers have long been aware of the intimate, sensory, and emotive aspects of clothing.<sup>3</sup> There is an endless number of poems dedicated to garments and the evocative effect of cloth and clothing (see for instance Duffy, 2004) and poet Virginia Woolf, for instance, was particularly skilled at capturing images and memories through the nonverbal and the tactile language of dress (Abbs, 2006: 209). Although poetic and artistic works better capture the complex intimacy of our relationships with clothes, the concept of representation also emerges in artistic and poetic explorations when clothes are used as metaphors or symbols that represent the body, a person, or memories. This is often highlighted by the way in which garments are displayed laid flat or

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<sup>3</sup> Only a few relevant examples are included here since the aim of this section is not to discuss the use of clothing as a medium in art but to give a sense of how garments as evocative things have been explored through art. Other artists who frequently use and explore clothing in their practice include for instance Caroline Broadhead, Louise Bourgeois, Leslie Dill, and Shelly Goldsmith.

hanging on a hanger, which is suggestive of the idea of garments as objects of representation rather than things with possibilities.

Offering an unusual perspective of garments, artist Helen Barff has deviated from the traditional appearance of clothing by creating uncanny jesmonite castings of the insides of clothes. These sculptures, which resemble something that might be discovered deep inside a cave, are part of Barff's project, *Memory of Clothes* (2019), which was a collaboration between Barff, the Worthing Museum, and writer Suzanne Joinson. Barff's project explores clothes as anchors in remembering place and how autobiographical memories of garments connect with the local landscape. Although some of Barff's artistic outcomes explore the evocative possibilities of clothes from a non-conventional perspective, the research part of the project is mainly concerned with why and how clothes are connected to memories within a bigger narrative rather than with the experience of individual garments.

Personal memories associated with garments have also been explored more extensively by artist Lee Mingwei and writer Emily Spivack. Spivack's books *Worn Stories* (2021) and *Worn in New York* (2017) feature people's personal anecdotes about individual garments - mostly told to her by writers, actors, designers, and artists - accompanied by a photograph of the garment. *Worn Stories* offers a traditional biographical record of person-garment relationships and although some of the stories are suggestive of the emotions involved, the garments predominantly come across as *representations* of memories and emotions. Artist Lee Mingwei's *Fabric of Memory* (2006-2023) also explores the memories people associate with cherished clothing items from their childhood, but in contrast to Spivack's books, Mingwei's immersive installation places the garments and their narratives in a gallery where instead of photographs, the actual items are contained in a box with the associated narrative printed on the inside of the lid (Mingwei, 2020). Although the physical garment is present, the narratives do not specifically explore the experience of garment in itself but rather its existence as a representation of a memory.

Mingwei's installation does, however, introduce the presence of the garment itself as part of its significance, an effect that is even more intensely captured by multi-disciplinary artist Christian Boltanski in some of his installations. Echoing Elisabeth Wilson's (2003: 1) comment about how clothes displayed in museums 'hint at something only half understood, sinister, threatening', Christian Boltanski has created some powerfully evocative work with worn clothes. In some

of his large-scale installations the clothes take centre stage, creating a melancholy or even tragic kind of tension that lingers somewhere between presence and absence. In Boltanski's work, the garments allude to 'the abandoned outer skin' a husk of sorts that nonetheless is charged with 'its history, its fate, its tragedy' (Petersen, 1990: 43 cited in Constantine and Reuter, 1997: 172). Boltanski's garments appear as residues of people, but they are also charged with an intangible history of their own. Although Boltanski's use of clothing could be interpreted as mere representation, I wonder whether this was his only intention for choosing to work with worn garments. Whether he was fully conscious of it or not, some of Boltanski's work, such as *Migrantes* (2012) captures a quality of worn garments that cannot be objectively perceived but is rather felt as an uncanny presence.

A certain presence is also suggested in photographs of individual clothes by artist Sophie Calle. In *appointment*, an exhibition in which Calle juxtaposes her personal artefacts with items in the *Freud Museum* in London, Calle alludes to the evocative presence of a bathrobe in 'The Letter' which includes an image of the garment as it lies draped over an armchair and an anecdote about the garment (Calle, 2004b: 82-3). The way the 'long white terry towelling robe' (Calle, 2004b: 83) lingers on the brown leather chair imbues it with a certain air of significance; there is something about *this* bathrobe that belongs to no other bathrobe or garment. The short anecdote that accompanies the photograph has a poetic undertone in which mysterious tension and silences between the lines almost invites one to feel what Calle feels in relation to the bathrobe:

'And so, in the morning light, he would get up carefully...gently hiding inside the white bathrobe. When it was all over he left the bathrobe behind with me' (Calle, 2004b: 83).

Whether or not it was Calle's conscious intention to emphasise a certain presence, 'The Letter' suggests that it is the bathrobe itself that holds the meaningfulness.

Like the previously mentioned academic work, the examples above are a testament to how intimate and emotive our relationship with clothing is and that there is more to clothing than aesthetics and functionality. Furthermore, the work by Boltanski and Calle shows the power of the presence of the garments themselves and that art has the ability to reveal aspects of the garments that conventional language cannot. Apart from work that recognises the importance of the presence created by the individual garments - such as Calle's bathrobe - art projects that consider our relationship with clothes tend to focus predominantly

on clothes as representations of memories or on stories about garments, rather than exploring the nature of the actual garments. Since this research is concerned with the experience of intensely evocative garments, it is important to recognise the significance of the garments themselves and to 'to leave the [garment] to rest in its own self' (Heidegger, 1971: 31), to encounter the garments as they are without imposing meaning upon them.

## 1.7 Intensely evocative garments

'...its presence charged with some kind of agitating force...so extraordinary / that I will never be able to part with it...' (Langh, 2023)

I have a black dress that was hanging dormant in my wardrobe for nearly a decade (Fig. 1). I say dormant to suggest that the dress was not part of my active wardrobe but was nonetheless still part of my wardrobe. But was the dress indeed dormant, or had its essence as a phenomenon simply shifted? Every time I came across the dress in my wardrobe I would linger briefly in its presence while ripples in the fabric of the present moment revealed a portal to the past. What the dress looked like had become irrelevant, what mattered was the way its presence brought back feelings of summer rain, the rough texture of pavement under bare feet, and that feeling of how love sometimes seems to stop time.

Commodity-wise there is nothing extraordinary about the dress. It was bought on sale in a high street store, it is made from cheap polyester fabric, and although the design is nice, it holds no particular aesthetic value. The dress has transcended its utilitarian and aesthetic function and has become much more than 'just a dress'. It has acquired an uncanny presence that stirs something deep within me and evokes a sense of connection that cannot be captured through conventional language. When I speak of uncanny presence (as explored more in depth on page 10), I mean that I recognise the dress as a familiar material thing, yet it has a mysterious metaphysical quality that makes it seem unfamiliar. In other words, the dress manifests through a tension between the ordinary and the strange. Although I can of course talk about my memories of the specific moment that the dress is connected to or about my relationship with the person it reminds me of, this would not convey how I feel when I encounter the dress.

When I browse the contents of my wardrobe most garments belong to the category of liking, I like the way they look, feel, and fit me. Other garments evoke mild nostalgia and may inspire contemplation of past versions of myself, people I know or once knew, and places I have been to. Then, there are a few items that stir something deep within me, such as the black dress mentioned above, a pencil skirt that my mother made for me on the spur of the moment, a dark blue baseball cap that used to belong to my late father, and a vintage dress imbued with passionate anticipation. These garments have a particular presence that is different from the other garments in my wardrobe, they resonate with something deep within me. My encounters with these garments are felt on a deeply embodied and intuitive level and I cannot quite explain what it is that makes these garments particularly resonant. The garments evoke a kind of magic that is involved in encounters with 'real' things, a resonance that originates somewhere deep in one's chest (Watson, 1990: 28-29).

I am not alone in my experience of this kind of deeply resonant quality that these garments evoke. Other scholars have also noted that some garments have a presence that is difficult to explain (van Doorn, 2016; Medvedev, 2007; de Perthuis, 2016; Stallybrass, 2012; Weber, 2011). Sandra Weber, for instance, discusses her personal relationship with three specific garments in a book chapter on clothes, memory, and identity. Sharing her personal experience of a shirt that used to belong to her now deceased brother, Weber (2011: 247) writes that although the shirt mostly remains hidden in her wardrobe, she is 'always aware of its presence'. Fashion scholar Katalin Medvedev (2007: 35) has even developed a personal ritual in which she reconnects with the memory of her dead father by examining his wardrobe and evoking his spirit through his clothes. She writes:

'When I stroke them or inhale their scent, I sense his presence: his smile, his slight stoop, his delicate hands. When I shut the wardrobe, his presence vanishes' (Medvedev, 2007: 35).

Similarly, in *Worn Worlds: Clothes, Mourning, and the Life of Things*, Peter Stallybrass writes about how he had initially struggled to evoke the memory of his deceased friend and then suddenly his friend was there in a leather jacket. For Stallybrass it was the presence of the jacket that brought the spirit of his friend back to life.

Sometimes worn clothing can make us feel like we are confronted with ghosts when the residues of a person that remains in a garment evokes the presence of the person 'in absentia' (Findlay & Romagosa, 2018: 143). Clothing, such as a

‘friend’s old dress, or a grandfather’s retired jacket, or an aunt’s abandoned hat’ can ‘carry spectres of...loved ones’ (Mavor, 1997: 121). When Karen de Perthuis writes about her experience of wearing her partner’s mended old jumper after his death, she shares how she would dream ‘vivid potent dreams’, awaking ‘sure of his presence’ (de Perthuis, 2016: 61). Approaching her relationship with the garment from different angles, de Perthuis notes, however, that the garment has such a powerful presence that it resists theoretical analysis and ‘demands a narrative of its own’. These are precisely the types of garments that this research is concerned with, garments that have a potently evocative presence that resists theoretical analysis and conventional language. Part of the uncanny quality of worn clothing may be a result of physical traces, such as creases, stains, and wear and tear, this research, however, is concerned with a metaphysical beyond, an unseen quality that is somehow perceived yet is not physically there.

Intensely evocative garments maintain a certain direct connection to people and moments, which imbues them with a presence that transcends what can be readily perceived, often making them appear almost sacred as is suggested in the above examples. Cloth can be regarded as ‘a so-called contact relic’ that gains ‘its power through having wrapped or touched a holy body’ (Hahn, 2017: 59) and it is not uncommon that evocative garments are referred to as relics. Relics are connected to a ‘sacred person or place in terms of being a product of (as blood indicates a body), adjacent to (as touching or having touched) or actually being a portion of (a fragment or splinter) the holy thing’ (Hahn, 2017: 19). There is in other words always a direct connection between the relic and its sacred origin, a relic always ‘shares an authentic physical relationship with the holy thing’ (Hahn, 2017: 19). Intensely evocative garments are relics in the sense that they have been in contact with a body or a cherished moment in the past, and therefore remain connected to something considered sacred on a personal level. The relic-like quality of intensely evocative garments is thus twofold in that they may have literally touched the body of a person, or persons, and that they bear witness to encounters, i.e., the garment may remain as a relic of an event of intense emotion.

Intensely evocative garments are material things that maintain a connection to people, places, and past moments. They have a unique presence that makes them different from other clothes and often hold a sacred place in our lives, whether this is through rituals such as in Katalin Medvedev’s (2007) case or by becoming intimate companions like Karen de Perthuis’ (2016) jumper. Relics are often subject to myth and magic and in the last section of this chapter I will further

explore the nature of intensely evocative garments by introducing the notion of *bleeding garments*, which evolved through a contemplation of my personal experience of the previously introduced black dress in relation to Barthes (2006) idea of the *punctum*.



Figure 1 My black dress (2021)

## 1.8 *Bleeding garments*

‘Things bleed into us, and we bleed into things’ (reflective diary entry, 2021)

Reading the title of this thesis, you may already have wondered what *bleeding garments* refers to, why bleeding of all things? In section 1.3 I already proposed a certain dissolution of boundaries, and the idea of bleeding relates to the nature of intensely evocative garments as *things*. This bleeding has nothing to do with blood in the literal sense but is used as a metaphor intended to capture the expanding and particularly intense nature of intensely evocative garments. While experience can be difficult to capture through conventional language metaphor can put into words what we cannot otherwise express. As Christopher Tilley (1999: 8) notes, an empirical or objective account regards a body as a body and a pot as a pot [or a garment as a garment], while metaphor provides a means of mediating between the concrete and the abstract. It is precisely a tension between the concrete and the abstract that intensely evocative garments present us with, and metaphor provides a powerful means to capture this tension.

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes embarks on a journey in discovering the essence of the photograph through his personal experience. He observes that most photographs only evoke a polite interest, and because these can be readily studied based on things such as appearance and creative skill or effort, he calls these types of photographs *studium* (Barthes, 2006: 27-8). Then there are the occasional photographs that are ‘punctuated, sometimes even speckled with...sensitive points’ that like an arrow shoot out and pierces one on a deeply emotional level (Barthes, 2006: 26-7). Barthes refers to these types of occurrences as *punctum* and in contrast to the *studium*, the *punctum* is a forceful wounding (Barthes, 2006: 26-7). It is an ‘internal agitation’ that generates a desire to express the ‘unspeakable’ (Barthes, 2006: 19). If we apply Barthes’ idea of the *studium* and the *punctum* to the wider material world, we might observe that generally things are subject to polite interest or curiosity. Many things are even taken for granted or regarded with such indifference that we barely notice them. Then there are things, such as intensely evocative garments, that disturb the world of *studium* and animate us (Barthes, 2006).

I initially referred to intensely evocative garments as ‘punctum garments’ because they share a similar agitating and enigmatic nature with Barthes’ *punctum* and

because their emotional intensity and significance is considerably different from other garments.<sup>4</sup> However, after further contemplation of my experience of the black dress it occurred to me that the dress does not puncture me but rather expands beyond its perceived outer boundaries, it reaches towards me and stains me. It is not quite as sharp and violent as the way that Barthes' describes the *punctum*, but rather a soft emanation that reaches beyond the concrete materiality of the dress and envelops me. In many ancient rites, blood is what 'animates, validates or vitalises that on which it is shed, bringing the dead to life' (Watson, 1990: 49) and its metaphor therefore also captures the feeling that intensely evocative garments appear as if imbued with a spirit of their own. The 'bleeding' in *bleeding garments* reflects the particularly potent evocative nature of intensely evocative garments that expands their materiality beyond the concrete, as well as the ways in which these garments can appear as if almost animated by an uncanny presence. There are other items with sentimental value that may bring comfort and help us recall fond memories, but they do not evoke an intense emotional response, they do not 'bleed'. This research is not concerned with polite recollection, it is concerned with garments that stir something deep within.

## 1.9 Concluding thoughts

In his book *How Things Shape the Mind*, cognitive archaeologist Lambros Malafouris (2013: 2) asks: 'Where does the mind stop and the rest of the world begin?'. Where indeed does our being end and the world begin? As explored in this chapter, drawing a boundary between us and the world is difficult and problematic, and will result in a distorted understanding of the world. To explore what *bleeding garments* (i.e., intensely evocative garments) are actually like as an experience I argue that we must suspend our assumptions about them and explore them without the restrictions of pre-defined boundaries. This research builds on the idea that no clear boundary can be drawn between us and the material world and that rather than dividing the world into agents and objects we

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<sup>4</sup> Fashion scholar Otto von Busch (2005) has also considered the *punctum* in relation to clothing; however, he looks at a detail - a stain - in a specific garment and discusses the mnemonic impact of this physical trace as a witness of an event.

should approach the world in terms of possibilities and gatherings of forces that shift and interact with each other.

This research emerges from a shift in awareness and is situated in that liminal space in which everyday reality and otherworldly strangeness flow together. I propose that an in-depth understanding of what our experience of *bleeding garments* is like, requires a radical shift in awareness that moves away from a cognitive, analytical, and strictly theoretical mode toward one that embraces the magical and the poetic. In this chapter I have started to shift the awareness by moving away from the traditional tendency to regard the material world in terms of a separate 'other' that is controlled by agents, and instead considered the world as place of relations and possibilities where boundaries, when perceived, are never fixed. By doing this I have sought to free clothing from the restraints of representation so that we can start to contemplate what *bleeding garments* are like in the more expanded sense. To explore the experience of *bleeding garments* without the restriction of assumptions, this research uses a serendipitous and intuitive practice-led approach that draws on phenomenology, magical awareness, and poetry. In the next chapter I will continue the shift in awareness by looking at the underpinning methodological approaches that inform this research.

## **Chapter II - Methodological Framework** A Different Perspective

One of the aims of this research is to identify a potential methodology for exploring our experience of intensely evocative garments and therefore the methodology is not pre-defined but rather emerges through the research process. Providing a kind of phenomenological toolbox, this chapter lays out the building blocks for the practice-led research process. I begin by discussing the phenomenological approach and its underpinning attitude, after which I further explore the ideas introduced in chapter I, section 1.3 - that all things are imbued with a vitality of their own and perceived as an entanglement between physical and metaphysical forces - in relation to the magical worldview. The end of this chapter considers poetry in its broader meaning as an expression that can heighten our sensitivity to the relationship between the physical and the

metaphysical. In this research, magical awareness guides the way intensely evocative garments are approached as things with a 'spirit' of their own, phenomenology provides the method of inquiry - the way I situate myself as a researcher in relation to the research subject - and poetry constitutes an invitation to experience the world through a heightened affective awareness. The methodology is not resolved in this chapter and therefore it does not lay out a precise methodological structure but rather provides the building blocks for a potential methodology that evolves throughout the thesis.

## 2.1 Magical possibility

'The way people feel has nothing to do with what makes sense' (The Romanoffs: episode 6, 2018)

In her article *Darning Mark's Jumper*, Karen de Perthuis (2016: 68) notes how the way in which her mended old jumper seems to evoke the spirit of her deceased partner resonates with her on a primitive and magical level. This is followed, however, with a disclaimer that she does not believe in witchcraft, ghosts, or mediums. Although de Perthuis recognises that there is a magical aspect to her relationship with the jumper, she ultimately dismisses it as irrational and occult. The sense of presence, spirit, or energy that people experience in relation to certain garments is often dismissed as irrational - even by the people themselves. Echoing de Perthuis, Sandra Weber (2010: 247) writes about her deceased brother's old shirt and comments that she knows it is ridiculous to imagine that she can still feel her brother's presence in the shirt. Whereas Shahidha Bari (2019: 23) has commented on how the ability of matter to absorb meaning involves a kind of a magic but that this is a 'foolish superstition to which we stupidly subscribe nonetheless'.

There seems to be a certain tension between the theoretical and the rational, and the emotive and the magical in de Perthuis' article (2016). Despite regarding her magical experience of the jumper as irrational, de Perthuis (2016) also finds solace in the thought that even everyday material things are infinitely more than their physical appearance. In her own words, through the jumper she escapes 'to a place of enchantment, a place of memory, of love, of loss and desire, to a place where [her partner] is whole' (de Perthuis, 2016: 68). Her 'rational, everyday self'

may struggle to acknowledge the magical properties of the jumper but her primitive ‘unconscious, dreaming self’ (de Perthuis, 2016: 68) is clearly sensitive to its otherworldly quality.

The way we feel may not always seem rational, but this does not mean that our feelings are foolish. The desire to connect spiritually and emotionally with and through material things is inherently human and there seems to be something particularly enchanting about textiles and clothing since elements of magic and storytelling are common in textile practices all over the world (Gale & Kaur, 2002: 96). As explored in section 1.5 in Chapter I, there is something about cloth as a material that makes it particularly prone to becoming emotionally and spiritually meaningful. The idea that cloth or clothing can become imbued with spirit or soul is common in the spiritual experience of cloth. Navajo weavers for instance incorporate ‘a flaw into the border of a rug’ to create a ‘spirit line’ so that the weaver’s soul can flow out of the rug once completed, and in Thailand mothers would weave a piece of silk cloth to give to their sons to protect them from bad spirits when they left their village for work or to defend the country (Conway, 1992 cited in Gale & Kaur, 2002: 96). Echoing previously explored examples of garments that evoke the spirit of loved ones, the above examples show how the intimate nature of cloth makes it conducive for forming magical connections and suggest that the magical possibility of cloth is not culturally bound but rather a common aspect of how we experience cloth and clothing.

In Western capitalist societies, magical connection may no longer commonly play a role in the production or traditions of cloth but that does not mean that it is not present in our interaction with cloth and clothing. Regardless of time, place, and culture, humans are inclined to some form of magical thinking, as scholars have noted (Greenwood, 2009; Luhrman, 2020; Rosengren & French, 2013; Schneider, 2006; Subbotsky, 2014). Magical thought cannot be replaced or eliminated despite theories that argue that magical thought will eventually be replaced completely by scientific thought and rationality as societies become more scientifically and technologically advanced (Rosengren & French, 2013: 48-9). In fact, it has been argued that magical thinking is merely suppressed by ‘social and cultural pressures that place greater value on science, logic, and rational thought’ (Subbotsky, 2010 cited in Rosengren & French, 2013: 49). Magical thinking is inherent to our experience of the world and cannot be eradicated no matter how much we try to convince ourselves that it is foolish.

All things have magical possibility - including our clothes - because the possibility of magic always resides within us. I propose that to explore what makes *bleeding garments* unique as a phenomenon we need to embrace their magical possibilities, because is it not the possibility of magic that makes us feel like certain garments can hold the spirit of a lost loved one or residues of a moment in the past? Magical possibility, however, cannot be grasped through theoretical analysis and therefore embracing the magical quality of *bleeding garments* requires a shift in awareness. Rather than merely theorising and trying to understand these garments from a sociological or psychological perspective, I argue that we should wholeheartedly embrace their emotive, abstract, and uncanny nature, and become sensitive to their magical quality. Embracing these aspects means that we must allow their materiality to expand into the metaphysical and attune to them as gatherings of forces that are involved in the entanglements of the cosmos. Rather than dismissing it as foolish, ridiculous, or irrational, we should embrace the magical as an important part of our experience of *bleeding garments*. This is important because magical awareness allows us to connect with the world on a deeper emotive and spiritual level, and because, as I argue in this thesis, our precognitive (that is, our embodied, intuitive, and felt) experience of *bleeding garments* is magical in nature.

## 2.2 Magic as a heightened awareness

‘...spirit moves through all things / spirit moves through all things / spirit moves through all things / spirit moves through all things...’ (System of a Down, 2001)

Reminiscent of the notion of the divine in Heidegger’s *fourfold*, the above lyrics from a song called *Science (2001)* by the band *System of a Down*, suggest that everything in this world is more than the sum of what can be objectively perceived. The song touches on the idea that the scientific perspective has failed us by not recognising that the spiritual and metaphysical are important parts of human experience. In magical thought ‘all things are seen as having an internal dimension, a certain “spirit”’ (Subbotsky, 2014: 4), and the notion that spirit moves through all things can thus be seen as suggestive of magical possibility. I am not suggesting that there are paranormal entities floating around that inanimate things can become possessed by, but that things have possibilities

beyond the assumed and measurable which can elevate our experience of them when we are willing to remain sensitive to these possibilities. We tend to assume that things are the sum of their physical appearance but as Heidegger argues, there are many ways of being of which substance and physicality is only one mode (Wrathall, 2005: 12). According to Heidegger, both animate beings and inanimate things have ways of existing that cannot be reduced simply to physical processes (Wrathall, 2005: 12).

To understand the world in an expanded sense as a place that is not only physical but also metaphysical, we need to acknowledge that there is more than one way of being in the world and 'we must accept the fact that not everything can be measured by traditional scientific methods' (Wrathall, 2005: 98). Heidegger suggests that 'we run the risk of overlooking the world' if we accept the physical sciences as the only valid way of knowing and dismiss anything that is beyond the reach of science as unreal (Wrathall, 2005: 98-9). Science operates according to a world where only things that can be repeatedly measured, dissected, and analysed are truly real, which is useful for science as it provides something 'hard and solid to hold on to' but it does also divide the world into things that can be measured and things that cannot (Lachman, 2015: 29). The downside of this approach is that it is precisely the things that 'science has told us for some centuries now are not real' that we tend to value in our *experience* of the world (Lachman, 2015: 29, italics added), such as, for instance, sensing energies that cannot be objectively perceived (e.g., auras) or chance encounters and occurrences that feel particularly meaningful. As author Andrew Juniper (2003: 24) notes, by establishing science as the only valid source of knowledge 'we have left behind ideas that the world may hold a little more magic than we suspect'.

In contrast to traditional Western thought, the Japanese philosophy of Zen believes that a completely scientific view of reality inhibits a more holistic view of life and limits us to 'a rather mundane view of something altogether extraordinary' (Juniper, 2003: 24). Although not as widely applied in contemporary capitalist societies, this worldview is not unfamiliar to Western philosophy and spirituality. Paganism, a pre-Christian worldview that was widespread in Europe until the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, is grounded in a similar holistic worldview but as a dualistic mindset, took a hold, the 'rejected mode of knowing', as Lachman (2015: 30) calls it, became increasingly forgotten. It is this rejected mode of knowing that we now commonly refer to as magic, which,

although no longer accepted as a valid source of knowledge, is still present in our everyday lives.

Rosengren and French (2013: 43) note that magic can refer to everything from beautiful natural events to seemingly unexplainable phenomena, but that it has also been used as a term for thinking that is considered illogical or irrational. In colloquial use, magic is primarily used to define the belief in the use of supernatural powers to create and influence seemingly impossible occurrences. The word *irrational* often crops up in discussions on magic as mode of thinking; magic is what occurs when we are not thinking clearly and when we let our emotions take over. However, as Rosengren and French (2013: 44) argue, magical thinking is more than just being ignorant, illogical, or going against scientific knowledge. Magic can mean different things depending on the context but in the broadest sense, magic is a mode of thought that is grounded in the belief of a coherent universe where all things are interrelated (Russel, 1997: 3).

Since the philosophy that underpins magic and its practice is grounded in the idea of a holistic cosmology that is made up of forces and energies (Greenwood, 2000: 23), parallels can be drawn to previously explored ideas about the world as a place of intermingling forces and energies as proposed by scholars such as Deleuze and Guattari (2004), Ingold (2010), and Heidegger (1971). In magic, however, some of these energies, which are present in all things, are considered to exist in the 'otherworld', which forms its own distinct world but exists parallel to what we perceive as the 'real' world (Greenwood, 2000: 23). Magic is 'a divine sense of cosmological oneness, wherein connections between this world and the unseen otherworld can be made' (Best, 2018: 10) and the practice of magic involves 'opening up' to these otherworldly forces (Greenwood, 2000: 23).

It is important to note that the otherworld is not a separate physical world that we can somehow travel to through a portal. Rather, the concept of the otherworld can be understood as a source of knowledge that is both internal and external and can give access to a rich wisdom that can help us deal with everyday realities (Greenwood, 2000: 32). I should also reiterate that I am not at any point arguing against scientific understanding, I am simply suggesting that there are other ways of understanding and experiencing the world. Science provides valuable knowledge, but in the process, other ways of understanding the world are often overlooked and dismissed as irrational or trivial because they do not produce objectively measurable data. Magic is commonly not considered as a valid source of knowledge; however, the benefit of magic- as well as art and poetry as I will

explore later - is that it can help us explore, express, and understand our inner emotional world in relation to the outer world. Therefore, rather than opposing it to science, I propose that we should regard magic as a way of knowing in its own right that can help us gain a richer understanding of the world and our experience of it.

Magic as such is not in itself irrational, it simply has its own logic that is not limited by objectively perceived boundaries. It is 'the other way of knowing' that can help us understand a hidden knowledge that is not immediately or easily available to us, as anthropologist Susan Greenwood (2000: 135) notes. It is also worth noting, that engaging in magical thinking does not negate a belief in science and rather than opposing scientific and magical thought we should regard them as complementary ways of knowing that can both enrich our understanding of the world and our experience of it. Magic is ultimately about acknowledging and identifying the interconnectedness of the universe (Best, 2018: 34). It draws on the same resources as everyday life but in magical thought things are approached through a heightened awareness (Greenwood, 2000: 41). This involves a shift in consciousness that allows one to discover associations and connections between things, experiences, and feelings (Greenwood, 2009: 29). Magic as a way of knowing, then, embraces the idea that 'spirit' is present in everything and that everything is connected. Magic participates in the world and recognises that everything in the world connects and corresponds, as Lachman (2015: 30) notes.

The two main concepts that influence magical thought are similarity and contagion, both of which draw on the idea that everything in the world is interconnected. Like magical thought itself, the idea of similarity and contagion are also considered to be central to human primitive thought (Rosengren & French, 2013: 46). That is, we have an inherent tendency to find patterns and connections in things that have no obvious causal relationship. Contagion refers to the idea that certain properties can be transferred from one thing to another through direct or indirect contact (Nemeroff & Rozin, 1992, 2000; Rozin, Millman, & Nemeroff, 1986 cited in Rosengren & French, 2013: 46), which then 'establishes a continual link or contract between the two through which further essence can be transmitted' (Rosengren & French, 2013: 46). In other words, things that have been in contact will always maintain a certain contact (Greenwood, 2009; Subbotsky: 2014). It is the idea of contagion that lies at the

heart of our relationships with *bleeding garments*. Contagion creates and maintains connections between garments, people, and past moments.

Magic is not about finding empirical evidence, but a way of making connections through a heightened affective awareness. The practice of magic in connecting with the otherworld is a process of learning to see connections between the planetary forces and the self; to understand one's being within the wider magical whole (Greenwood, 2000: 31). When we engage in magical thinking, we become sensitive to the entanglements of the world, we can sense how everything is connected and how our world consists of more than that which is readily available to us. Magic gives us access to a different kind of knowledge, one that embraces our experience and is not bound by the objective and the rational. It allows for 'contemplation of different ways of relating to the world', offering a counter part to the 'rationality of modernity, which denigrates the wisdoms of the body and subjectivity' (Harvey, 1997: 181-2 cited in Greenwood, 2000: 26).

*Bleeding garments* exist somewhere in a liminal space between everyday reality and the otherworld, and it is precisely this tension that makes itself known when we sense the connections that *bleeding garments* maintain. Rather than regarding it as incidental, this research aims to embrace the otherworldly aspects of *bleeding garments* because it can reveal more about our experience of these garments. I propose that magical awareness is important in the experience of *bleeding garments* because it enables us to fully connect with aspects that make these garments unique and extraordinary. Instead of dismissing our magical experience of *bleeding garments* as irrational or reducing their meaning to mere cognitive association, magical awareness can heighten our experience of these garments by acknowledging their involvement with the otherworld.

### 2.3 The phenomenological attitude

'Things can show themselves to us in a variety of different ways, depending on the kind of involvement we have with them' (Heidegger, 1962: 51 cited in Thomas, 2006: 46)

We cannot assume that we know what things are and, as I have suggested thus far, there is more to *bleeding garments* than can be objectively understood. *Bleeding garments* present us with an uncanny presence that makes us feel like their materiality holds more than what one can perceive by just looking at them.

Bennett (2010: 5) notes that perceiving things as *things*, requires a certain readiness or openness from us as subjects. It requires a way of looking that is 'open to the appearance of thing-power', a willingness to look at what is there to be seen. It is precisely this kind of openness to fully encounter what we are perceiving that phenomenology requires. Heidegger argues that the ways in which things appear to us are subject to our involvement with them - we are part of the mirror play of *the fourfold* (explored in section 1.3). The nature of *bleeding garments*, then, is dependent on our involvement with them, and it is our subjective experience of these garments in the moment that constitutes their nature as things.

