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## **CONVERSATIONAL SKINS**

*heirloom 'pelts' that emerge and evolve*

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Design // 2016  
Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand

**GRETA MENZIES**



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## **ABSTRACT**

Fabric garments augment and transform the body as a second skin. This project is a poetic, heuristic inquiry that investigates taking this 'second skin' through multiple forms, transitioning between flat fabric, garment form, flat fabric, garment form etc. In this cyclical long-term relationship, the surface of the textile-skin is inscribed and augmented as cuts are made, and 'healed' through various textile processes. The scars write a story on the surface. There is a ceremonial sensation to removing and the 'flattening' the skin, which evokes the collection of a pelt. Using a phenomenological methodology the 'flat' and 'form' iterations are performed and photographed, growing a catalogue of the fabric's evolution.

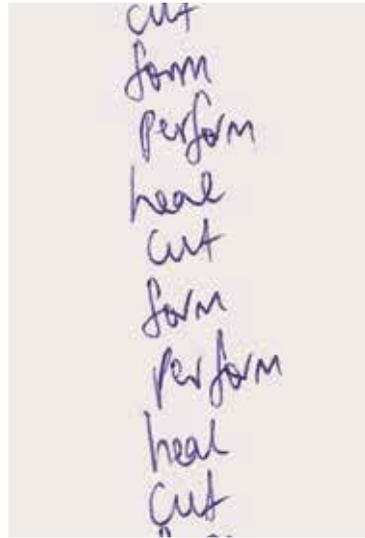
Returning a garment to 'flat' offers erasure of form; it can become a level plane for a new construction. This action is achieved by utilising the method of 'zero waste' design, in which no fabric is removed in the construction of a garment. This enables the form to be unpicked, reassembled and sewn back to a flat-fabric state. The flat/form/flat/form cycle is played out as a conversation with the cloth, responding to the flow and tendencies of each textile.

The central proposition is that the flat-form-flat cycle provides a channel to engage in the transformative performance of dress, while enacting a use practice that diverges from problematic consumption models. In doing this, a unique surface pattern is inscribed on the cloth. The process asks: 'what might be allowed to develop?' The outcome demonstrates a collection of nine textile 'pelts' with documented progression; liminal pieces that are detailed artefacts in themselves, yet invite further interaction.

Key Words:

Textile Design, Speculative, Zero-waste, Shapeshift, Fashion, Skin, Transformation, Performance.







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## INTRODUCTION

Conversational Skins is a project spanning textile design, dress philosophy, fashion design, performance, speculative design and sustainability. This is played out as a poetic inquiry, considering textiles as second-skins that shapeshift, becoming multiple garment forms. As a garment, textiles become a second skin, augmenting body shape and allowing the wearer to experience 'becoming'. I am interested in the performative aspect of wearing clothing, and the joy in dressing up and varying appearance. As fashion researcher and activist Otto Von Busch describes:

Fashion is transformation. It is a promise of becoming, a vessel of shapeshifting, a craft with which we can navigate across the currents of the social...the mirror offers us to shapeshift – 'who do you want to be tonight?' This is the true shamanistic aspect of fashion; it offers us a new skin (Von Busch, 2013).

Trained in textile design, my practice has included image making, jewellery, and textile design – always with great interest in bodies, dress, feminism and environmentalism. Throughout the course of this Masterate degree I have discovered a passion for speculative fiction, as a well as in interest in futurists and transhumanism<sup>1</sup>, insofar as these topics demand a reimagining of bodies and modes of being in the world.

The intent of this project is to visualise a reflection on textile dress in a contemporary and future-thinking context, through the development and documentation of evolving textiles. In this work a single piece of cloth takes shape as multiple garment forms, moving cyclically between flat fabric, garment form, flat fabric, garment form etc. This 'flat-form-flat' cycle is enacted using the practice of 'zero-waste' design, where no

<sup>1</sup> Transhumanism is a loosely defined movement which looks to extend human abilities through technology, e.g. Genetic engineering, digital technology, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence etc. It challenges traditional concepts of what it is to be human. (Sorgner & Ranisch, 2014)

fabric is removed in the making of a garment. This facilitates an opportunity to unpick the form, and reassemble the textile back to 'flat'. I started to think about this while designing textiles for Holly McQuillan's fashion project 'Make/Use', which developed open source, user modifiable zero-waste garment patterns. The Make/Use patterns were printed with way-showing surface designs (fig. 1), which guided the maker/user to create and adjust a garment form (fig. 2). In Conversational Skins there are no guides, and making is played out as an intuitive, heuristic, practice-led investigation on nine different fabrics.

The textiles are thought of as second skins. Throughout the forming/flattening process a surgical language arose: making cuts, healing cuts, grafting, suture, etc. This correlation between textile and surgical techniques is explored in depth by artist Rhian Solomon, whose practice links skin and cloth, body and dress, and who founded sKINship™: a research program connecting artists and fashion designers with scientists and medical professionals to share knowledge. Responding to this in a 'textile surgeon' role, I collected and developed an assortment of methods to 'heal' different fabrics, responding to tears and cuts. However, although there are similarities in technique, my intuitive and spontaneous way of working is far from the planned, precise nature of surgery.

Effecting the skin analogy, the textiles are referred to as 'pelts', and parallels between skin and fabric are frequently employed when discussing the artefacts. The fabric stretches, sags and wrinkles with use, and in the shedding and flattening process a pattern emerges on the surface of the cloth, speaking to its history with the maker/wearer. The textile becomes a text, inscribed with its past transformations. Moving between garment and flat fabric offers an *erasure of form*, and opportunity for *textile surface* to evolve.

