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FIGURES OF FEAR

The Material Embodiment of Fear, Fashioned and Performed

An exegesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand

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Anneliese Theron

Julieanna and Catherine

Thank you for unlimited access to your knowledge and expertise

Thank you for the emotional support

Thank you for pulling at the seams

Mama

Danke für alles

Danke, dass du meine Ängste immer verschwinden lässt.

Liebe dich für immer

This little black book is an exploration into the material embodiment of fear, fashioned and performed. *Figures of Fear* discusses themes related to fear, othering, the colour black, materiality, embodiment and fashioned performance. Fear is presented in its historical framework, as well as its use and impact today. I reference my own history and relationship with fear, having grown up in South Africa, and how that has served as a catalyst for this work. The concept of the 'Other' and the act of othering is highlighted as a vehicle through which fear operates. In conjunction with this, emphasis is placed on materiality and the use of black in fashion and fear. Despite having deep roots in fashion, this work exists in a fine arts context today whilst illustrating the strong connection between performance and fashion. Fear is riddled with contradictions, and has the ability to illuminate deep rooted views and ideologies within an individual.

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6. THE STORY OF LITTLE SUCK-A-THUMB.



One day, Mamma said "Conrad dear,
I must go out and leave you here.
But mind now, Conrad, what I say,
Don't suck your thumb while I'm away.
The great tall tailor always comes
To little boys that suck their thumbs;
And ere they dream what he's about,
He takes his great sharp scissors out
And cuts their thumbs clean off,—and then,
You know, they never grow again."



Mamma had scarcely turn'd her back,
The thumb was in, Alack! Alack!

(15)



The door flew open, in he ran,
The great, long, red-legg'd scissar-man.
Oh! children, see! the tailor's come
And caught out little Suck-a-Thumb.
Snip! Snap! Snip! the scissors go;
And Conrad cries out—Oh! Oh! Oh!
Snip! Snap! Snip! They go so fast;
That both his thumbs are off at last.

Mamma comes home; there Conrad stands,
And looks quite sad, and shows his hands;—
"Ah!" said Mamma, "I knew he'd come
To naughty little Suck-a-Thumb."

(16)

Figure 1. Hoffman, H (1845) The Story of Little Suck a Thumb. From Der Struwwelpeter

Inception

My most beloved article of clothing as a very young child was a peach coloured cotton top. I had it for a long time, and by the age of five it was already faded and worn out. It was valuable to me as it had become part of my thumb-sucking ritual that would help me trail off to sleep every night. I would place my left thumb through the satin care label on the inside of this top and suck my thumb. My right hand would encapsulate the left along with the cotton fabric while my right thumb began to rub back and forth on the satin care label. Afraid of being alone in the dark, the combination of this ritual and the tactile sensation of the satin label put me at ease until I fell asleep. This ritual continued for years and my worried mother was eager for me to kick it. Then, I read Heinrich Hoffman's 'The Story of Little Suck a Thumb'(figure.1).The fear of the tall tailor entering my room that night and brutalizing my precious hands was enough for me to put an end to this ritual. The top was contaminated too, it represented an open invitation for this intruder. It was swiftly disposed of.

My relationship with fear and all it's parts has manifested and changed many times over my twenty-six years from an imaginary tailor in a children's book to the visible panic buttons in my childhood home in South Africa. As a teen, fear meant not surviving the politics of friendship or the loss of my prepubescent body for a rounder female figure. As a young adult, fear to me was men, personal safety and failure. Today fear to me is abstract and often self induced, whilst being more present and tangible than ever before. Where fear felt wild and unruly, dress offered the opportunity to curate, construct and control. Dress is my weapon, it always has been. It is a barrier between me and the outside world.

Figures of Fear is an exploration into the material embodiment of fear, articulated through fashion, materiality and embodied performance. On the outside, these figures appear as black, powerful and intimidating individuals, silhouetted in a moment of tension. Internally, they are representative of the culmination of human aggression, misunderstanding, apathy and ultimately fear. They aim to reconfigure the recognized human silhouette out of its once generic and symbolic systems of representation in order to test the body's potential to transgress limitations inflicted by established systems of signification. Dress as an embodied practice becomes a valuable tool with which I process thoughts, ideas and experiences surrounding fear.

CHAPTER 1

Fear

How does one define fear? Fear can be identified as an emotion, and a potentially powerful one at that. In many contexts, it can be a direct motivator for action, as was the case with me and the Tall Tailor. It has an interplay between a catalyst to fight when channelled into anger such as direct action to protect oneself. As well as a catalyst to flight when focused towards hope, the hope of self-preservation. The main factor of fear is that it focuses its concentration on an external object or situation or idea, onto which the drive of the emotion is projected, so one is usually afraid of something. ¹

“Fear always has an intentional object. It is always directed at something. ... What distinguishes fear from anger, sorrow or joy is not the object but the interpretation of it. ... For fear to announce itself, the threat must be perceived as being serious”. ²

Ultimately fear is a choice of perception, in that the world is what you choose to make of it; and whether an externalised object is perceived as a threat to be fearful of, is highly subjective. As is the case with a proposed law from the provincial government in Québec, Canada led by the nationalist Coalition Avenir Québec party. The new government was sworn in on 18 October 2018, after which they argued that “secularism law” would be necessary in order to preserve Quebec’s culture as well as its historic church-state divide. Announcements were made that public employees would be unable to wear religious symbols in the future. Muslim and civil liberty groups have vowed to challenge the new law. They argued that this law could trigger the politics of fear otherwise understood as discrimination thinly veiled by fear as justification. In 2008 a government commission recommended that prison guards, police, judges and anyone with coercive powers should appear impartial and thus be banned from wearing outwardly religious symbols as well. Five years on, and the separatist Parti Québécois attempted, and failed, to pass the “Quebec values charter” which would have banned all public servants from wearing religious symbols.³ Despite this, the episode did lead to an increase in racism, violence and intolerance, particularly against veiled Muslim women. Ironically the party announced that it had no plans to withdraw the gold crucifix from Quebec’s National Assembly. The religious symbol was placed there in 1936

¹ Svenden, L (2008). A Philosophy of Fear. Reaktion Books; London.

² Svenden, L (2008). P.35.

³ ‘It’s part of who I am’ (2018). <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/17/canada-quebec-secularism-law-caq>.



Figure 2. Hulton Archive (1956) Road Sign. Retrieved from: <https://www.thoughtco.com/passes-coordination-of-documents-act-43481>.

and is representative of the state and then-dominant Catholic church connection. These proposed laws appear targeted and reactionary, founded on a lack of understanding or truly open dialogue about what really threatens a society. Furthermore it illustrates a fear of difference and systematic othering and the role that dress and body adornment can have in creating the image of fear.

Fear is adorned and closed. It has the sophisticated facades and cultural trappings that quietly add layer upon layer to our adult experiences. Fear is a tool. A political, cultural, generational tool.