What experience is genuinely like is difficult to access through traditional theoretical and scientific approaches because of its nuanced, fleeting, and subjective nature. Experiences happen in the moment and therefore exploring them requires a type of holistic awareness that the natural and social sciences tend to lack. As the founder of phenomenology, philosopher Edmund Husserl argued, the raw material of experience is chaotic, formless, and impossible to fully understand in its original state (Thomas, 2006: 45). Our experiences, however, are an important part of our being in the world and attempting 'rigorously to eliminate our human perspective' from how we experience the world will simply end in absurdity (Polanyi, 1974: 3).

So, if traditional scientific inquiry does not provide us with an adequate approach, then how can we understand experience? How might we begin to explore and capture the experience of *bleeding garments* as we experience them in the moment? Seeing, or feeling, things for what they truly are and understanding them as they present themselves to us in the moment lies at the heart of phenomenology. Phenomenologist Max van Manen (2017a) defines phenomenology in its truest sense as an inquiry into the ordinary meanings of experience, i.e., what is an experience like while we are living in and through it. Phenomenology is often used simply as a synonym for the study of experience - particularly when applied to non-philosophical research - however, it is worth noting that 'not all qualitative research inspired by phenomenology is phenomenology' (see for instance Giorgi, 2008 for examples). The phenomenological approach is not simply the study of experience and to define it as such does not capture the unique phenomenological approach that scholars (Hansen, 2012; Skolowski, 2005; van Manen, 2017a) refer to as the phenomenological attitude.

One of the most important things to understand about phenomenology is that it is a philosophical approach to knowledge, not empirical or naturalistic (Gillis, 1976: 82). According to one of Heidegger's contemporaries, J. Glenn Gray (1967: 96), Heidegger believed that philosophical thought 'should challenge conventional ways of viewing the world and...provide a more authentic knowledge of things than any social or natural science can achieve'. Heidegger saw philosophy's mission as breaking new paths, opening new perspectives, and bringing 'into radical question the very foundations of the values and norms by which people live' (Gray, 1967: 96). Philosopher Robert Skolowski (2005: 50-1) argues that studying the physical object and its appearance from within the natural attitude (our default viewpoint) tends to create 'barriers between us and things' or reduce 'things into mere ideas'. In contrast, the phenomenological attitude 'disengages completely from the natural attitude' and reflexively considers everything that the natural attitude encompasses (Skolowski, 2005: 47).

Since it was first proposed as a philosophical approach by Edmund Husserl, different versions of phenomenology have been developed. This research draws on Heidegger's hermeneutic or existential approach to phenomenology and Max van Manen's views on phenomenology in its true sense, both which acknowledge that phenomena cannot be separated from our subjective experience of them. Challenging Husserl's original approach, Heidegger was instrumental in developing it into a methodology, which rather than creating a philosophical equivalent to the scientific method, situated itself within a world that unfolds and becomes (Thomas, 2006). As opposed to Husserl, Heidegger proposed that successful phenomenology acknowledges that things or phenomena cannot be removed from the world in which they happen.

Husserl criticised existing philosophical approaches because he believed that they were incapable of producing non-contingent or pure knowledge (Gillis, 1976: 76). He argued that 'no previous philosopher had understood clearly the concepts and methods that made true philosophy possible' (Gillis, 1976: 76). To challenge this, Husserl proposed a process of gradual refinement of 'the content of consciousness in order to purge any psychological elements and render possible a knowledge of the essence' of what is being experienced (Gillis, 1976: 81). Husserl had a background in mathematics and perhaps therefore his approach was a little too rigid and remote when he proposed a type of objective science of experience

and believed that the everyday world needed to be bracketed - that is, temporarily removed from the studied phenomenon. Heidegger, however, embraced a more holistic and poetic philosophy, recognising that we cannot know what experiences are actually like unless we acknowledge our subjectivity and that things only reveal themselves to us in a world (Thomas, 2006: 46).

Anthropologist Susan Greenwood has commented on how the benefit of phenomenology is that it does not reduce human experiences to social or psychological events but rather suspends 'analytical categories of rationalistic social science' and takes 'what people do and say seriously' (Greenwood, 2000: 42). Although it is true that phenomenology is not based on reduction, it is important to understand that phenomenology in its original sense is not simply about taking what is said seriously but about taking *things* seriously as they truly appear to us and about discovering meaningful insights about our experience through a process of continuous wonder and questioning. Phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of phenomena, the origin of their being, and keeps the momentum of contemplation going until it reaches some kind of realisation that captures the phenomenological essence of what an experience is like as it is being lived through. But what is this essence that I am referring to, you might ask. In a phenomenological sense, essence refers to what 'something is, as it is' (Heidegger, 1971: 17) and because there are many ways in which things can be, phenomenological essence is not fixed but rather a type of becoming. In phenomenological terms, essence cannot be correct or incorrect and therefore essence can in fact be understood as a dynamic type of 'essencing' (Inwood, 1999: 10) and the 'essencing' of a thing depends on its involvement with other things, environments, and moods.

One of the main elements that makes phenomenology unique as a methodology is that no aspect of experience or our understanding of it can be taken for granted (Thomas, 2006: 43). Phenomenology is about letting 'that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself', as Heidegger (cited in Wrathall, 2005: 9) puts it. Put more simply, phenomenology is about encountering the world with a sense of openness and wonder that acknowledges that things always appear to us in their own unique way and that they cannot be reduced to preconceived assumptions. The natural and social sciences are commonly concerned with investigating and explaining causal relationships and tend to search for knowledge beyond the phenomenon itself, whereas phenomenology takes a holistic approach and stays with the phenomenon to

understand what it is like as an experience so that we can 'learn to see them in such a way that they show up as they really are' (Wrathall, 2005: 9). The world as a place of possibilities is not a concrete entity that can be objectively measured and studied but rather something that must be felt and seen for what it is (Wrathall, 2005: 98). This also means that the certain presence that *bleeding garments* have cannot be truly grasped through theoretical analysis; as Karen de Perthuis also observes when she comments on how her partner's old jumper resists theoretical analysis (2016: 60) and concludes that nothing can get to the depth of how the jumper makes her *feel*, nothing can capture its phenomenological essence (2016: 63).

If theoretical analysis cannot capture the phenomenological essence of what is being experienced, what then does phenomenology draw on? How can we know what things are like in a phenomenological sense? As a process, phenomenology gradually aims to come closer to the essence of an experience by contemplating it through a sense of wonder, which is considered central to the phenomenological attitude - see for instance Heidegger's (1995) phenomenology of boredom or John Heron's (1970) phenomenology of the gaze as a social encounter. In *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, psychologist Clarissa Pinkola Estés (2008: 149) refers to wonder as a kind of innocence and comments on how returning to 'an alert innocence is not so much an effort, like moving a pile of bricks from here to there, as it is standing still long enough to let the spirit find you'. Wonder means to listen with one's soul, one's whole being, rather than simply focusing on systematically reordering what one thinks they already know. When we are engaged in wonder, the boundaries we assume that the world is ruled by shift, the interconnectedness of the world bursts forward, and we perceive things as if for the first time. It is 'a boundary disturbing reaction' (Robertson, 2006: 48) that disrupts existing assumptions and can help us see things we take for granted anew. It means to break loose from 'a world of theoretical order' (Robertson, 2006: 47) and opening up to a world of possibilities.

Our experiences may lead us into serious reflection, however, from a phenomenological perspective our experience, as we are experiencing it in the moment, is raw and happens before conscious thought, which means that our experience is pre-reflective or non-reflective (van Manen, 2017a: 814). The pre-reflective moments of our experiences offer valuable insights into what things are actually like but as van Manen (2017a: 817) notes, when we start reflecting on the experienced moment we are in, 'we may already have lost touch with the living

sensibility' of that moment. The challenge of phenomenology then, lies in somehow accessing or recreating these moments of raw experience and traditionally phenomenological inquiry retrospectively brings awareness to an experience in order to reflect phenomenologically on it (van Manen, 2017a). This can be done with the help of examples such as imagined scenarios, anecdotes, and poetry that somehow capture the phenomenon that is being studied so that a felt understanding can be reached. The examples that this research builds on have emerged through practice-led experiments and participatory workshops. This material, which is explored in-depth in chapters III and IV, create a felt understanding that offers insights about what *bleeding garments* can be like as an experience. I argue that a practice-led process can be highly conducive for phenomenological understanding since it provides access to an embodied, pre-cognitive, and emotive type of knowing and can help capture elements that are difficult to convey through conventional language.

*Bleeding garments* only reveal themselves to us in a world, *our* world, and therefore I argue that traditional scientific approaches cannot provide meaningful insights about what these garments are like as a phenomenon. Exploring *bleeding garments* requires a certain openness to encountering them as *things* in the expanded sense, which is why I propose exploring them through the phenomenological attitude of wonder. When we apply a sense of wonder and openness to *bleeding garments* as they appear in the moment, we encounter them, we can start to understand that there is something particular about the experience of *bleeding garments* that differs from encounters with other garments.

## 2.4 Poetry in its broader sense

'A Poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness, and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as [humans] entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why' (Shelley, 1940: 3)

As the above quotation suggests, poetry moves us in a particular way, yet we rarely know why or where it comes from. This peculiar and ephemeral nature of poetry also makes it difficult to define because how do you define something that you cannot 'point to'? Primarily and colloquially, poetry refers to a literary genre

that consists of written or spoken language and its signs that are 'preponderantly delivered in premediated limited' verse (Mandel, 1998: 80). However, if we apply the phenomenological attitude to poetry, we will eventually realise that poetry, in its broadest sense, is not defined by or even located in written poems; poetry is related to poems only in a contingent sense, if at all (Grossman, 2007: 146). This research is not concerned with poetry as the art of language but rather draws on an expanded definition of poetry as a heightened affective awareness. This does not mean that poetry does not manifest as written language in this research but that the origin and the possibilities of poetry are considered in a broader context.

Poems come from somewhere and it is this somewhere that is poetry in its broadest sense. In his book *The Hatred of Poetry*, poet Ben Lerner (2016) argues that poetry is born from a desire to transcend the finite boundaries of the world and to express what, ironically, seems to lie beyond the reach of language. He makes the radical argument that it is in fact impossible to fully capture the divine force of the poetic moment and that ultimately 'all we can do is clear a space for poetry (Lerner, 2016: 9). Ultimately, poetry cannot be forced, but rather requires a certain openness and commitment to letting it happen. The origin of poetry lies in our commitment to the invisible which happens in us long before we become conscious of the visible (D'Annunzio, 1925: 17 cited in Bachelard, 1971: 16). There is indeed something almost spiritual or divine about the way poetry just seems to arrive from somewhere. Poetry 'acts in a divine and unapprehended manner, beyond and above consciousness' (Shelley, 1840: 3) and the poetic instant, as Bachelard calls it, hits you like lightning (Kearney, 2008). Even poets do not necessarily feel as if they have written their poems 'as much as heard them' or been given the poetry, as observed by poet Naomi Shihani Nye (Astley, 2008: 00:53:38).

Despite the feeling that poetry is sometimes almost ineffably given to the poet, poetry, in its broader meaning, is born somewhere deep within us; it is the purest expression of our inner emotional world (Lerner, 2016: 16). Heidegger sees poetry as a form of truth that is a vital part of human life, without which we (would) become violent brutes or viciously selfish robots (Heidegger, 1971: xv). According to Heidegger (1971) an authentic experience in the world is poetic in nature, and thinking, language, and poetry all come from the same place. He argues that we dwell poetically and that it is poetry that causes dwelling to be dwelling in the first place (Heidegger, 1971). The possibility of the poetic, then, exists in all of us if we only know how to attune to the world authentically; if we

know how to dwell in a meaningful way that remains true to our experience. Poetry is something that is always already in us and tends to surface when our most inner being meets the world in all its extraordinary and mysterious beauty, poetry makes the taken-for-granted seem unfamiliar and extraordinary. In *A Defense of Poetry*, 19th century poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1840: 3) explains how poetry

‘awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world; and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar...’

Similarly, Heidegger considers poetry to be a type of truth that reveals an ‘ontological truth or the truth of being’ (Gray, 1967: 106). He is not speaking about truth as true or false statements but rather as ‘a kind of “seeing” reached by means of a leap out of [our] habitual tendency to place [ourselves] over against the world of objects, which places us ‘in midst of’ the world so that we can encounter the ‘real’ as it unfolds rather than trying to invent the world ‘as an outsider’ (Gray, 1967: 106-7). Young People’s Poet Laureate Cecilia Knapp (2020) echoes Heidegger when she notes how poetry can help us express feelings that we have not quite been able to understand before. She comments on how the creation of poetry is ‘a process of wonder and discovery’ that ‘feels like grasping towards truth’.

Poetry is ideal for a phenomenological study of *bleeding garments*, not only because it provides a form of expression that can capture the abstract and emotive aspects of our experience, but because poetry in its broader sense can help shift our awareness to one that embraces the extraordinary and seemingly ungraspable. Furthermore, defining poetry in a broader sense expands the possibilities of poetry as a form of expression by placing emphasis on quality or tone rather than medium. In this research poetry is considered as a quality that can be present in all art forms rather than being dependent on written poems. Poetry is approached as a quality that can communicate the phenomenological essence of *bleeding garments* in a way that generates a heightened awareness of the possibility of the poetic. Thus, in this research poetry is a suggested presence rather than something concrete that can be explicitly defined as this or that.

Writing about the use of poetry in research, Sandra L. Faulkner observes that poetic expression unites ‘the heart, mind, imagination, body, and spirit’ by

inviting 'intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic responses' (Leggo, 2008a: 166-7 cited in Faulkner, 2017: 209). The use of poetic expression in research is referred to as poetic inquiry and it has become increasingly common in qualitative research as a research method, an analytical tool, and a way to represent research data. Poetic inquiry can be defined as 'a form of qualitative research...that incorporates poetry in some way as a component of investigation' and uses poetry as a literary artform 'to more authentically express human experiences' (Faulkner, 2017: 210). This research is a form of poetic inquiry in that it draws on poetry as a component of investigation; however, in contrast to traditional poetic inquiry where poetic language is used to access, analyse, and represent research data, this research draws on poetry in its broader sense and incorporates poetry not only as a form of imaginative and emotive language but also as an awareness and a quality that can manifest in both written and visual language. In a more practical sense, poetry manifests as a tone in the practice-led outcomes, as a form of expression in participatory workshops, and as a general suggestion of the possibility of the poetic in the overall research - including the written thesis. Poetry, then, forms a bridge between the abstract and the concrete; a bridge between the metaphysical materiality of *bleeding garments* and the practice-led phenomenological understanding of the garments.

As you may have noticed, I have now defined both poetry and magic as boundary-free modes of thought that acknowledge the interconnectedness of the world and provide ways to explore and make sense of the world through metaphor, imagination, and myth. If both magic and poetry can be defined as a heightened affective awareness, in what way, then, are they different? When we consider both according to their traditional definitions, magic is a belief system and poetry is a form of writing but as soon as we consider their broader definitions it becomes more difficult to distinguish between their definitions. Parallels can be drawn between the two and in the end, there is always a little magical possibility in poetry and a little poetic possibility in magic. Ultimately, however, magic is a mode of thought that is always grounded in the idea of contagion and similarity, it is an awareness where connection and influence is always present. Poetry on the other hand, is a kind of meeting point between our inner being and the world where a veil is lifted to reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary. It is a type of sudden 'seeing' that transcends the boundaries of the world as we normally perceive them.

Poetry has been a topic of debate at least since ancient Greece - perhaps even longer - and defining it is difficult if not impossible. The more I contemplated the nature of poetry, what it really is and where it comes from, the more challenging it became to define it. Whether it is a state of being, the desire to express oneself through poetry, or the moment a written poem or a work of art resonates, poetry in its most primary form always happens in the moment. Poetry, in the broadest sense, is not an intellectual endeavour, it is an affective encounter and the only way we can truly know when or what poetry is, is by feeling it and to feel it we must make room for it. This is perfectly captured by poet Emily Dickinson in a letter to T. W. Higginson on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August 1870, where Dickinson describes how the only way in which she knows poetry is when she encounters it:

‘If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know *that* is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know *that* is poetry. These are the only way I know it. Is there any other way.’ (Ratcliffe, 2016)

When we consider poetry as an affective encounter that we know by feeling rather than something that is bound to a medium, we understand that poetry in its broadest sense, manifests as a resonance, it is an encounter. The possibility of the poetic exists in any type of artwork or artefact as well as the natural world. Poetry, then, is not contingent on a specific medium or object but a result of our awareness of our being in relation to the world. Poetry as an affective awareness can make us perceive things more deeply and profoundly and therefore this research consciously seeks to create moments conducive for poetry by drawing attention to the unspoken elements of our experience and creating a tension between the concrete and the transcendent.

## 2.5 Concluding thoughts

‘Phenomenology aims to capture the instant moment’, as van Manen (2017a: 817) notes and the phenomenologist’s task is to retrospectively bring the phenomenon to life through examples. As per original phenomenological tradition, this research seeks to retrospectively conjure up the experience of intensely evocative garments so that we can reflect on this with wonder from within the phenomenon itself. This happens through different practice-led experiments and participatory workshops that allow me as an artist or participants to stay with the

phenomenon, capturing the experience as it happens in the moment. By connecting with a heightened affective awareness and engaging creatively with intensely evocative garments, this research seeks to suspend assumptions about our experience of these garments so that we can experience them through a sense of openness and wonder.

In this chapter I have proposed that the phenomenological attitude is most suitable for a deeper understanding of *bleeding garments* as a phenomenon and that there is an otherworldly aspect to our experience of these garments that should not be ignored. Because of their entanglement with the otherworld (defined in section 2.2, p. 44), exploring and capturing the experience of *bleeding garments* requires a shift in awareness that allows us to see beyond the world as we normally understand it and suspend previous associations and assumptions that we may have. Telling stories or writing *about* these garments and describing them through general emotional terms is unlikely to fully capture our experience of them. Instead, I propose that the phenomenological sense of wonder and poetry as a transcendent expression of our inner emotional world can help explore and capture parts of the subjective experiences of *bleeding garments*. In this research, poetry is approached as an awareness, a quality, and as an expression that enables us to grasp parts of the otherworldly quality of *bleeding garments*, while phenomenology informs the overall approach of inquiry, and magic is a mode of consciousness that attunes us to the possibilities and the interconnectedness of the world. Together these three form an interdisciplinary methodological framework that is conducive for a richer understanding of what the experience of *bleeding garments* is really like.

Considering that magic is about opening up to the otherworldly forces of the world, parallels can be drawn between the practice-led research process and the practice of magic. Like magic, this research is concerned with becoming 'aware of the connections that give rise to the life around us, and...exploring [these] connections in deeper, more profound ways'. (Best, 2018: 10). Forming a type of ritual for exploring the unseen aspects of *bleeding garments*, my transdisciplinary art practice provides a heightened embodied and intuitive way of thinking, through which I seek to understand and capture the phenomenological essence of *bleeding garments*.

## Chapter III - The Practice-led Research Process

### Making the Unseen Visible

This chapter looks at how the research process has evolved from contemplating garments as things with possibilities to an in-depth exploration of the phenomenological essence of *bleeding garments*. I begin by considering art practice as a method of knowing and how phenomenology has informed the research process, after which I provide a detailed description of the practice-led methods and outcomes, the aim and structure of the participatory workshops, and the role of exhibitions in the development of the research. It is important to reiterate that this thesis is concerned with a different way of knowing, a knowing that emerges through an intuitive, emotive, and embodied engagement with the world. A phenomenological practice-led approach offers a different way of understanding and engaging with the world and as I will explore in this chapter this is not a matter of opposing traditional scientific methods to alternative ways of knowing, but about acknowledging that to know what intensely evocative garments are like as an experience we must shift our awareness and apply an approach that embraces the emotive and the mysterious.

#### 3.1 Staying with things

‘It is to cheat oneself of the richest prize to preserve as a record merely the inventory of one’s discoveries and not this dark joy of the place of finding itself’ (Benjamin, 1932: 314 cited in Leslie, 1999: 108)

The phenomenological approach states that we must stay with things themselves to reach meaningful insights about what things are really like. Staying with things means that we do not remove the phenomenon from its moment, its environment, and its involvement with the world. It requires us to be present here and now and encounter the thing as it appears to us in the moment. In other words, we must dwell with the thing rather than step away from it and objectively observe it from the outside. Put more poetically, we must acknowledge the gathering of *the fourfold* and the possibilities that its mirror play presents. An important ‘part of the original intent of doing phenomenology’ is to approach an ordinary human experience *as a phenomenon* (van Manen & van Manen, 2021: 1073, italics added). Furthermore, phenomenology is not merely concerned with

explaining ‘what something is [in an absolute sense]; it also explores what this phenomenon can mean by offering possible interpretations’ (van Manen, 1997: 360). The practice-led outcomes introduced in this chapter therefore do not focus only on one approach but provide different interpretations of the phenomenological nature of *bleeding garments* through a range of methods and mediums.

The sentiment of staying with things is faintly echoed in Walter Benjamin’s views on the process of remembering the past. Alluding to the complex nature of memory, Benjamin suggests that we cheat ourselves if we merely settle for immediate associations and do not dig deeper when exploring our past. He argues that one should approach one’s own past like an archaeologist, unafraid to dig and get one’s hands dirty (Benjamin, 1932: 314 referenced in Leslie, 1999: 108). Though this research is not specifically concerned with remembering the past, it is concerned with a dark place of finding. Not the gloomy, unhappy kind of dark, but dark as in mysterious and elusive. As already stated, this, however, is not a place that is within the reach of traditional analytical methods. Reaching this shadowy place of finding requires us to attune to things on a deeper level, and rather than assuming that we already know what things are, we must embrace the possibilities they hold through a sense of wonder.

It is perhaps worth emphasising that this research draws on phenomenology in its ‘original [philosophical] sense’, as van Manen (2017a) puts it, and is therefore not concerned with comparing individual differences in experience, but rather seeks to discover ‘the inceptuality (beginning) of the deeper or primal meaning (van Manen, 2017a: 815) of the phenomenon of intensely evocative garments. In phenomenologically inspired sociology or psychology, analytical comparison of subject groups is a crucial aspect of the research process; however, the aim of this research is to explore the ‘structure or core essence(s) [of the phenomenon], the very thing(s) without which it would cease to be the phenomenon itself’ (Allen-Collinson & Evans, 2019: 296-7). Although the anecdotes, practice-led experiments, and workshop outcomes presented throughout this thesis are highly subjective, they are not intended to be analysed from a psychological or sociological perspective. The aim of this research is not to compare or analyse experiential differences, but to engage in a process of reflective wonder and ‘deep questioning’ to understand the primal meaning (van Manen, 2017a: 831) of the phenomenon of intensely evocative garments. The examples used in this thesis should therefore be approached as a narrative material that supports the process

of reflecting phenomenologically on the experience of intensely evocative garments.

There are certain kinds of presence ‘that cannot be grasped directly through common scientific language and qualitative research methods’, as phenomenologist Finn T. Hansen (2012: 150) has noted. An inventory of objective facts and anecdotes is unlikely to provide significant understanding of what our relationships with *bleeding garments* are genuinely like and therefore this research seeks to go *beyond the stories* we might normally share about evocative garments. The aim of this research is to dig deeper and explore an aspect that is often difficult to grasp through traditional analytical methods, that is, what we feel when we encounter *bleeding garments*. Rather than settling for what we assume that these garments are like, this research intentionally goes down the rabbit hole to discover *bleeding garments* through phenomenological wonder, while embracing the magical and the poetic. By applying the phenomenological approach to practice-led methods, the aim is to expand the materiality of *bleeding garments* into the metaphysical and to make their unseen elements visible. The intention is to explore and bring attention to elements that may otherwise be difficult to capture, or even acknowledge on a fully conscious level; things that resonate somewhere deep within us but that cannot be objectively perceived.

One of the main objectives of this research process is to stay with clothes as *things* from the very beginning. The purpose of this is to gain an understanding of garments as things with possibilities rather than assuming that garments always appear to us in a certain way. In practice, this happens through an explorative practice-led process that explores the nature of clothes as material things as well as the emotive quality of individual garments - in particular the black dress introduced in section 1.7. As part of this process, I also developed a workshop method which allows one to ‘uncover’ poetic fragments from evocative garments through a process of creative deconstruction. The material generated as a result of the workshop process - the uncovered fragments - reflects the emotional experience of the garment as perceived in the moment and provides a glimpse into people’s subjective experiences of individual garments. The material uncovered by workshop participants complements my practice-led process and provides further insights into how we experience evocative garments.

This chapter provides a detailed account of my process of contemplating garments through my art practice and introduces the method of creative

deconstruction used in the participatory workshops. It considers the role of my practice in the research process and situates the ideas explored in the first two chapters in a place of discovery through practice-led engagement. Although more comprehensively discussed in Chapter IV, in this chapter I begin to consider how deeper engagement with *bleeding garments* through practice-led methods can provide a much richer understanding of these garments as a phenomenon. To understand art practice as a research method, it is crucial to recognise the possibilities of art as a process of discovery and involvement and therefore, I will begin by situating my practice within a research context by considering art practice as a method of knowing.

### 3.2 Unfolding through and along

‘From a Zen perspective, works of art that are done in moments of enlightenment are indeed mediums for others to grasp the ungraspable’ (Juniper, 2003: 93)

The above sentiment echoes Heidegger’s (1971) views on art as a revealing of the true being of things, while also highlighting the involvement of the artist. Traditionally, the Western approach to art has tended to be overly concerned with representation, symbolism, and outcome and the value of art is often determined by aspects such as the artwork as an object and the status of the artist - not always but often. Japanese Zen philosophy, on the other hand, places emphasis on the wisdom that art holds and its ‘ability to transfer this wisdom to others’ (Juniper, 2003: 94). It recognises that the world is in a constant process of transformation and becoming and that part of the value of art lies in its ability to capture the world as it shifts, transforms, and intertwines. Thus, art as a practice is not simply a means to an end but a process of uncovering and unveiling the world; art is a process through which we come to know the world.

According to Zen philosophy the artist is seen as a medium who channels their experience of the world into acts of creativity (Juniper, 2003: 91). It ‘is the supreme achievement of an artist to reach the levels where *conscious effort and thought are abandoned to the dictums of the unseen forces* that guide our lives’ (Juniper, 2003: 92, italics added). Pure artistic expression should not be driven by self-indulgence or self-promotion but spring from a heightened awareness of the world that is free from the ego (Juniper, 2003: 92). This does not mean that

the artist should seek detachment from the self to gain a completely objective view of the world but that they should - as Heidegger might say - dwell authentically in the world by staying true to their own Being and the world. The true artist is not distracted by fame, fortune, and self-promotion but rather holds a certain humble openness to the world and encounters it as it unfolds around and through them. In other words, one might say that to discover the magic and knowledge that can emerge through art practice, the artist must dwell attentively and authentically with things, rather than assuming the role of an outside observer. It is this kind of authentic involvement that makes art practice particularly compatible with the phenomenological approach.

Despite the ever-changing nature of knowledge, it is still predominantly understood as something we know, full stop, and is often associated with an accumulation 'of true descriptions and rational explanations...for how things work in our physical, social, and cultural worlds' (Johnson, 2010: 142). However, as Mark Johnson argues we should understand and approach knowledge as a '*process of knowing*', rather than defining it as 'a body of true statements' (Johnson, 2010: 144, italics added). This more comprehensive approach to knowledge involves a shift in focus that places emphasis on process and acknowledges the role of the feeling - and moving - body in the process of knowing (Johnson, 2010: 145).

Arguing for a more dynamic definition of knowledge, Tim Ingold (2011: 154) proposes that knowledge should be understood as a movement that is not produced in one direction but rather integrated 'alongly'. By this Ingold (2011: 154) means that knowledge is a journey and that everyone who engages in knowledge, even scientists, are ultimately wayfarers who 'journey *through* the world *along* paths of travel'; as inhabitants of the world, we know as we go. Echoing Ingold's notion of knowledge, practitioner-researcher Ellen Sampson notes how in her research on wornness and the affects of wearing, she 'was "along with" her subject' by embracing the complex entanglement between her as a maker, wearer, and researcher. Sampson (2022: 41) uses the relationship between her embodied self and the shoes she made as a locus for knowledge; materiality becomes a kind of co-creator which contributes to the development of the research process. Sampson writes that she chose to 'embrace the entangled position of maker and wearer as researcher' rather than 'attempting to lessen' this entanglement in search for 'an elusive objectivity'. In this research I apply a similar approach, where I as a practitioner-researcher place my own experience

of (intensely) evocative garments at the centre of the research process. My creative engagement - as well as participant workshops - thus constitute the space where the research takes place.

Drawing on Ingold, Sampson (2022: 41) notes how in anthropology and ethnography, the researcher must observe from the inside and embrace their relationship with the subject. Phenomenology draws on a similar sentiment of placing oneself as an active participant on the inside, rather than a passive observer outside the phenomenon. In this research, it is my practice that enables this inside perspective and allows me to stay with the phenomenon as it happens in the moment. In Sampson's research her subjective, sensory experience of wearing became inseparable from the research and this is precisely where the knowledge emerged. Although not specifically concerned with wearing, this research also embraces subjective knowledge and acknowledges that since we experience things subjectively in a world, we cannot separate ourselves or the world from our experience. As Sampson's research also shows, for a deeper understanding of our experience of material things, we must embrace this entanglement between subject, experience, and world. Approaching knowledge as a process that happens through and along unlocks the possibilities of knowledge and emphasises that knowing can emerge just as much through embodied and felt interaction as it can through rational and systematic analysis.

This research is concerned not only with one aspect of knowing, but with a felt knowledge that combines the cognitive, sensory, intuitive, and the emotive; it draws from embodied knowing in the most expanded sense. The aim is to avoid a kind of removed objective analysis and instead adopt 'a non-procedural approach' (Hansen, 2012: 4) to get to the heart of *bleeding garments* from within the phenomenon itself. The process is deliberately open-ended and contemplative, partly because embracing the flow of the process is central to my art practice, but more importantly because this is precisely where some of the most meaningful insights of this research emerge. I argue that traditional research methods are inadequate and may even result in a distorted understanding of *bleeding garments* precisely because they tend to objectively analyse the phenomenon from the outside, essentially separating the garment from the experience of it., art-as-research or practice-led methods are particularly well-suited to help us explore things from within our own experience. Furthermore, practice-led research and phenomenology are particularly compatible because they are both contemplative and conducive for discovering or even stumbling upon knowledge.

When free from expectations and self-promotion, art practice is always connected to the moment and is therefore highly conducive for capturing experience. Since this research is concerned with how *bleeding garments* are experienced as they appear in the moment, it requires an approach that embraces the abstract and fleeting nature of the experienced moment. The embodied and intuitive nature of art as a practice can create room for contemplation that enables us to connect with the world as it flows through us and lingers around us. This, however, requires us to understand art practice not as a means to an end but as a meaningful act in and of itself that can reveal things that we cannot otherwise perceive. From this perspective, art is not just about finished outcomes but about being open to what unfolds along the journey.

### 3.3 Contemplation through wonder

‘...reflection led only by intellectual curiosity and interest is...keeping us away from obtaining a thinking and deeper wonder and connectedness with our...experience of seeing the world as a fundamental mystery’ (Hansen, 2012: 5)

As noted in Chapter II, wonder is central to the phenomenological attitude. Through a process of wonder and contemplation, phenomenology seeks to transcend initial assumptions and discover what things are like as they appear to us in the moment. By drawing on examples such as imagined scenarios, anecdotes, and poetic descriptions, phenomenology asks what things are like; is it like this, or like that, could it be like this or like that? This research builds on the same sentiment, however; rather than being a process of traditional philosophical thinking and writing, the process of wonder and contemplation happens partly through my art practice. The goal of the practice-led process is not to produce specific outcomes but to contemplate the phenomenon of *bleeding garments* through practice-led experiments that are underpinned by a sense of magical and poetic awareness and phenomenological wonder. Rather than being bound to textual examples, the phenomenological examples that this research draws on also take the form of creative experiments such as images, poems, and installations.