*Erasure of form*: I have spent years modifying existing garments: hemming, screen-printing, embroidering and adjusting in various ways - something that fashion and

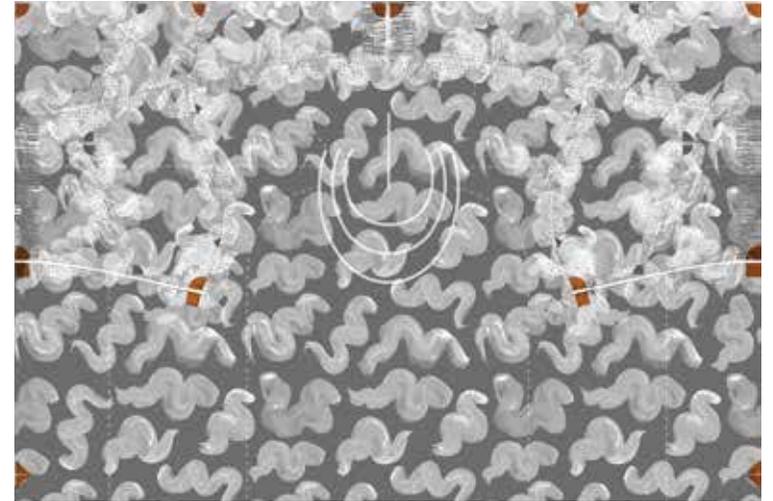


Figure 1. Make/Use. 2015. Artwork for digital fabric print.



Figure 2. Make/Use. (2015). Long Tshirt. Digitally printed silk.

textile researcher Dr Kate Fletcher refers to as “the Craft of Use” (Fletcher, 2012). However, reworking an existing garment is limited: iterations become extensions or reductions of the original form. Garments that can be ‘reset’ back to flat at any time retain the option of erasing the garment form entirely, offering flexibility in its long-term use. The erasure could also be ceremonial, a symbolic act that marks a progression to the next stage – whether it is in the context of the user (another stage in life), or as it is passed on to the next owner, removing the form so they can customise and take ownership of the piece. While the form is erased, markers of past incarnations show on the surface.

*Textile surface:* The marks left by past iterations develop a unique textile surface. To accept these scars and undulations may necessitate a ‘Wabi Sabi’<sup>2</sup> mindset, embracing the disruptions in the cloth. Similar to Kintsugi: the art of repairing broken pottery with gold, the supposition is that the healed cuts add value to the textile through conspicuous mending. As fashion researcher Dr Kirsi Niinimäki describes: “Wabi Sabi philosophy is about finding perfection in imperfection – it is the very crack in the pot that makes it perfect.” (Niinimäki, 2013). Also, when the fabric is ‘flattened’, there is opportunity to augment the textile surface (e.g. add a screen-printed pattern) without the interruption of working around a form. Restoration to a level plane is seen as an opportunity and a challenge, a chance to harness a ‘curated serendipity’ in responding to cuts and devising repair work. This is played out as a conversation with the cloth, responding to its natural tendencies and the needs of each fabric. The idea of dialogue is also reflected in the blue conversational print<sup>3</sup> designs, and in reference to textile dress as a language, a conversation between bodies.

Dress allows us to perform different selves, to reshape and transform the body, and to speak without words. Fashion theorist Patricia Calefato writes, “The things we adorn and decorate ourselves with are the language through which our bodies speak to other bodies” (Calefato, 1997). Wearing clothing is performative, be it intentional or not. As gender studies researcher Stephen Seely puts it, “all clothing, even at its most

<sup>2</sup> A Japanese philosophy and aesthetic, which finds beauty in the “imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete” (Koren 1994)

<sup>3</sup> Conversational prints, or ‘conversationals’ are a category of surface pattern designs, which depict recognisable imagery or somehow converse with the viewer.

quotidian, transforms the wearer" (Seeley, 2012). This opportunity for transformation and becoming is the seductive aspect I find in fashion. It also drives the wastefulness associated with the industry, where a desire for novelty and change is fed by environmentally destructive practices.

Underlying this project is a personal challenge: I often wonder how I can continue to design and make things – especially in the realm of textile fashion - in a world plagued by overproduction and ecologically unsustainable consumption habits. This project is an experiential inquiry that uses critical making to address these issues, taking cues from philosopher Kate Soper's "Alternative Hedonist" approach (Soper, 2012), which sees sustainable practices not as problematic or 'less', but as an improvement to the current consumer-lifestyle which, she would suggest, contributes to a degradation of the soul as much as the environment. Current materialist culture requires a rethinking of the buy-use-dispose model of consumption.

Sustainable design researcher Cameron Tonkinwise suggests, "design timely things, things that can last longer by being able to change over time...design things that are not finished, things that can keep on by keeping on being repaired and altered, things in motion" (Tonkinwise, 2005). These pelts are designed to be in motion, evolving through use and interaction, moving between flat and form. The amount of forms a piece could take is undetermined and indefinite, and making in this way facilitates a lifespan that far exceeds current expectations for a garment. Textile researcher Beverly Gordon reflects: "Living as we do in a post industrialised world, fabric has become ubiquitous and inexpensive. Most of us are very distant from its production, and the magic of cloth making has for the most part become invisible" (Gordon, 2011)'. The abundance of textiles means we de-value them, as with most things in consumer culture when we are removed from their manufacture. Valuing cloth is a key idea in this project, where garments are formed and flattened using the methodologies of zero waste design, retaining the entire fabric.