The exploitation of fear has deep historical roots that linger for generations. I can look to the first eighteen years of my life in Cape Town, South Africa and the way in which fear is utilized to manage social divisions and polarize an entire country. The use of fear during the apartheid era perpetuated social segregation. Within a post-apartheid context, this segregation is still visible and the fear of crime and violence used as grounds for a predominantly racist fear of difference. Fear of crime is not unjustified and a brief conversation with any South African immigrant will highlight this fear as one of the main reasons for leaving, as was the case with mine almost eight years ago.⁴

Fear of crime is temporally, spatially and socially distributed.⁵ Citizens attempt to reduce, manage and decrease the incidence of crime and fear by providing a sense of protection in a number of ways. First by urban form such as walls protecting residences. Second by changing their lifestyle in terms of limited social interaction and restricted spatial movement. My own experience in Cape Town supports this theory, and it was not until I left at age eighteen that I truly started using public transport on my own in New Zealand. This approach to risk management, where individuals assess risk and alter behaviour has appropriately been described as the 'Architecture of Fear'.⁶ The citizen feedback to the climate of crime in post-apartheid Cape Town, highlights its bleak impact on public order and urban life (figure.2). Furthermore it also questions the true motives behind them. An argument can be made that citizen responses to insecurity in Cape Town is recreating a city of divisions that exhibit a striking resemblance to the apartheid era. South Africa has dealt with numerous social engineering projects such as colonialism, democratization and apartheid. However apartheid's legacy remains particularly deep and lingers to this day. Overcoming this inherited spatial and social structure is South Africa's modern day challenge.

⁴ Moser, C (2004). Urban Violence and Insecurity. Russell Press, Nottingham;UK

⁵ Lemanski, C (2004). Environment and Urbanization Vol 16. Oxford.

⁶ Beinart, W; Dubow, S (1995). *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth Century South Africa*. Taylor & Francis Ltd, London.



Figure 3. Miller, J (2016) How drone photographs showcase racism in South African architecture. Retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/07/06/africa/south-africa-apartheid-drone-photography>.

Apartheid directly translates to “apart-ness”. Communities were completely re-ordered according to lines drawn on maps during this era. On the urban level, apartheid entrenched and standardized race-based residential segregation. In the apartheid city, the spatial withdrawal and segregation of black citizens to urban peripheries reflected and facilitated social distancing from white citizens, who were granted large central areas of land. Historian Maynard Swanson’s 1977 article on the ‘sanitation syndrome’⁷ addressed these issues by comparing Africanist and international historical literature. Swanson tried to illustrate how public fears of epidemic disease were weaponized by authorities in the early twentieth century as a means to justify residential racial segregation in two of the Cape Colony’s chief cities, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. White colonial officials in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth were deeply concerned about chaotic social and sanitary conditions in the urban areas. They identified Africans, ‘Coloureds’ and ‘Malays’ as a threat to public health, enforcing the ideology of apart-ness. In analysing the motivations behind Cape Town’s long history of urban segregation, Swanson’s orthodox “sanitation syndrome” which explains black segregation as a means to curb the spread of disease, this however is no longer universally accepted. This health justification was an ostensible reason for ulterior motives, such as state power and economic interests. However, the salient motivation remained racist fear of ‘other’, deliberately disguised as anything and everything from spatial quarantine, protection of property, political sovereignty, fear of commercial competition, or the securing of business land. This fear of difference was at the core of the popular phrase ‘swart gevaar’. The Afrikaans saying directly translates to ‘black danger’ and was used as a justification for apartheid’s apart-ness. A vital component of fear is a risk to one’s personal safety. Fear always contains a pretension, a future projection, concerning pain, injury or death, and in this case a connection to the colour black.⁸

These motives continue to influence sociospatial exclusions, twenty six years after the demise of apartheid (figure.3). Since the early 1990’s, wealthy and mostly (but not exclusively) white South Africans were dissatisfied with their security-conscious homes. They sought to rectify this, thus reducing fears, by securing entire neighbourhoods, closing street access, employing private security guards and erecting electrified fences. The yearning for maximum security has led to many illegally enclosed neighbourhoods. Supporters of this approach claim that gated communities

⁷ Swanson, M. (1977). The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900–1909. *The Journal of African History*, 18(3), 387-410. doi:10.1017/S0021853700027328

⁸ Furedi, F (1997). *Culture of Fear*. Bindles Ltd, UK.

lead to increased community and decreased crime, however research suggests otherwise. One can look to research in both South Africa and America, which indicates that erecting high walls and monitoring entrants facilitates social exclusion, disrupts urban planning, and enhances segregation. This rings true to my own experience in Cape Town, where I lived in the same neighbourhood for most of my childhood. It was in close proximity to my highschool, church, community centre and shopping mall. It was almost exclusively white as well. Despite white South Africans making up only 9.8 percent of the population,⁹ my interactions with black South Africans were very limited because of this very reason. Thus far, Johannesburg has been the main site of South Africa's residential enclosures, but as fear and crime have risen in Cape Town, otherwise known as South Africa's "murder capital", a similar fortress fate has been embraced. During the apartheid era the National Party was not powerful enough to maintain the oppression of the black majority using force alone. They managed this problem by employing a much greater weapon: ideas. The strongest of these ideas were of course fear. The backbone of apartheid repression as previously cited was 'black danger' (swart gevaar). This term embodied an unjustifiable and irrational fear of black violence and justified anti-black hatred and authoritarianism.¹⁰ The National Party assured all South Africans, black and white, that tucked in the psyche of every black man were hidden weapons of mass destruction. We all know how that story unfolds.

⁹ Census 2001 - Census in brief. Statistics South Africa. p.16. Archived from the original (PDF) on 5 May 2005. Retrieved 17 September 2013.

¹⁰ Memmi, A. (1967). The colonizer and the colonized. Boston: Beacon Press.

One can look to examples within Aotearoa and how race-based discrimination and othering contributed to land battles in more recent history. In 2004, the leader of the National Party, Don Brash delivered his contentious 'Orewa' speech.¹¹ Brash articulated feelings and ideas Pākehā New Zealanders felt in relation to 'brown privilege'. Anecdotes about Māori students getting a 'free-ride' through education and claiming sought-after positions in training programmes from better qualified Pākehā led the discussion, as did a call to end the treaty gravy train and 'race-based' funding in health.¹² There were Māori and Pākehā voices speaking out against these statements from the outskirts, nonetheless racial tension was high. Perhaps a contributing factor to this was the 2003 Foreshore and Seabed Act,¹³ which removed Māori rights to claim title to parts of the Aotearoa coastline, despite the fact that these rights had already been asserted previously in court. Warnings from the United Nations and the Waitangi Tribunal emphasised the racist nature of the Act. The largest demonstration by Māori and other supporters in Aotearoa history was not enough, and the Act was passed. This illustrated that Pākehā fear and anxiety were seemingly more important than Māori trauma. Racism and colonisation are intimately and consistently entwined. As Memmi¹⁴ asserts, the portrayal of the 'native' as inferior made the theft of native land and the enforcement of colonial law a mere exercise in salvation for the coloniser.