Discovering the world through wonder requires us to be open to the possibilities of things as they present themselves to us in the moment and to encounter them

holistically and intuitively; to be open to their mystery. Apart from distinctly phenomenological studies, traditional scholarly analysis is often removed from the moment itself. Traditional methods tend to dissect the phenomenon and study its parts, often from the outside and by trying to be as objective as possible. In studies on evocative garments this is often done through an analysis of anecdotes about how and why certain garments have become meaningful (see for example Banim & Guy, 2001; Bye & McKinney, 2007; Weber, 2011). As I argue in this thesis, an approach that predominantly focuses on anecdotal facts will not fully capture what intensely evocative garments are actually like as a phenomenon. What makes *bleeding garments* extraordinary are the encounters between the person and the garment and therefore to understand them as a phenomenon we must consider our raw, pre-reflective experience.

Moments, however, are transient and as soon as we turn to reflecting on and analysing an experience, we partly or completely lose touch with the actual moment, and this makes our experiences difficult to capture. Despite being a challenging endeavour, inquiry into experience is not a futile task because it can provide knowledge about our being in relation to the world that we inhabit. We may not be able to reflect consciously on the pre-reflective aspects of our experiences, but they do ‘carry the meaningfulness-character of the concrete context of life’ (van Manen, 2017a: 813). This does, however, require an approach that embraces the embodied, emotive, nuanced, and elusive elements of our experience. It requires a type of knowing that remains open to the possibilities of the world and does not close in on itself. It requires us to be open to wonder and wonderment, to see the extraordinary in the ordinary, and to stay with things as they appear in the moment.

As a practice, art can enable us to encounter the world in the moment, but only if we embrace the idea of art as a way of knowing that is born from authentic encounters with the world where the artist, like a kind of medium, channels their experience through their practice. It is a way of looking deeply and abandoning the idea of representation so that the world can be encountered in its “is-ness” (Juniper, 2003: 95); a sentiment that also echoes the purpose and methodology of phenomenology. Just like phenomenology in its true sense is about letting things show themselves in the moment, art in its purest form is also about encountering things as they unfold in the moment. In this sense, neither phenomenology nor art is about following a linear, goal-oriented process but about following the possibilities and forces of things and occurrences to gain a

richer understanding of what things are and can be like. This is not to say that all art is necessarily phenomenological, but that the artistic process has certain phenomenological potential. Harnessing this potential, however, requires us to understand art practice as a meaningful journey in itself rather than a mere means to an end. We must approach art practice as a process of wonder and discovery that takes place in the moment.

The process of wonder that this research builds on, began with a simple contemplation of garments as *things*. The intention was to step back and rediscover garments as things in and of themselves rather than representations of something; to offer 'a counterpoint to the dominant discourse that focuses upon the value of the garment as a signifier' (Sampson, 2022: 226). Drawing on theories of entanglement and Heidegger's (1971) fourfold, I set out to observe garments through a sense of wonder to discover the curious and the poetic in the seemingly ordinary and taken-for-granted aspects of clothes. By encountering garments as they appeared in the moment, the intention was to go beyond the conventional forms that show garments laid flat, neatly folded, hanging on a hanger, or dressed on a body. I saw it as crucial to the process of understanding *bleeding garments* as a phenomenon to contemplate garments beyond their conventional and assumed appearance. Understanding garments as something more than a representation of the body or of identity is essential in the task of exploring *bleeding garments* because it helps us see them as things in and of themselves, not only adjuncts to the body.

Evolving alongside my theoretical contemplation of garments as material things, this process of encountering garments through wonder first took the form of charcoal frottages and photographs of abandoned garments. Rather than evoking immediate associations of the absent body, these images show the garments in an in-between, almost animated state, suggesting that there are other states a garment can be in than being worn, waiting to be worn, or representing a body. *Becomings*, a series of charcoal frottages, explores the fluid character of cloth and captures garments in a ghostly state of becoming (see fig. 2 and 3). These frottage imprints started as an exploration of trace and draw on the magical idea that things that have once been in contact will always maintain some kind of contact, which is reflected in the direct contact between garment and the material on which the tracing was done. At first, I simply chose garments that I found 'lingering' on chairs - garments that were in an in-between-state - after which I

also started tracing the seams, folds, and creases of garments that are emotionally meaningful to me.

Following the texture of the garments, these imprints create an appearance of movement and highlights the ‘thingly’ character of the garments while the ephemeral nature of the charcoal creates a sense of temporality. This gives the images a ghost-like appearance that hints to an elusive presence rather than something concrete - a theme that is central to this research. These moments of tracing resulted in an intimate exploration of garments and helped me understand clothes as *things* with possibilities. The following reflective diary entry describes the intimate quality of the process itself:

‘Prompted by the idea of clothes as processes of becoming and the current flow of my own clothes - which has shifted from an extensive wardrobe to a small collection of certain clothes that move between the chair in the bathroom and the chair in the bedroom - I ended up creating frottages of a few garments placed in shapes that highlighted the soft fluidity of the cloth. Searching for and tracing the landscape of creases and folds underneath the paper created a different kind of connection with the material, one of felt shapes and volume. As the cloth underneath would easily shift, I had to precede with care, maintaining a light but steady contact with the surface as my hands moved across the paper.’ (reflective diary entry, 2021).

The first frottages that I made were on dotted pattern paper because that was the only large paper that I had access to at the time. I quickly noticed, however, that there was something rigid about the paper that seemed to almost resist the garment underneath. This led me to testing the technique on cotton calico, which not only generated a different result but also a different experience. On cloth the charcoal slid silk-like across the surface and produced more distinct shapes. It was as if the cotton calico and the cloth of the garment somehow recognised each other. Simultaneously creating a distance and bringing me closer to the garment, this process allowed me to encounter the garments through a sense of openness and was the beginning of a serendipitous process of discovery that would influence my overall research process. The contact barrier created between the garment and the cloth, separated me from the garment as it would normally be perceived while also creating an intimate moment of rediscovery and remaking.

Rediscovery through wonder is also present in a collection of photographs of abandoned garments called *Found Entanglements*. While contemplating garments as things, I started noticing items of clothing dropped on the pavement, left on a park bench, or even tangled with the branches of *clematis vitalba* and

other climbers or trees. In *Found Entanglements* each garment has its own distinct character that is influenced by its relationship to the surrounding environment, the type of cloth it is made of, and our subjective encounter with the images. For example, in 'Specimen 27' the garment appears heavy and almost seems to be absorbed by the surface it is lying on (see Fig. 4) whereas in 'Specimen 7' (Fig. 5) the two garments lie suspended on the supporting branches. In these photographs there is a tension between the concrete and the unknown which gives the abandoned garments a quality that is both familiar and strange. While they do still allude to the absent body, they also appear as if having acquired a life of their own, slowly slithering like creatures into the unknown. The abandoned garments might at first seem like empty husks left behind like when a snake sheds its skin, but when we encounter them with a sense of wonder they acquire an unfamiliar almost animated quality.

The process of rediscovering garments as *things* sets the foundation for this phenomenology of *bleeding garments* by showing garments as things with possibilities that extend beyond the idea of garments as representations of style, identity, the body, or memories. It introduces the garments not as mere adjuncts to a body or a person, but as things in themselves, which is also central to the phenomenon of *bleeding garments*. Unintentionally, there is a certain poetic undertone to the early practice-led explorations, a poetic possibility. Although poetry as a quality in my art practice is more consciously explored in later works, a sense of the poetic was present from the very beginning of the practice-led process. When poetry is considered in its broadest sense as a heightened awareness of our being in relation to the world, it is difficult to identify exactly what poetry is or when it happens; however, poetic possibility and the poetic moment is always about a certain tension, a kind of charged silence. This silence often lingers between what is there and what is suggested, between the concrete and the ephemeral. The frottage imprints and the abandoned garments both present us with this slight tension between presence and absence. It is important to consider, however, that to sense this tension, one needs to stay with the images and let them unfold in the moment rather than analyse them solely based on context and symbolism.

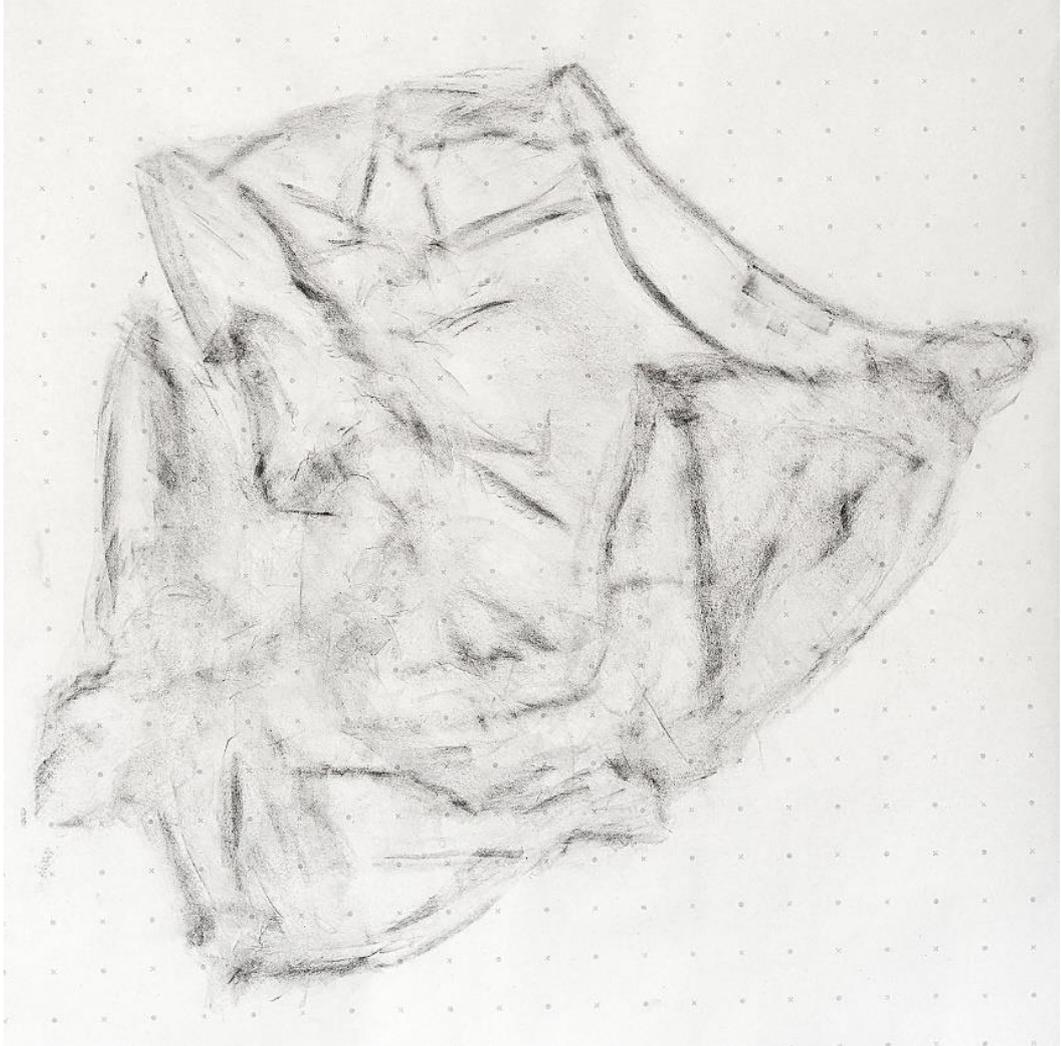


Figure 2 A ghostly imprint of a garment. Frottage of T-shirt, *Becomings* (2021) [charcoal on dotted pattern paper]

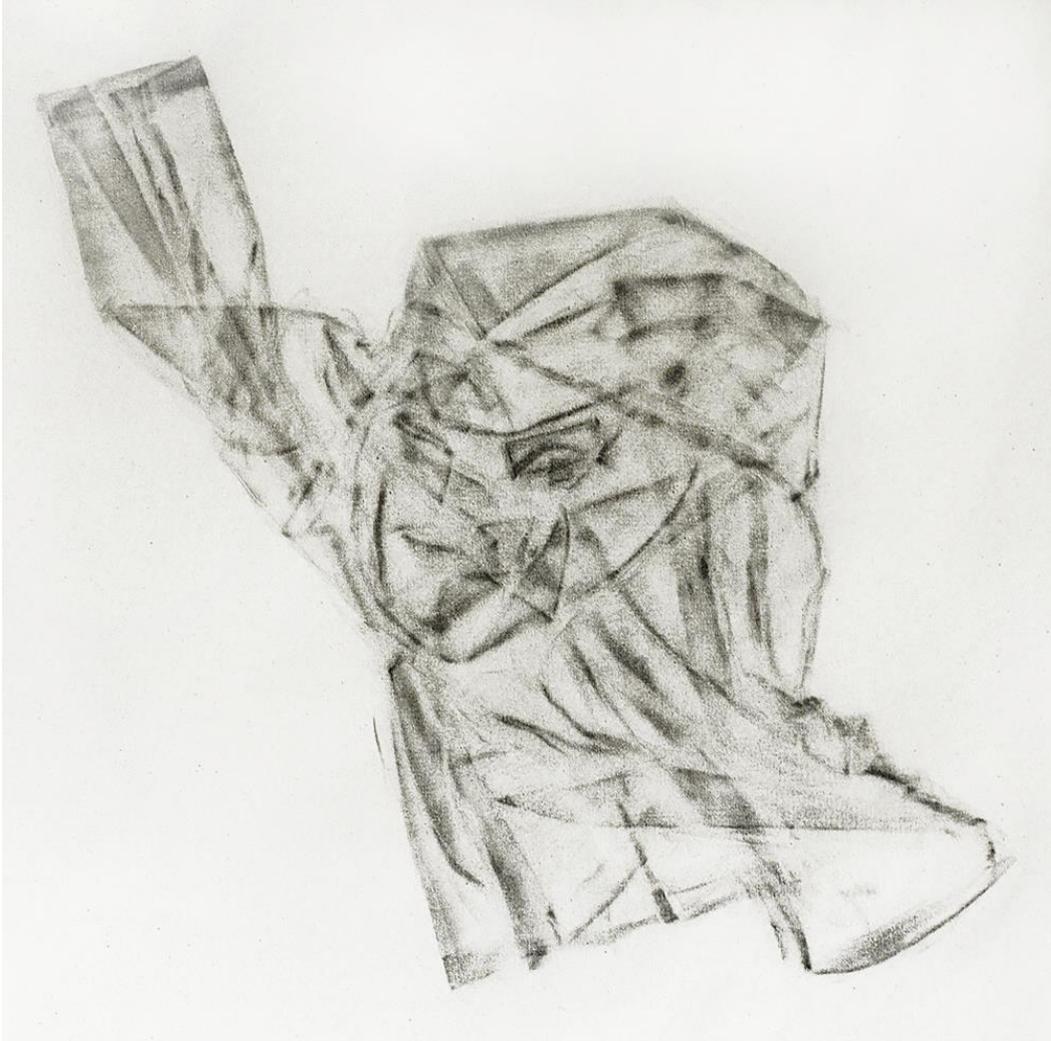


Figure 3 Seams, folds, creases. Frottage of long-sleeved top, *Becomings* (2021) [charcoal on cotton calico]



Figure 4 An abandoned garment becoming merged with the pavement. 'Specimen 27', *Found Entanglements* (2021)



Figure 5 Two abandoned garments cradled by climbing plants. 'Specimen 7', *Found Entanglements* (2021)



Figure 6 Abandoned garment blending in with its surroundings. 'Specimen 9', *Found Entanglements* (2021)



Figure 7 An abandoned garment that has been continuously run over by cars. 'Specimen 31', *Found Entanglements* (2022)

### 3.4 Poetic contemplation

‘Get the tone right and you have a true story on your hands’ (Murakami, 2006: 81)

There are certain things that cannot be understood based on facts, but are rather felt through their unique quality, the tone or texture that they evoke. In the introduction to one of his short stories, writer Haruki Murakami suggests that when telling a story, tone is more important than facts and that one ‘could even say that there are stories that are not true at all’ despite being factually accurate (Murakami, 2006: 81). It is not only storytelling and written stories that are subject to tone, the way we experience the world is also always to some degree subject to tone. Tone has to do with meaning and experience and impresses and affects us by leaving ‘visceral and corporeal tracts’ (van Manen, 1997: 364). It is important to consider the vital role of tone in this research since it is precisely through the subtle nuances of tone that we can begin to understand and capture what *bleeding garments* are like as an experience. It is not their facts that hold their phenomenological essence but the quality of them as an experience. It is partly through the ways in which their tone affects us that we feel their meaning and know what they are as they are.

But what exactly is tone? Where is it located and how does it emerge? There is more than one definition of ‘tone’ but the one that applies in this context is a general mood or the main qualities of an experience. According to Max van Manen (1997: 359) tone means to let something ‘speak to us, address us, so that its deeper meaning has a noncognitive effect’ and is also crucial in phenomenological understanding. Tone can be considered a quality, or a texture, and can therefore be present in both text and sound and can even be said to appear in materials such as cloth. Tone or quality is not, however, something that can be easily identified as one specific thing. We cannot read a text and point to one specific thing that gives it tone, nor can we say that the quality of cloth can be determined only by, say, its smoothness. Tone is a confluence of elements - both concrete and intangible - that together create a texture that influences how we experience something. Tone can be distinctly felt yet it is somehow always difficult to explain exactly what is being felt. Even when it is a haptic quality or texture it is never easy to distinguish exactly why something feels the way it feels.

Tone also shifts and changes depending on the context and our mood and is difficult to fully encounter or comprehend if we are not present.

As already mentioned, the practice-led process was informed by a poetic awareness from the very beginning. Once it became clear that poetry had a central role in the research process and in understanding the experience of *bleeding garments*, it also became relevant to explore the definition of poetry in relation to the research. The theoretical side of this is considered in chapter II, where the definition of poetry is expanded from the conventional understanding of poetry as a literary genre to a broader definition of poetry as a heightened affective awareness and an unveiling of truth. When we consider poetry in the broader sense, tone is important because it is tone that makes poetry feel like poetry, not facts. Therefore, poetry is never dependent on a specific medium but rather dependent on a certain tension that produces a tone or quality conducive for poetic possibility.

Building on the notion that poetry in its broader sense is not dependent on poems, part of the practice-led research process involved exploring the role of poetry in my art practice as well as poetry as a quality in art. This does not mean that poetry as a written expression is excluded but rather entails a broadening of the possibilities of how poetry is understood and expressed. As already suggested, poetic quality is born from a tension between the ordinary and the mysterious, the concrete and the ephemeral and is experienced as a kind of charged silence that oscillates between the two. As poet Ben Lerner (2016: 14-5) suggests, what makes a poem, or an artwork, resonate poetically is a certain tension where we can sense the gap between the virtual and the concrete. Because we can never fully capture the ineffable quality of the poetic moment, Lerner even argues that poetry is not difficult, as some people may think, but in fact impossible. He says that as a poet, one lives 'in the space between what [one] is moved to do and what [one] can do' and argues that ultimately poems are always failed attempts at capturing that feeling that moves us to create poetry in the first place (Lerner, 2016: 15).

Accepting the idea that all we can do is 'clear a space' for poetry (Lerner, 2016: 9), I first explored poetry as a quality in art through an installation that seeks to capture the notion of *bleeding garments* and my personal experience of how I feel in the presence of my black dress. The installation was exhibited at the *Practice as Research: PhD Work in Progress* exhibition in the UCA Foyer Gallery in Farnham in December 2021. Without immediately revealing its meaning, *My*

*Bleeding Dress* presents the viewer with a certain uncanny presence that is both tragic and compelling. As can be seen in Fig. 8, the way the dress hangs from the hanger was influenced by the frottage imprints and the abandoned garments, making the dress appear as somewhere between cloth and viscous substance. What is important in this installation is not the dress as a dress, but the dress as a thing with an intensely evocative presence, and therefore the weight of the fabric is used to create a certain heaviness to suggest that the garment is saturated with emotion and meaning. This is further suggested through the threads that flow from the dress into bowls of fake blood, connecting the materiality of the dress with the metaphor of blood (Fig. 9).

When installing the piece in the Foyer Gallery, I had the chance to observe people's reactions and noticed that it turned some heads and evoked some *oooh's*. In other words, it had a presence that grabbed people's attention, which suggests that I succeeded in evoking a certain intense presence. Whether people liked it or not was irrelevant since the purpose of the installation was to create a quality that reflects the intense presence that I experience in relation to my black dress. The responses to the installation happened by chance; however, later in my research process I engaged in more deliberate observation and conversations with people to gain insights about how people experienced the practice-led outcomes. The responses evoked by the *My Bleeding Dress* installation were thus useful in that they influenced my approach to how I exhibited practice-led outcomes later in the research process.

Another important part of exploring the role of poetry in my art practice was a process of expanding the meaning of a poem that was uncovered from the black dress through a process of creative deconstruction, the precursor to the participatory workshop method used in this research (I return to this in more detail on page 78). The process of expanding the meaning of the poem was done by contemplating the unique meaning of the individual words within the poem in relation to the poem. Although thematically this does not form a central part of the overall research process it played a role in my understanding of poetry in its broader sense. The most important insights that emerged during this process were the notion of scale and the realisation that poetry is always limited by our materials and what we can do - echoing Lerner's (2016) comment about the tension between what we are compelled to do and what we actually can do. Thus, any poetic outcomes created during this research should be understood as incomplete, they are simply fragments of what originally inspired the poetry.



Figure 8 Installation that seeks to capture the uncanny presence of my black dress while also exploring poetry as a quality in art. *My Bleeding Dress* (2021) [garment, sewing thread, and glass bowls with fake blood]



Figure 9 Detail of *My Bleeding Dress* (2021)

My art practice allowed me to explore poetry in its broadest sense in a way that I could not have achieved only through theoretical analysis. It is through my practice that I could bring together philosophical and theoretical ideas about poetry and its possibilities in relation to my art practice. Writing about her own

practice, academic and artist Barbara Bolt (2010: 74) notes how material practice can become a ‘means for unifying mind, body, and spirit, in action’. ‘In blurring the boundaries between the conscious and unconscious, [the] creative process allows the silenced utterance to be spoken’ (Bolt, 2010: 74). Approaching poetry as a quality in my art practice has been instrumental in this research because it has allowed me to tune into the quality of *bleeding garments* as experienced in the moment through a heightened affective awareness that remains true to the complex and mysterious nature of the phenomenon itself. Situating myself as an artist within the research has enabled me to channel my own experience of *bleeding garments* through my practice by bringing together the concrete and the metaphysical.

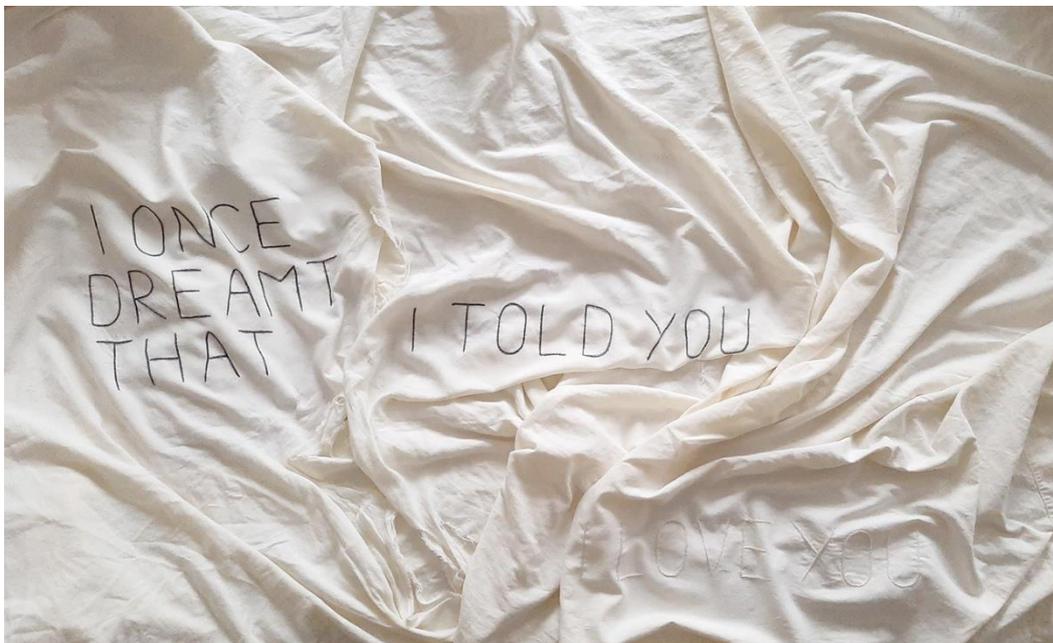


Figure 10 A word from the poem *untitled* expanded into an embroidered bedsheet. ‘carefully’, *Beyond the Dress: an expanding poem* (2021)

The notion that art as a practice can uncover a hidden knowledge echoes ideas explored in philosophical writings by Kearney (2008), Heidegger (1971), and Shelley (1840), who understand poetry as something almost ineffable that can reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary. Similarly, since art is not ruled by boundaries, it enables us to connect with the world in a holistic way that engages several senses and modes of consciousness at once. Art practice brings together the conscious and the unconscious and illuminates the extraordinary in the

ordinary. Just like poetry allows us to transmit those feelings that we have ‘not quite been able to understand before’ (Knapp, 2020), so can art help us explore, express, and understand things that are otherwise difficult to describe. It can unveil the possibilities and hidden beauty of the world by uniting us with the world rather than objectively placing us outside of it.

Artistic practice is particularly conducive for understanding material things because it is itself usually born from material and sensory engagement. We cannot fully understand material things simply by conjuring up a theoretical image of them, we need to engage with them, and we need to engage with them not only on our terms but on their terms as well. Materiality must be engaged with and understood as a sensory and sensual experience that grows from a kind of meeting point between us and things. Even an image of a garment alludes to the tangible materiality of the garment and can evoke different responses depending on the character of the cloth and its entanglement with *the fourfold*. What I mean by the entanglement with *the fourfold* here, is that things are always more than the sum of form and matter, they are experienced as things entangled with other things, whether these are concrete things, imagined things, or emotions. Since art and poetry are not ruled by boundaries, they have the ability to capture and express the complexity of these entanglements.

### 3.5 Uncovering poetic fragments

‘...only by evoking it are we able to make something present’ (Linschoten, 1987: 99 cited in van Manen, 1997: 353)

There is something uncanny and elusive about *bleeding garments* that is not easily defined or rationalised; they are felt rather than cognitively perceived and are therefore difficult to describe using conventional language. Though we have words for emotions, the way we feel is never easily captured with just a few generic words and the same emotion, such as love or hate for instance, may and will shift depending on context and mood. Furthermore, a range of different emotions can be present at the same time and the boundaries between them can be blurry. Emotions may share certain basic qualities but beyond that they are subjective, complex, and nuanced. As academics Todd Lubart and Isaac Getz (1997: 286) note, emotions are multidimensional and the social representation of an emotion ‘is often insufficient to describe the...richness of an individual’s

experience'. Using common words to describe the experience of *bleeding garments* is therefore unlikely to capture the complexity of them as an experience.

Part of the reason that it is difficult to capture the experience of *bleeding garments* is because descriptions are thoughts about feelings and tend to filter out the pre-reflective elements of an experience through rationalisation. To get to the heart of *bleeding garments* we must access our pre-reflective experience of them, our first thoughts. 'First thoughts have tremendous energy', as poet and writer Natalie Goldberg notes, 'but our internal censor usually squelches them', which means that 'we live in the realm of second and third thoughts...twice and three times removed from the direct connection of the first' (Goldberg, 2005: 9). Raw thoughts are also free from the ego and that part of us that tries to control and 'prove the world is permanent and solid, enduring and logical' (Goldberg, 2005: 9). Egoless expression, however, is 'full of energy because it is expressing the *truth of the way things are*' Goldberg, 2005: 9, italics added). These so called first thoughts, the raw material of our experience, form the type of truth that phenomenology is concerned with and are key to understanding *bleeding garments* as a phenomenon. However, as the introductory quotation suggests, it is only by evoking these raw thoughts that we can make them present enough to capture them, or rather, capture fragments of them.

Using the metaphor of a caged animal to illustrate the restlessness that grows inside her, writer and poet Dominique Hecq (2015: 140) explains how her poems begin as an inner disturbance. As mentioned in Chapter I when I introduced the black dress, there is something about the presence of the dress that stirs something deep within me, a kind of internal agitation. Early on in my research process - before I started my PhD - I turned to written poetry when I discovered that I was unable to capture how the dress made me feel through any form of conventional language. My first attempt was to write about the dress by trying to contain some of its mysterious quality through a fragmented narrative and the silences between the lines - similar to Sophie Calle's (2004b) 'The Letter' (see Chapter I, page 28). This, however, felt like an attempt to impose a narrative on the dress and although it captured parts of the moment that the dress is connected to, the poem had somehow come from the wrong place. It still did not come even close to capturing the feelings the dress evoked, the cause of that internal agitation. The reason that writing *about* the dress felt unsuccessful, was because it was a process of writing down thoughts on thoughts about feelings.

The written poetry, thus, did not reflect the raw experience of the dress but rather what I thought the dress represented.

Growing even more curious about the dress as a *thing* that expands beyond its concrete materiality and feeling unsatisfied with the inability of conventional language to capture my experience of it, a serendipitous moment eventually led me to discover a creative approach that allowed me to ‘uncover’ poetry from the dress. This method was born in a moment of heightened affective awareness where I silently meditated on the dress and its presence, engaging with its materiality right there and then without any kind of goal in mind. Then, suddenly, it was as if a veil was lifted, and the dress revealed itself through poetry. Immersed in a kind of creative trance I wrote down first thoughts and feelings that somehow seemed to come from another place than my previous attempts at capturing my relationship with the dress. Evoked by the concrete and metaphysical elements of the dress, this deconstructive process generated poetic fragments from the raw thoughts that emerged in that particular moment. By continuing to intuitively shape the fragments into a narrative (see poem below), the emotive texture of the dress finally began to reveal itself and I could see that there was more to the dress than I had initially thought.

*untitled*

‘No strings’

you said

so I carefully folded myself into your

creased

chaotic

abstract

history

and stitched a neat little hem

to hold the dust of future memories

it’s a complex weave

delicate, erratic, and slightly warped

(poem uncovered from black dress, 2018)

The discovery of the aforementioned method was crucial to the development of this research as it provided a simple approach for exploring *bleeding garments* beyond their assumed narratives. My initial experiments with this method led to the development of the participatory workshop that forms one of the main methods of inquiry in this research. To complement my practice-led experiments, it was important to the research process to also get a sense of how other people experience garments that are meaningful to them. Drawing on an argument that intuitive dwelling only is not enough in phenomenology and that this should be complemented by discussion and a communal wonder (Hansen, 2012), this research does not only rely on my personal experience, but also seeks to understand how other people experience garments that are meaningful to them.