The central proposition of this project is that the flat-form-flat cycle provides a channel to engage in the transformative performance of dress while enacting an alternative use practice from problematic consumption models, and asks 'what might be allowed

to develop? In this text I discuss the process and experience of entering into a 'new-materialist' relationship with the textiles. The pelts evolve with minimal planning, always in motion. They are brought to life through wearing, and healed in an intuitive way, responding to the fabric with various textile techniques and bricolage, producing a palimpsest<sup>4</sup> effect.

I am a textile designer, and so my focus is on the textiles. This is why they are ultimately displayed flat, as 'pelts' – I am interested in what happens to the fabric, how does it react? What does it say? Making the fabrics into garments was done in a free, heuristic way, engaging in a kind of rapid prototype fabrication. If this was to be considered purely from a fashion perspective, the forms could be found wanting. I also note that the pelts have been formed and flattened in quick succession in an effort to uncover what might happen to the textile, and so the garments have not been lived in. Allowing time for the garments to be worn would be important to further understand what might happen to fabrics in a long-term evolving cycle. Over time, the act of wearing cloth changes its surface, structure and shape, which would further necessitate a Wabi Sabi aesthetic/mindset as mending would be not only in response to cuts made for structural change, but for upkeep of a continuous textile surface (without unwanted holes or wear). A longer-term exploration must be left to future research, as it is not within the scope of this project, which serves as an indicator or speculation of what is possible.

Conversational Skins is poetic and conceptual. I enact, record and present a speculation about evolving garments, taking a lead from designers Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby who, in their recent book 'Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction and Social Dreaming' call for designers to engage in speculative design: stepping away from neoliberal capitalist commodification, away from the marketplace, and toward imagined realities. These imaginings ask "what if" questions, intended to provoke social, political, and ethical discussion. "Speculative designs depend on dissemination and engagement with a public or expert audience; they are designed to circulate" (Dunne & Raby, 2013). In order to share and circulate the work, documentation has been a vital part of this project.

4. Palimpsest: "Something reused or altered but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form" (Palimpsest 2016)

I produced nine 'forms' (constructing garments) or nine 'flats' (de-constructing the garments and re-joining the cuts) each week. The work was photographed on Friday mornings in a set location. The images show the flat and form iterations in sequence, showing the evolution of each textile. As well as documenting the changes, the images capture a pleasure and playfulness that was inherent in the process. The story was also recorded through diary keeping as I made the pieces, noting thoughts and observations that occurred during the process. This experience is the story of this project, told through pelts (as artefacts) and photography. To unpack this, I've inserted excerpts from my 'making diary' (figs. 1 & 2) to further relay the sensations of making and wearing:

*the contrasting haptic qualities of the two wools: heavy, felted, grey, and soft, cloudlike, cream.  
They merge together in violent action, pierced repeatedly by barbed needles.  
I only stab my finger once.*

Conversational Skins is led by a research-through-design process: flowing through a cycle of experience based techniques: making (cutting and healing), performing (wearing and photographing), reflection...and repeat<sup>5</sup>. This text describes research involved in the making of nine textile artefacts, unpacking the thought processes and development of the project. It does this firstly by contextualising and discussing the work in four sections: Zero waste, Shapeshifting, Skin, and New Materialism. In each section I discuss relevant theory, art and design precedents and my own work to paint a picture of the heuristic process. Following this, I present and discuss the Pelts, reflecting on the findings from each piece. I describe the pelts as liminal: being in an "intermediate state, phase, or condition" (Liminal, 2015) speaking to the idea that each stage is potentially temporary and further change is invited, so the body of work is not in a final state, but rather at a point in time.

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5. See the appendix for cutting information and healing techniques

## ZERO WASTE

Zero waste design involves utilising the entirety of the material - nothing is wasted. The term emerged in fashion in 2008, but is not a novel concept; the practice is as old as dressing with cloth and skins. In industry, around 15% of fabric is discarded in the making of a garment, with an estimated 60 billion square meters wasted in 2015 (Rissanen & McQuillan, 2015). Designing out this waste is an effective practice for sustainability, however as researcher Timo Rissanen notes:

Zero-waste fashion design is not “good” in and of itself; it needs to be examined in a much broader context... This points towards a new, expanded vision for fashion design: as well as designing and making garments, fashion design needs to design the consumption, wearing and using of garment. (Rissanen, 2013)

‘Designing consumption’ is a key aspect of this project, which seeks to explore an alternative relationship with textiles: valuing them as evolving second skins, allowing them to shapeshift and change through cutting and healing (mending). Zero-waste design principals facilitate this by allowing the textile to be unpicked and ‘flattened’ to a level plane, ready for the next iteration to be formed.

I was introduced to the flat/form concept through designing textile prints for the user-modifiable, zero waste garment patterns in ‘*Make/Use*’. “A key feature of the *Make/Use* garments is their ability to be re-set and re-made” (McQuillan, 2015). The patterns provide users with guides embedded in the surface print for making and altering garments. This project explores cycling through flat and form with no guides or formal planning.

Conversational Skins engages in spontaneous pattern cutting, allowing garments to be formed and the textile healed through a conversation with the cloth. This is a poetic way of making, and departs from traditional fashion practices. Sustainable



Figure 3. Roberts, J. (2013). Garments from 'Free Cutting' workshop.

fashion researchers Kirsi Niinimäki and Maarit Aakko note that, "taking distance from the common rules of patternmaking allows experimental and creative design processes" (Aakko & Niinimäki 2014). This has been true for the work produced in this project.