¹¹ Pelkowitz, A; Crengle, S (2004/12/01) The Orewa Speech. The New Zealand medical journal

¹² Pelkowitz, A; Crengle, S (2004/12/01) The Orewa Speech. The New Zealand medical journal

¹³ Dr Pita Sharples (16 October 2006). "Loss and Grief – Uncensored". Speech to the National Association of Loss and Grief Conference. The Maori Party. Retrieved 2 December 2007

¹⁴ Memmi, A. (1967). The colonizer and the colonized. Boston: Beacon Press.



Figure 4. Blythe, E (2019) PROTECT IHUMĀTAO. Retrieved from: <https://tearaway.co.nz/protests-continue-at-ihumatao/>.

Neo colonialism and racism are still visible in present day Aotearoa. The Ihumātao land battle and its occupation of protectors offer an appropriate case study. A peaceful protest group, known as SOUL (Save Our Unique Landscape) consist of some mana whenua and local community representatives. The site is located next to the Ōtuataua Stonefields Historic Reserve in Māngere, and is home to the oldest archaeological site and is considered to be sacred land by local iwi and hapū. In 2014, 32 hectares neighbouring the site was redesignated from rural farmers to a SHA (Special Housing Area). Protests soon followed (figure.4), with land protectors arguing that the land was taken 'by proclamation' during the Waikato invasion in 1863. The 1840 Treaty of Waitangi agreement¹⁵ was breached once the land was violently confiscated under the New Zealand Settlements Act. Campaigners took the issue to the United Nations in 2017. They were hopeful that government intervention would address the alleged breaches under the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People.¹⁶ The UN report recognised that consent and consultation from Māori had not been sufficiently sought. Furthermore, it advised that the government evaluate the plan's compliance with the Te Tiriti o Waitangi in conjunction with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Today the campaign continues.

¹⁵ Levy, M., Nikora, L.W., Masters–Awatere, B., Rua, M.R., Waitoki, W. (2008). Claiming Spaces: Proceedings of the 2007 National Maori and Pacific Psychologies Symposium, 23–24 November, Hamilton. Hamilton: Maori and Psychology Research Unit.

¹⁶ Adds, P. (2012). E kore au e ngaro: Ancestral connections to the Pacific. In S. Mallon, K. Mhina-Tuai, & D. Salesa (Eds.), *Tangata o le moana: New Zealand and the people of the Pacific* (pp.17 - 35). Wellington, New Zealand: Te Papa Press.

CHAPTER 2

Othering Fear

How does Fear visually present itself? Does it have a colour? Is it black, red or alert orange? If one could touch fear, what would the sensation be? What are its tactile qualities? Does fear have a shape? How are its outlines and details framed, sculpted and drawn? Is fear beautiful to look at, especially when what it conveys is so grotesque? Or are we so accustomed to fear that its multiple transformations and translations between aesthetic and affect go largely unnoticed? Can you ever get to the root of fear, or is it endless, like unmethodical series of apparently infinite stitches. I ponder these questions as I push the needle into black leather, stitching and moulding the difficult fabric into some semblance of a mask.

The culture of fear can be disseminated by a wide broad scope of agents either deliberately or otherwise. These can include the media, government, science, the arts, industry and politics. The effortlessness required to generate fear means that today's society remains excessively fearful of unlikely harms and dangers. A great deal of societal fear comes from the mistrust of the 'Other'. The 'Other' is a term used to describe groups of individuals that are, simply put, 'not like us'.

Othering refers to the act of defining and labelling an individual as a subaltern native, or understood as someone who belongs to the socially inferior categorization of the other.¹⁷ The application of othering diminishes the value of those who do not fit the norm of the dominant social group, which ultimately is considered to be a version of the 'Self'. Similarly, in human geography, the act of othering refers to the exclusion and displacement of the othered to the edge of society, from the social/self group. It is on the fringes where mainstream social norms are less relevant. The process of othering occurs when different identities are set up in an unequal relationship. It is the result of the concurrent construction of the self/in-group and the other/out-group in mutual and unequal opposition, by identifying desirable characteristics. This constructs a superior self/in-group in contrast to an inferior other/out-group, but this superiority/inferiority is nearly always left implicit.¹⁸

¹⁷ Brons, L. (2015). Othering, an analysis. *Transcience. A Journal of Global Studies* (6.1)

¹⁸ Brons, L. (2015). Othering, an analysis. *Transcience. A Journal of Global Studies* (6.1)



Figure 5. Video screenshot via ATF Baltimore (2019) Retrieved from: <https://religionnews.com/2019/07/31/why-do-racists-hate-ethnic-and-religious-clothing/>.

On 18 July 2019, a Hindu priest was hospitalized following an attack that took place in New York's Queen's borough. Sixty two year old Swami Ji Harish Puri was beaten by a man yelling "This is my neighbourhood." Swami was wearing Hindu priestly attire when he was struck. Similarly on 24 July 2019 in Baltimore, surveillance footage (figure.5) show a fifty nine year old Muslim man crossing the street before being beaten by three individuals. The assailants knocked off his religious headwear, before pushing him to the ground and kicking him repeatedly. What ties these incidents together is age, gender, brown skin and religious dress. These attacks also coincide with U.S president Donald Trump's inflammatory statements targeting four non-white Democratic congress women urging them to go back to their own respective countries. This further ignited racial tensions and fear of the other. In each of the July attacks the men were seen wearing clothing that marked them as other in through the eyes of their attackers. Their religious dress was seen as a threat and illustrates how racialization works and is manifested. Racialization is not just based on the colour of an individual's skin, but can incorporate other aspects of physical identifiers, such as what language people are speaking or what they are wearing.¹⁹

Philosopher G. W. F. Hegel established the concept of the 'Self' which requires the Other as a counterpart in the late 18th century.²⁰ The Other is represented as an alter ego, or as another self. *In Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*,²¹ Jean-Paul Sartre applied the dialectic of intersubjectivity to explain how the world is changed by the appearance of the Other, and of how the world then appears to be oriented to the other person, instead of the self. The Other is not a radical threat to the existence of the Self, but rather a psychological phenomenon in the course of a person's life. This understanding of self and other is discussed in de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.²² De Beauvoir describes, whilst referencing Hegel, a theory of self and other in relation to hierarchical social differences and gender. Another take on this, are the ideas of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Lacan argues that language plays a central role in constituting identity. We see this during the apartheid era in South Africa where black identity was framed under the phrase 'black danger'. Identity and the understanding of it as Lacan points out is inherently gained in the gaze of the powerful.²³

¹⁹ Singh, S (31 July 2019) *Why do racists hate ethnic and religious clothing?* Retrieved from: <https://religionnews.com/2019/07/31/why-do-racists-hate-ethnic-and-religious-clothing>

²⁰ Honderich, T. (1995). *The Oxford companion to philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²¹ *Being and Nothingness*. Trans. Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press, 1984, pp. 107–108.