Since this research aims to move beyond anecdotes we might share about garments, the participatory element also requires a method that allows people to access their garments through deeper engagement. Rather than drawing on interviews or surveys, this research uses a creative workshop method that invites participants to engage with their garments in the moment. The aim of the participatory workshop is to facilitate a moment of heightened awareness that is conducive for intuitive and embodied knowledge. During the workshop, participants are invited to explore their garments in the moment through a series of creative prompts that slowly uncover glimpses of the emotional experience of the garments as perceived in the moment. Rather than being a process of writing *about* the garments, the aim of the workshop is to connect with an intuitive and poetic knowledge that emerges from deep within - i.e., first thoughts.

Effective qualitative research 'is marked by a rich complexity of abundance' (Winter, 2000 cited in Tracy, 2010: 841) and therefore a key component in qualitative research is to convey the complexity of the research by showing rather than telling (Tracy, 2010: 843) using 'bountifully supplied, generous, and unstinting' (Tracy, 2010: 841) descriptions and illustrations. The purpose of the material generated during the workshops is precisely this, to show the multifaceted ways in which intensely evocative garments can appear to us through insights that are 'at least as complex, flexible, and multifaceted as the phenomen[on]' itself (Tracy, 2010: 841, original italics). The workshop outcomes are an extension of my autobiographical practice-led experiments and add to the richness of the research insights. Like the practice-led outcomes, the poetic fragments discovered by participants are intended as phenomenological examples that seek to bring the nuanced complexity of the phenomenon to life.

Furthermore, the workshop method is part of the search for a potential methodology for exploring intensely evocative garments and maps out a process that is conducive for moving beyond anecdotes to better capture the subjective experience of the garment.

The aim of this research is to explore how intensely evocative garments are experienced in the moment and therefore the emphasis is on the encounter between person and garment. Daniel Miller notes that in ethnographic studies on the relationships people have with material things it is worth not only focusing on narratives told by informants, but to also let the things themselves speak. Miller points out that:

‘Language is often defensive, restricted and carefully constructed as a narrative. You can ask people about themselves, but the results are often much less informative than one would like’ (Miller, 2008: 2).

Echoing the above observation by Miller, the workshop is designed to move beyond carefully constructed and assumed narratives that confirm and illustrate facts rather than allowing for new truths to emerge. By creating a moment where the participant can enter into an intuitive dialogue with their garment, the workshop allows for a deeper understanding of how it manifests as an experience.

The workshops happened ‘in that liberal spirit of taking people as you find them and letting them emerge as they would’ (Miller, 2008: 5). Because this research is concerned with the phenomenon - the encounter between person and garment - there was an element of self-selectivity in the recruitment of participants. It was important to find participants who had an emotional connection to a specific garment. There was no target group set for the workshops and participants were recruited based on interest, which ensured that the people who joined had personal experience of evocative garments. A total of 10 people joined the four separate workshops that took place in venues suitable for facilitating workshops, including the University of the Creative Arts campuses, the Folkestone Bookshop, and the Nucleus Arts Creative Cabin. The common denominator among the participants was their involvement in the creative industries and an interest in the affective roles clothes play in their lives. The estimated participant ages ranged from early 20s to 60s and there were six women, three men and one non-binary person. In terms of race representation, there were two non-white participants and eight white participants. It is important to note, however, that

since this research does not focus on how cultural and societal factors impact individual experience, no demographical data was collected during the workshops. The above details are based on observations of how the participants presented themselves, rather than recorded evidence of how the participants self-identify.

Although phenomenology can address both individual experience and the phenomenon, these are ‘different problems’ and therefore it is important to distinguish between them (Giorgi, 2008: 4). As previously noted, this research is not founded upon demographical differences or similarities and therefore such data analysis is not the focus of the workshops. This research is concerned with understanding the ‘essential characteristics of intensely evocative garments ‘regardless of who the experiencer is’ (Giorgi, 2008: 7). It is important to keep in mind that what we are exploring here is the phenomenon and that although the practice-led experiments and the poetic fragments ‘uncovered’ during the workshops draw on personal experience, they should not be treated as empirical “samples” of factual data (van Manen, 2014: 256-60 referenced in van Manen, 2017a: 820) that needs to ‘be coded, sorted, abstracted, and accordingly analysed in some “systematic” manner’ (van Manen, 2017a: 810). Rather, phenomenological examples function as eidetic windows into the phenomenon that ‘in a vocative manner...lets one experience what one does not know’ (van Manen & van Manen, 2021: 1078).

From a sociological or psychological perspective, a ‘lack of...analytic attention to the specificities’ of experience ‘in relation to, for example, gender, age, ethnicity’ can be seen as problematic as our individual experiences are always influenced by personal, cultural, and societal circumstances (Allen-Collinson & Evans, 2019: 298). This research acknowledges that our experiences are always subjective and shifting, but the focus is philosophical, and the aim is to explore the originary elements of human experience that connect us regardless of our demographical profiles. By using examples in the phenomenological sense (that is, as evocative narratives that allow the phenomenon to be born within the reader or viewer), this research shows how the phenomenon of intensely evocative garments is both a highly subjective experience and is born from our inherent tendency to connect with the world through a heightened affective awareness. There is a paradoxical element to the nature of phenomenological examples in that they seek to provide phenomenologically universal descriptions through concrete narratives. As Max

and Michael van Manen (2021: 1079-80) argue, the phenomenological example 'can provide access to the phenomenon in its universal singularity'; it 'reconciles the incommensurable couplet of the particular and the universal'.

Things 'can appear differently depending on the mood we are in' (Ahmed, 2014: 14) and our mood constitutes "the condition of our openness for perceiving and dealing with what we encounter" (Boss, 1979: 110 cited in Ahmed, 2014: 17). The workshop process is, therefore, designed to make the participant sensitive to the emotive and poetic quality of the garment; to invite an affective awareness of the garment. Heidegger speaks of mood, or attunement, as something we as human beings are fundamentally always in and observes that it is not something that emerges 'in the empty space of the soul and then disappears' but that there 'is only ever a change of attunement' (Heidegger, 1995: 68). Furthermore, according to Heidegger (1995: 88), all attunements are ultimately hybrids in that they belong partly to things and partly to the subjects. Our mood then, is not an internally isolated event but emerges through an engagement with people, things, and environments. This means that the way intensely evocative garments appear to us is affected by our mood while the emotional quality of the garment in turn affects how we encounter them - it is a reciprocal exchange.

Because our willingness and ability to encounter things affectively is dependent on how we are attuned to our surroundings, the workshop process seeks to facilitate an openness to encounter the garments holistically as they appear in the moment and to draw attention to the garment as a material thing that expands beyond its concrete materiality. This process starts when the participant is asked to choose the garment by mindfully encountering the contents of their wardrobe (see Appendix A) and intensifies during the workshop when the participant is asked to engage with their garment through metaphor. These prompts (the pre-workshop guidance and the metaphor exercises) are intended to gently attune the participants to the emotive quality of their garments.

At the beginning of the workshop participants are asked to write a few words about their garment on a card and save it for later. Juxtaposing the initial description with the poetic outcome at the end of the workshop shows how the garment is perceived before and after the workshop and highlights that there is usually more to be discovered about the garments than one might initially assume. The descriptions written at the beginning of the workshop tend to reflect

a more general idea of the garments whereas the material generated during the rest of the workshop gives a more expanded view of how the garment is actually experienced. The 'before' versions tend to be descriptive and objective, providing details about why the garment is considered to be meaningful, what it looks like, and where it came from. These are anecdotes that might help analyse and classify the garments, but they do not provide meaningful insights about what the garment is like as an experience.

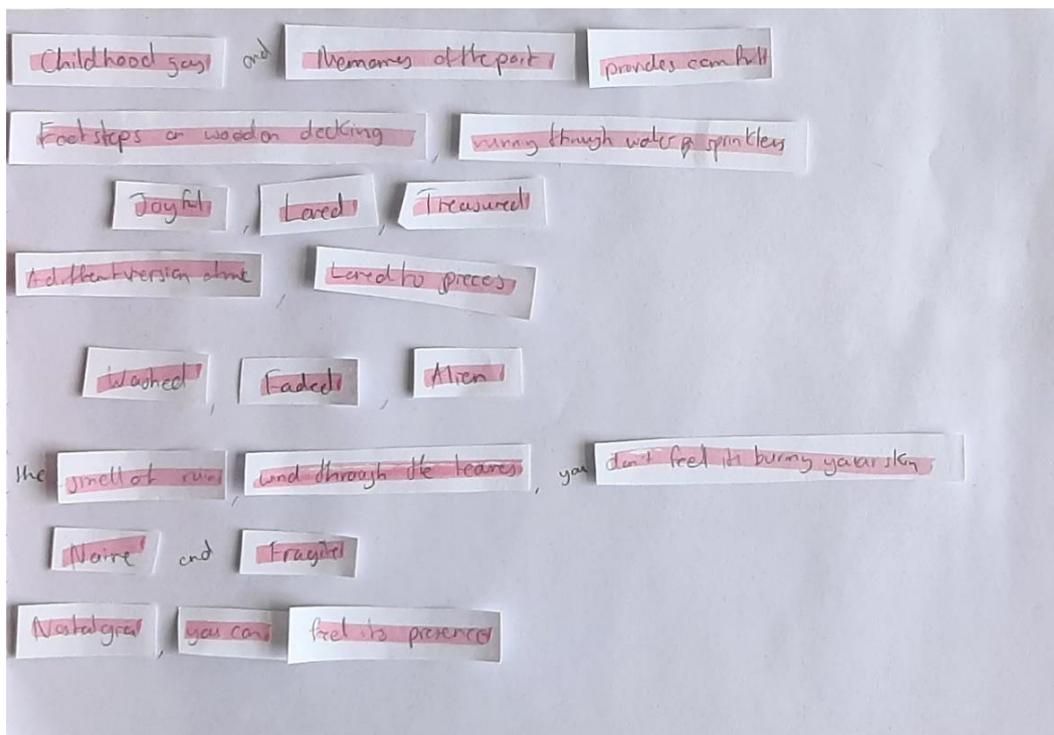


Figure 11 'Childhood joy and memories of the past provides comfort / footsteps on wooden decking, running through water sprinklers / joyful, loved, treasured / a different version of me / loved to pieces / washed, faded, alien / the smell of rain, wind through the leaves / you don't feel it burning your skin / naïve and fragile / nostalgia, you can feel its presence.' Poetic fragments uncovered by workshop participant (14/07/2022)

To highlight the 'thingness' of the garments, the process of uncovering starts with an activity where the participants are invited to engage with the materiality of the garments using frottage. This functions as a warm-up exercise in which the participants encounter the garments from a different perspective while maintaining a tangible connection with the garments. This is followed by a series of writing prompts based on metaphor and freewriting that are intended to intuitively lead the participant on a journey that culminates in a collection of poetic fragments. By considering the garment in terms of weather, sound, and

natural elements, the metaphor exercise introduces the notion of the immersive and the sensory and invites participants to expand their awareness in a way that is not only cognitive but also embodied. The freewriting that follows is intended to lead the participants into even deeper engagement with the garment by encouraging them to write down everything that arises from sensory and emotive engagement with the garment. By helping participants ‘enter more fully into [the] words’, the freewriting ‘*invites* an account of the mind [or the body] reacting’ (Elbow, 1989: 57, original italics). It not intended as a writing exercise but rather as an invitation for the experience of the garment ‘to “be written”’ (Elbow, 1989: 65), to let the garments become written. To ‘stimulate active reflection’ after the workshop, participants are given a *reflectionnaire* (Francis, 2009: 51) which asks them to reflect on their workshop process and whether it has influenced their experience of the garment (see Appendix D). This reveals further insights about the garment as an experience and is helpful for understanding the impact of the workshop.

After the freewriting process, the initial poetic material becomes a site for further uncovering when the participants are asked to highlight things that feel particularly resonant in that moment. The result is a poetic reflection of the garment’s unique phenomenological essence and captures aspects of what the garment is like as experienced in the moment. It is important to note that this is not a creative writing workshop but what I like to refer to as a process of ‘emotional archaeology’. The reason I call the uncovered poetry poetic fragments is because it best reflects the incomplete nature of the material. These fragments are not a finished poem or narrative as such, but rather fragments that together evoke a sense of the garment as an experience. This raw material does not tell a whole story but rather provides a glimpse of the phenomenological essence of the garment as experienced by the participant in the moment.

Although it is the process of creative deconstruction that uncovers the experience of the garments, the process of discovery starts before the actual workshop when participants receive written guidance on how to encounter *bleeding garments* (see Appendix A). Since encounters with intensely evocative garments are embodied and emotive rather than cognitive and analytical, we may not immediately know which garments are particularly evocative. Open-ended discussions with people about evocative garments and comments from workshop participants suggest that intensely evocative garments may not be the garments

that people first think about when they reflect on their wardrobe. The garments that people initially think about are often garments that are primarily *thought of* as being meaningful rather than ones that are perceived to have an intensely evocative presence.

*Bleeding garments* are not discovered through a cognitive analysis of one's wardrobe but are felt and must therefore be encountered to be known. When provided with a description of *bleeding garments*, some workshop participants discovered that the garment or garments that they thought were the most meaningful are in fact not ones that agitate. Some workshop participants commented on how they would have chosen an entirely different garment had they not read the guidance before the workshop. As one workshop participant commented: 'As soon as I saw the garment, I knew' (Instagram comment, 23/01/2023). This is an important detail because it shows that there are different kinds of evocative garments and that there is something unique about garments that evoke particularly intense emotions. *Bleeding garments* are not always the obvious ones, they are the ones that hide in the back of the wardrobe or lie dormant in drawers, patiently waiting for us to pause long enough to contemplate their presence. They are the ghosts of our wardrobes and ghosts must be evoked to be experienced, which is precisely what the pre-workshop guidance and the workshop process seek to do.

One workshop participant, who chose to explore a garment from her childhood, commented on how even after the workshop she still cannot explain exactly why the garment makes her feel the way it does (workshop discussion, 26/05/2022). Now, if this research was concerned with psychology, I might have been interested in unpicking her childhood memories to understand the significance of this garment, but that would reduce the garment to an object of representation and undermine the garment as a *thing* with possibilities. From a psychological stance, the garment would be regarded as a mere adjunct to a psychological event isolated to the mind; however, it is precisely the strange and the mysterious that makes our encounters with these garments unique and therefore, exploring the experience of these garments requires a method that enables us to embrace the strange and the elusive.

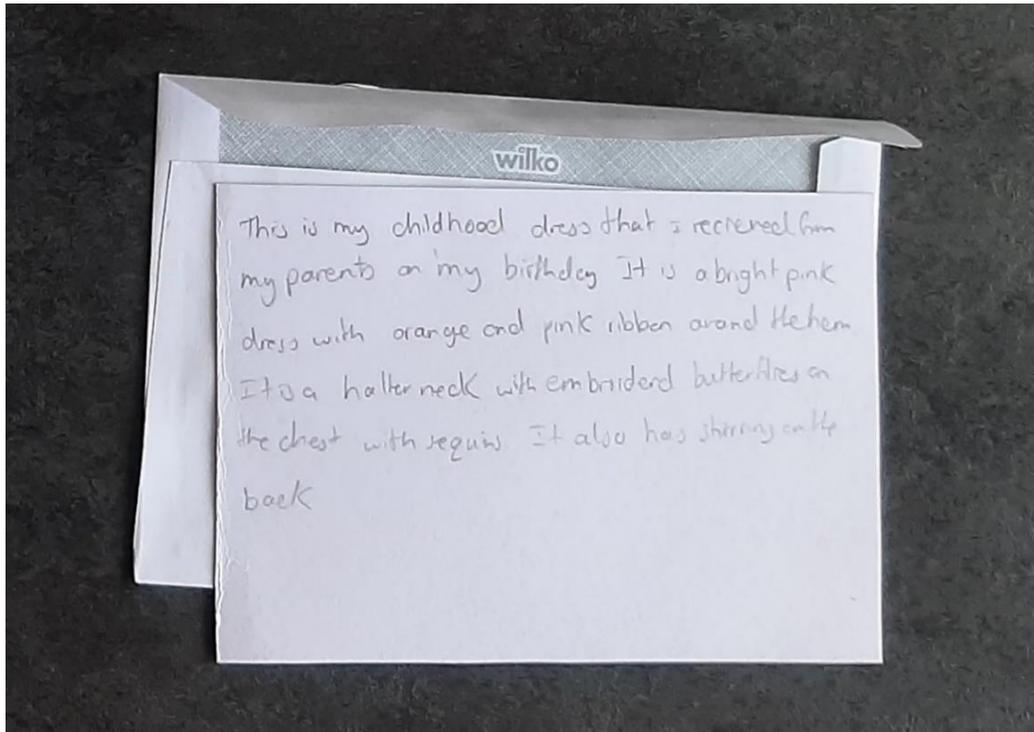


Figure 12 'This is my childhood dress that I received from my parents on my birthday. It is a bright pink dress with orange and pink ribbon around the hem. It's a halter neck with embroidered butterflies on the chest with sequins. It also has shirring on the back.' Pre-workshop description written by participant (14/07/2022)

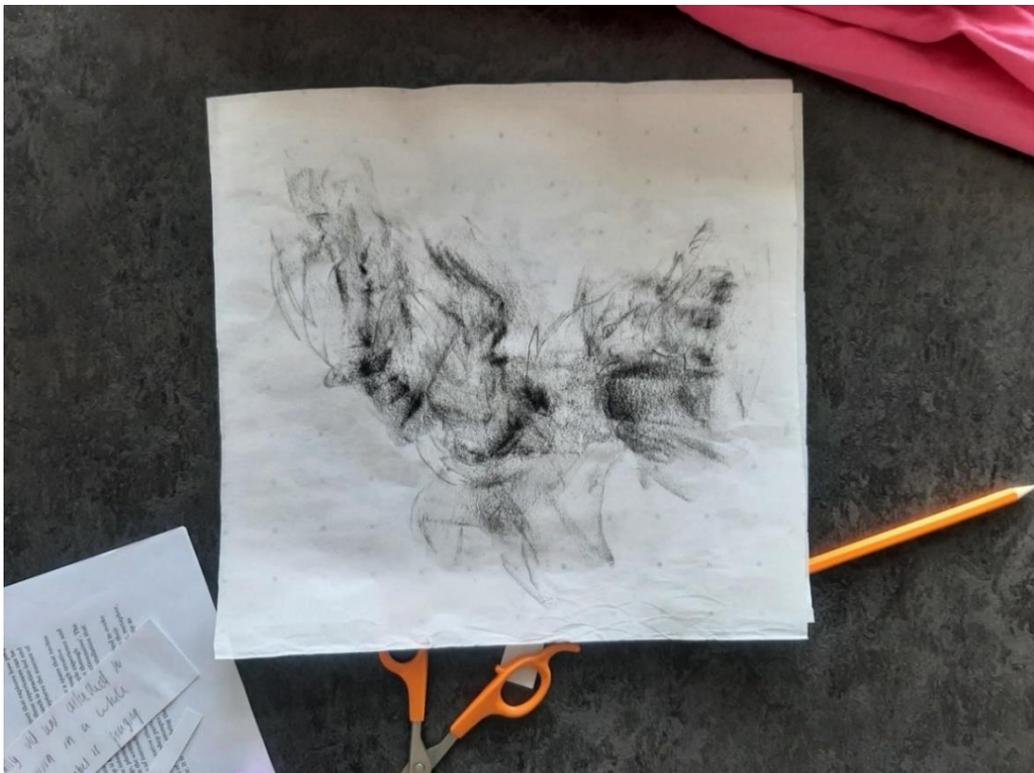


Figure 13 Charcoal frottage made by a workshop participant (14/07/2022)

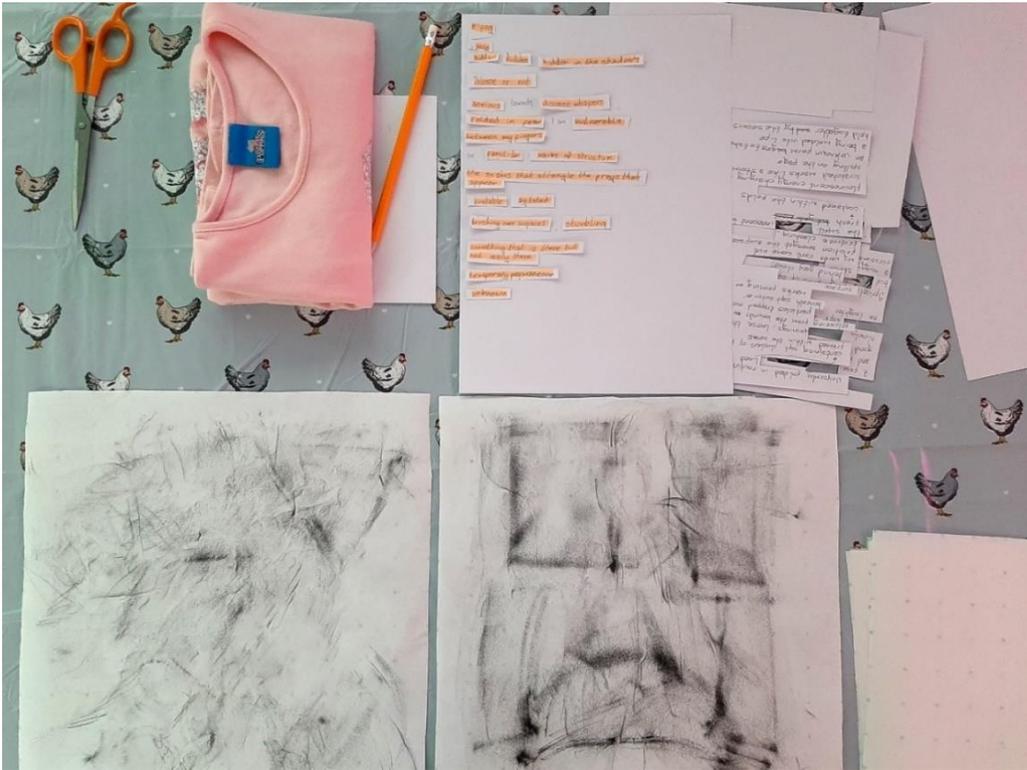


Figure 14 Participant workshop process, including garment, charcoal frottage, and uncovered poetic fragments (26/05/2022)

### 3.6 Exploring the unseen

‘...people overlook the shadows, but that is where she finds beauty and life’.  
*(Something from Tiffany’s, 2022)*

Quoting a line from a cheesy Christmas movie in a doctoral thesis is perhaps more than a little unusual, but the movie itself is completely irrelevant here. The reason the above line resonated with me and why I felt compelled to include it, is because it echoes many of the ideas explored in the previous chapters and because it reflects the aim of my practice-led process. In a magical sense, *bleeding garments* exist somewhere between the everyday world and the magical otherworld and understanding them as such requires us to explore their relationship to the shadowy otherworld and not only consider them as familiar everyday objects. The otherworld can present us with extraordinary life and beauty if we take the time to tune in and embrace the possibilities that this shadowy place holds. By this I do not mean that we should embark on a literal

journey in the shadows or some paranormal dimension, but rather take the time to embrace and explore aspects that we normally might dismiss as irrational.

As discussed in the section on magic in Chapter II, the otherworld is not a separate paranormal place, but a space of possibilities that is closely entwined with the everyday world. It is that shadowy, liminal awareness that happens somewhere between the conscious, the unconscious, and the intuitive and thus does not respond well to traditional rationalistic methods of analysis. The otherworld cannot, however, be accessed theoretically and objectively but rather requires an approach that embraces the mysterious and the emotive. As writer-curator-musician Mark Pilkington (2021: 64) notes, the forces of the strange are not easily tamed and controlled. Traditionally there have been attempts 'to neutralise these inconvenient glimpses of otherness within the rationalising, organising structures of religious and scientific orthodoxy' but the 'further a society pushes in one direction the more the weirdness pushes back' (Pilkington, 2021: 64). Pilkington (2021) argues that strange phenomena - whether defined as paranormal, anomalous, supernatural, or miraculous - are an inherent and important part of how we experience the world and ourselves and should therefore be embraced with a curious and open mind.

We 'can try to shape...control...or banish [the strange], but it's always there, bubbling away at the peripheries of knowledge and *at the heart of experience*' (Pilkington, 2021: 65, italics added). The weird is 'inherent to our perception and to our consciousness' (Pilkington, 2021: 65) and the more time we spend looking at something, the stranger it will appear. The more I contemplated the uncanny quality of *bleeding garments*, the stranger and more extraordinary this quality became. Eventually my quest in trying to capture the metaphysical materiality of *bleeding garments* led me to contemplate the ghostly quality of worn garments that makes them appear almost as if haunted by a spirit. Inspired by the idea of capturing the unseen and animating something seemingly static, this contemplation resulted in a series of photographs inspired by spirit photography.

The phenomenon of spirit photography peaked in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, after photography became more widely used, and often depicted occult phenomena such as spirits of lost loved ones or séances where occult occurrences such as ectoplasms manifested through mediums (Chéroux *et al.*, 2004). These photographs were early photomanipulations - some more crudely done than

others - but nonetheless part of a popular trend of connecting with the spiritual otherworld. The phenomenon of spirit photography later became less popular, but it did not disappear completely. A series of photographs of levitating garments, called *Haunted: Capturing Spirit* (see images 20, 21, and 22), was particularly influenced by more recent photographs of 'levitation experiments' taken in the 1960s by *The Society for Research on Rapport and Telekinesis (SORRAT)*, which, unlike earlier photographs, look less manipulated and more like something one almost wants to think is 'real'. The haunted garments floating in the air like ghosts may have been thrown into the air, yet the camera has captured a moment that cannot be seen with the naked eye, making the garments appear as if they are in fact levitating.

Reflecting on the phenomenon of *bleeding garments* in relation to paranormal phenomena such as spirits and ghosts led to the realisation that what this research seeks to do is make the unseen visible. This sentiment lies at the core of both the practice-led experiments and the participatory workshops. Not all practice-led experiments generated during this research are directly inspired by the paranormal or the magical, but they do all explore the otherworldly character of *bleeding garments* by elevating the strange, the mysterious, and the magical. Intuitively we may perceive *bleeding garments* as having an uncanny presence, but we cannot see it or perhaps even explain why it is that we feel this way. To paraphrase the words of one workshop participant: it is there, yet it is also not there (participant reflectionnaire, 26/05/2022). Because of the elusive and nuanced quality of *bleeding garments* and because of our tendency to suppress feelings that arise from magical thinking, this presence remains unseen unless we embrace the otherworldly elements of our experience.



Figure 15 'Levitating' blouse, *Haunted: Capturing Spirit* (2022)



Figure 16 'Levitating' top, *Haunted: Capturing Spirit* (2022)



Figure 17 'Levitating' pencil skirt, *Haunted: Capturing Spirit* (2022)

### 3.7 Towards a practice-led phenomenology

‘A good phenomenological text has the effect of making us suddenly “see” something in a manner that enriches our understanding of everyday life experience’ (van Manen, 1997: 345)

The ‘seeing’ that the above quotation is referring to is not a purely cognitive affair but ‘distinctly existential, emotive, enactive, embodied, situational, and nontheoretic (van Manen, 1990 cited in van Manen, 1997: 345-6).

Phenomenology must speak to the senses, it must have tone, and it must engage not just the conscious mind but the unconscious, the sensory, and the emotive. The examples that phenomenology draw from are fundamentally different from more commonly used ‘case in point, explanatory, clarifying, or illustrative’ examples often used in qualitative research (van Manen, 2017: 820). It is not the ‘facts or actualities of [the] examples’ that are important, but rather how the examples can help us discover what is unique about a phenomenon (van Manen, 2017: 820). This is often created through a ‘tension between what is unique and what is shared, between particular and transcendent meaning, and between the reflective and the prereflective spheres of the lifeworld’ (van Manen, 1990 cited in Van Manen, 1997: 346). It is through this tension that phenomenology can ‘break through the taken-for-granted dimensions of everyday life’ (van Manen, 1997: 346).

Traditionally, phenomenology is presented as a contemplative text that seeks to evoke the essence of the phenomenon through examples so that the phenomenon can be born within the reader and generate a felt understanding. What makes this research different from traditional phenomenological inquiry is that it draws on art practice as a form of contemplation and reaches beyond the written page by involving practice-led elements. Rather than creating a traditional phenomenological text, this research seeks to explore what a practice-led phenomenology might look like. If traditional phenomenology compiles its material in a text that is published as a paper, book, or book chapter, this practice-led phenomenology also uses the gallery as its platform.

Drawing on the idea of tension between the particular and the transcendent, I first began exploring the idea of a practice-led phenomenology through an immersive installation named *Spectral* (Fig. 18, 19 and Appendix E). Creating a distinct sense of presence, this shrine-like installation, which can be entered and contemplated from within, seeks to evoke the experience of *bleeding garments*

and invite the viewer into a state of wonder and reverie - much like garments that evoke intense emotions might do. Forming a reliquary that envelopes the dress, the installation expands the materiality of the dress both literally and figuratively through a soundscape created from the rustling sound of the dress and a projection that features macro images of its fabric along with poetic fragments uncovered from the dress. This results in an intimate dialogue between textiles, moving image, sound, and poetry that echoes my individual experience of the black dress and brings the uncanny and elusive quality of *bleeding garments* 'vividly into presence' (van Manen, 1997: 353). *Spectral* is not intended to be explored analytically or even purely aesthetically, but rather intended as a moment where the viewer is invited to feel the expanded materiality of the dress and contemplate the phenomenon of intensely evocative garments from a personal perspective.



Figure 18 The black dress and its reliquary. *Spectral* (2022)



Figure 19 Detail of *Spectral* (2022)

To gain an understanding of the impact of the installation and whether it would succeed in creating a sense of wonder, the installation was exhibited in the Brewery Tap UCA Project Space in Folkestone in September 2022. This provided a way to share and contemplate my research with other people and generated insights about the value and purpose of my practice in relation to the research

process. When exhibited in the gallery, *Spectral* generated different kinds of discussions and knowledge between gallery visitors and me. The installation acted as a kind of mediator between me as the researcher and the gallery visitors, providing a way for me to effectively share the ideas explored in this research. The conversations that took place in the gallery were open-ended and recorded through reflective writing. By being fully present in the process of shared contemplation I was able to observe and record nuances that cannot be captured through a systematic recording of facts and descriptions.

Phenomenology seeks to engage in an authentic dialogue with the phenomenon (Hansen, 2012: 150) and this also applies to the conversations about feelings and thoughts evoked by the practice-led outcomes. The reason I used open-ended discussions rather than questionnaires or interviews to record people's reactions to the installation, is because I wanted to engage in 'real' conversations and be fully present during the shared contemplation. Active analysis can make us partly or completely lose touch with the moment as an experience (van Manen, 2017a: 816), and providing questionnaires would have altered the environment and risked removing the gallery visitor from a moment of wonder and contemplation.

The initial objective of the practice-led research process was to create an installation that would evoke the phenomenological essence of *bleeding garments* through poetic fragments uncovered by participants (the particular) and immersive elements like the ones used in *Spectral* (the general). However, after a series of serendipitous encounters and further reflection, I realised that this would have distracted from where the research and its meaningful insights actually emerged. It was not until I started reflecting on the entire research process that I realised that the practice-led phenomenology is not a separate installation informed by the practice-led process, but rather the entire process itself. The idea of a final installation was goal-oriented, a search for an outcome, and it occurred to me that since it is process, not outcome, that lies at the heart of phenomenology, this should also be the focus of the practice-led phenomenology.