I take inspiration from fashion designer and researcher Julian Roberts who works in a similar way, in a process he named 'subtraction cutting' (fig. 3). In his book 'Free Cutting', he describes how the process differs from convention: "pattern cutting is not about cold geometry...but rather it is about a warm human being touching cloth, and exploring ideas using spatial measurements that are human, not abstract" (Roberts, 2013). At points, I did use paper modelling as a design ideation tool (fig. 4). These mock-ups acted as loose speculations rather than mathematically correct miniatures. They helped with visualising the step from 2D to 3D, however realising forms from the textiles was still intuitive and imprecise, which necessitated continual problem-solving. This cut-and-respond technique exemplifies the 'curated serendipity' which characterises the work.



Figure 4. Paper models.

## SHAPESHIFTING

I cannot speak of shapeshifting or skin without mentioning French artist ORLAN. Famous for her 1990's plastic surgery performance series critiquing beauty standards placed on women, her art "interrogates every defining aspect of being human: gender, ethnicity, religion, beauty, physiognomy, and even physiology itself – through an endlessly mutating oeuvre that defies categorization" (Garellick, 2010). The work in this project touches upon many of the themes and ideas Orlan has deeply unpacked in her art, especially her ongoing work: 'Suture, Hybridization, Recycling', a collaborative series made of clothing from her wardrobe: deconstructing the garments, and reconstructing them into new clothing that highlights the sutures.

In this project I was able to shapeshift, to 'become other' and experience transformation through changing my second-skins, and through the second-skins themselves changing. Fashion researcher Otto Von Busch describes: "The shapeshifting offered by fashion is ephemeral. The combustion of the now, fuelled by desire, is the power that bursts apart the moment to move into the next..." (Von Busch, 2013). Fashion is transformation, and fluidity in self-representation is the aspect of clothing I love - a chance to play and experiment becoming different characters and forms.

In *Conversational Skins*, my body was transformed by the textile through dress, then I transformed the textile (and so on) in a cyclical conversation with the cloth. Cuts were made and healed, shapes formed and flattened. The conversations with each cloth were different. Some flowed easily, some were forced, some were marked by awkward silences.

I recorded the sensory experiences encountered in the making and wearing of the forms, some of them unexpected - during unpicking I would recall parts of the podcasts I'd listened to whilst making the seam. Photographing the forms visually

recorded the wearing experience; each form and fabric felt different, and I moved differently in response. In this project shapeshifting was both a method for making, and an experience of becoming.

Philosopher Kate Soper states, "To be human is to need (desire) diversity, change, novelty, self-development" (Soper, 2008). The cyclical, liminal nature of the Pelts allow for this desire in a way that mitigates overconsumption. In some ways it sits within a 'slow fashion' tenet. Slow fashion is concerned with owning less, mending, and enjoying simple pleasures. While this resonates with my intentions, I find a lack of 'carnival' in the ethos. Fashion is inherently ephemeral, but as Kate Fletcher points out, "Just as fashion without sustainability is ignorant, sustainability without fashion is sad" (Fletcher, 2012). The way of making and wearing in this project attempts to marry slow fashion with novelty and a sense of 'playing' through experiential research.

In their book 'Visualising Research', Carole Gray and Julian Malins point out, "Design is experiential. We learn most effectively by doing – by active experience, and reflection on that experience." Philosopher Donald Schön likens it to conversation: he suggests that designing is a 'reflective conversation with the materials of a situation.' (Schön, 1983). Doing, making, and wearing – cycling through flat and form in a self reflexive mode helped unite research and practice, allowing me to connect the dots between what I was reading and doing.

I enter into the force and flow of the fabric.  
Cut, drape, stitch. Unpick, match and heal.  
Sheer silk asks to be treated gently, the  
machine runs slow.

I make cording and patches from found  
materials to cover scars and strengthen  
weak points.

If it tears, it tears. Mending is beautiful.  
Mending means time to listen:  
time for physicists, jellyfish breeders and  
heroin addicts to tell their stories in  
podcasts.

When I unpick, I remember the words  
I heard when I made the seam.

Situating the work on my body was intentional; the work has potential for wider application, but at its core is a poetic, site-specific (my body/the textile) investigation of the evolving-second-skin idea. Ideas of bodies, skin and clothing runs through this project, and all are a site of political and personal sensitivity. It is impossible to pick a 'neutral' body to present a garment on. The fashion industry may be seen as trying to do this, using tall, thin bodies without breasts to showcase garments, but here the model acts as coat hanger, shrinking back as a platform for the clothing. Putting my own body into the garments allowed me to enter into the experience.

I am influenced by artist Catherine Bagnall's work, which focuses on performance practices, dress and 'becoming'. She writes, "I am interested in the performative power of fashion to shift and question how we see ourselves – or what we can become" (Bagnall, 2008). *Conversational Skins* explores this idea through making and wearing/performing spontaneous, temporary garment forms.

Gestalten publisher Robert Klantenn states that "investigating the form and nature of human beings always happens at a time when technical upheavals create social consequences, and that there is a great demand for such investigation today" (Klantenn, Ehmann & Schulze, 2011). These modifications and reconstructions can "invent, enhance, obscure and alter identities" (Klantenn, et al., 2011). They can also question, rebel against, or reinvent what is considered normal, humorous or fashionable.

Artists Lucy Mcrae and Bart Hess collaborate to explore these ideas (fig. 4), and "By exceeding the limits of fashion, photography and performance, Lucy and Bart visualise a futuristic ideal image, and in doing so they raise questions about human engineering of the future." (Assouly, 2013). I read their images as conversation pieces. They work within a speculative framework, visualising and provoking with imaginative costuming and photography. I echo this approach in the images of this project.