²² Beauvoir, Simone de. (1989, c1952) *The second sex* /New York, Vintage Books

²³ Johnston, Adrian, "Jacques Lacan", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Retrieved from: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/lacan/>.

Examples of 'othering' can be traced throughout history and is a very relevant a prevalent issue today, existing in a wide range of contexts and approaches. What they all have in common is creating fear of difference.²⁵

Othering has been implemented throughout history in various ways, affecting those deemed inferior based on race, orientation, size, shape or gender to name a few. The racist perspective of 19th-century Europe was invented with the othering of non-white peoples, which also was supported by the manufacturing of scientific racism. Studies within scientific racism claimed that in relation to a white-man's head, the head-size of the non-European man was indicative of inferior intelligence. European populations were able to justify Western imperialism by Orientalism. Orientalism refers to the study and fetishization of the Eastern world.

European academics of Orientalism justified the cultural artifice of a difference of nature and ethos, between white and non-white peoples. This was done in order to identify, classify, fetishize and subordinate the culture and peoples of Asia into the oriental other. By doing so they exist in opposition to the Western self.²⁴ Heterosexuality is associated with normative, 'normal' or 'natural' social and sexual relations and for those who do not uphold these heterosexual standard can ultimately expect to be 'othered' as well.²⁵

In a society wherein man-woman heterosexuality is the sexual norm, the Other refers to and recognizes homosexuals as people of same-sex orientation who have been classed as "sexually deviant" by society. Sexual or othering based on gender identity is realised by applying negative connotations to the terms that describe lesbian and gay, bisexual and transgender people. This ultimately diminishes their political power and social status. By doing so LGBTQ communities are displaced to the margins of society.

In modern society, the act of subordinating and othering women is merely lauding an oppressive historical tradition. As de Beauvoir states²⁶ a non-gendered "self" and "other" duality has existed since the dawn of consciousness itself. However, it is through the manipulation of nature and

²⁴ Mountz, Alison (2009). "The Other". Key Concepts in Political Geography: 332.

²⁵ Mountz, Alison (27 January 2016). "The Other". Key Concepts in Political Geography.

²⁶ Beauvoir, Simone de. (1989, c1952) *The second sex* /New York, Vintage Books



Figure 6. Voisard, A (2018) Some say Women's March pink hats aren't inclusive. Philly organizers say wear what you want. Washington Post.



Figure 7. Dalton, H ; Bhaskaran, S (2018) Fecal Matter. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/10/style/ugly-pictures-on-instagram.html>

history that the self/other division has become sexualized. Males are rendered as history's subject, while the female exists as the Other and her story exists in relation to her male counterpart as opposed to an independent being. We see how this concept is reinforced in society by examining the different socialization processes that women and men undergo. Men are taught to understand and craft their identities in terms of who they are. Women on the other hand piece together their identities based on what they are not. The woman is viewed as "an incomplete man". She ceases to exist independently from man and is an extension of him, an appendage. A recent response to this was the *Me Too movement*,²⁷ a trending tag and call against sexual harassment and sexual assault. The movement began to spread virally in October 2017 as a hashtag on social media. The intent was to demonstrate the widespread pervasiveness of sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace. It followed sexual-abuse allegations against American film producer Harvey Weinstein. Similarly the 2017 Women's March birthed the Pussyhat Project,²⁸ a nationwide effort initiated by Los Angeles based Krista Suh and Jayna Zweiman (figure.6). A pussyhat is a pink, crafted hat, created in large numbers by thousands of participants involved in the march. They were originally designed to form as part of a peaceful protest against United States president Donald Trump's inauguration.

Othring may add fabrication or new meaning to something or someone for the purposes of power or political gain, however it ultimately takes something away from the othered. It subverts individuality and places a veil of shame over them. What we wear signals our membership within groups, be they organized by gender, class, ethnicity or religion or a mutual belief in something that places us on the fringes of society. How we dress is an expression of our identities and how we make ourselves culturally visible.

Hannah Rose Dalton and Steven Raj Bhaskaran are international, trans-disciplinary art provocateurs who create and produce under the brand name Fecal Matter. They birthed Fecal Matter in 2016 and use it as a platform to express their uncensored views the presentation of gender in fashion and the posthuman body. Through their work, Fecal Matter have crafted a world of contentiously dark fantasy (figure.7). Their work encourages critical and free thinking about our own belief

²⁷ Evans, Alyssa (2018) "#MeToo: A Study on Sexual Assault as Reported in the New York Times," *Occam's Razor*: Vol. 8 , Article 3. Retrieved from: <https://cedar.wvu.edu/orwwwu/vol8/iss1/3>

²⁸ Just, S. N., & Louise Muhr, S. (2019). "Together we rise": Collaboration and contestation as narrative drivers of the Women's March. *Leadership*, 15(2), 245–267. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715018809497>

systems, perceived realities and fears. They exist in the commercial fashion industry by selling their famous 'skin-boots' and 'dildo-bags' to their loyal following. They show an unwavering commitment to their otherworldly appearance, so much so that the image of them collecting their mail or doing trash in their chosen appearance somehow normalises their presence. In this way, they disrupt what is considered costume and everyday wear. The deliberate subversion and disruption of anticipated aesthetics and behaviors within the fashion industry have led to huge extremes in how they have been received. Responses have ranged from extreme passion to vilified hatred. "People have spat at us on the street, screamed and yelled, beaten us up. We get harassment on the daily, death threats in our inboxes but at the same time we have an unbelievable amount of support, love, and kindness around us."²⁹ Sri-Lankan born Steven experienced and understands social issues and politics first hand, by facing discrimination from a very closed-minded environment which reduced him to his race alone. "I had to protect myself from the violence I was exposed to as a child. So that is how I was introduced to all the real issues people face concerning race, gender, sexuality, and poverty, through my own struggles". The aesthetics of fear is anything that challenges what we as a collective are comfortable with. Fecal Matter subvert the 'human' qualities in their appearance just enough to create a level of discomfort when interacting with the general public. I respond to their work as a creator and lover of the avant garde, their ability to accept that they will be ostracised whilst staying true to their aesthetic identity. They lean into the public's distrust of them and use it as commentary for larger issues that they address in their fashion.

²⁹ Moran, J (11 June 2019) Fecal Matter's Everyday Extreme. Retrieved from:<https://www.papermag.com/fecal-matter-extreme-2638772979.html>

My practise has explored the position of homo sapiens in relation to other non-human beings and inanimate objects and how that is, and can be illustrated within a fine arts practise. Important questions that informed my work: How does it feel to be post human, what is a non-human, and more importantly what is a human? To test the boundaries of the body, a good understanding of these theories is necessary. Neil Badmington in *Theorizing Post humanism*³⁰ discusses how post humanism has been assumed, developed, implied and appropriated in a range of cultural and philosophical contexts. Rosi Braidotti³¹ discusses the post human predicament which requires us to think beyond our current humanist restrictions and challenge them. The image of the body plays an important role in this perception and the ultimate breakdown of the body in a traditional sense is part of this work.³² The body and all its attachments have come to be viewed as trope, text and metaphor, encouraging one to think of the social systems attached to it. By removing important 'human' characteristics like the face and familiar body shapes, a mutual becoming between bodies and material occurs which alters the sense and image of self.

