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There are few fashion designers who have in earnest ventured into the field of technologized garments with success or elegance. Of note is the work of Hussein Chalayan who pioneered the integration of robotics, and LED-encrusted garments as performative grand finale/fantasy pieces in runway presentations. Ying Gao, an emerging Montréal techno-fashion designer, is another who has embraced the potential of technology in fashion. However, Gao sits at the other extreme of Chalayan's showmanship, rather exploring the personal and intimate relations constructed between techno-fashion, the body and the public. It could be said that Gao's designs question the very heart of a positivistic drive of an increasingly technologized society by creating playful and irreverent designs, unexpected in their poetry and ability to display the nonutilitarian aspects of techno-fashion. Trained as a fashion designer, and working as a researcher/professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal, Gao uses technology as artistic expression—and material conduit—to choreograph a fashion object relative to machine, body,

environment, as well as social and material transformation. Her garments can be understood as relational objects, drawing on the public to react and act with them and by this virtue creating subtle and unexpected moments of kinship with these “living” objects.

Gao's sartorial works of art have, for example, explored instances where the garment is modulated by the viewer's movements, breath, or capacity to explore an object in the dark with a flashlight, all with an aim to enchant as well as posit a better understanding of what technologized fashion might add to the larger conversation of fashion discourse and experience.

Works such as “Walking City 1 + 2” (2007) contain motion sensors, which trigger pneumatic systems in a dress, making the garment's origami layers “breathe” and move when someone is present. While, “Living Pod 1 + 2” (2008) is activated by a pocket lamp shone deep into its organza and leather folds, launching a series of small motors to make it modulate. Finally, “Playtime 1 + 2”





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(2010), inspired by the Jacques Tati film of the same name, is triggered by the flash of a camera wherein one dress becomes uncapturable by act of rapid motions, while the other dress echoes back to the “paparazzi” with a flash of its own, thus blurring the photograph. In both cases the garment’s immediate reactions cause a miss-documentation of the object, as well as an awareness of the act of looking and attempting to capture its image. It should be mentioned that beyond the technological finesse of Gao’s designs is the meticulous crafting of fashion garments which

stand on their own stylistic merits, irrespective of technological addons. Combining leather and organza along with sensors, robotics and kinetics, Gao creates fashionable second skins which breathe, move and shape-change before our very eyes, and with our bodies, environments and acts. This is also what we ask of fashion: to transform us in the very moment, and in the very act of being part of our body as we navigate unknown social and architectural terrains. After all, fashion is our lived accomplice.

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