Rather than being neatly contained in one installation, the practice-led phenomenology, then, is the entire process of contemplation and discovery that I have shared in this chapter. In other words, the practice-led phenomenology includes all the practice-led outcomes that emerged from and generated insights during the research process. This led me to create an annotated exhibition named *(Magical) Presence* (Appendix F) - shown in the Brewery Tap Project Space in March 2023 - that invited gallery visitors to contemplate the research through

their own experience. Reflecting the entire research journey, the exhibition begins by drawing attention to garments as things with possibilities with work from the *Becomings* and *Found Entanglements* series and culminates in a more magical and poetic realm by introducing the idea of a metaphysical beyond through poetry and images that explore presence and the notion of *bleeding garments* (see Fig. 20-22). The notion of uncanny presence is captured by two floating garments from the *Haunted: Capturing Spirit* series printed on a sheer georgette fabric. The two suspended textile pieces create a sense of an ephemeral presence; they are there yet almost not there. This idea of ephemerality is also captured in a video of a shadow play created by the swaying hem of my black dress. Shadows are an extension of things; they belong to the thing, but they shift and are only perceivable under certain conditions. The dancing shadow echoes the notion of *bleeding garments* as things that expand into the metaphysical, which is only available to us if we are receptive to the tension between the 'real' world and the otherworld, light and shadows.

The title of the exhibition is intended to reflect the otherworldly presence of *bleeding garments* as well as the idea of being magically present; that is, receptive to magical thinking and the otherworldly aspects of the world. Rather than being a showcase of finished outcomes, *(Magical) Presence* is intended to inspire a shift in awareness conducive for new ways of thinking about evocative garments. The exhibition includes annotations that complement the practice-led outcomes and thus provides a comprehensive overview of the research process. The aim in the curatorial staging of the exhibition was to inspire both emotional and philosophical insights, which when experienced together by the visitor creates that tension between the concrete and the transcendent that enables phenomenological understanding. The practice-led phenomenology is 'a process of amalgamation...[a] unifying of ideas, perspectives, insights and facts that evolves through the multi-disciplinary engagement with [artworks], texts, space...resulting in an exhibition for visitors to experience both intellectually and through their bodily senses' (Treimo, 2020: 20). A phenomenological text is considered successful if the reader 'is "continuously confronted with the phenomenon"' (Linschoten, 1987: 115 cited van Manen, 1997: 367) and the intention with the practice-led phenomenology is to continuously keep the essence of the phenomenon present. Exhibiting the entire practice-led research process in a gallery, places the phenomenological essence of *bleeding garments* and their otherworldly possibilities right in front of the viewer, or better yet,

participant so that they can reflect on the phenomenon from within their own experience.

### 3.8 Concluding thoughts

Part of this research is about exploring how a practice-*led* process can generate knowledge about our experience of *bleeding garments*. This requires an approach that acknowledges that art as a process and as a way of knowing behaves differently than for example the social sciences. A practice-led process needs to recognise that the process of knowing happens partly on the terms of the process itself. The key is in the word *led*; it is the practice that leads. In this chapter I have introduced different ways in which my transdisciplinary art practice has informed the research process. I have considered art as a way of knowing and provided a detailed overview of the practice-led process - including the participatory workshop method - to show the role of my practice in this research.

As a methodology, phenomenology draws on examples such as real or imagined scenarios or poetic accounts of experiences that invite a phenomenon to be born within the reader. This research explores the phenomenon through a variety of practice-led examples and in this chapter, I have introduced the experiential material that this research draws on. The aim of the practice-led experiments and the material generated during the participatory workshops is to make present the unseen aspects of intensely evocative garments so that the phenomenon can be retrospectively brought to life and subjectively reflected on. The next chapter further considers the insights generated through these examples and how creative engagement with the notion of intensely evocative garments can enable phenomenological understanding. It discusses the meaningful insights discovered through the practice-led outcomes and the participatory workshops, drawing together ideas discussed in chapters I, II, and III.



Figure 20 (*Magical*) *Presence* at Brewery Tap UCA Project Space, Folkestone (2023)

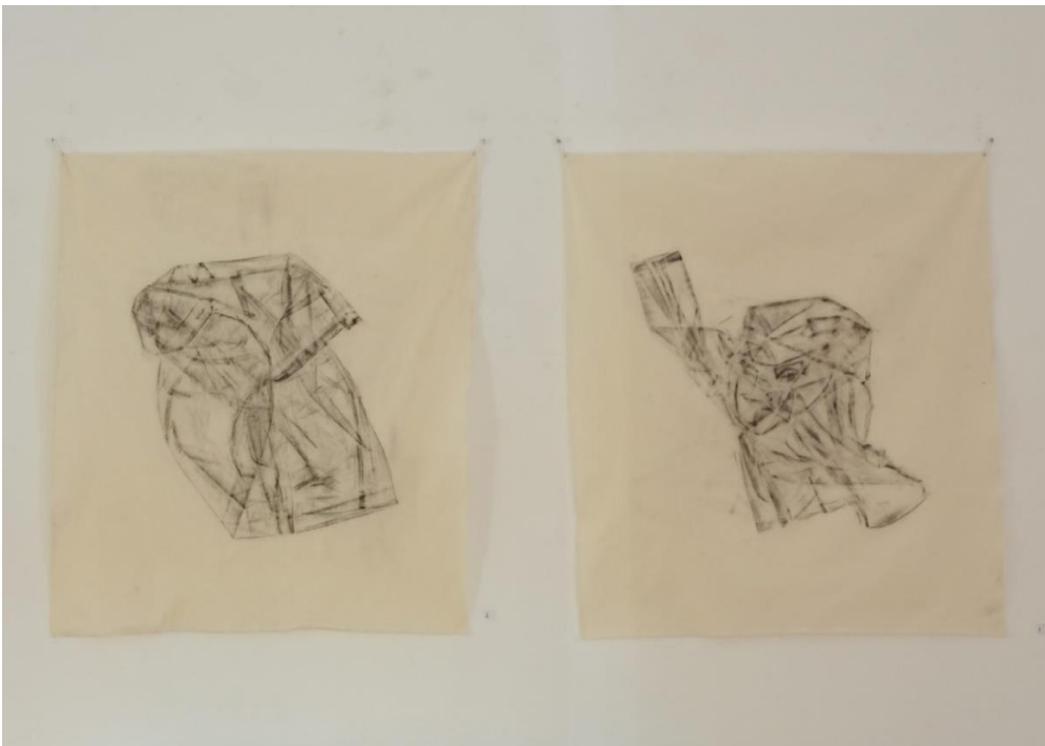


Figure 21 From exploring garments as things... Two frottages from the *Becomings* series. (*Magical*) *Presence*, exhibited at Brewery Tap UCA Project Space, Folkestone (2023)



Figure 22 ...to the notion of *bleeding garments*. *(Magical) Presence*, exhibited at Brewery Tap UCA Project Space, Folkestone (2023)

## **Chapter IV - Meaningful Insights** Encounters and contemplation

This chapter further explores the research process introduced in the previous chapter by looking at meaningful insights discovered through the practice-led outcomes and the participatory workshops. I draw connections between the practice-led experiments, poetic fragments uncovered by workshop participants, and responses from gallery visitors to show what *bleeding garments* are and can be like as an experience. The chapter concludes with a further shift in awareness and explores the essence of *bleeding garments* through an imaginative and poetic thought experiment.

## 4.1 Authentic dialogue

‘...it is actually somewhat bizarre to use the objectifying term “data” for phenomenological inquiry as phenomenology is concerned with meaning and meaningfulness rather than “informational” content’ (van Manen, 2017a: 819)

Phenomenological inquiry is ‘a quest for meaningful insights about the *phenomenal* and the *unique* aspects of an experience or event’ (van Manen, 2017a: 833, italics added). It is concerned with the ‘most fundamental *primary* mode’ of a phenomenon (Heron, 1970: 244, original italics) and seeks to explore what it is that we ‘actually encounter’ (Heron, 1970: 251) when we experience something. At the heart of this quest lies wonder and thus the insights that phenomenology is concerned with cannot be achieved through premediated and structured analysis but are rather discovered through a kind of open reflection (van Manen, 2017a: 833). Commenting on the purpose of the phenomenological text, van Manen notes that the phenomenologist ‘does not present the reader with a conclusive argument or with a determinate set of...insights’ but rather seeks to lead ‘the reader reflectively to that region of lived experience where the phenomenon dwells in recognisable form’ (van Manen, 1997: 367).

Phenomenological understanding captures what ideas *feel* like, and in that regard, phenomenologists are actually not that different from poets (van Manen, 1997: 367); phenomenology is concerned with poetic truth rather than objective truth.

Meaningful insights are reached by attending to things as they appear in the moment, but what exactly are meaningful insights and how does one know if an insight is meaningful? In a phenomenological sense, an insight is meaningful when it enables us to see something anew, as if for the first time, and inspires us to reflect differently and more fully on a phenomenon from within our own experience. When engaging in phenomenology, it is important not to get distracted by the pursuit of logical arguments but rather to engage in an authentic dialogue with the phenomenon one is studying (Hansen, 2012: 150). The phenomenologist aims to step away from the tendency to interpret and understand experiences in a conceptual, theoretical, or biographical way (van Manen, 2017a) and rather listen and question from within their personal experience to ‘hear the reverberation’ of the phenomenon (Hansen, 2012: 150).

The meaningful insights that this research is concerned with were partly dependent on there being room for the research to develop in an unconstrained

and serendipitous manner by following the flow of the overall process and the material discovered during it. This open-endedness is a way to maintain a certain openness to *bleeding garments* as things with possibilities and to suspend assumptions about them. This does not mean that the process is random or insincere, it simply means that rather than being set against ‘controlling conditions’ (Bolt, 2011: 142) traditionally associated with the scientific method, this research process follows its own flow. Practice-led research may ‘often contradict what is generally expected of research’ (Bolt, 2011: 150) but this is also where the strength of art-as-research, or art as a process of knowing, lies. Like phenomenology, art-as-research ‘proceeds on the assumption that we can never know the outcome in advance and that knowledge is emergent rather than prescribed’ (Bolt, 2011: 150) and can therefore offer authentic and novel ways of understanding and looking at the world.

Traditionally, research has been a quest for establishing truths through a conformity between what is observed and what is already known, and truth is therefore understood as correspondence (Bolt, 2011 :145). The phenomenological approach to truth is different in that phenomenology is not concerned with correspondence but rather with meaning and possible meanings. Heidegger argues that truth should be understood as an ‘unconcealment’, a revealing, and that there is always a horizon of ‘unconcealment’ beyond which things remain unconcealed (Bolt, 2011: 147). This research is concerned with a revealing where truth emerges as meaningful insights about what *bleeding garments* are and can be like as an experience. While these meaningful insights provide a deeper understanding about the phenomenon, this research also recognises that there is a horizon of ‘unconcealment’ where things are not revealed to us. The aim with the meaningful insights, then, is not to identify a set of true or false statements but to explore the possibilities of *bleeding garments* as an experience and to inspire new ways in thinking about and engaging with evocative garments.

Rather than relying on preconceived structure and systematic analysis, the rigour of this research lies partly in its ability to *stay with things*. According to Heidegger, philosophical thought should be about being present and ‘fully focused on what is there to be perceived’ (Gray, 1967: 100). He argues that the scientific methodology is problematic because it operates according to a prescriptive model and rather than ‘careful observation of things’, it is a testing of the unknown in terms of the already known’ (Bolt, 2011: 143). Phenomenology on the other hand, is about knowing how to listen and to observe because thought ‘is

not so much an activity that we initiate as it is something that is initiated by...being itself' (Gray, 1967: 100). This requires a stance of 'simplicity, astonishment, and openness to the world as world' and can ultimately only be achieved through poetic and intellectual experience (Gray, 1967: 99). It is important to acknowledge that phenomenology and art-as-research draw on a different approach than the scientific method traditionally does and that this is where the strength of these approaches lies.

Both art-as research and phenomenology thrive on the ability to maintain a continuous openness to discovery. Commenting on the nature of phenomenological inquiry, van Manen (2017a: 823-3) notes that phenomenological insights 'are "encountered", "discovered", "given", "found", or sometimes even "stumbled upon"' and that therefore there is no 'recipe approach' to discovering phenomenological insights. This also applies to art-as-research because it is in and through the process of practice that 'new ways of thinking' (Bolt, 2011: 87), doing, and knowing emerge. Both phenomenology and art-as-research are most successful when we remain open to wonder, serendipity, and the flow of the process. By understanding that we cannot know the outcome of the process we remain open to its flux and flow, which allows us to assume the role of explorers rather than goal-oriented knowledge makers.

Despite the serendipitous nature of phenomenology, there are certain ingredients that are necessary for describing and understanding phenomenological insights (van Manen, 1997), without which phenomenology will fall short of its task. Outlining five important aspects of phenomenological understanding, van Manen (1997: 351, 353, 355) states that phenomenological insights must be placed in the concrete world so that we can understand them through our individual experience (concreteness), brought 'vividly into presence' (evocation), and expressed in a manner that creates 'layers of phenomenological meaning' (intensity). Furthermore, the phenomenological text must 'bring about a transformative effect so that [a] deeper meaning...reaches [our] inner being' (epiphany) and this in turn requires us to be open to a 'meaning [that] has a noncognitive effect' (tone) (van Manen, 1997: 359, 364). Phenomenological understanding, then, is about vividly showing the phenomenon so that we can contemplate it phenomenologically from within our own experience, and therefore phenomenology requires effort from the phenomenologist as well as the reader.

The reason for introducing this chapter by discussing the idea of meaningful insights is to establish a starting point for the sections that follow. It is important to keep in mind that the nature and purpose of the material discovered during the research process differs from what we normally refer to as research 'data' and that the process through which these insights were - and are - discovered is practice and material-led (and by material I do not only refer to tangible material but also to intangible material such as emotions). The aim of this research, and this chapter, is not to categorise, generalise, or analyse but rather to show what *bleeding garments* are and can be like as an experience by evoking the phenomenon through different possible interpretations.

This chapter further discusses the insights that emerged through an interplay between practice-led experimentation and theoretical and philosophical concepts explored in Chapters I and II. I begin by considering material generated during the participatory workshops and through exhibitions, I then consider the phenomenological essence of *bleeding garments*, and finally I will conclude by shifting awareness to the magical possibilities of evocative garments by further exploring the notion of *bleeding garments*.

## 4.2 Individual wonder and uncovered fragments

'[I] was able to put into words on a page how this garment made me feel'  
(participant reflectionnaire, 26/05/2022)

The most significant impact of the participatory workshops was the way they engaged people to think differently and more deeply about their relationships with individual garments, enabling them to become more aware of the garments as *things*, which is valuable for both this research and the participants themselves. This is likely partly due to the workshop's potential to remain true to both the participant's individual experience and to the garment as a phenomenon by not forcing meaning upon either. Considering that it is the encounter between the person and the garment that makes the garments unique and significant as a phenomenon, it is important that both are equally acknowledged in the process. The value of the workshop method is that it allows for deeper engagement and for the interaction between person and garment to manifest as something more concrete, which results in richer insights about the connection between the person and their garment.

It is worth reiterating that the participatory workshops are not concerned with writing poetry and therefore the uncovered poetic fragments should not at any point be analysed as good or bad poetry. The uncovered material reflects a deeper emotional knowledge that emerges when the garments are encountered through a heightened affective awareness. Each set of poetic fragments uncovered by participants have an individual ‘texture’ that should be contemplated in relation to the aim of the workshop rather than stylistically or semiotically analysed as a piece of writing. Although I do in this section reflect on the meaning of some fragments uncovered by participants, my intention is not to dissect them and over-analyse their meaning, but rather to emphasise certain themes and textures that emerge through the material. By highlighting elements that evoke contrast, uncanniness, and intense emotion I do not intend to impose meaning upon the poetic fragments but rather to *show* what arises when people are invited to explore evocative garments through an affective and intuitive awareness. This process of ‘paying attention to *repeating, recurring, and forceful* words and phrases’ can be thought of as a kind of ‘poetic transcription’ (Faulkner & Ruby, 2015 cited in Faulkner, 2017: 215, original italics).

In the previous chapter, I introduced a poem (*untitled*, see page 79) that ‘emerged’ from my black dress when I could not find the words to describe how I felt in the presence of the dress. Becoming written in a moment of heightened affective awareness, this poem captures a hidden truth that I had previously not been able to articulate. However, when I later tested the iterated version of the workshop method developed as part of this research, I uncovered further poetic fragments from the same dress that are different from the ones in the poem named *untitled*. Whereas the first poem (*untitled*) captures the relic-like nature of the dress and how its presence evokes my feelings about its connection to the past, the second set of poetic fragments (see following page) says more about the uncanny, mysterious, and elusive presence of the dress.

*Presence*

Something was lost, yet  
residues of your presence  
remain, now abstract and  
far away, a whisper  
somewhere in the shadows

An echo and nothing more  
perched there like a  
raven from the past  
feathers rustling like the  
dying embers of a bonfire

I suppose I always knew  
that the goodbye was there  
Like when you've seen  
Casablanca before and  
you already know that it ends.

(poem uncovered from black dress, 2022)

While the last stanza in *Presence* does allude to how I feel about the memories the dress is connected to, the first two stanzas almost animate the dress into something creature-like lurking deep inside my wardrobe. They reflect the otherworldly nature of the dress and how I still, after all this time, cannot quite grasp that elusive yet intense feeling that it evokes. When reflecting on the poetic fragments, it occurred to me that there is a faint resemblance to Edgar Allan Poe's poem *The Raven* - a coincidence, not a conscious result. Appearing as if having taken up residency like Poe's raven, the black dress will forever remain present, echoing the emotions of a past moment (unless I get rid of it, which I have already implied is unlikely). Comparing the two poems, suggests that the fragments uncovered using the iterated method better reflect how I experience the expanded materiality of the dress. This more comprehensive and structured method

developed as part of this research is more conducive for capturing the experience of evocative garments because it uses metaphor as a bridge for accessing sensory and embodied experience and focused freewriting to allow for the unconscious elements of the experience to emerge in form of a more concrete language.

Through words such as ‘residues of presence’ and ‘a whisper in the shadows’, the poem *Presence* alludes to the otherworldly nature of my black dress. These could of course have been partly influenced by my overall research process where the idea of uncanny presence had already emerged at this stage; however, I am not the only one who has uncovered such words. The idea of presence is also alluded to in poetic fragments uncovered by workshop participants. Exploring a childhood T-shirt that she keeps ‘folded tightly at the bottom of [a] drawer’ (participant reflectionnaire, 26/05/2022), one participant uncovered words such as ‘hazy’, ‘hidden in the shadows’, and ‘temporary permanence’, and observed that the garment is ‘something that is there but not really there’ (poetic fragments uncovered by participant, 26/05/2022). As the below uncovered fragments (Fig. 23) suggest, this garment is experienced as having a mysterious and ephemeral quality; the garment is complex and strange yet also familiar. This tension between the known and the unknown and the idea of absent presence captures an element that is common in the experience of *bleeding garments*.

The concept of shadows also emerged for a participant who uncovered predominantly descriptive fragments from his garment, such as ‘sunny’, ‘light’, ‘speed’, and ‘blue skies’, (poetic fragments uncovered by participant, 26/01/2023). The participant’s final poetic fragments evoke a sense of lightness that seems to reflect the quality of this cycling shirt and the feelings associated with it. However, a discarded fragment that the participant chose to omit from the final fragments suggests that there is more to the garment than its feathery lightness, the garment also has ‘shadowy folds’ (poetic fragments uncovered by participant, 26/01/2023). It is interesting to observe that there is a contrast between lightness and darkness even in this mostly descriptive and joyful experience. The participant did later mention that the last time he wore the garment he got into an accident and therefore the garment was holding onto past trauma (post-workshop discussion, 26/01/2023).

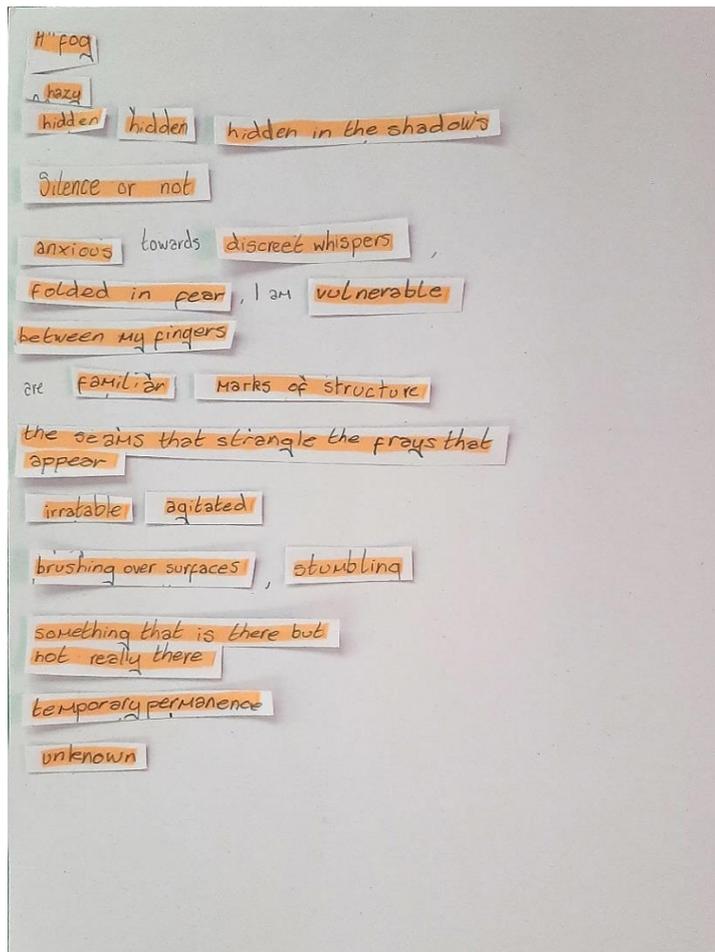


Figure 23 These poetic fragments are particularly mysterious and reflect the unknown and unseen elements of the garment as experienced in the moment. Poetic fragments uncovered by workshop participant. (26/05/2022).

The notion of the hidden and the mysterious is a common theme in poetic narratives uncovered during the participatory workshops (see Fig. 23, 24, 25). Words such as ‘shadows’, ‘unknown’, ‘silence’, ‘hidden’, ‘alien’, (poetic fragments uncovered by participants, 2022) suggest that *bleeding garments* are experienced as having a shadowy side, an aspect that is difficult to fully grasp. This aspect may never be fully understood or captured because it is felt through an affective awareness that cannot easily be translated into consciously comprehended concepts or words. Even the imaginative and boundary-free expression of poetic language will not fully capture how we feel in the presence of these garments. However, this uncanny and elusive quality is part of what makes *bleeding garments* different from other evocative garments and we must be careful not to overanalyse or rationalise this, as it risks flattening and undermining the experience of these garments.

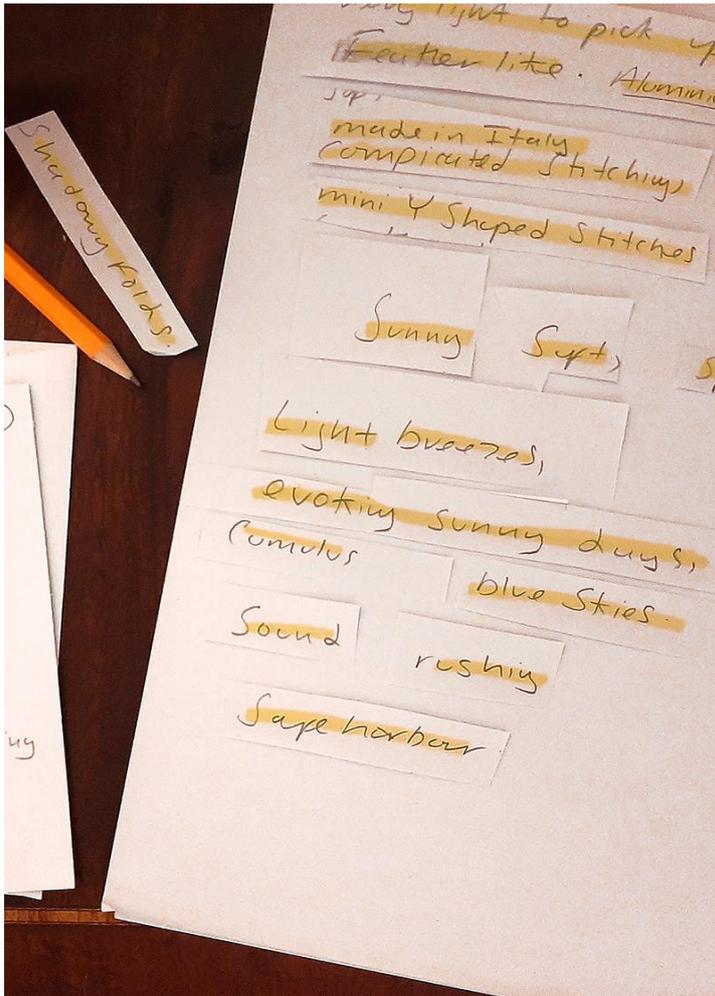


Figure 24 These poetic fragments gain a different ‘texture’ when juxtaposed with the discarded fragment on the left. Poetic fragments uncovered by workshop participant. (26/01/2023)

The idea of connection also manifests in different ways in poetic fragments uncovered by workshop participants. Whether explicit or implicit, some of the uncovered fragments have an active element which suggests that the garment is not merely experienced as representing memories or emotions but that it is the garment itself that maintains a connection to people, places, and moments. Exploring a dress from her childhood, one workshop participant uncovered fragments that reflect a powerful sense of connection to her past self: ‘...it *holds onto* my childhood and a past version of me’, ‘*keeps alive* my childhood self as she exists in more than my memory’, which suggests that there is an active element to this otherwise dormant garment that is no longer worn but is still kept (participant reflectionnaire, 14/07/2022, italics added). The entanglement with the past also manifests in another workshop participant’s uncovered fragments

where nostalgia is experienced as being present as ‘a patchwork of times, spaces, dates, places’ in a pair of woollen socks (Fig. 25).

As mentioned in Chapter III, the process of uncovering begins when the participant selects the garment. If this stage is approached in a purely cognitive manner the participant will likely choose a garment that they *think* is particularly meaningful but may in fact not be intensely evocative. The guidance on encountering *bleeding garments* (Appendix A) is therefore crucial to the process. Commenting on the process of choosing the garment, one workshop participant noted how the garment she chose ‘was sort of hidden’ and although she did not know why, when she saw it, she ‘just felt like [she] had to pick it’ (post-workshop discussion, 26/05/2022). Two people also joined the workshop without reading the pre-workshop guidance and although this is an important step in the workshop process, being able to compare the processes of participants who did not read the guidance with ones who did, confirmed the importance of the guidance and provided valuable insights about the potential of the workshop as a method for understanding how individual garments are experienced. There is a noticeable difference in the uncovered material when comparing the workshop processes and outcomes of participants who read the pre-workshop guidance with ones who selected a garment through a less deeply engaged process. However, despite the difference in the tone of the uncovered fragments, it can be observed that all of them to some extent reflect how the garment is experienced in the moment.

Interestingly, the participants who selected their garment without reading the pre-workshop guidance, commented on how the description they were asked to write at the beginning felt like it better reflects their feelings about the garment than the uncovered fragments (post-workshop discussions, 20/07/2022, 26/01/2023). One participant who chose to explore an oversized denim jacket that is in active use, commented on how the descriptive narrative says more about her relationship with the garment than the uncovered fragments, some of which describe the look of the jacket - ‘navy’, ‘oversized’, ‘long’, ‘pockets’, ‘stitch’ etc. (fragments uncovered by participant, 20/07/2022). While most of the uncovered fragments are descriptive, some do allude to what the garment is like as an experience. The tone of words such as ‘thunder’, ‘drums’, ‘lion’s growl’, suggest that the jacket is experienced as something powerful and empowering. This shows that the uncovered fragments can capture how the garment is experienced in the moment, regardless of whether it is intensely evocative or not.

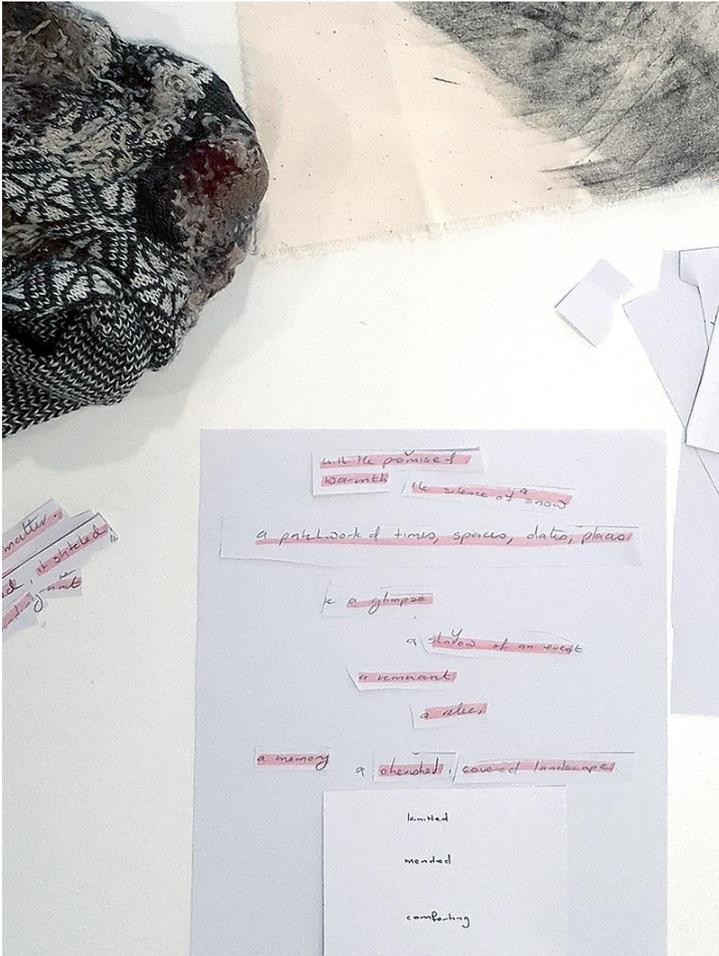


Figure 25 'with the promise of warmth / the silence of snow / a patchwork of times, spaces, dates, places / a glimpse / a shadow of an event / a remnant / a relic / a memory / a cherished, covered landscape' Poetic fragments uncovered by workshop participant. (20/07/2022).

Some uncovered fragments may at first seem like they do not 'say' much about the garments, but when contemplated for a while they can provide insights about how the garment is experienced in the moment. This can also be seen in the poetic fragments uncovered by another workshop participant who did not choose their garment based on the pre-workshop guidance (Fig. 26). Although the cardigan that the participant chose to explore may not be intensely evocative, the uncovered poetic fragments do reflect how the garment is experienced, the unique essence of the garment as a material thing. Reflecting on the workshop process the same participant wrote that it 'was interesting to look at [the garment] more closely' and to 'really see it' (participant reflectionnaire, 26/01/2023). This provides a meaningful insight about the workshop as a method by suggesting that the workshop process allows one to truly 'see' the

garment as a meaningful thing, rather than maintaining the assumption that one already understands the significance of the garment.