³⁰ Badmington N. (2003). *Theorizing Posthumanism*. University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota

³¹ Braidotti R. (2013). *The Posthuman*. Polity Press, Cambridge

³² Seely S.D. (2013). How Do You Dress a Body Without Organs? Affective Fashion and Nonhuman Becoming. *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*



Figure 8. Del Toro, G (2017) *The Shape of Water*. Fox Searchlight Pictures.

One can look to director Guillermo del Toro's 2017 film *The Shape of Water*³³ as an expression of the fear and hatred associated with otherness. As the director himself has stated, what makes this film so compelling is its "embrace of otherness" in a modern world tainted by "fear and hatred". Similar to *Fecal Matter*, the film reveals the beauty and value of eccentricity. The story follows a young mute woman, Elisa in the United States during the Cold War era. Elisa works in a government laboratory and is confined to its fringes. She relies heavily on her co-worker Zelda to translate her sign-language into English. Elisa discovers and befriends the "Asset" was taken from the Amazon river in South America and brought to the government facility for experimentation and torture (figure.8). Together they plunge into the depths of a companionship significantly more immersive than either of them had experienced before, especially Elisa. A humanoid amphibian, the Asset has the ability to respond non-verbally to Elisa. He does this by showing admiration for her dancing or appreciation for her gifts of hard boiled eggs.

The two othered characters forge a romantic bond of mutual fascination and admiration, epitomized by Elisa's touching words to her roommate: "When he looks at me...He does not know what I lack, or how I am incomplete. He sees me for what I am...".³⁴

³³ Del Toro,G (2018, January 8). Golden Globes 2018. Retrieved <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5-B8FCPV8E>

³⁴ 2017 Feature Film Study. FilmL.A. Feature Film Study: Page 25. August 8, 2018. Archived from the original on August 9, 2018. Retrieved August 14, 2018.

CHAPTER 3

Black

I walk alone at night. I blend in. I only wear black. Black is my protection. I am intimidating.

This project has forced me to be more introspective and reflect on the choices I make everyday, especially regarding my own choice of dress. It is no coincidence that I am a more practical and palatable version of the figures I have made. A simple answer would be that black is what looks best on me. My skin is pale and I've actively avoided the sun in favor of darkness since I was 16. I quickly realised that my complexion could not keep up with the constant need to be tanned like all my peers. If I can't compete in your race, I'll run in my own. My transformation was completed a few years later when my blonde locks were snipped and traded in for short red hair. The upkeep was not worth my valuable time anymore. We all have persona's, we are the architects of our own identities. I visualise and curate all my immediate spaces, so naturally my appearance would receive the same treatment. Again I ask myself, why black? Why does this feel like the only option for me right now, why has it become the default setting? Perhaps as I've gotten older, wiser and more secure, the male gaze no longer validates me, instead making me deeply uncomfortable. Black is beauty on my terms then? Perhaps. Perhaps it's serving as a transitional phase for something else. Or it offers a fail proof uniform, appropriate in any context. If I can't compete, I'll run in my own.

Black can be everything I need or nothing at all, the point is that I'm the only one who truly knows.

Black is a colour imbued with hidden meanings. In the darkness of black clothes lies the story of Western culture. Its status and symbolism has changed many times over, crossing over everywhere from religions, classes and witch hunts to the polished boots of fascism and the leather jackets of teenage rebellions and club culture. Its power lies in its duality and makes a statement without shouting about it.³⁵

Throughout history the wearing of black clothing has had various and often contradictory meanings. At times signifying death, power, elegance, sexual allure and subversion. In Western dress, black has come to signify many things where at any one time it's diverse and contradictory



Figure 9. Unknown (1604) *The Somerset House Conference*. National Portrait Gallery, London.

uses became apparent. The colour has long been associated with the Devil and death. One can trace the use of black in fashion back to the days of antiquity as it was the colour chosen to represent those in mourning. By the fifth century it had been embraced by the church in Constantinople as a symbol of mourning for Christ as well as serving as an indicator of self-denial and humility. In addition, medieval manuscripts further depict the colour as being worn by the Devil and the penitent.³⁵ The Burgundian court was known for its extravagance and splendour. Wealth derived from its commercial centres of Brabant and Flanders. Philip the Good initiated the connection between the wearing of black and the centres of power, which continued through successive centuries at European courts and parliaments. This placed black dress firmly within the urban environment, at the centres of commerce, wealth and power, as is reflected in numerous paintings and portraits of the time. One of the most notable depictions of black's association with position and authority is The Somerset House Conference. Representatives of two great powers, England and Spain, can be seen sitting opposite one another negotiating the peace treaty, ending close to two decades of war. They were all dressed in black. This was reflective of the great influence Spanish fashion at European courts had during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, characterised by flawless tailoring, a severe silhouette and the prevalence of black (figure.9).

Prior to the refinement of synthetic dyes in the 20th century, the process of creating black dyed fabric was a long and tedious process. A version of black was obtained by consecutive dyeing of various colours, such as oak galls, overdyed with woad, weld and madder, or the repetitive dyeing of indigo to achieve a deep blue-black. Due to the labour involved and the costly procurement of dyes, black became an expensive material to produce, which leads to the paradox of that time. While it was worn as a symbol of humility and denial, creating the fabric was costly and thus exclusively accessible only to the rich and powerful. By the late 1600s, people both in Europe and the US had begun to fall under the spell of witchcraft. Born from religious fanaticism, black was seen as evil and this was where it originally gained its superstitious associations. In the nineteenth century, black was adopted as a colour of preference by the Romantics such as Byron, Shelley and Keats. They regarded and lauded the colour for its melancholic aura. However, perhaps the most notable figure dressed in all black from the era is to be found in Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer Above a Sea of Fog* (figure.10). The character represents the idealized depiction of the lonely romantic hero.

³⁵ Trudgeon, Margaret & National Gallery of Victoria (2008). *Black in fashion : mourning to night* (1st ed). Council of Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

³⁶ Trudgeon, Margaret & National Gallery of Victoria (2008). *Black in fashion : mourning to night* (1st ed). Council of Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.



Figure 10. Friedrich, C (1818) *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*. Hamburger Kunsthalle.

A woman's wearing of black was mostly limited to mourning clothes and maid's uniforms. The Victorians wore grief like no one else and devised complex rules when wearing the colour, as well as hiding their bodies in dark veils and thick fabrics. There was an expectation that women would remain in mourning for up to four years after the death of their husbands. By the late 19th century black dress had come to epitomize the image of sophisticated and mature woman,³⁷ which eventually built the foundation for what would be a more androgynous approach to fashion in the 1920's. This in conjunction with streamlining in tailoring and silhouette led to Coco Chanel's now iconic 'Little Black Dress'.³⁸ While black was asserting itself between the two world wars in women's wardrobes, it also took a sinister role in the uniforms of the elite troops of Fascist Germany and Italy during the 1930's. This choice of black uniform reflected the colour's long-held symbolic associations with authority and ultimately menacing evil. In 1950's United States, black was the colour of choice for the anti-establishment Beat Generation.