Figure 5. Silhouette of work by Lucy and Bart: 'Evolution' (2008) which used rubber balloons and nylon stockings to augment body shape.

Cindy Sherman's feminist work has long been an inspiration as an example of storytelling and shapeshifting through dress and props. The meaning of the images are left open, and "the experience of looking at Cindy Sherman's work encourages viewers to create their own stories around her fictional characters" (Steiner, 2003). I don't claim that my images emulate her conceptual work, but the idea of a narrative emerging from the portraits for a viewer to interpret adds to the conversational potential of presenting the textiles alongside their historic forms in photographic image. As I edited the photos, I found myself thinking of the figures as characters - removed from my sense of self - times when I was an 'other'. I create stories and impressions when reflecting on the images - sometimes unconsciously naming them: ice queen, drunken bridesmaid, fitness clown. I'm surprised at just how different the characters look, even though it is an evolution of the same textile-skin (figs. 6-9).



Figure 6. Pelt 8 *merino*, form 2.



Figure 6. Pelt 8 *merino*, form 2.



Figure 7. Pelt 8 *merino*, form 3.

## SKIN

Skin is all

We can know of another's mind, heart.  
Ache and rejoicing, how well we love  
Ourselves: skin is where

Our names are written:  
We write our own lines there. ("Thinking With the Body" 37-42, Torrevillas, 1996)

*Skin and bodies - loaded subjects! Mine has carried and  
breastfed 3 children, you can tell by the skin.  
I wonder if I will pass these second-skins on to my children.*

Skin is in-between, it is the template on which our experience, inner and outer, is inscribed, and our experience, and our inheritance, is there to be read by others. It is where the world confronts the I, and the I meets the world. (Mundi, 2006)

French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu observed in his book 'The Skin Ego' that the skin (and the same could be said for clothing as a second skin) functions in at least 3 ways: to contain, to protect, and to communicate (Anzieu, 1989). Similarly, textile writer Beverly Gordon writes, "...cloth serves as wrapper, container [and] framer..." (Gordon, 2011). Cloth, as a second skin, not only protects and frames the body, but also merges with it, as researcher Stephen Seely observes, "The molecules, fibers and textures of the fabric

endlessly fold in and out of the surfaces of the body as skin and cloth, organic and non organic, body and thing become one." (Seely, 2012). Textiles hold an intimate connection with bodies, acting as interfaces with the external environment. This works in two ways, the cloth is both an interface: a boundary at which two points meet, and the cloth also 'interfaces with': interacts with others as a communicator.

The pelts of this project wrap and contain the body, but they also communicate visually as garment forms. This form is structurally sound, yet unfixed, allowing the maker/wearer to experience series of 'becomings'. Artist Catherine Bagnall's work focuses on performance practices and its intersection with dress and 'becoming', and she notes, "clothing after all is a point of intersection or a boundary between ourselves and the outside world" (Bagnall, 2014). Material researcher Catherine Allerton picks up on this in her paper about sarongs, which she dubs 'super-skins', noting that there is no single life of a sarong, but a range of possibilities of becoming within each (Allerton, 2007). This idea that a series of potentials lies within the cloth is inherent in the Pelts of this project, but rather than taking shape on a body through wrapping and tucking like a sarong, they are cut and manipulated, then broken down and reassembled.

*I feel like Dr Frankenstein.*

As artist Rhian Solomon describes in the sKINship project<sup>6</sup>, there are many parallels between plastic surgery and pattern cutting/fashion processes. She describes surgeons marking out procedure plans with a pen, making a mock-up in paper or cloth, and similar (or identical) folding and suture techniques (Solomon, 2013). I used many of these techniques in the textile Pelts of this project (figs. 10-11). I took both

<sup>6</sup> "sKINship's current research program looks to promote experimental collaborations between the disciplines of Reconstructive Plastic Surgery and Pattern Cutting for Fashion" (sKINship, 2016).



Figure 10. Suture.



Figure 11. Fold.

the role of both surgeon and patient, cutting and suturing my textile-skin; though in opposition to the careful, planned practice of a surgeon, I took risks, pushed the boundaries of the cloth, and responded to its materiality. Like fabric, skin has a grain. Like skin, fabric can be pulled taut, can wrinkle, and can become distorted with wear. Throughout the project, to inform and inspire textile practices, I collected words to describe skin and textiles and the process that can be applied to both.

In making the pelts, I explored a suspension of control, allowing the textiles to lead the way in some decisions, and responding to 'mistakes' as being part of the process towards realising a form that was not completely planned, allowing and embracing serendipity. It was a poetic way of making, a conversation with the cloth, also likeable to drawing or painting. Anthropologist Tim Ingold describes the drawn line as irrevocable, even if erased the pressure of the mark remains (Ingold, 2010). This is true in the making and healing of lines in the pelts: each mark is permanent and becomes a part of the story written in the surface, creating a palimpsest effect where newer lines are written over older ones, and all remain visible.