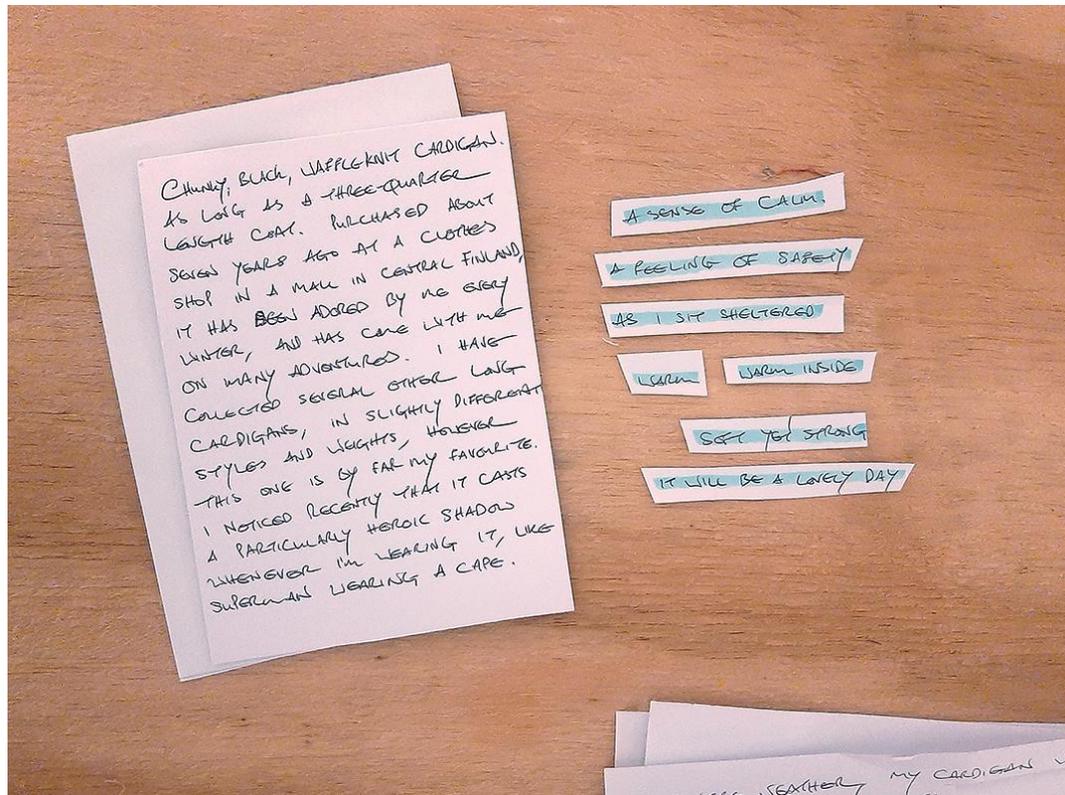


Figure 26 'a sense of calm / a feeling of safety / as I sit sheltered / warm...warm inside / soft yet strong / it will be a lovely day' Description of garment (left) and poetic fragments (right) uncovered by workshop participant. (26/01/2023).

Although the process of uncovering can be meaningful regardless of whether the garment is mildly or intensely evocative, an engagement with *bleeding garments* tends to result in more evocative and abstract poetic fragments (see Fig. 11, 23 and 25). In contrast to poetic fragments uncovered from 'favourites', which tend to be more straightforward, fragments uncovered from *bleeding garments* can make the garments appear almost more mysterious. The workshop participant who uncovered the fragments shown in Figure 23 commented on how during the workshop the garment 'no longer appeared like a garment' and that it almost seemed like a thing with 'feelings and emotions' (participant reflectionnaire, 26/05/2022). The participant observed how the garment has an intense presence that she still cannot make sense of and that the garment will be returned to its spot in the drawer because that is where it belongs:

'I say that [I understand my garment better now] but I still don't fully understand it...It sort of exists in my wardrobe but it is never truly seen or felt, and when I got it out my wardrobe today, I sort of...felt like this overwhelming feeling of sadness but I don't know why because I look at this T-shirt and...I don't like it, it doesn't fit me...I think it's one of my oldest pieces of clothing I have in my wardrobe, and you know what, it makes me feel sad! And it makes me feel anxious...but I know after this workshop I'm still going to fold it in the exact same way, and it will go in the exact same place, like amongst my pyjamas, which makes no sense because it's not pyjamas, but it just belongs there, that's its spot and it will stay there...' (post-workshop discussion, 26/05/2022)

Comparing fragments uncovered from garments that were chosen based on the pre-workshop guidance with garments that were not chosen based on the guidance, shows that there are different kinds of evocative garments and that not all evoke intense emotions. *Bleeding garments* are not 'just' favourite things that bring comfort, they have a particular presence that evokes the unexplained and the unseen. In studies on emotional attachment to clothes, evocative garments tend to be grouped together and no distinctions are made between the intensity of the feelings that different garments evoke. evocative garments are categorised based on the associations that the garment evokes. Although this research does not seek to categorise, it is necessary to differentiate between intensely evocative garments and other evocative garments because *bleeding garments* form a distinct phenomenal group. This can also be observed in how some workshop participants responded to the pre-workshop guidance by noting that when they encountered their wardrobe with a certain openness there was one particular garment that stood out and that this garment was not the one that they initially thought was particularly meaningful.

By asking people to encounter their garments in a state of heightened awareness rather than talk about the contents of their wardrobes, this research shows that there are garments in our wardrobes that we do not actively reminisce or think about but feel as a presence when we take the time to encounter them.

Experiences shared by workshop participants suggest that *bleeding garments* are often dormant, i.e., not actively thought about. In other words, they are either not worn and kept hidden away or they have become so integrated with the active, everyday wardrobe that, although they are somehow always present, their intensely evocative quality blends with everyday experiences (individual discussions with workshop participants, 2022, 2023). *Bleeding garments* are

initially difficult to conjure up in thought because they must be fully encountered before they can be cognitively reflected on and are therefore almost like ghosts that require a certain sensitivity to really be seen.

Reflecting on how the garments make them feel after the workshop, participants commented on how they feel ‘even more attached’, ‘feel better about [their] relationship’ with the garment, experience ‘more depth’ to why the garment has been kept and are generally more aware of their garments (participant reflectionnaires, 2022, 2023). Regardless of whether the garment was mildly or intensely evocative, all participants experienced a heightened awareness of their relationship to their garment as a result of the workshop, which shows that the workshop is conducive for deeper and more meaningful engagement with evocative garments. Due to its transformative potential that ‘provides a bridge between the physical and the metaphysical, the known and the unknown’ (Hume, 1998: 312), there is a ritualistic element to the workshop process. Speaking about the transformative element of the ritual, performance artist Marina Abramovic observes how the ritual changes you. ‘You go through the ritual, and you are not the same after; you learn and become different’ (*Marina Abramovic in Brazil: the space in between*, 2016). By going through the workshop process the participant’s understanding of the garment shifts, it becomes more heightened, while the process also transforms the unseen aspects of the garment into something that can be more actively contemplated. The workshop process can thus inspire new ways of thinking about evocative garments, transforming how the garments are perceived and engaged with.

The insights discovered through the participatory workshops do not provide definitive answers but rather highlight the uniqueness of the garments as material things and invites further contemplation. The poetic fragments explored in this section are raw and unfinished and rather than giving a clear answer to the meaning of the individual garment, they are suggestive of what the garment is like as an experience and often evoke further questions, feelings, and wonder about the garment as a thing. The process of uncovering does not make their meaning explicit but rather suggest that *bleeding garments* are about more than simply representation and that part of what makes these garments particularly evocative is that we can never quite grasp their metaphysical materiality. The uncovered fragments show how intensely evocative garments are not just material objects worn to protect and decorate the body but that they are alien, hidden, discreet whispers, and shadows of events...

### 4.3 Felt understanding

‘I want people to come and feel something...Art for me is an adventure where you just dive in’. (Boltanski & Beil, 2006: 44).

Just like artist Christian Boltanski wanted people to know his art by feeling its meaning rather than analysing it intellectually (Boltanski & Beil, 2006: 44), this research also seeks to inspire felt meaning. The aim of this research is to contemplate *bleeding garments* as if for the first time and to inspire new ways of perceiving, thinking about, and engaging with evocative garments in general. Heidegger (1971: 72) argues that art is ‘the letting happen of the advent of truth of what is’, that art can reveal what things are really like rather than reproduce our immediate assumptions of them. This revealing, however, does not happen cognitively but rather requires an embodied and felt awareness that is not isolated to the analytical mind. It requires us to be present and to attend to things as they appear in the moment. It is also worth devoting particular attention to the words ‘letting happen’ as this suggests that truth cannot be preconceived or controlled but that there is always an open-endedness to the process of knowing.

In *Embodied Knowing Through Art*, Mark Johnson discusses the tendency to oppose feeling and knowing and that feeling, as it is traditionally defined, does not generate knowledge. He notes that according to Kant’s definition, aesthetics and art are ‘felt (*not known*) as a sense of harmony and right order’ (Johnson, 2010: 143, original italics). ‘To know’ is defined as perceiving something directly or being aware of factual knowledge, whereas the act of feeling is defined as an instinctual awareness. Knowing is commonly concerned with facts and truth whereas feeling is abstract and instinctual. Both, however, are an *awareness of something* and being aware is defined as having perception or knowledge. Feeling, then, is also a type of knowing and as Mark Johnson (2010) argues, it is important to recognise the role of the feeling body within our definition of knowledge.

Since this research is concerned with capturing the *experience of bleeding garments*, it partly relies on people’s responses to the practice-led outcomes. Thus, the intuitive and serendipitous process of contemplation through practice that lies at the heart of this research also extends into dialogues in the gallery. In addition to the knowledge generated and discovered through the practice-led process and participatory workshops, meaningful insights also emerged when

contemplating exhibited practice-led outputs together with gallery visitors. As discussed in the previous chapter, being present during the *Spectral* and (*Magical*) *Presence* exhibitions, provided opportunities to develop the research further because it allowed me to communicate my research through an immersive experience that could be felt and not only explained through words. It should be noted that the aim of the *Spectral* installation was not simply to create an aesthetically pleasing experience that can be objectively analysed but to invite the viewer ‘to explore, wonder and reflect in order to reach [an] understanding’ (Arnold, 2016 cited in Treimo, 2020: 19) that resonates with their subjective experience.

During the *Spectral* exhibition, I covertly observed as gallery visitors engaged with the installation to get a sense of people’s initial reactions to the installation. Most gallery visitors felt inclined to spontaneously share their thoughts and feelings about the installation, and therefore open-ended conversations about the research emerged naturally. Since these conversations were inspired by the moment rather than forced by my agenda as a researcher, they provided useful insights about the impact of the installation. Silently observing people as they moved around the gallery, how they lingered and explored the dress and its reliquary from different angles, also confirmed that the installation succeeded in its task of inspiring wonder and contemplation. People who took the time to explore the installation eventually seemed to reach a certain state of wonder and left in a different state of being than when they first entered the gallery. Some visitors spontaneously commented on how the piece draws you in, perfectly capturing what the installation seeks to do. A few people were also intrigued by the layered nature reflected through the dialogue between the draped fabric, the projection, and the poem, and commented on how the more you look at the installation, the more you discover; an observation that reflects the feeling that there is more to the complex nature of *bleeding garments* than can be objectively perceived.

Although an installation with immersive elements loses a great deal of its impact when captured in photographs or on video, visual documentation of the *Spectral* installation also acted as a conversation starter that helped illustrate the main themes explored in this research. When I first told a neighbour about my research, she was eager to share a story about a dress she used to have (personal conversation, 22/08/2022). She reminisced about how beautiful it was and how well it fit her and told me where she bought it, about a specific occasion when she

wore it, and how she eventually got rid of it because the fabric had simply become too frayed to hold the dress together. When I on a different occasion showed her a video of the *Spectral* installation (see Appendix E), along with the poem uncovered from my black dress (*untitled*, see chapter III, page 77) and the exhibition text (Appendix E), there was a shift in how she thought about clothes she has kept but does not wear.

Talking about garments that were different from the dress she initially told me about, my neighbour mused over the idea of presence and how some garments almost feel as if they are haunted (personal conversation, 09/09/2022). She told me about another dress, that used to belong to her mother, and a suit jacket that belonged to her late husband and how these garments have a presence that she cannot explain; there is just something particular about them that is different from her other garments. When she reflected on her own experience through my practice-led research, a different awareness took over and she became more sensitive to the extraordinary quality of garments that she cherishes. It is precisely in this shift of awareness that my research takes place, that slight shift that enables one to sense the otherworldly aspects that we sometimes encounter in seemingly ordinary, everyday things if we stay with them long enough to truly 'see' them.

Both the *Spectral* installation and the (*Magical*) *Presence* exhibition highlighted the importance of being present, slowing down and attending to things so that various nuances of meaning can be felt and understood. Although intended as an opportunity to contemplate *bleeding garments* from a personal perspective - rather than being only an aesthetically pleasing experience - the (*Magical*) *Presence* exhibition did at first not evoke the kind of curiosity or commitment that I had hoped for. Some gallery visitors commented on the aesthetics of the exhibition and the work, suggesting that art displayed in a gallery is predominantly approached as a visually pleasing experience of order and harmony. Most of these people did not take the time to read the annotations in detail, which are crucial to understanding the research and the purpose of the exhibition. In the end, the exhibition generated two kinds of responses. On the one hand there were people who looked at the aesthetics, and then there were the ones who fully engaged with the ideas of the research, which inspired them to reflect on their own relationship to the themes and ideas presented in the exhibition.

As already mentioned, phenomenological understanding asks a lot of its reader, or in the case of this research, also the gallery visitor or participant.

Understanding or internalising phenomenological meaning that ‘overflows its ordinary informational’ function, requires one to be receptive to inner meaning (van Manen, 1997: 362), and not stop at what can be objectively perceived.

Whether it is the research process itself or the process of understanding its outcome, phenomenology requires us to attune, stay, and even return to things to allow an inner meaning to resonate with our subjective experience. People who did take the time to stay and contemplate the exhibition said it made them think, which ultimately is the aim of this research. Whether these thoughts were about the fuzziness of things and the world as a place of possibilities or more specific contemplation on personal relationships with evocative garments, the exhibition evoked contemplation about our relationship with material things and the world in general. Interestingly, the idea of parallel worlds came up thrice in discussions with gallery visitors, which suggests that the exhibition was able to successfully shift the awareness to a more expanded and imaginative mode if or when people took the time to attune to the magical and the poetic elements that this research offers.

The underpinning idea of uncanny presence was also experienced and observed differently by different workshop participants. Many commented on how certain things hinted towards something elusive or haunted. Some people recognised the uncanniness of the abandoned garments, while others commented on the elusive nature of the frottage imprints. One person thought that my black dress placed on a chair had a secretive and almost holy presence and that encountering it evoked a feeling similar to that of entering a church. This echoes previously explored ideas about evocative garments as relics, but rather than being a purely symbolic association, the relic-like quality of the dress manifests in the way it nonchalantly drapes itself over the chair (Fig. 27). The way in which the experience of *bleeding garments* is communicated depends on the way in which they are presented and paying attention to how the dress was placed on the chair gave it a life of its own, imbuing it with a presence that echoes the way the dress makes me feel.

One of the most powerful encounters during the (*Magical*) *Presence* exhibition was with a woman who said that she had not expected to have such an emotional response to the exhibition. The concept of *bleeding garments* moved her to tears because it made her think about a dressing gown of hers that used to belong to her grandmother. The garment, she said, is hideous but getting rid of it is an

impossible thought because of its connection to her grandmother and various past emotional experiences (individual conversation, 17/03/2023). The exhibition resonated with her because the notion of *bleeding garments* corresponded with her personal experience of the dressing gown. For her, the exhibition successfully revealed the phenomenon of *bleeding garments* in recognisable form so that its phenomenological essence was reborn within her, enabling her to contemplate the research through her own experience. This again brings to mind Christian Boltanski (Boltanski & Beil, 2006: 8), who considered himself to be ‘an artist who wants to arouse emotion’ He wanted to ‘make people cry’ and finding ‘the means to do it’ was his job Although my aim is not specifically to make people cry, any contemplative, emotional, and intense responses can be considered as successful and meaningful insights because they show that people recognise something in the work that resonates with their subjective experience, therefore successfully bringing the phenomenon to their awareness so that the living meaning of this lived experience can be reflected on phenomenologically (van Manen, 2017a: 818).

The gallery visitor who commented on the relic-like quality of the black dress, also observed something familiar in a poem named *Poetic Entanglement* (Fig. 29), which explores the notion of *bleeding garments* through my experience of the black dress. Although she could not say why she felt like she had read it before, she commented that it was nice to read something familiar. The above response may not have been as forcefully emotional as the previously mentioned response, but it does show how the poetic description of *bleeding garments* conveyed something recognisable that echoed the gallery visitor’s subjective experience. As van Manen (1997: 366) notes, successful phenomenological inquiry ‘evokes reflective experience of life through sensory and prereflective awareness as well as reflective meaning that concerns our place in life’. It makes us think, and it makes the world...call on us to think our feeling in the broadest and deepest sense of the term’ (van Manen, 1997: 366). It was interesting to witness how the exhibition did not evoke thoughts and insights only about clothes but about our being in the world and our relationship with material things in general.



Figure 27 Black dress on chair, *(Magical) Presence*, exhibited at Brewery Tap UCA Project Space, Folkestone (2023)

Comparing the responses to the *Spectral* installation and the *(Magical) Presence* exhibition, I observed that the latter evoked more focused contemplation about how we experience the material world, whereas *Spectral* inspired moments of more abstract wonder. The installation and the exhibition, then, belong together

because they can create that tension between the concrete and the abstract that is conducive for evoking the essence of the phenomenon so that it can be reborn within us. The abstract and mysterious elements of the installation are complemented by the more concrete contemplation offered by the annotated exhibition. Together the installation and the exhibition create that certain tension that phenomenological understanding draws on and provide the tools and the framework needed to contemplate the phenomenological nature of *bleeding garments*.

It is important to reiterate that the intention with phenomenological inquiry is not to argue for a definitive conclusion but to evoke the phenomenon in recognisable form so that it can be reborn within the reader, or in this case the gallery visitor. As a complementary whole, *Spectral* and *(Magical) Presence* form a practice-led phenomenology that aims to evoke a felt understanding by exploring different ways in which garments can be and become. Together the evocative effect of the *Spectral* installation and the contemplative nature of the annotated exhibition create a tension between the abstract and the concrete, typically found in phenomenology. If the person is receptive to this tension, the practice-led outcomes can evoke a felt understanding of *bleeding garments* as well as active contemplation about our relationship with garments and the material world in general.

The way we feel in the presence of *bleeding garments* can never be fully captured through any means, not even poetry or art, since it is in our subjective encounters with the individual garments that the phenomenon happens, and these moments are fleeting and pre-reflective. Any attempt to capture these encounters can be nothing more than exactly that, an attempt and will only capture fragments of the actual experience. The success of the practice-led research outputs that have emerged through this research therefore lies in their ability to evoke an experience that echoes the phenomenological essence of *bleeding garments*. If this echo reaches the viewer or reader in a way that resonates with their subjective experience it can produce a felt knowledge of what *bleeding garments* are and can be like as an experience and it is this felt knowledge that enables a revealing of truth, or ‘unconcealment’, to happen.



Figure 28 My black dress enveloped by an aura of emotion. *Emotional Energy* (2023)  
[reactive print on viscose]

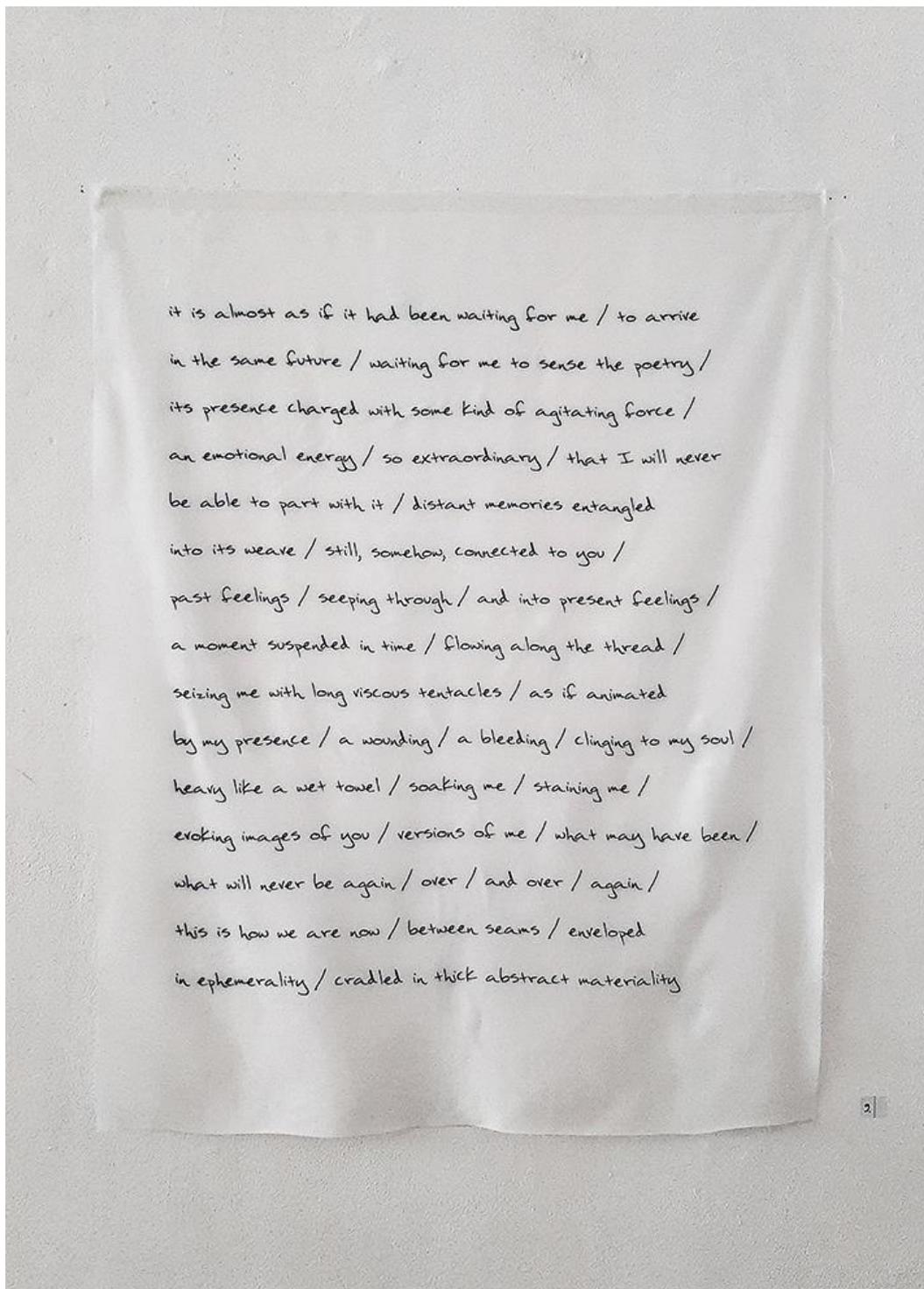


Figure 29 One gallery visitor recognised something familiar in a poem that explores the notion of *bleeding garments*. *Poetic Entanglement* (2023) [reactive print on viscose]

#### 4.4 The phenomenological essence of *bleeding garments*

‘Truth is...a kind of “seeing” reached by means of a leap out of [our] habitual tendency to place [ourselves] over against the world of objects. (Gray, 1967: 106).

This research is not concerned with correspondence, validity, or rationality but about seeing things differently, anew, and wholeheartedly. It is about attending to things as they appear to us in the moment. This requires a certain ‘letting go’ so that we may experience things in an unrestricted way and ‘see’ things for what they are rather than impose meaning upon them. Rather than proposing to establish a theory or hypothesis this research simply asks, what are intensely evocative garments like as an experience. What is it that makes *bleeding garments* the phenomenon that they are?

Drawing on existential phenomenology, the aim of this research is to explore what the phenomenological essence of *bleeding garments* might be. What is the underlying nature that makes these garments the phenomenon that they are? As already noted in Chapter II, essence in the phenomenological sense does not refer to just one specific quality or occurrence but should be understood more like a happening. Phenomenological essence is not ‘some singled, enduring, universal quality of something, an attribute or state of that thing, as is commonly conceived’ but rather a “happening”, where the Being of something is unconcealed’ (Bolt, 2011: 175). Essence is the way something is in the most fundamental way; it is the moment when we see and feel something for what it is and as it is. To use an example from this research, when the gallery visitor had an emotional response to the notion of *bleeding garments* during the (*Magical Presence*) exhibition, it was the essence of the phenomenon that revealed itself to her.

There are many ways in which beings and things can be, and when we understand garments as more than adjuncts to the body that express or represent the Self, we can start to contemplate evocative garments in the broader sense. To understand how *bleeding garments* are experienced we should avoid approaches that assume that garments act as carriers of meaning that merely represent emotions and memories. We must approach garments in general as things with possibilities and suspend our assumptions of them as fashionable items, functional commodities, or stand-ins for the body. We must acknowledge that clothes are not mere

representations but things in themselves and that they therefore have possibilities beyond the assumed. Acknowledging garments as material things with possibilities, provides a more expanded starting point that is conducive for encountering *bleeding garments* as they appear in the moment rather than as what we think they are. It frees the garments from restricting boundaries so that we can better perceive their entanglements with the world - an aspect that is perfectly captured by the abandoned garments in the *Found Entanglements* series (Fig. 30).

Garments can evoke emotional responses or become emotionally meaningful in many different ways. Most garments belong to the category of liking; we like the way they look, feel, and fit us. We may keep some of these garments despite not wearing them because they hold onto a part of the Self that we are not ready to let go of. Then there are garments that evoke distant memories of former versions of ourselves, places we have been to, and people we know or have known. Some of these garments are perhaps no longer worn but we keep them nonetheless because they form a tangible link to people and the past. As already noted, this research is not, however, concerned with clothes that evoke memories and emotions in general. The distinct phenomenal category that this research is concerned with is evocative garments that evoke particularly strong emotions, ones that are often difficult to explain or even identify, i.e., *bleeding garments*.

In this thesis I have established that *bleeding garments*, i.e., intensely evocative garments, form their own distinct group and that they are different from garments that evoke milder emotional responses. Although some people may feel compelled to share stories about personal garments when asked about evocative garments, *bleeding garments* are rarely the ones that immediately come to mind. This is because *bleeding garments* cannot be thought of but need to be encountered. These garments are often dormant rather than an active part of our consciousness, which means that it is only by exploring our wardrobe through a heightened awareness that we can know these garments. Whether they are part of our daily wardrobe or hidden at the bottom of a drawer, *bleeding garments* do not reveal themselves to us unless we attend to them in the moment. It is our encounter with these garments in the moment that makes them significant as material things and encountering them requires a heightened affective awareness.

That *bleeding garments* need to be encountered to be discovered tells us something important about the nature of these garments. As previously explored

through my experience of the black dress, examples from other scholars (de Perthuis, 2016; Stallybrass, 2012; Medvedev, 2007), and the participatory workshops, *bleeding garments* have a certain presence that is different from that of other garments. This presence, however, is not simply the physical presence of the garment itself nor is it the presence of memories evoked by the garment. As mentioned in Chapter I, other scholars have also commented on the particular presence that certain evocative garments have. Karen de Perthuis (2016) describes how her late partner's old jumper *evokes his presence*, Peter Stallybrass has written about how he felt like the *spirit* of his deceased friend manifested in a leather jacket, and Katalin Medvedev (2007) says that she can *sense the presence* of her father when she opens his wardrobe and encounters his worn clothes.

If this was a sociological or psychological study, I might conclude that it is the concrete presence of the garments that evokes thoughts about moments when they were worn or about the people that once wore them. In other words, the garment would simply represent the moment, person, or place, and the associated memories. This, however, does not capture or describe what the experience of this presence is like, how it makes one feel. As de Perthuis (2016) notes, there is something about the presence of her partner's old jumper that evades theoretical analysis and no matter how much she tries to explain it through different concepts there is nothing that can capture how the garment makes her feel. The reason this presence cannot be easily explained or analysed is because it is not a physical matter-of-fact kind of presence but a metaphysical presence, a presence that cannot be seen yet is somehow still perceived as being part of the garment. What is being sensed is the presence of the past; the presence of people, emotions, and moments.

We now know that *bleeding garments* form a distinct phenomenal group and that they have a specific presence that must be encountered to be known. We can conclude then, that our experience of these garments in the moment is crucial to these garments as a phenomenon. But this still does not capture exactly what this encounter is like. Where does this sense of presence come from and what does it feel like? Evocative garments are always connected to something, a person, a moment, past feelings, or even future hopes or dreams. We may not always be able to clearly explain this connection, but it is always a sense of connection that makes us hold onto these garments. This is why we may be unable to part with certain garments because doing so would also sever this connection. This sense of connection is particularly potent in *bleeding garments*, and this is what imbues

them with an uncanny, almost animated presence, which is reflected in the *Haunted: Capturing Spirit* series (Fig. 31).



Figure 30 Abandoned garment nestled next to the pavement. 'Specimen 35', *Found Entanglements* (2023)

So far, I have proposed that *bleeding garments* have an uncanny presence, a tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar, that is encountered and felt, not thought of, and that this presence is a result of a sense of connection. In factual terms, this connection is related to people, moments, and emotions yet, this does not capture what this connection is like as an experienced phenomenon. What is important to recognise here is that this connection is not felt in terms of representation, it is felt as a direct link to the people or moments that the garment was once in contact with. Considering the magical concept that things

that have previously been in contact will always remain connected, we can conclude that encounters with *bleeding garments* are of a magical kind. That is, these garments maintain a magical connection where we can sense the entanglement of the physical and the metaphysical, the concrete and the spiritual. They may only connect us to that which is now only present in its absence, but they connect us nonetheless and it is this connection that lies at the heart of *bleeding garments*. This connection, however, should not be taken lightly, it is indeed a connection in the sincerest meaning of the word.

The notion of magical connection becomes even more obvious when we consider items that we do *not* want to keep. In these cases, keeping the item maintains a connection that we do not want to hold on to and the act of getting rid of the garment can almost become a ritual of letting go, a way of actively severing the connection. In a collection of stories about clothing found by Emily Spivack on the online platform *eBay*, there is one anecdote where the act of selling a wedding dress became a way for a woman to process her feelings and let go of the connection maintained by a dress 'for a wedding that never happened' (Spivack, 2010). Although the woman could simply have sold the dress without any further comments, the woman chose to include the following description in a photo of the dress: 'he was a loser anyway', a sentiment that is reiterated in the seller's item description (Spivack, 2010).

The adverse effect of magical connection is also present in the case of a person who told me about how he has kept a T-shirt that is connected to an ex-partner but that the presence of the garment is so overwhelming that he keeps the garment in a plastic bag hidden deep inside the wardrobe (online conversation, 03/12/2020). In this example, the feelings about the magical connection maintained by the garment are conflicted. This person neither is neither ready to let go of the connection, nor does he, however, wish to be in the presence of the garment. Whether they make us feel uncomfortable or whether we desire and cherish these connections, *bleeding garments* hold onto people and past moments, and this lies at the heart of the experience of all *bleeding garments* regardless of what our individual experience is like.



Figure 31 Image capturing the uncanny, almost animated presence of *bleeding garments*. 'Levitating' slip dress, *Haunted: Capturing Spirit* (2022)

## 4.5 Dead things do not bleed

‘...red is our colour by birth- / right, the colour of tense joy / & spilled pain that *joins us / to each other*’ (Atwood, 2004: 145, italics added).