The 1970s and 80s London saw a subcultural explosion, as the ripped fishnets, safety pins and torn-up trousers of punk became the Victoriana of goth and the voluminous proportions of New Romanticism. Black was the colour of choice for teens expressing themselves beyond the mainstream.

The course of fashion history was forever changed in 1981 when Rei Kawakubo made her Paris debut with label Comme des Garçons. Her collection was dark in colour, hole-ridden and dubbed as "Hiroshima chic" by the fashion press, who decried the anti-fashion garments.

Activist group Time's Up encouraged all actresses and actors who would walk the Golden Globes red carpet to dress in all black. The intent was to show solidarity against the sexual harassment of women in Hollywood, however the scope broadened to that of women in any other industry as well. 30 January 2019 saw a group of US congress women following their lead by dressing in all black for the first state of the union address by United States president Donald Trump. Trump himself had been accused many times over by numerous women of sexual misconduct.³⁹ There is nothing about black that inherently signals protest, but really no other shade would have sent a clearer message. An earlier example such as country legend Johnny Cash chose to wear black as a reminder to Americans of everyday injustices.

³⁷ De Pont, Doris. & New Zealand Fashion Museum. (2012). Black : the history of black in fashion, society and culture in New Zealand. Auckland, N.Z : Penguin

³⁸ De Pont, Doris. & New Zealand Fashion Museum. (2012). Black : the history of black in fashion, society and culture in New Zealand. Auckland, N.Z : Penguin

³⁹ Bell, E., Meriläinen, S., Taylor, S., & Tienari, J. (2019). Time's up! Feminist theory and activism meets organization studies. *Human Relations*, 72(1), 4–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726718790067>

One can look to New Zealand and their relationship with wearing the devil's own colour: black. September 2011 rugby fans watched, where New Zealand hosted the Rugby World Cup. The national team stood to challenge their international competitors dressed in all black. For many, the All Blacks have come to represent an idealized embodiment of New Zealand's physical prowess, however many other sporting codes are also framed in black. The team names, the colour of their uniforms, even by the colour of their boats. A black singlet for an Olympic athlete, the Black Caps, the Tall Blacks, the Black Sticks and Black Magic are appellations that inspire great national pride – and sometimes great shame, but they all speak to the collective New Zealand sporting identity.⁴⁰ This colour, expressive of New Zealand's national identity is not restricted to sporting endeavours alone. Efforts to create an international identity that presents New Zealand as clean, green and 100% Pure New Zealand are further articulated through tourism advertising. Interestingly the colour chosen for this marketing campaign is not green but black. The language that is used to describe any creative output also references the black psyche. The colour has deep roots in Maori Creation beliefs, where Earth and Sky separate ultimately birthing Māori Gods.⁴¹ As the sun rises at dusk and sets at dawn, the world follows a daily cycle of light (Te Ao) and darkness (Te Pō). Māori creation narratives emphasise this movement from nothingness and darkness to the world of light (Te Ao Mārama). It is said that the world itself is created each morning with the rise of the sun out of darkness.

⁴⁰ De Pont, Doris. & New Zealand Fashion Museum. (2012). Black : the history of black in fashion, society and culture in New Zealand. Auckland, N.Z : Penguin

⁴¹ B.G. Biggs, 'Maori Myths and Traditions' in A. H. McLintock (editor), Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, 3 Volumes. (Government Printer: Wellington), 1966, II:447-454

My childhood memories of the colour black in Cape Town were less that of a fashion statement, and more of an outward expression of race. Black is highly political. It's meaning and intent has shifted many times over. The word carries a great deal of weight in both pre- and post apartheid South Africa.

Black exists within a range of contexts and has adopted different meanings throughout South Africa's loaded history. Black and it's connection to fear has always been there. On a surface level black represents the absence of light. This creates a framework wherein it becomes something unknown, unseen and ultimately misunderstood based on the set of values and opinions an individual may bring to it. The act of othering as a means to mitigate fears surrounding difference shares similar values with fears surrounding black. Perhaps the interpretation of the colour is more or a reflection of the reader and less about the colour itself, ultimately serving as a vehicle for preconceived notions and ideas.

CHAPTER 4

Fashioning and Performing

Why does most of my practice require some form of labour intensive, self induced torture?

Time spent with a garment represents quality and effort to me. Naturally this does not always apply, but my best work usually has long isolated hours attached to it. It is meditative and painful. Repetitive and never ending. Stitches upon stitches upon more stitches. I've rejected most of my technical education. Sketches have been replaced with a single design line in my mind. Patternmaking exchanged for on-the-body cloth painting. Machine sewing replaced with hand stitching and cable tying. This seems to be about control. Minimising everything so much that I am left with the purest form of making. Unhindered by any rules that limit me or disinterests me in the first place. However this process is taxing and asks a lot of me. Mentally and physically. Pushing needles through thick leather a hundred times over. Deconstructing and reconstructing the piece everytime it is adorned. Asking just as much from the wearer. The weight of the material, the subject matter and the physical demands. Perhaps these serve as some version of a sentence served on behalf of 'otherers' and an ode to the 'othered'.

Apparel... Garments ... Attire ... Garb ... Outfits ... Ensembles

Clothing, costume and dress are all words that describe what humans adorn and cover themselves with, whether that be for modesty, protection, decoration or display. Our fashioned appearance function as a silent communication system, providing the viewer with basic information about, age, gender, status, occupation, religious affiliation or ethnic background. It can offer insight into personality characteristics and aesthetic preferences. The words "clothing" and "costume" are sometimes used interchangeably to refer to what is being worn, but the words differ in several ways. Clothing often refers to a particular garment, whereas costume references an ensemble, usually for the purposes of 'dressing up' or performing for events. Finally I'd like to add 'dress' in this as well. Dress may refer to a single article of clothing or the action of, however it is also a reference to an individual's overall appearance or various identities. (Roach and Higgines define the word 'dress' as any body modification).⁴² In contrast to costume, dress establishes individual

⁴² Clothing, Costume, and Dress ." Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion . . Retrieved October 12, 2019 from Encyclopedia.com: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/fashion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/clothing-costume-and-dress>



Figure 11. Theron, A (2018) *Me, I'm Not*. Test Space, Massey University

identity within a cultural context, and emphasizes common social characteristics which include age and gender, marital status, and occupation. A lot of information in regards to identity is communicated through sensory cues provided by dress without the observer having to ask questions.⁴³ In the world of high fashion the line between clothing and costume is especially blurred. The avant-garde ensembles that walk the runways of designers like Comme des Garçons, Jeremy Scott or even Rick Owens could certainly be called costumes and yet, it is a term not often, if ever, used by the women who wear those clothes or by the designers who designed the garments. Part of fashion's art is its artifice. In that way, we all wear costumes every day.