Cloth as a second skin - to peel this skin off, flatten it, to make a pelt. The pelt speaks of its histories as skin speaks through its scars. It also holds less palpable memories in the surface - of the wearing, the marking (sore fingers! tiny stitches! heavy rug-tufting gun!), the podcasts I listened to, and jumping up and down on a cold morning, dancing for the camera.

hairy	fold
smooth	drape
thick	tear
delicate	touch
soft	cut
rough	heal
shedding	suture
scarred	wrinkle
wrinkled	pinch
fleshy	bind
taught	pierce
worn	ornament
imprinted	stretch
	wash
	augment

Valuing these textiles as second skins, embracing the flaws, and feeling the autonomy to change their appearance perhaps necessitates the valuing of one's own skin. Conceivably a subsequent effect from this alternative-consumption of 'things' is a re-valuing of self, which is quite powerful when women's bodies are cut up into commodified parts in advertising, and where unattainable photoshopped ideals permeate the visual landscape of our cities, magazines, and screens.

Jewellery designer Akiko Shinzato's work 'Another Skin' explores an obsession with changeable appearance, with exchangeable printed body parts (eyes, ears etc) suspended in metal apparatus (fig. 12). Her work responds to the performance of self, played out through social media in response to societal convention and pressure to look a certain way. Perhaps within an alternative consumption mode, playing with appearance can be reclaimed as a pleasurable activity, removed from the expectations of advertising standards. Jeweller/researcher Susan Cohn describes the power of adornment as code, "Visual codes work like signs as discrete units of meaning which represent the deeper cultural matrix. Codes facilitate the relationships between individuals, their society and its environment" (Cohn, 2009). This is a powerful sign system, one that can adhere to convention, or rebel through carnivalesque inversion.

As well as affecting the form through wearing, textiles have a physical effect on the body through the act of making and mending. Textile researcher Beverly Gordon reflects, "Clothing making can create what Herbert Benzon of Harvard Medical School calls the "relaxation response", a measurable state in which brainwaves change, and heart rate, muscle tension and blood pressure decrease, and a feeling of serenity ensues. (Gordon, 2011) The 'relaxation response' invoked by the making, mending and augmenting involved in owning and using evolving garments stands in stark contrast to the way clothes are typically acquired today: trips to a shopping mall. So if, as sustainable design researcher Stuart Walker describes, "contemporary aesthetic norms are based in capital intensive, highly automated, unsustainable procedures" (Walker, 2007), then what could an alternative look like? What could it feel like? This work is one response to these questions, looking to experience and enjoy the transformative effects of clothing within a 'new-materialist' mindset.



Figure 12. Akiko Shinzato. (2014). *Another Skin*. Brass, leather.

## NEW MATERIALISM

Presently, textile garments are consumed and discarded at a rapid pace in the name of change. "No industry has better perfected this cultural cycle of invention, acceptance and discard of continually changing modes of appearance" (Fletcher, 2014). Fashion researchers Elizabeth Wilson and Joanne Entwistle posit that "Further research could examine the relationship between textiles and the body: for example, developments in the manufacture of textiles that may in the future (and in some cases already do in the present) change the relationship between body and garment" (Entwistle & Wilson, 2001). Re-evaluating our relationships with textile garments - considering them to be liminal, changeable second skins challenges this consume-and-discard practice.

Reading work by philosopher Kate Soper, particularly around what she has coined 'Alternative Hedonism' has been influential in how I think about designing and making in consumerist culture. She speaks about consumerism denying us sensory pleasures, repressing us in its avoidance of the carnivalesque<sup>7</sup> and its work-ethic dominance.

In *Conversational Skins* I seek to re-obtain those sensory pleasures, and an enjoyment in engaging with the absurd and carnivalesque aesthetic. In response to Soper's argument that the answer is not to revert back to 'simpler' times, but to reimagine new modes of being in the world, I explore an alternative mode of consumption. Looking forward, not back is echoed in the 'Eco-effectiveness' chapter of William McDonough & Michael Braungart' book 'Cradle to Cradle', which also calls for a different way of doing things without having to return to a pre-technological state. They suggest incorporating the best of technology and culture, which would include a "shift in perspective [and] evolving tastes and trends" (McDonough & Braungart, 2002). In this project I use traditional craft processes such as hand stitching, embroidery,

7. "Marked by an often mocking or satirical challenge to authority and the traditional social hierarchy" (Carnavalesque 2014)

What might  
be allowed to  
develop??

screen-printing and smocking alongside digital embroidery, pneumatic rug tufting, digital textile printing and machine stitching. I use hand spun, hand woven cloth alongside store-bought factory made fabric. The work is responsive to what is available, and the needs of the fabric, rather than championing only preindustrial processes, which can be prevalent in the 'slow fashion' movement.

On her 'Alternative Hedonism' philosophy, Soper states: "Nor is this 'other pleasure' to be conceived in an exclusively nostalgic or retrospective mode, since it is as much about what might be allowed to develop as about restoring what has been lost." (Soper, 2008). Asking 'what might be allowed to develop?' is part of the central proposition of this project, and this is explored through relating to the fabric in a new-materialist framework.

In his paper 'Rethinking Fashion Design: New materiality, smart products, and upcycling', Antti Ainamo states: "Eschewing the negativity of traditional materialism that assumes a necessary choice between to manufacture and pollute, on the one hand, or not to manufacture and not to pollute, on the other hand, new materialism is an openly positive approach" (Ainamo, 2014). As a strategy to implement this 'positive approach', Ainamo suggests that "Textile fashion grows from what is already in motion, like a plant grows from a seed..." (Ainamo, 2014). This idea of growing is echoed by Tom Ingold in 'The Textility of Making' – he argues that rather than imposing form upon the material world, practitioners can make things by intervening in the force and flows of materials, and again uses the term 'as a plant grows from a seed' (Ingold, 2009). The work in this project explores the notion of making something that is permanent yet impermanent, something that grows and evolves, and the idea of evolution and growth is played out both conceptually and physically. Conceptually as an idea, which is seeded and germinates through sharing the work, and physically - as per Ingold's 'flow', I honour and respond to the material properties of the fabric.