With the idea of magical connection and presence in mind, I shall now shift the awareness further and explore the nature of *bleeding garments* through a different perspective, one that is rooted in the imaginative, the magical, and the poetic. Please keep in mind that I am simply proposing a shift in how we perceive our encounters with *bleeding garments* and that this research is not concerned with scientific inquiry but with what things actually feel like as we experience them. In the previous section I explored the presence that *bleeding garments* have and I now want to explore this further through magical thinking. I have already implied that the intense but elusive quality of *bleeding garments* can make them appear as if charged with an energy, something that almost seems to imbue them with a spirit of their own. Normally, we might dismiss this kind of thought as foolish and irrational but let us set aside ‘rational’ thinking for a moment and approach this with an affective awareness. What if the presence we feel when we encounter *bleeding garments* is not a result of us falling for foolish superstition, but an actual energy emanating from the garments? Imagine that residues of our emotions could become entangled in the weave or knit of our clothes whenever we experience intense emotions and that these residues would then linger, charging the clothing with a type of static emotional electricity that could be affectively sensed by us.

In his book *The Nature of Things: The Secret Life of Inanimate Objects* interdisciplinary scholar Lyall Watson (1990: 17) muses over the idea that humans have some kind of ‘aura’, that can be ‘boosted by emotion’ and transferred to inanimate objects by close proximity or touch. He elaborates on this idea by stating that if this energy field were indeed to exist, then the emotional connection would be strongest between people and the things they value most (Watson, 1990: 18). In other words, the stronger the emotions involved, the stronger the aura becomes. This concept is also commonly referred to in relation to paranormal events such as poltergeist phenomena, which are thought to be caused by an emotional tension between a person and their environment (Bord & Bord, 1998: 128). Although Watson’s notion of emotional energy is not completely irrational, he does not conclusively argue that material

things literally soak up our emotions, but rather challenges us to think differently about our involvement with the material world. Watson essentially suggests that we should not ignore the magical as it too holds knowledge about the world and our experience of it. My intention is neither to argue for the existence of emotional energy nor against it, but to use it as an idea that supports my task of embracing the magical nature of *bleeding garments*.

Let us consider for a moment that, through the entanglements of the world, matter could somehow record past experiences when the emotional content is strong enough and that garments could become imbued with residues of our emotions. I am proposing that in a magical and poetic sense it is not our memories of people and moments that make certain garments emotionally resonant, but our affective encounter with an emotional energy that lingers within the garments that gives rise to a felt connection. Perhaps certain garments become particularly evocative not because we *think* they are meaningful but because they are imbued with residues of emotions after having been exposed to particularly intense emotional events either once or over a longer period of time. Rather than resulting from a cognitively generated memory it is, then, an emotional energy embedded in the garment that creates and maintains the connection. If we consider my black dress as an example, it is not then the dress as a representation that evokes feelings, but my encounter with an energy within the dress that resonates.

If *bleeding garments* can contain residues of one person's emotions, then why not also residues of different people's emotions? This would mean that *bleeding garments* do not only have the ability to absorb emotions from the person wearing the garment but have the potential to absorb any particularly intense emotions that the garment comes into contact with. Considering the idea that *bleeding garments* could hold residues of shared emotional experiences, makes them even more magical than if they were associated exclusively with our own emotions. This means that not only 'we' as individuals can be physically absorbed by our clothes but that 'we' as lovers, friends, family could somehow remain within the weave or knit of certain garments. Who knows, maybe something does remain of *us* and the way *we* were.

Now that I have introduced the idea that *bleeding garments* are imbued with residues of emotions that linger within the garments, I shall further expand on the metaphor. As already mentioned, the blood metaphor reflects the particularly intense, expanding quality of *bleeding garments* but when this is considered in

relation to the idea of emotional energy, it becomes even more potent. It is no longer simply a metaphor but acquires a kind of magical realness by suggesting that *bleeding garments* 'bleed' because they are bursting at the seams with emotions, which creates an aura of emotional energy that 'stains' the person for whom the garment is meaningful. It is the emotional energy that emanates from the garments and makes us feel like they have a particular presence that forms the 'bleeding' in *bleeding garments*. This is illustrated in an image of my black dress surrounded by a fiery glow (Fig. 32). It is this 'bleeding' that magically connects us to people and past moments through the presence of the garment. The idea of emotional energy is also captured in the poem below, which emerged through contemplation on my relationship with the black dress. Providing a poetic description of *bleeding garments*, the poem explores the encounter between person and garment and the expanding, abstract nature of *bleeding garments*. The poem poetically illustrates the previous argument that it is our experience of the garments in the moment that makes them meaningful and significant as a phenomenon.

it is almost as if it had been waiting for me / to arrive in  
the same future / waiting for me to sense the poetry /  
its presence charged with some kind of agitating force /  
an emotional energy / so extraordinary / that I will never  
be able to part with it / distant memories entangled into  
its weave / still, somehow, connected to you / past feelings /  
seeping through / and into present feelings / a moment  
suspended in time / flowing along the thread / seizing me  
with long viscous tentacles / as if animated by my presence /  
a wounding / a bleeding / clinging to my soul / heavy like  
a wet towel / soaking me / staining me / evoking images  
of you / versions of me / what may have been / what will  
never be again / over / and over / again / this is how we  
are now / between seams / enveloped in ephemerality /  
cradled in thick abstract materiality

*Poetic Entanglement* (Langh, 2023)



Figure 32 My black dress 'bleeding' emotional energy. *Emotional Energy* (2023) [digitally manipulated photograph]

My reason for drawing on Watson's idea of emotional energy is magical, not scientific. Considering that we experience *bleeding garments* through magical thinking, the idea of emotional energy can deepen our experience of them because rather than reducing their meaning to a psychological process that can be objectively analysed, it acknowledges that our experience of these garments is highly subjective, emotive, and embodied. Cloth 'connects us with memories of other times and other places', notes Lesley Millar (2007: 6) in the introduction to *Cloth & Culture Now*. Though Millar is referring to the mnemonic properties of cloth, I propose that we should also consider this sentiment in a magical sense to understand *bleeding garments* as an experienced phenomenon. Whether it is possible for material things to absorb residues of our emotions is beside the point because the way we feel in the presence of these garments is not scientific or analytical. To appreciate these garments as a phenomenon, I argue that we should embrace that uncanny feeling that there is more to these garments than what can be objectively explained. Rather than suppressing the magical by rationalising our experience, I propose that we should approach *bleeding garments* as magical moments in which we can feel the interconnectedness of the world and the presence of past emotions that linger in one garment.

## **Chapter V - Concluding thoughts**

Rather than establishing any absolute truths, this research seeks to inspire new ways of thinking about and approaching *bleeding garments* - and evocative garments in general. This chapter looks at how the research contributes to the existing academic environment by considering *bleeding garments* in relation to the idea of magical value and how this might be acknowledged not only in research but in everyday life.

## 5.1 Magical value

‘...and we will know that magic is part of what [we are], just as flight is part of what a bird is’. (*The Book of the Lady Catherine of Winchester*, 1209-67 quoted in Clarke, 2006: 7)

Describing photographs that stir something within us (i.e., the *punctum*) Roland Barthes (1981: 55, 59) notes how ‘the punctum...is a kind of subtle *beyond...*’ and that regardless of whether it is triggered or not, the *punctum* ‘is what [one] adds to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*’ (original italics). The same sentiment applies to *bleeding garments*, they are encounters with a metaphysical beyond through which past encounters make themselves known. Most garments do not have a ‘blind field’, as Barthes (1981: 57) calls it, that makes us sense something beyond their ‘actuality’. When we encounter *bleeding garments*, however, a blind field emerges through which we can sense their interconnectedness with people and past moments. In other words, *bleeding garments* have a subtle metaphysical materiality that expands beyond their concrete materiality.

The first research question that this research addresses is: What are intensely evocative garments like as an experience? I argue that it is our encounters with the garments in the moment that holds their significance and meaningfulness, and that the phenomenological essence of these encounters is inherently magical. Whether we are fully conscious of it or not, *bleeding garments* are experienced as maintaining a magical connection to people, places, and past moments. Shahidha Bari (2019: 23) has argued that the ability of clothes to magically connect us to people and moments is foolish since material things cannot hold the people we love and that all that it offers is ‘a broken promise’. I disagree with this statement. I argue that this kind of rationalisation dismisses the significance of our subjective experience. If it is our experience of *bleeding garments* that holds their meaning, then does not dismissing this as irrational render our experience as insignificant? Is it not precisely the ability of material things to magically hold residues of loved ones and past moments that makes us keep and cherish these things in the first place? Worn garments may not always or forever hold our loved ones in the literal sense, but they can remain connected to people or moments we love and cherish in a metaphysical sense, which can be just as valuable as concrete connections.

Things can have a range of different values and meanings, which also shift over time, but we live in a world where value is considered to be predominantly monetary, functional, or based on the uniqueness of a resource or product. Deep down we know that emotional value is important, but we will often dismiss this as silly or foolish. Although increasingly acknowledged as central to our clothing practices, emotional value has traditionally been treated as secondary or irrational and is still underrepresented in clothes research. This research takes the idea of emotional value one step further by suggesting that *bleeding garments* have magical value and that although they may no longer be worn, their value is not replaceable or reproducible. In other words, if we get rid of the garment, we will also lose the connection that it maintains. Whether conscious or unconscious, *bleeding garments* are experienced as connecting us to people, places, and moments and it is precisely this experience of magical connection that makes these garments unique as a phenomenon. Rather than dismissing this aspect as foolish or frivolous, I propose that we should embrace it as an extraordinary aspect of *bleeding garments* that makes our experience more meaningful.

The overall aim of this research is to explore what *bleeding garments* are and can be like as an experience and what a methodology for exploring these might involve. To truly 'see' *bleeding garments* I have proposed a shift in awareness that embraces the emotive and the intuitive elements of our experience. Because of their metaphysical blind field, ignoring this aspect will necessarily result in an incomplete understanding of what *bleeding garments* are like as an experience. This research shows how a practice-led methodology that draws on the phenomenological attitude of wonder, magical awareness, and poetic contemplation can help us reach a deeper understanding of what *bleeding garments* are like as a phenomenon. It shows that there is more to evocative garments than we might initially assume and that taking time to truly encounter the clothes we keep in our wardrobes can reveal new things about our relationships with clothes - as can be observed in insights discovered during the practice-led process and the participatory workshops.

There is, however, no straightforward answer to what *bleeding garments* are like as an experience because our experiences are not objective nor are they fixed. The way we experience *bleeding garments* always depends on our involvement with them and this may also shift depending on things such as moods and time. However, there is something universal in how we experience these garments and as I have argued, the phenomenological essence of *bleeding garments* is magical

connection. That is, the 'originary' nature of these garments as a phenomenon is rooted in a sense of connection that is born from magical thinking. The reason that these garments are meaningful to us is because they are experienced as directly connected to people, places, and past moments. This becomes particularly noticeable when we consider how difficult it is to get rid of certain garments, but even more so if we turn this around. Sometimes a garment may evoke painful feelings and the opposite happens: we *want to let go* of the garment because by holding onto the garment we are also holding onto the pain. Furthermore, it is in fact not only *bleeding garments* that are experienced through magical thinking, but any evocative garments that connect us to significant aspects of our lives can be experienced through magical thinking.

The practice-led process, including the participatory workshops, addresses the second research question: What might a methodology for exploring intensely evocative garments involve? Although the methodological approach applied to this research is impossible to replicate due to its serendipitous nature, the process offers valuable insights about how we can explore our subjective experience of evocative garments. Rather than providing a recipe approach for exploring *bleeding garments*, the methodology developed for this research shows how a shift in awareness is required to explore what *bleeding garments* are like as a phenomenon. This research shows that applying the phenomenological attitude of wonder, magical awareness, and poetry to practice-led methods results in a process of inquiry that is highly conducive for a more in-depth exploration of *bleeding garments* because it places us subjectively and intuitively within the phenomenon rather than objectively outside of it.

Feelings are not rationally constructed or logically comprehended concepts and therefore traditional scientific methods are likely to fall short in research on experience. Regardless of the intensity or the shape they take, feelings emerge from deep within the soul and as Pinkola Estes (2008) argues, intuition is the messenger of the soul. Thus, to get to the depth of how we feel we must engage our intuition, we must engage our embodied, feeling self and let things unravel without imposing systematic logic or rationality on them. This is why practice-led and poetic methods are highly conducive for exploring subjective experience; they are the language of intuition. When this is grounded in the phenomenological attitude of encountering things through a sense of wonder as they reveal themselves to us in the moment, we can reach even richer insights about what experiences are actually like.

By exploring my own experience through my practice, I have been able to place myself within the phenomenon rather than outside of it, which has resulted in a deeper understanding about what *bleeding garments* are and can be like as a phenomenon. Furthermore, the participatory workshops facilitated during this research also show that creatively and intuitively exploring evocative garments as experienced in the moment allows for deeper and more meaningful insights to emerge. This is partly suggested in the differences between descriptions written by participants at the beginning of the workshop and the final poetic fragments. Although the material generated during the workshops is unique to the participant and the moment of ‘uncovering’, certain recurring themes that emerge from the material show that despite each encounter being uniquely subjective, there are also elements that connect the individual experiences. Comparing poetic fragments and reflections from different participants suggests that *bleeding garments* are experienced as mysterious and potently present. *Bleeding garments* are therefore not easily captured through conventional language and as this research shows, poetic language and metaphor can therefore be more conducive for expressing their unique nature. It is important to note, however, that despite the ability of poetry to reveal aspects that we may otherwise struggle to express, *bleeding garments* will always maintain a certain mystery.

Because of their complex and uncanny nature, *bleeding garments* are unlikely to come up in conversations and it is only through authentic encounters with our wardrobes that we can discover these garments. *Bleeding garments* only reveal themselves to us in the moment and they must be encountered before they can be truly seen and contemplated. As the pre-workshop activity (see Appendix A) shows, when people are invited to mindfully encounter the contents of their wardrobes in the moment, they may discover garments that they initially did not realise were intensely evocative. The guidance on how to discover *bleeding garments* is therefore a simple yet effective way of accessing our wardrobes from a different, more mindful perspective, and is crucial to the workshop process.

I propose that the magical aspect should be considered in research on evocative garments as well as in everyday life because it can help understand the complexity and depth of these relationships. Despite the recent shift in scholarly studies on clothing, affect and subjective experience remain underexplored in research on clothing, yet it is precisely in experience that our clothing practices are situated. We do not choose garments only based on how they look or what they do but also based on how they make us feel. The reason we cherish certain

garments more than others and hold onto them despite perhaps no longer wearing them is not because we *think* they are meaningful but because they *feel* meaningful. Furthermore, not acknowledging what experiences feel like ultimately perpetuates and creates situations, environments, and worlds that feel wrong. Although this research is specifically concerned with garments it is also an invitation to consider experience in relation to the wider material world.

The world is not a straightforward and objective place and therefore we cannot expect to only know it only through a naturalistic mode of thought. Through its magically and poetically contemplative approach, this research proposes a different perspective to the traditional Western approach to clothing and material culture in general. It contributes to the growing interest in new approaches to material culture by arguing that both persons and things are equally as important in the phenomenon of *bleeding garments*. By focusing on the metaphysical aspects of these encounters, this research further pushes the boundaries of existing scholarly work on clothing and emotion. It contributes to the current scholarly paradigm shift that seeks to abandon dated but long prevailing approaches to material culture and clothing by partly returning to ideas explored before the age of modernity, such as the magical idea of the interconnected nature of the universe.

## 5.2 What we feel matters

‘...I didn’t want to lose that energy’ (van Doorn, 2016: 88)

The above quotation taken from Niels van Doorn’s research on kinship and material culture in queer communities, shows that we cherish certain things precisely because they hold our loved ones. Prompted by Peter Stallybrass’ (2012: 38 cited in van Doorn, 2016: 88) observation ‘that cloth is not only closely connected to memory but in fact “is a kind of memory”’, van Doorn shares an anecdote from one of his research participants, John, who speaks about a pair of hand-me-down leather boots. John comments on how he misses the person whom the boots belonged to and that he ‘was upset that [he] couldn’t have [a] new sole put on top of the old one’ because he did not want to lose the energy that was part of the original sole (van Doorn, 2016: 88). To the cobbler, these boots probably just looked like another pair of worn-out boots needing to be mended

but to John the worn soles had a particularity that could not be replaced and could only be described as 'energy'.

Someone once mentioned to me how they had been confronted with a kind of residual cloud of energy that seemed to linger in their home after an intensely emotional event (personal discussion, 2023). This feeling was not caused by any distinct physical factors but was nonetheless experienced as very palpable and visceral. Whether it is 'real' in the sense that it can be empirically proven or not, that feeling of metaphysical energy that we may sometimes encounter should not be ignored because it is part of how we experience the world. This research encourages us to trust in our experiences; that the way we feel is not foolish or irrational. Magical thinking is inherently human and rather than being an irrational emotional response, magical consciousness creates a heightened sense of interconnectedness that can make our experiences more meaningful.

*Bleeding garments* will always remain connected to people, moments, and emotions that they were once in contact with, and whether it is conscious or unconscious, this sense of connection is what we feel in the presence of *bleeding garments*. I propose that, in the magical sense, we should embrace the idea that it is an energy embedded within the garments that maintains this connection and that it is magical connection that lies at the heart of our experience of *bleeding garments*. Why does this matter, you might ask. Why do we need to know what the phenomenological essence of intensely evocative garments is and why do we need to understand it as something magical? It matters because feelings and subjective experience matters and by understanding how we truly experience the world we can understand more about ourselves and others and create and maintain more meaningful connections.

In an 'Ask an Expert' article on an American online platform called *Seasons* - a resource platform for carers - a woman asks for guidance on how to help her grandfather to 'downsize his belongings' by letting go of his deceased wife's old clothing (Gibbs, 2022). Betsy Gibbs (2022), an occupational therapist, responds with a list of things to consider when 'letting go of sentimental items'. These include things such as asking what the grandmother might want to be done with the clothes, sharing memories while boxing up the items, and asking someone to make a quilt from some of the clothes (Gibbs, 2022). This is good advice since it encourages a gentle approach; however, I am not convinced by the concept of simply letting go of sentimental items because this approach is missing one

important consideration: some things cannot be replaced in any shape or form, not even by a memory because the things themselves *are* the memory.

It is of course understandable that keeping all the clothes is perhaps not sustainable or reasonable; however, rather than convincing her grandfather that it is 'OK to let go' (Gibbs, 2022), perhaps a more sensible and empathetic approach would be to try and understand his experience and, rather than letting go of everything, help him hold on to a couple of things that matter the most. In instances such as the above example it may be beneficial to encounter and identify any *bleeding garments* that a person may wish to hold onto. Attending to the garments as what they are in and of themselves rather than dismissing them as empty husks that only take up space, might make the process of sorting and discarding even more meaningful and help the grandfather hold onto garments that are irreplaceable.

*Bleeding garments* - and certain other meaningful material things - ultimately cannot be replaced, not even by an image, because it is the garment itself that holds the connection. If we get rid of the garment, we will also lose the connection. Now, I do not suggest that we should always hold on to every single item that evokes memories and emotions, because to some extent everything has a story. I do, however, suggest that there are certain things that we should cherish with every fibre of our being and rather than regard the phenomenon of emotional connection as unhealthy, foolish, or trivial, we should embrace it as an extraordinary and beautiful aspect of our lives. Regardless of whether material things actually can absorb residues of our emotions, magical connection is central to our experience of *bleeding garments* and embracing this connection honours the extraordinary nature of this phenomenon. It validates our *experience* of these garments as something real, important, and beautifully poetic.

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## Appendix A - How to discover *bleeding garments*

### Guidance on how to encounter intensely evocative garments, i.e., *bleeding garments*.

*Bleeding garments* are not just any sentimental items of clothing, they are potently evocative items that stir something deep within us; they agitate us. These garments have an uncanny, almost animated presence and appear as if saturated with an emotional energy that seeps out, figuratively staining us. *Bleeding garments* are never exclusively about comforting feelings or about sad feelings, but rather evoke a certain tension between presence and absence and comfort and loss.

Although encounters with *bleeding garments* tend to be almost violently instantaneous, we should not assume that we immediately know which garments 'bleed'. It is important to note that *bleeding garments* cannot be discovered through analysis. It is not a question that can be cognitively answered but a quality or a presence that is encountered and felt. *Bleeding garments* are discovered through an affective awareness and this requires one to be receptive to their unique presence and evocative quality.

Encounters with *bleeding garments* are of a highly subjective nature and may be either instantaneous or they may require us to spend some time in their presence. However, as suggested above, they will always resonate on a deeply embodied level rather than being items that are chosen through conscious reflection. Below are a few tips on how one can become receptive to *bleeding garments*.

1. You should not expect to find a *bleeding garment* solely by thinking about the clothes you own, but rather by exploring your wardrobe with a certain openness and wonder. It is also worth noting that the word *wardrobe* does not only refer to a physical space but also the entire collection of personal clothes that a person wears, might wear, or will never wear again.
2. Before you approach your wardrobe, take a moment to connect with yourself in the present. Take a few long breaths and let go of any expectations you might have.
3. Slowly browse the contents of your wardrobe, allowing the items to present themselves as they are. Do not impose meaning or narratives on any items, do not analyse them or contemplate them too much. Engage all your senses and your entire body, not just your mind, and let whatever feelings appear to flow naturally.
4. Pick out any items that resonate with you emotionally. Again, try not to overanalyse.
5. If you have found an item (or potentially items) that feels as if it has a unique and intensely evocative *presence*, this is likely to be the garment you wish to explore during the workshop.
6. If you have selected a few items but are not entirely sure whether they 'bleed', investigate them separately. Do they evoke strong feelings or only mild curiosity? Can you immediately and explicitly explain why the garment is meaningful or does it have an uncanny presence that you cannot quite put your finger on?
7. If you have discovered a garment that evokes an almost violent emotional response that is difficult to describe this is very likely to be a *bleeding garment*.
8. Remember, *bleeding garments* agitate but we may not be able to explain exactly how or why. They have a particular quality that seems to expand beyond their physical materiality.

## Appendix B - Participant information sheet



Participant information sheet 2023

### **Participation in workshop exploring intensely evocative garments through creative and poetic engagement**

This document is for the purpose of providing you, the participant, with information about the research, the purpose and objectives of the workshop, and how the material generated during the workshop will be used.

**Research title:** *Bleeding Garments: A magical and poetic approach to the phenomenology of intensely evocative garments*

#### **Name and contact information of researcher:**

Henrica Langh, [REDACTED]

#### **Alternative contact (supervisor):**

Professor Victoria Kelley [REDACTED]

**About the research:** This workshop is part of a PhD research project that explores how people experience personal garments that evoke intense emotions and how these experiences can be explored and captured through magical thinking and poetry. The research is practice-led and will result in a written thesis as well as an immersive installation that captures the essence of intensely evocative garments.

**The purpose of the workshop:** The aim of the workshop is to facilitate a space that invites participants to explore the magical and poetic quality of their garments through creative engagement and poetry. The purpose is to collect material on how people experience and engage with personal garments that evoke intense emotions. This will be done through observation, notetaking, audio recordings, photography, and participant 'reflectionnaires'. The collected material will be used to inform the written thesis and an immersive installation that invites people to experience the essence of intensely evocative garments.

**Workshop format:** During the workshop participants explore their personal garments through a series of creative prompts which include image-making, metaphor, free-writing, and reflective practice. It is vital to bring the physical item to the workshop as physical proximity and tactile engagement is crucial to the workshop process. The workshop concludes in a brief discussion about the overall process and any key discoveries. The duration of the workshop is

approximately (1.5) hours, including a short comfort break. Participants are expected to be present during the entire duration of the workshop.

**Data collection:** The workshop process and outcomes will be recorded through notetaking, photography, discussion, and a form completed by participants after the workshop. Any material collected during the workshops may be referenced in the written thesis and may also be presented as part of research outputs such as conference papers or articles. All collected material will remain anonymous, unless otherwise agreed in writing. Each participant will be given a participant number so that any workshop material and outcomes can be linked together without using personal identifiers. Please see below for detailed information about each medium of data collection.

Observation and notetaking: Throughout the workshop the researcher will observe and take notes to record the workshop process. The purpose of this is to record the overall workshop process and atmosphere and take note of any significant discoveries.

Photo documentation: The researcher will also take photographs of the overall workshop process and the individual creative outcomes, including the garments and the final poetic narratives. Photographs taken during the workshop will not show any personal attributes that can be used to identify participants.

Audio recording: The post-workshop group discussion will be recorded for research purposes. Excerpts from the transcribed recordings may be used in research outputs but the audio itself will not be played or published anywhere. Audio recordings will not be associated with any personal information and will be safely stored on the researcher's cloud drive until transcribed after which the audio files will be deleted.

Reflectionnaire: After the workshop participants will be asked to reflect on their individual workshop process by completing a 'reflectionnaire'. Participants will only be asked to include their participant number on the form.

**Data storage:** All digital files, including transcripts, photographs, and reflectionnaires will be stored securely on the researcher's university cloud drive. Audio recordings, reflectionnaires, and photography will be anonymised from the start and will only be identifiable based on the participant number. The researcher's observational notes will be kept in the researcher's personal archives.

**Confidentiality and GDPR compliance:** All material collected during the workshop will be anonymised and will therefore not be subject to GDPR compliance. The Participant Consent Form will be scanned and stored on the researcher's UCA cloud drive only and will not be shared with any third parties. Personal information such as names will only be collected to get consent from participants and will not be disclosed in research outputs or to third parties. Once scanned the physical Participant Consent Forms will be destroyed and the scanned copies will be kept in a secure folder on the researcher's university cloud drive until 31 March 2024 (six months after the research project is completed) after which they will be destroyed.

**Rights:** Should a participant wish to withdraw from the research and the workshop they are free to do so at any time. The researcher has the right to ask a participant to leave the workshop for any number of reasons, and particularly if they consider their involvement to have a negative impact on any of the other

participants or the overall workshop atmosphere. What and how much participants share about their individual process during the workshop is entirely up to the participants themselves; however, out of respect for the workshop process and the other participants everyone is encouraged to contribute to the concluding discussion and to share their thoughts on their personal workshop experience.

**Copyright:** The concept, design, and structure of the workshop method is the intellectual property of the researcher. By taking part in the workshop, the participant agrees not to copy or recreate the workshop method and use it for public or commercial purposes - this also applies if the participant withdraws from the workshop. Creative outcomes produced by participants during the workshop are the intellectual property of the participant; however, by taking part in the workshop the participant agrees to let the researcher use their creative workshop outcomes in research outputs. The participant should also credit the researcher if publicly sharing any parts of the workshop or its outcomes, e.g., on social media.

**Potential risks:** Unexpected emotions may arise during the workshop process and it is the participant's responsibility to monitor their personal process. Due to the emotive nature of the workshop and the research it is important that everyone feels comfortable during the workshop process. Everyone involved, including the researcher and the participants, are responsible for creating and maintaining a 'safe space'. Although the workshop has transformative and therapeutic potential it is important to note that the workshop is not equivalent to or a substitute for counselling or therapy. The researcher is not qualified to offer any form of therapeutic advice or help. Should a participant feel an urgent need to talk to about any feelings that arise during the workshop they are advised to contact the Samaritans on 116 123 ([www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)), or another organization, such as Mind ([www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)), who can offer counselling support. Remember that it may also be helpful to talk to friends or family.

**Potential benefits:** In addition to being a valuable source of knowledge for the research project, the workshop can also be beneficial for the participants. Creatively exploring evocative garments can lead to new discoveries about the garment and its connection to certain memories and emotions. However, the overall experience is dependent on the individual process and the researcher cannot guarantee that the participant will benefit from the workshop in any significant way.

**Research results:** Participants will be given the option to sign up to an email list if they wish to be informed about future workshops, the final showcase, and planned or published research outputs that mention workshop outcomes. The email list will only be used to send information related to the research and will not be shared with third parties.

Please feel free to ask any further questions about the research or the workshop process by contacting the researcher at [REDACTED] or speaking directly to the researcher before the workshop.

**By signing the Participant Consent Form the participant confirms that they have read, understood, and agree to adhere to the above.**

## Appendix C - Participant consent form



### Participant Consent Form

**Project title:** *Bleeding Garments*: A magical and poetic approach to the phenomenology of intensely evocative garments

**Researcher:** Henrica Langh, PhD Researcher, University for the Creative Arts

**Supervisor:** Professor Victoria Kelley, University for the Creative Arts

### Participant Name:

**I confirm that I understand that by ticking each box below and signing this consent form, I am consenting to that aspect of the research or the workshop. I understand that it will be assumed that unticked boxes means that I DO NOT consent to that part of the research. I understand that I may be deemed ineligible to participate by not giving consent for any one element.**

<b>Taking Part in the workshop and the research project</b>		Tick Box
<input type="checkbox"/>	I confirm that I have read and understood the above and freely consent to participating in this workshop and the related research.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet provided by the researcher. I have been given a full explanation by the researcher of the aim and purpose of the research and of what I will be expected to do. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the study and have understood any information provided as a result. I have been given adequate time to consider my participation and agree to comply with the instructions and restrictions outlined in the Participant Information Sheet.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I voluntarily agree to take part in the practice-led research project titled <i>Bleeding Garments</i> : A magical and poetic approach to intensely evocative garments.	

	I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to justify my decision and without prejudice and that all records of my participation will be destroyed.	
	I acknowledge that in consideration for completing the study I shall not receive any reimbursement, payment, or rewards.	
	I understand that the workshop is the intellectual property of the researcher and agree not to copy or recreate the workshop concept or structure.	
<b>Use of the information I provide for this project only</b>		
	I understand that any personal data relating to participants is held and processed in the strictest confidence, and in accordance with the GDPR and the Data Protection Act (2018) where applicable. I agree that I will not seek to restrict the use of the material collected during the workshop on the understanding that my anonymity is preserved. I understand that my data gathered in this study will be stored anonymously and securely and that will not be possible to identify me in any publications.	
	I understand that my personal details such my name or email address will not be revealed to people outside the project.	
	I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs.	
	I consent to my voice being recorded during the post-workshop discussion and I understand that the recordings will be destroyed immediately following transcription.	
<b>Use of the information I provide beyond this project</b>		
	I agree that any creative outcomes generated by me during the workshop can be used in research outputs and publications by the researcher.	
	I agree to participate in the recorded post-workshop discussion and that the information I contribute can be used in research outputs and publications by the researcher.	
	I understand that the personal information and the workshop material I provide will not be made available to any commercial organisations and will be used solely by the researcher.	

By signing this form, I agree to the terms outlined above and on the Participant Information Sheet. I confirm that I understand the nature, purpose, and procedure of the research and agree to be part of the workshop and the research project. I understand that I may request a scanned copy of this consent form for my own records.

Participant name \_\_\_\_\_

---

Participant signature

Date signed

I (the researcher) certify that I have provided the individual above with the Participant Information Sheet and explained the purpose of the research and the workshop. Any further questions have been answered and any future enquiries will be answered if they arise.

---

Henrica Langh, PhD researcher

Date signed

## Appendix D - Participant reflectionnaires

### Participant 1

#### Post-workshop reflectionnaire

Participant number 1

**Title of research project:** *Bleeding Garments*: a magical and poetic approach to intensely evocative garments.

**Researcher:** Henrica Langh, PhD student, University for the Creative Arts

The purpose of this reflectionnaire is to actively reflect on your individual workshop process and your relationship with your garment. The questions are in a first-person format to emphasise the reflective aspect of these questions. Reflectionnaire responses will be used to inform the research project and research outputs but will always remain anonymous. Please write the participant number you were given at the top of this page as this will enable the researcher to connect the reflectionnaires with the material generated during the workshop.

Please reflect on the below four questions and write down your thoughts. Feel free to continue on a separate piece of paper if the space provided is not sufficient.