I reference and explored the idea of what a garment could be and the meaning of dress in my 2018 MFA work entitled *Me, I'm Not*. *Me, I'm Not* (figure.11) was my entry into spatial, body and object dynamics within the framework of dress. This installation of stockings, bound together in a series of knots around two supporting pillars, was laced with figurative connotations of the body which inhabited the architecture of the space. The material choice of stockings references the institutionalized use of the garment and the constructs imposed upon the women who are forced to wear them. My distortion of the object encouraged a discourse where moving outside of those boundaries can be empowering and liberating. The introduction of an anonymous living being that visually mirrors aesthetic qualities of the object and then physically becomes part of it questions the power dynamics of these three entities. Watching as the performer dresses and undresses the garment/object broadens the scope of what can be considered wearable dress, even if it only exists temporarily within the performance. One cannot exist without the other in this context and together provide a series of mutual becoming.

'*A Body out of Bounds: and other Becoming's*' (figure.12) is another 2018 MFA work born from *Me, I'm Not*, which served as a catalyst for *Figures of Fear*. It incorporated elements of performance, deconstruction, dressing, embodiment and sculpture. I set out to open my creative process to the viewer by placing a body of a barely dressed young male on a white plinth and sculpting/building/entangling him with a selection of chosen materials forming a grotesque body and a blurring of garment and body. The materials I used in this work included zip ties, old rain jackets, a cut-up bean bag shell, sheets of large mouse pad foam, mesh tops and stockings. All these materials are synthetic and contrasted with his fleshy body, not only in its makeup but also in colour. The performance subverted an 'ideal of original' - white, male, plinth, gallery setting to that of a

⁴³ From *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 10 (4), 1992, 1-8. Reprinted by permission of The International Textile and Apparel Association.



Figure 12. Theron, A (2018) *A Body out of Bounds*. Test Space, Massey University

grotesque, layered, heavy, complex and dark figure. The process of transformation is quick and places two opposing materials, body and object, in close proximity to one another. The materials were all recycled, found, donated or repurposed, and in the spirit of deconstructivism I embraced the unpredictability of the materials and what they could offer me. The 10-minute performance systematically disguised any visual characteristics of the human form, instead morphing his body into an unrecognizable living sculpture. The living sculpture in turn questions ideas around dressing the body towards an anti-fashion state or dress that contradicts everyday wear. This performance served as a window into my making process, further illustrating my rejection of commercial fashion design as well as fashion production. I would instead work with a material that interests me for a specific time and feel a sense of urgency to make something with it that related to the body. In a non-linear fashion, I would make and finalise a garment and only then research and attach a concept to it and create sketches and samples. My non-chronological approach was something that I grappled with coming into my first year of the MFA program. How can I encourage my process and create meaningful work that encourages a greater conversation, whilst having a good understanding of the meaning attached to my own work? *The A Body out of Bounds: and other Becoming's work* was very much a response to this frustration.

The term performance, as opposed to theatre, offers a broader scope through which work can be read. This can encompass anything from live performance, street performance, film, contemporary dance, music videos or immersive and site specific work. This also gives a wider scope for understanding the emerging realm of hybrid practice between experimental fashion and performance design. There is a type of performance art that has emerged within areas of conceptual fashion design which draws on a history of artists creating with the performing body and clothing.⁴⁴ This is true of fashion artists such as Martin Margiela, Rei Kawakubo, Hussein Chalayan and Viktor and Rolf to list a few. These artists are all characterized by their cross-disciplinary approach to fashion, thus challenging fashion, and what it is perceived to be. By communicating themes, messages and ideas through their work and employing a visual narrative, they begin to communicate through the clothed and performed body.

The work of Rei Kawakubo poses questions related to bodily borders, breaking down the binary views that fashion often imposes upon the bodies they adorn. Kawakubo's 1997 collection for Comme des Garçons examined the ways in which we view the relationship between bodies and

⁴⁴ Bugg, J (2015) FASHION & PERFORMANCE: MATERIALITY, MEANING, MEDIA. Frame publishers, Amsterdam



Figure 14. Chalayan, H (1998) *Between*.
London Fashion Week



Figure 13. Kawakubo, R. (1997) *Lumps and Bumps*. Paris Fashion Week.

clothing (figure.13). The collection, simply entitled “Dress becomes body, becomes Dress, and they are one”, distorted and transformed the model’s natural body shape by making it difficult to see where her body ends, and the garment begins. This illusion was created by having cloth wrapped around large lumps in an unusual placement on the body. As a result, the viewer is unable to tell whether the lumps on the model’s body are in fact real deformities or thickly wrapped pieces of cloth.⁴⁵ Hussein Chalayan’s 1998 spring/summer collection sent armless cocoon-like dresses down the runway, before ending the show with six models in chadors, all varying in length. The first model to appear was nude, aside from her masked face. As each female body appeared from behind delicate opaque ivory cascading muslin curtains, each gained larger amounts of black material increasingly covering the model’s body from the top down (figure.14). Chalayan’s intent here was to highlight his experience of growing up amongst a Muslim culture to his audience. Specifically how he viewed the traditional Islamic women’s dress as symbolic of inferiority, antithetical to Western ideas of ‘Freedom’.⁴⁶

These designers communicate their ideas and concepts around the social and political climate, whilst embracing performance. They communicate embodied narratives about ideas and process. *Figures of Fear*, despite having roots in fashion, does not belong on a runway but instead calls out for a bodies to animate and perform them. Finding the appropriate mode of presentation has pushed me beyond my usual role as a maker, to that of curator and director. *A Body out of Bounds* served as my introduction into performance, however it illuminated to me that situating myself as part of the performance in such a direct way is not where I want to be. I exist in the creation and making process enough as it is, and performing felt too self-referential. Furthermore inviting individuals with their own history and background in dance and theater to the work not only enriched the performance, but also gave me the opportunity to use their expertise when creating the final work.

I looked to Butoh as a tool that could inform the movements and be a frame of reference through which I directed. Butoh is a form of Japanese dance theatre, consisting of a diverse range of motivations, techniques and activities for movement, dance and performance.⁴⁷ Butoh came to light in 1959 through collaborations between its two founders Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno

⁴⁵ Seely S.D. (2013). How Do You Dress a Body Without Organs? Affective Fashion and Nonhuman Becoming. *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly*

⁴⁶ Quinn, B (2002) A Note: Hussein Chalayan, *Fashion and Technology*. *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*

⁴⁷ Shea A. Taylor, (2012), “Butoh: a bibliography of Japanese avant-garde dance”, *Collection Building*, Vol. 31 Iss 1 pp. 15 - 18



Figure 15. Sankai, J (2015) *UMUSUNA: Memories Before History*. Performed in Ann Arbor October 23-24, 2015

the heels of World War Two. There existed a mixture of confusion caused by the industrialization process of their millenary traditional culture, and horror, caused by the bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, across the social vision of life. Important characteristics of the art form includes playful and grotesque imagery, taboo topics, extreme or absurd environments; it is traditionally performed in white body makeup with slow hyper-controlled motion (figure.15). However, with time Butoh groups are increasingly being formed around the world, with their various aesthetic ideals and intentions.⁴⁸ I collaborated with local performance collective *WithLime* otherwise known as Miki Seifert and Willaim Franco on a series of workshops with my performers. This created a foundation on which I could build on later with each garment and performer. The restriction, weight, discomfort, sound, visibility and tactile nature of each piece, in conjunction with this Butoh framework served as the choreography for *Figures of Fear*. Their movements emphasize their weight, restriction and discomfort. Sometimes we have to learn to walk with a limp, to feel our way through the shadows. A silent and restricted performer in one of these garments may at times be as static as a mannequin, but the realisation that what you are confronted with is a living, breathing organism accurately communicates the strong connection dress has to the individual, as well as the experience a viewer has to both of these elements.