Intervening in the force  
and flow of the fabrics  
is like a dance.

I cut, the fabric drapes

I join, and a form emerges.

Pull one thread far long  
enough, and the form

collapses.

Edges fray, and I choose to

stop the unravelling, or

encourage it along.

Thick paint embellishes sheer

silk, and changes the fall -

suggesting the beginning of

a new form...

In contrast to traditional materialism that focuses on what is settled, fixed and permanent, the new-materialist approach assumes always an aggregate whose elements vary according to its connections, its relations of movement and rest, the different individuated assemblages it enters. (Ainamo, 2014).

The artefacts in this project are made from assemblages, both of materials: fabric, fiber, yarn, threads, but also so much more than this: they embody the time spent making, a conversation with the fabric, the experiences, and memories as an aggregate of substance and encounter. Serendipity, intuitive making and bricolage are important in my making practice, and this is reflected in the pelts. Found, collected and waste materials are used to construct and ornament; mending cuts becomes a responsive action, answering the need of the fabrics and the desire of aesthetics.



Figure 12. Von Drimmelen, S. (2014). *Painted*. Silk, cotton.

Saskia van Drimmelen & Margreet Sweerts echo this responsive action in their 'Painted' couture collective (fig. 13). Saskia describes the process: "A garment would be decorated over time by a series of hands, thereby acquiring its own story... As a result the pieces in the painted series would not be 'designed' but would just 'emerge.'" (Van Drimmlen, 2013). The garments grow through collaborative making.

In Jessica Hemmings' paper "Grown Fashion: Animal, Vegetable or Plastic?" she explores the work of designers who 'grow' garments, such as the Victimless Leather and BioCouture projects. These designers focus on innovating new alternative materials. Much of the research in this project has led to reading about nano- and biotechnology in materials design, for example Neri Oxman's work using silkworms as 'biological 3D printers' (Kahn, 2013). My project, however, focuses on diversity in ideas over materials. It uses fairly traditional materials, but in a way that critiques current manufacturing and consumption practices, asking if a human love of variation and change can be embraced, but redirected from an environmentally destructive to a soul-nourishing practice.

Hemmings states, "An appetite and obsession with all things new is often used to explain the excessive consumption the fashion industry inspires." (Hemmings, 2008), and goes on to point out that this obsession drives a market that actually restricts diversity in ideas and materials by churning out multiples of garments made from a limited range of materials. Sustainable Fashion researcher Kate Fletcher highlighted

this restriction in a recent blog post, simply titled: "Consumerist fashion: innovation repressor" (Fletcher, 2012). In this work I look to researchers like Dr Kate Golsdwothy, whose research into sustainable Fashion and Textile practices investigates "Design for Cyclability" (Goldsworthy, 2016) both in theoretical and practice led research, and also to fashion and textile design researchers Rebecca Earley and Kay Politowicz, who put forward 10 strategies for sustainable design. This project speaks to many of them (as indicated to the right).

Adopting a new materialist approach, this project visualises the innovation that can grow from non-consumerist fashion. As Soper puts it: "The potential of consumption to figure as a site of political agency is now recognised by both corporate capitalism and it's No Logo opposition" (Soper, 2008). This might explain the reason for the awkward nature of 'ethical' fashion, which enters into the system it rages against, and when successful in its goal to make 'ethical' fashionable, there is a risk of larger companies developing a watered down version and capitalising, e.g. a high street label selling flowing beige dresses or eco-slogan printed tee shirts.

In the book 'Aesthetic politics in fashion' Elke Gaugele writes, "Through the trend of ethical fashion, the fashion system began to adopt and display the critical discourse on its own exploitative modes of production for capitalist reasons." (Gaugele, 2014). Conversational Skins exists around the borders of 'ethical fashion', but speaks of ideas rather than marketable product. "As designers we need to stop designing applications and start designing implications" (Dunne & Raby, 2013). It does, however, use some of the language and indicators of fashion and textiles to present the work: photography, 'look book', etc., albeit in a subversive way (nothing is for sale, it promotes not-buying).

In the following section of this document, I present the output of this research though image and text.

Design to Minimise Waste	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Design for Cyclability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Design to Reduce Chemical Impacts	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes!
Design to Reduce Energy and Water Use	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Somewhat
Design that Explores Clean/Better Technologies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> -
Design that Takes Models from Nature and History	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Design for Ethical Production	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Design to Reduce the Need to Consume	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Design to Dematerialise and Develop Systems and Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Design Activism	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
(The Ten, n.d.)		

**THE PELTS:**



Pelt 1 rug tufted



Pelt 2 padded linen



Pelt 3 cream handspun/woven



Pelt 4 grey wool





Pelt 5 immortal jellyfish



Pelt 6 black linen gauze



Pelt 7 merino



Pelt 8 black handspun/woven



Pelt 9 silk georgette

**PELT 1**  
rug tufted



2 days in the rug-tufting room. It is loud, noisy, frustrating. Fingers hurt.

So many hours, tiny stitches. This does feel like surgery.  
The material is delicate and fleshy at the same time

The conversation with this pelt was staggered. I kept stalling in my responses to the fabric, not wanting to open up the delicate silke skin, but taking so much care when I did.

A lot of hard stitching - long conversations, or rather, long comfortable silences.