1. How did the garment appear to me during the workshop?

It no longer appeared like a garment I felt like I was looking feeling and talking about it as if it had feelings and emotions, something much more than just a piece of clothing

2. What kind of emotional responses did my garment evoke?

Sadness, confusion, comfort. I feel like I experienced a range of emotions towards my garment

3. What did I discover during the workshop? Did I discover anything significant, unexpected, or new about my garment or my relationship to it?

I think I experienced a sadness and anxiety towards this garment but for some reason I seem to keep hold of it folded tightly at the bottom of my drawer and I know after this workshop it will return to its same spot tightly tucked amongst my pyjamas

4. How do feel about my garment in this moment?

I discovered a new way to interact with this garment and through the various stages was able to put into words on a page how this garment made me feel. The rubbings provided a very interesting perspective on my garment.

5. If I describe my garment now, I would say:

It is something that is there but not really there it exists in my wardrobe yet is never truly seen or felt  
Maybe its me trying to hold onto a sense of the past

## Participant 2

### Post-workshop reflectionnaire

Participant number 2

**Title of research project:** *Bleeding Garments*: a magical and poetic approach to intensely evocative garments.

**Researcher:** Henrica Langh, PhD student, University for the Creative Arts

The purpose of this reflectionnaire is to actively reflect on your individual workshop process and your relationship with your garment. The questions are in a first-person format to emphasise the reflective aspect of these questions. Reflectionnaire responses will be used to inform the research project and research outputs but will always remain anonymous. Please write the participant number you were given at the top of this page as this will enable the researcher to connect the reflectionnaires with the material generated during the workshop.

Please reflect on the below four questions and write down your thoughts. Feel free to continue on a separate piece of paper if the space provided is not sufficient.

1. How did the garment appear to me during the workshop?

It appeared a lot more meaningful than I thought it was. It was very comforting and homely with lots of memories attached.

2. What kind of emotional responses did my garment evoke?

Reminiscent emotions and memories made me feel comforted.

3. What did I discover during the workshop? Did I discover anything significant, unexpected, or new about my garment or my relationship to it?

I discovered details in it that I had not noticed before like how the graphic is similar to my dad's eyes and the color my mum used.

4. How do you feel about my garment in this moment?

Like it is important and comforting. Like it holds lots of memories.

5. If I describe my garment now, I would say:

It is like an extension of home and family.

## Participant 3

### Post-workshop reflectionnaire

Participant number 3

**Title of research project:** *Bleeding Garments*: a magical and poetic approach to intensely evocative garments.

**Researcher:** Henrica Langh, PhD student, University for the Creative Arts

The purpose of this reflectionnaire is to actively reflect on your individual workshop process and your relationship with your garment. The questions are in a first-person format to emphasise the reflective aspect of these questions. Reflectionnaire responses will be used to inform the research project and research outputs but will always remain anonymous. Please write the participant number you were given at the top of this page as this will enable the researcher to connect the reflectionnaires with the material generated during the workshop.

Please reflect on the below four questions and write down your thoughts. Feel free to continue on a separate piece of paper if the space provided is not sufficient.

1. How did the garment appear to me during the workshop?

At first, I only saw it as my childhood dress that I used to love but after completing the workshop it became more about a garment that can hold onto my childhood memories.

2. What kind of emotional responses did my garment evoke?

It evoked both positive and negative emotions. There was a nostalgic longing for my childhood and the fun I used to have in this garment. It also made me think of my childhood self as a naive child who didn't know what her life was going to be like so I was sad that her unwavering joy would be broken.

3. What did I discover during the workshop? Did I discover anything significant, unexpected, or new about my garment or my relationship to it?

This garment isn't just a happy memory but it holds onto my childhood and a part of me

4. How do you feel about my garment in this moment?

I still love it and it still holds so much meaning to me but there is more depth to why I have kept it for so long

5. If I describe my garment now, I would say:

It is a symbol of my childhood and the pure joy and innocence I had. It reminds me of the happy memories of my family and holidays. It also ~~signifies~~ keeps alive my childhood self as she still exists in more than my memory.

## Post-workshop reflectionnaire completed with Microsoft Forms

### Participant 4

#### 1. How did the garment appear to me during the workshop?

Initially, the garment description was driven by my memories and associations of another place. However, during the workshop, the activities engaged with transcended the initial engagement and emotional choices that drove my choices to bringing the two garments to the workshop.

#### 2. What kind of emotional responses did my garment evoke?

The activities highlighted strong emotions tied to the memories of both items brought to the workshop. Working with words was and is difficult for me. Currently, the dissociated aspects brought into focus by the words require more work to capture the subjective quality of the two garments. Reflective thinking through the activities we engaged with did however offer a means to consider the garments in a different manner. Should the activity continue, and an analytical perspective be applied most likely my emotions may alter. However, currently, these two garments still remain my emotionally attached items. The workshop opened up personalised methods to think about the emotive associations of the garments we are affected by.

#### 3. Did I discover anything significant or new about my garment or my relationship to it?

I purposefully chose items with strong emotive content, cloth is the subject of my research, however, I had not considered emotive evocative meanings in garments.

#### 4. How do feel about my garment in this moment?

Neutral - both items were associated with summer and sunshine. Right now the weather is a bit grey and British.

## Post-workshop reflectionnaire completed with Microsoft Forms

Participant 6

1. How did the garment appear to me during the workshop?

Reminiscent

2. What kind of emotional responses did my garment evoke?

closure, nostalgia, slight sadness, sense of moving on but in a positive way

3. Did I discover anything significant or new about my garment or my relationship to it?

Yes

4. How do feel about my garment in this moment?

fulfilled and accomplished in terms of moving on

## Post-workshop reflectionnaire completed with Microsoft Forms

### Participant 7

1. How did the garment appear to me during the workshop?

That is a difficult question to answer because it could mean various things! I think I uncovered a new fondness and sensory intimacy with the garment during the workshop. I discovered lots of new small small details about it, like fraying parts and textures. It felt more comprehensive but also more fragmented.

2. What kind of emotional responses did my garment evoke?

A sort of soft comfort and fondness, and the process was very internal and thoughtful. It was hard to really identify emotions that were evoked and nothing was really viscerally powerful (although I was almost waiting for it)

3. Did I discover anything significant or new about my garment or my relationship to it?

More like a heightening of what was already there

4. How do feel about my garment in this moment?

Fond

## Post-workshop reflectionnaire completed with Microsoft Forms

Participant 8

1. How did the garment appear to me during the workshop?

It was interesting to look at it more closely. To really see it.

2. What kind of emotional responses did my garment evoke?

Nostalgia. Comfort. Happiness. Safety.

3. Did I discover anything significant or new about my garment or my relationship to it?

Yes! I was able to pinpoint why I am so fond of it.

4. How do feel about my garment in this moment?

Even more attached to it than I was before!

## Post-workshop reflectionnaire completed with Microsoft Forms

### Participant 9

1. How did the garment appear to me during the workshop?

I am not entirely sure what you mean by this question. Appear? Do you mean how did I feel about the garment during the workshop?

2. What kind of emotional responses did my garment evoke?

It was very interesting as it brought up emotions about the last time, I wore the garment and what happened to me when I was wearing it.

3. Did I discover anything significant or new about my garment or my relationship to it?

I discovered some very complicated stitching.

4. How do feel about my garment in this moment?

Feels good to look back at it. I feel better about my relationship with it now and will wear it again.

**Appendix E - Documentation of *Spectral***



Exhibition poster

Henrica Langh

***Spectral***

31 August - 3 September

Brewery Tap - UCA Project Space, Folkestone

*Spectral* is an immersive installation by transdisciplinary artist and PhD student Henrica Langh. The installation is part of her practice-led research on the phenomenology of intensely evocative garments and seeks to capture her experience of a personally meaningful garment. The installation incorporates textiles, projection, poetry, and sound to expand the materiality of the dress and create a shrine-like space with the intention to invite the viewer into a state of wonder and reverie, much like garments that evoke intense emotions might do.

Through their close relationship to the body and their involvement with our day-to-day experience of the world, clothes can become intimately entangled with our personal narratives. While the clothes we wear literally absorb fragments of our physicality they also have the ability to metaphysically hold residues of our emotions. Worn garments are tangible witnesses that silently connect us to past feelings and other people. Certain garments even seem to acquire an uncanny, almost animated presence as if imbued with some kind of spirit.

The black dress that is enveloped by the installation was hanging dormant in the artist's wardrobe for nearly a decade, due to its particularly strong emotional resonance. There is nothing aesthetically extraordinary about the dress, yet, through its connection with a specific moment in the past and a certain person, it has acquired an abstract emotional texture that transcends its physical materiality. Saturated with feelings from the past, the dress has remained as an emotional relic.

Providing a kind of reliquary for the dress that highlights its relic-like quality, this installation explores the emotional texture of the dress. Rather than describing the feelings or memories associated with the dress, the installation is an attempt at capturing the unique *experience* of the dress. The poem that weaves through the installation was not written *about* the dress but rather uncovered from it using a method of creative deconstruction developed by Langh as part of her research process. These poetic fragments provide a glimpse into the complex and abstract emotional materiality of the dress.

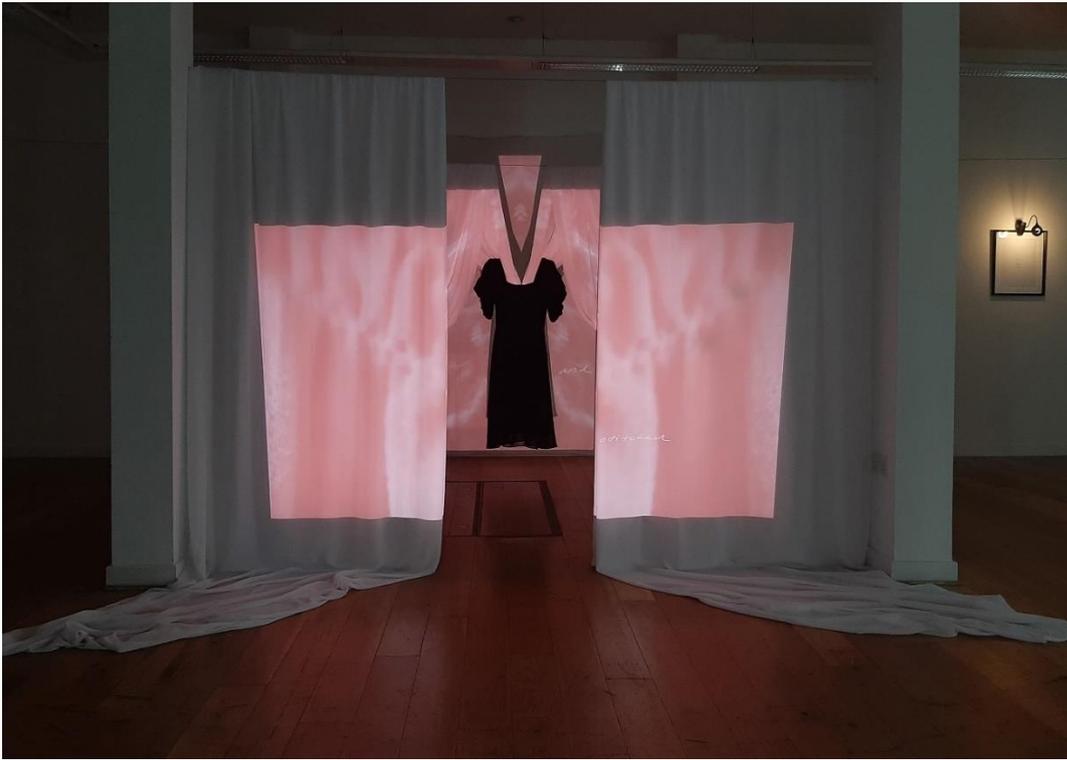
Full video of installation: <https://youtu.be/YTWrUzXSfaw>



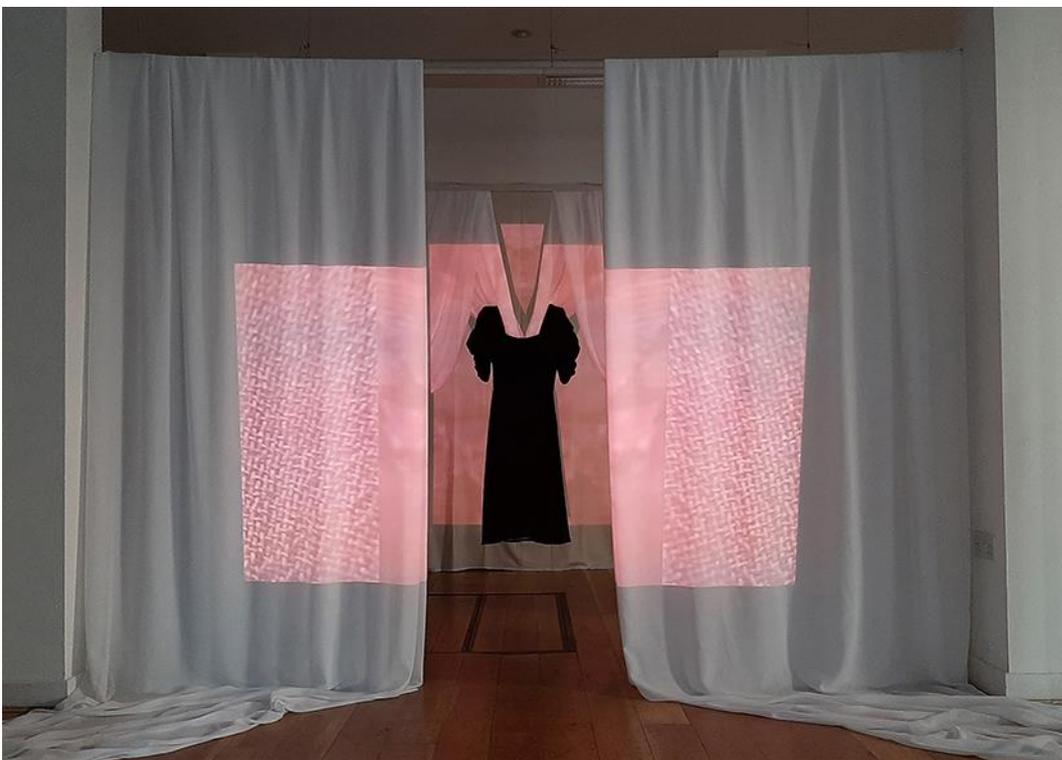
View from gallery entrance (2022)



Framed poem (*untitled*) 'uncovered' from black dress using creative deconstruction (2022) [framed print]



Front view of *Spectral* installation (2022)



Front view of *Spectral* installation (2022)



Close-up of installation seen from the left (2022)



Installation seen from the left with framed poem in the background (2022)



Installation seen from behind (2022)

## Appendix F - Documentation of *(Magical) Presence*

HENRICA LANGH



8 MARCH - 18 MARCH  
MON-FRI: 3-7 P.M.  
SAT-SUN: 12-6 P.M.

BREWERY TAP  
53 TONTINE STREET  
CT20 1JR FOLKESTONE

*Exhibition poster.*

Henrica Langh

## **(Magical) Presence**

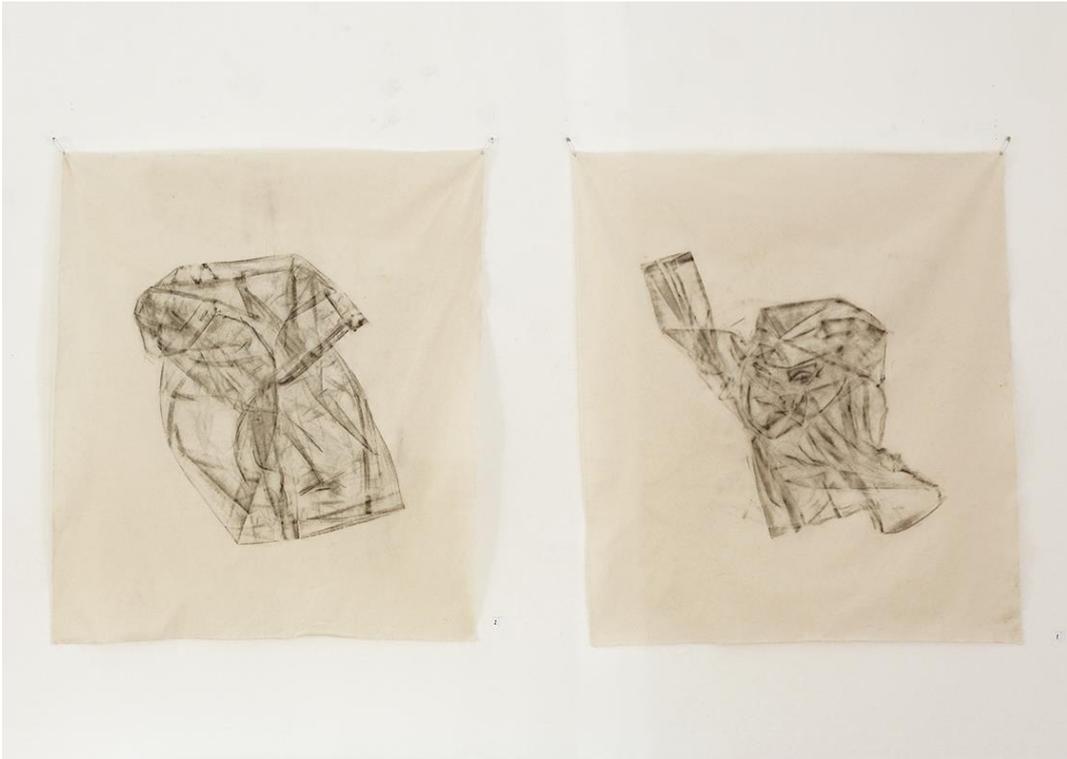
8 March - 18 March 2023

Brewery Tap - UCA Project Space, Folkestone

Most of us know from personal experience that material things can become emotionally meaningful through their connection to loved ones and cherished moments. Clothing - aptly also called our 'second skin' - seems to be particularly prone to evoking emotions and memories due to the intimate involvement with the body and the organic character of cloth as a material. Although most garments will evoke mild interest, there are certain garments that come to have a particularly evocative presence. Almost as if imbued with some kind of energy that expands beyond their concrete materiality, these garments have an elusive, uncanny, and almost animated presence.

PhD student Henrica Langh's current research is concerned with how we *experience* evocative garments that evoke particularly strong emotions. Drawing on the phenomenological attitude of wonder, Langh's practice-led research explores intensely evocative garments through a magical and poetic approach and seeks to capture what intensely evocative garments are like as an experience. The exhibition *(Magical) Presence* introduces Langh's practice-led research on intensely evocative garments and explores her use of artistic practice as a method of discovery.

Rather than being a showcase of finished outcomes, this exhibition is part of Langh's research process and is intended to inspire moments of individual wonder and shared contemplation. Visitors are invited to stay and contemplate the exhibition and their personal experience together with the artist. The title of the exhibition reflects that certain uncanny presence that intensely evocative garments seem to be imbued with as well as the idea of being magically present; that is, receptive to magical thinking and the otherworldly aspects of the world.



Two frottage imprints from the *Becomings* series (2021) [charcoal on cotton calico]



'Specimen 27' (left) and 'Specimen 26' (right) from *Found Entanglements* series (2012) [reactive print on viscose]



Black dress on chair (2023)



The black dress and its 'uncovered' poem (*Presence*) with the levitating blouse from *Haunted: Capturing Spirit in the foreground* (2023)

Something was lost, yet  
residues of your presence  
remain, now abstract and  
far away, a whisper  
somewhere in the shadows

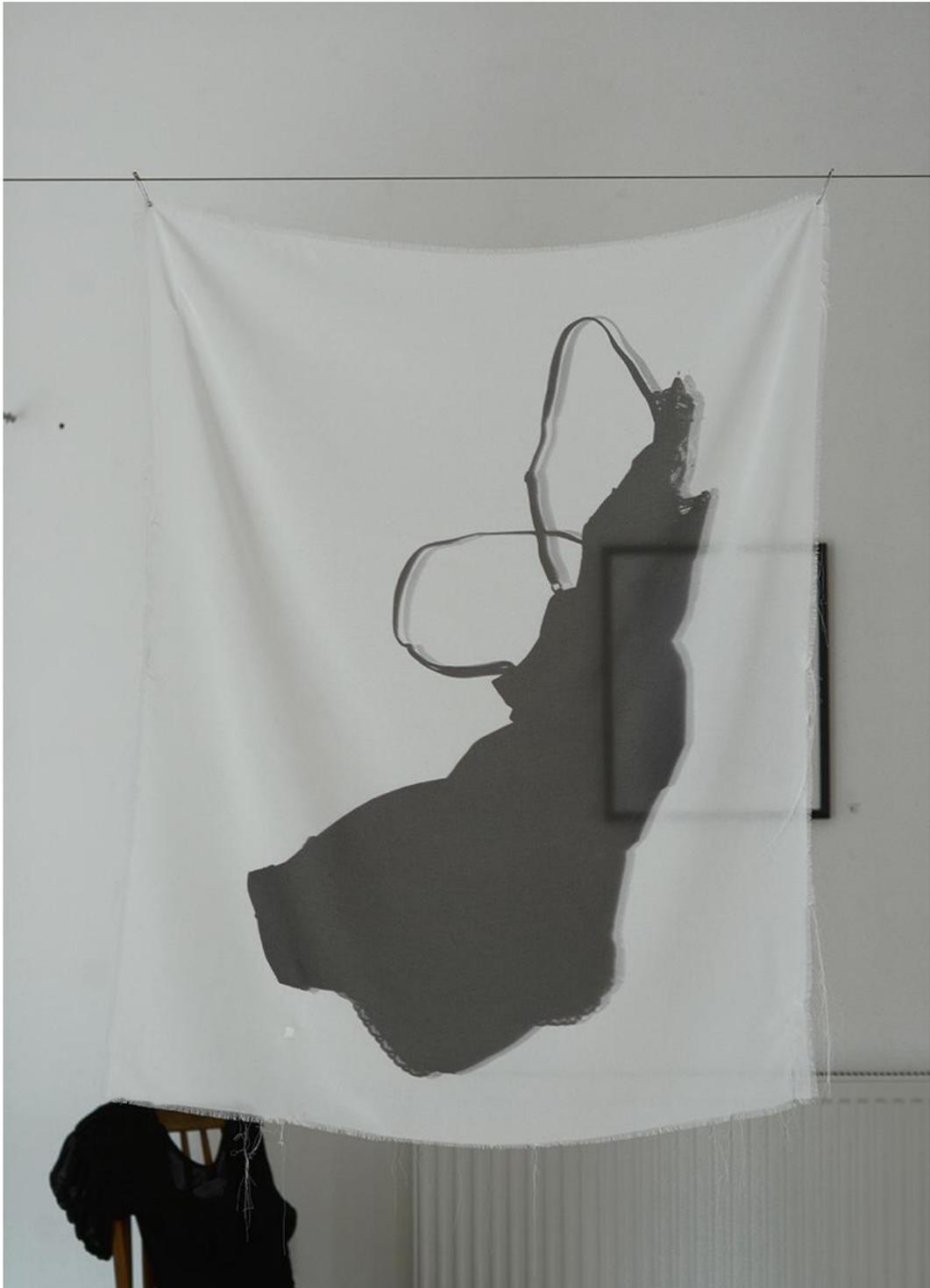
An echo and nothing more  
perched there like a  
raven from the past  
feathers rustling like the  
dying embers of a bonfire

I suppose I always knew  
that the goodbye was there  
Like when you've seen  
Casablanca before and  
you already know that it ends.

Poem 'uncovered' from black dress using the participatory workshop method. *Presence* (2023) [framed print]



Levitating blouse from the *Haunted: Capturing Spirit* series (2023) [reactive print on poly georgette]



Levitating slip dress from the *Haunted: Capturing Spirit series* (2023) [reactive print on poly georgette]



Levitating slip dress from *Haunted: Capturing Spirit* series. (2023) [reactive print on poly georgette]



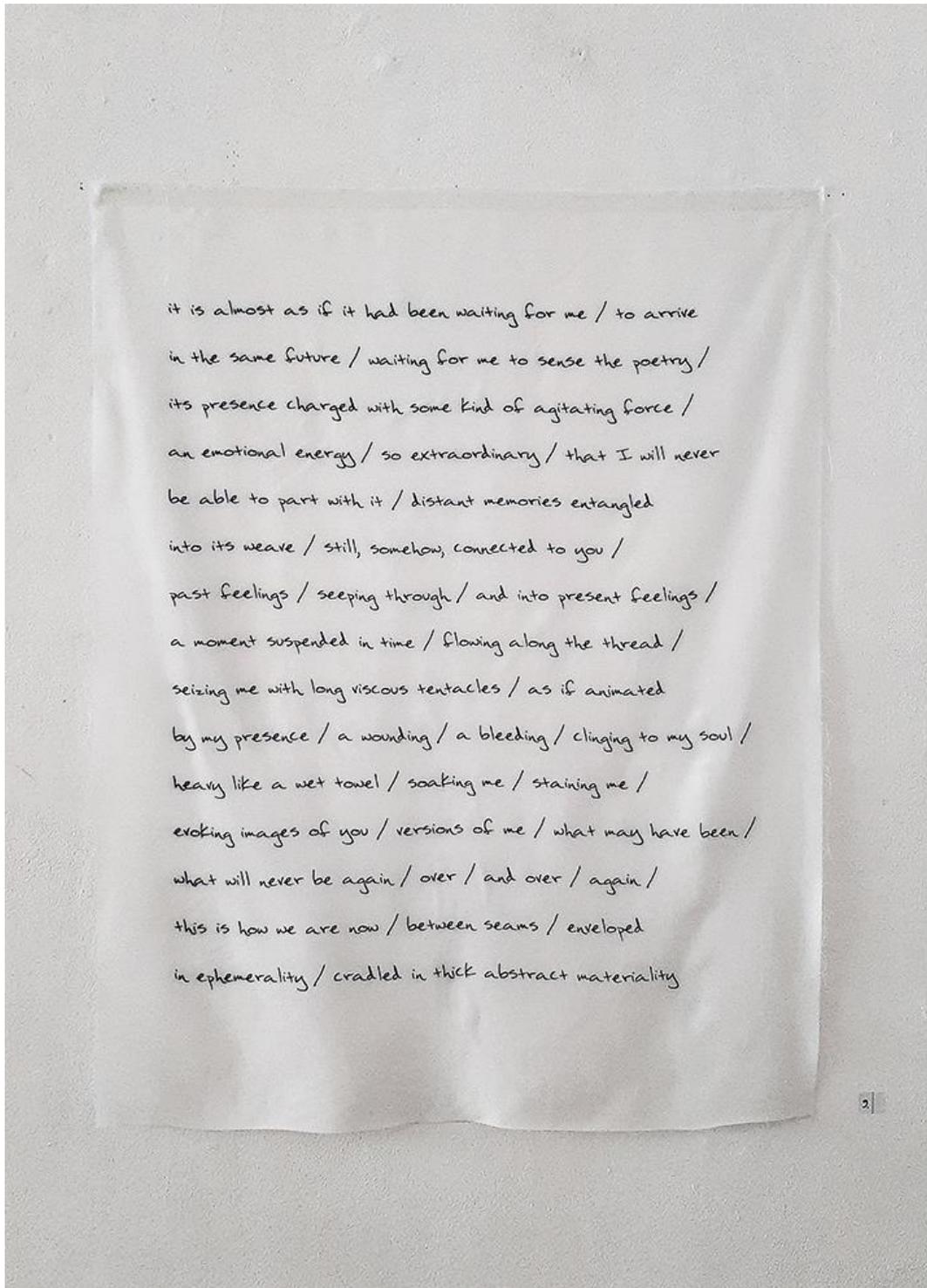
Still from video of shadow play created by the hem of my black dress (2022) Full video available at: <https://youtu.be/5Y8in18cDK4>



*Emotional Energy* (2023) [digitally manipulated photograph, reactive print on viscose]



Digitally manipulated image of my black dress bleeding emotional energy. *Emotional Energy* (2023) [reactive print on viscose]



*Poetic Entanglement* (2023) [reactive print on poly georgette]

## **Exhibition annotations**

### **Things with possibilities**

To understand what intensely evocative garments are like as an experience, we must first suspend our assumptions of garments as merely fashionable items, functional commodities, or representations of something and consider them as things in themselves. When we understand garments as more than adjuncts to the body through which we express or represent ourselves we can start to contemplate the phenomenon of intensely evocative garments anew by encountering them as *things* with possibilities.

Objects are commonly regarded as static and solid and are assumed to have clear borders that can be determined by sight and touch and to approach the material world in terms of static objects means to neglect the possibilities of the world. The word *thing*, on the other hand, suggests a certain expansive and even mysterious nature. Things do not begin or end with the thing itself. Things shift, they move, they expand, and they are in constant interaction with other things. A thing has endless possibility whereas an object is bound by its 'objectness'.

### **Intensely evocative garments**

There are many ways in which garments can become meaningful. They can become favourites because we like the way they look, feel, and fit us or they may evoke distant memories of former versions of ourselves, places we have been to, and people we know or have known. Within this category of meaningful garments, there are certain garments that form their own unique category. These are evocative garments that evoke particularly strong emotions; emotions that we may find difficult to explain or even identify. Only some garments will have this effect and they may not be ones we immediately think of because these garments need to be encountered in the moment before they can be thought of.

So, how then do we encounter these garments? We must be open to their possibilities as *things*, and we must engage with them through an embodied, intuitive, and emotive awareness. In other words, encountering them requires a heightened affective awareness. It is our encounter with these garments in the

moment that makes them significant, and we must therefore feel their presence to truly 'see' them.

I have a black dress that stirs something deep within me and evokes a sense of connection that evades conventional language. Although I can of course talk about my memories of the specific moment that the dress is connected to or about my relationship with the person it reminds me of, this would not convey how I *feel* in the presence of the dress. To explore the elusive quality of intensely evocative garments as experienced in the moment, I developed a creative method that enables one to 'uncover' poetry from a garment. Rather than writing about the garment, this process allows poetic fragments to emerge through intuitive engagement with the garment. These fragments provide a felt understanding of how the garment is experienced in the moment.

### **Presence**

Commodity-wise there may be nothing extraordinary about intensely evocative garments yet, they are more than 'just clothes'. When we take the time to encounter these garments in the moment, we may notice that they have a particular presence. This is not only a physical matter-of-fact kind of presence but a metaphysical presence that cannot be seen yet is still perceived as being part of the garment. It is almost as if they were imbued with some kind of animating force or spirit.

### **Emotional energy**

Have you ever wondered why it is difficult to get rid of certain emotionally meaningful things despite them having no traditional value? The reason this may be difficult is because doing so would also sever the connection maintained by the thing. In magical belief it is thought that things that have once been in direct contact will always remain connected. This notion of connection is also central to our relationships with intensely evocative garments. Whether conscious or unconscious, intensely evocative garments are experienced as remaining connected to people and moments. In other words, our encounters with intensely evocative garments are magical in nature.

Now, imagine for a moment, that material things could somehow record fragments of our emotions when the emotions are intense enough. What if the presence that we sense in intensely evocative garments is not simply a result of cognitive association but rather our affective awareness of an emotional energy that lingers within the garment?

Based on this magical idea of emotional energy, I have named intensely evocative garments as *bleeding garments*. This is not related to blood in the literal sense but to the idea of bleeding as something that seeps, expands, spreads beyond something. *Bleeding garments* are so saturated with emotions that they 'bleed' emotional energy which stains the one for whom the garment is meaningful. It is, then, this 'bleeding' that creates a presence that makes us feel like there is more to these garments than we can see.