The material choices I make and the way in which I utilise them is very much informed by deconstructionist methods and theory. The theories surrounding deconstructivism within a fashion context call to attention the mechanics of production and remove any aesthetic illusions associated with clothing, to reveal the construction beneath the surface. A 1988 MOMA exhibition about architectural deconstructivism brought the term into a larger consciousness. Allison Gill in her 1998 *Deconstruction Fashion: The Making of Unfinished, Decomposing and Re-assembled Clothes*,⁴⁹ draws parallels between the movement in architecture and the work of the Belgium fashion designer Martin Margiela. Margiela's clothing is an example of bodily deconstruction architecture. "In his anger against what too much money and too little imagination had done to his art form, Mr Margiela recycled thrown-away clothes, disemboweled his perfectly cut jackets and wrapped bright blue garbage bags around the clothes he made".⁵⁰ Margiela's clothing brings tailoring and garment construction secrets to the surface by exposing fixtures, linings, zips and re-using parts of

⁴⁸ Shea A. Taylor, (2012), "Butoh: a bibliography of Japanese avant-garde dance", Collection Building, Vol. 31 Iss 1 pp. 15 - 18

⁴⁹ Gill, A. (1998). Deconstruction of Fashion: The Making of Unfinished , Decomposing and Re-assembled Clothes. Fashion Theory, Volume 2 Issue1 pp. 25-50. Berg Publications

⁵⁰ Spindler, A. Coming Apart. New York Times, 25 July 1988



Figure 16. Theron, A (2019) *Figures of Fear*. Massey University



Figure 17. Theron, A (2019) *Figures of Fear*. Massey University

other articles of clothing. Fashion for everyday wear aims to be functional, well-made and discreet about the lining beneath. The paradox within this theory is that inevitably a new garment is constructed thus “Deconstruction becomes a process of analytical creation”.⁵¹ It is simultaneously deforming and forming, deconstructing and constructing, undoing and making. Both states become equally important, the design and anti-design are equally essential.⁵²

Figures of Fear makes fear visible. They are the material manifestation of fear. They are fashioned dress. A deliberate attempt to communicate a message to the viewer, by way of the overall manipulation of the wearer and complete distortion of their form (figure.16). It rids the wearer of outwardly human qualities and creates barriers between what we comfortably expect to see in the human form. It is cited that masks have the ability to create distance between the performer and the audience.⁵³ In conjunction with this, it offers a performer the opportunity to freely take on the character of another, in a way, escaping their own persona momentarily. In *Figures of Fear* masks not only unify the performers, collectively alienating them from observers, it also contributes to a feeling of discomfort an audience member might feel when approaching them. As humans we look to recognisable features in others as a source of comfort. When that is no longer visible we are forced to re-evaluate what and who we are experiencing.

When it came to testing various modes of presentation for *Figures of Fear*, lighting, score and space operated as supporting characters. They serve to enhance the experience and illuminate the otherness of the figures. I can reflect on this after my final MFA Hui this year, which served as a test of what helped, and what hindered the work. I chose The Pit in Massey, Wellington’s Block 12 as a presentation space. Viewers were greeted with a scene where three figures were situated on the lower level of the floor space. Viewers first experienced the work from a second level mezzanine area, and if they chose to, could walk down a flight of stairs to experience the figures on the same ground floor. This fifteen minute performance consisted of three figures, low and the ability to manipulate and change it during the performance was limited. Lighting has the ability to manipulate the tone of the space, not just as the viewer is introduced to the performance, but also as it progresses throughout. By having the ability to transition between moments of light and dark I am able to highlight details in the garments as well as highlight certain performers at particular

⁵¹ Martin, R. (1987) *Fashion and Surrealism*. New York: Rizzoli

⁵² Mary E. Roach-Higgins. “Describing Dress: A System of Classifying and Defining.” In *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning in Cultural Context*. Edited by Ruth Barnes and Joanne B. Eicher. Oxford and Washington, D.C: Berg Publishers, 1992–1993.

⁵³ Geczy, A., & Karaminas, V. (2017). *Critical fashion practice: From Westwood to Van Beirendonck*.



Figure 17. Theron, A (2019) *Figures of Fear*. Massey University

times. This can achieve moments of isolation for one performer, away from the collective group. The figure then is not only othered in appearance, but also in focus through lighting. Dress has the ability to communicate ideas about the wearer. Similarly the power and affect this can have on how the performer is approached and treated by a viewer who looks at this through their own lens. This multi-layered interaction aimed to emphasize this in the performance whilst still respecting the craft and material in the work. Fashioned dress and performance are closely linked in a variety of ways. Fashion and the clothed body in some ways is always performed. This is true of anything from a standardized runway show, to performing in a corporate suit for work everyday. Both performance and fashion can ultimately address issues of identity, character, narratives and social and political responsibility. *Figures of Fear* aims to highlight this connection whilst communicating our relationship with fear (figure.17).



Figure 17. Theron, A (2019) *Figures of Fear*. Massey University

Closure

In some ways this project happened to me. It was always coming. I can see hints of it's arrival in old works, memories, and everyday thoughts I never considered to be more than fleeting moments of mental drifting. Coming to terms with the idea that what I am critiquing is very much an inherent part of me has been eye-opening.

The thought is fear-inducing. It lives in most of us. Fear is addictive. It is how we survive.

It can drag you down, till you're nothing more than a limping figure yearning for a strong grip to hold onto.

It can propel you forward, sprinting further away from the threat on your heels.

I was raised in a world of fear, and I was content in that world, so much so that I unintentionally made it visible in my own work. Mirrored back to me were unknown figures, so distorted and unsettling that I could not place it. For as disturbing as they may be, they are horrifically beautiful too. Perhaps this is a reflection of the comfort and familiar relationship we have with fear, and how it is weaponized. Perhaps this is a provocation. The qualities and layers of fear has served as a rich source of creative fantasy for me. Approaching this work with the utmost control and care now seems absurd, as this has led me down paths reaching far beyond what I deem comfortable. Layers are built upon layers, stitched together in a complex and chaotic fashion to ultimately face the fear.

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