FORM 1



FLAT 1



FORM 2



FLAT 2



FORM 3



FLAT 3

The genesis of this pelt was a cream polyester with a fairly open 1:1 weave, chosen for its combination of drape, availability, and ability to be rug tufted. I spent two days transforming it into a thick hairy textile using blue wool yarns and an industrial rug tufting gun, purposefully holding the gun against the fabric for too long at regular intervals to create idiosyncratic tendrils over parts of the surface. It was a very physical, noisy process and my hands ached afterwards. Lifting the finished textile down from the frame was a triumphant moment, and its weight was a surprise; I had created a beast. The heavy fabric was backed with black silk and double sided fusing, chosen for its translucent quality, which revealed the underside of the tufting like veins under transparent skin.

Cutting into this was the fleshiest of all the pieces. Giant sewing scissors crunched through the thick layers of fiber. Metres and metres of bias binding had to be hand stitched to preserve the edge of every cut. In the second week I gave it a hair cut and style, trimming half of it, and braiding/wrapping tendrils from the other side.

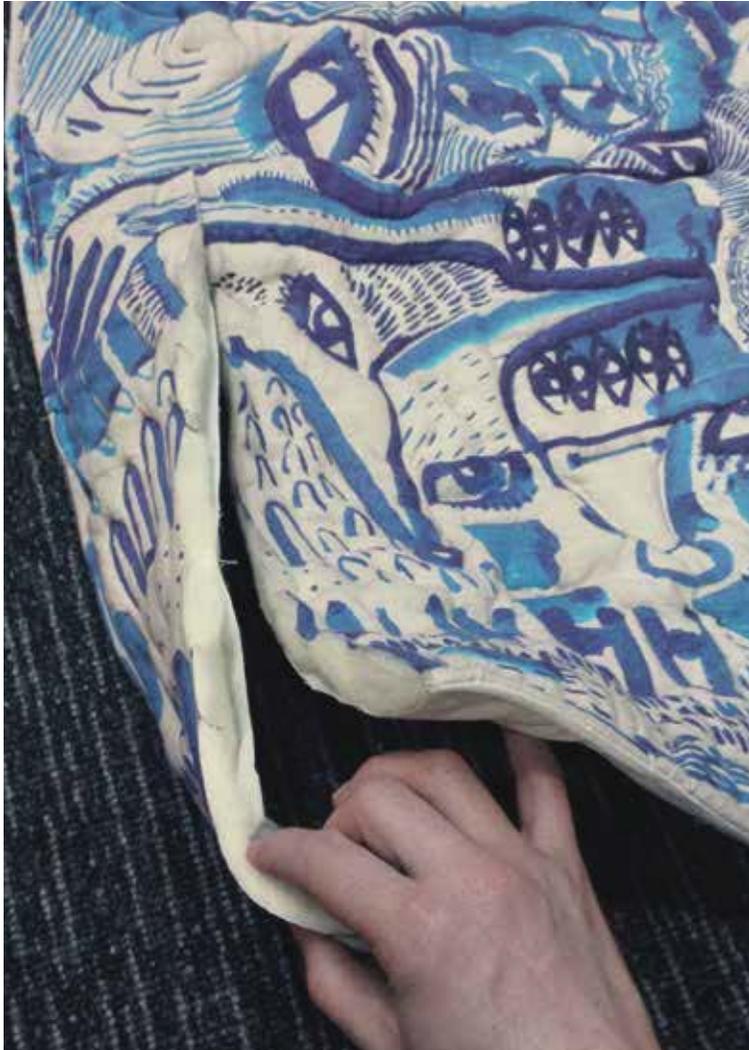
The delicate silk backing ripped many times, and required careful mending. In parts I've covered those areas, and parts the mended area stays revealed – like a proud scar. Wearing this huge, heavy textile is remarkable. At once I'm holding it up, and it is holding me, it is very much like wearing a very soft rug (unsurprisingly). Every chance I had to wear it I wished for more time with it in that iteration. It feels like an old friend.

**PELT 2**  
*padded linen*

this is very fleshy. it bleeds wool with every cut -

Gung ho! Its 'cut now, fix later.' I'm going to have to do some innovative mending.

the cuts left a gap, so I'm filling it with thread.  
Its like building new tissue, filament by filament,  
and creates a distinct gnarly scar.





FORM 1



FLAT 1



FORM 2



FLAT 2



FORM 3



FLAT 3

Padding this piece was my first foray into quilting of any kind. I needle felted a wool batting, and encased it between the digitally printed linen and a cotton backing. The wool would bleed out with each cut, and I would heal the edges of the cut with bias binding made from extra backing cloth. This piece was incredibly warm to wear, and the thickness gave it a sculptural quality. It felt like more than a skin, as if it also had a layer of flesh underneath. The wool would bleed out with each cut, and I treated the cut edges of this piece with care, encasing them with matching bias binding made from the leftover backing fabric. This was in contrast to the informal, carefree way I made the cuts.



Figure 14. Artwork for the linen digital print. Watercolour on paper with digital manipulation.

**PELT 3**  
cream handspun/woven



(first form)  
careful hand stitching - making this as loosely  
as possible.

(second form)  
I am tired. I'm not sure if I like this, BUT -  
anything can be cool if it is styled well ... right?  
love/hate relationship with this one.





FORM 1



FLAT 1



FORM 2



FLAT 2



FORM 3



FLAT 3

This fabric, hand spun, hand woven and gifted to me by a friend was immediately precious. I felt pressure to make it amazing. I started by fitting it to the digital embroidery machine's flatbed, and covered it with wool yarns – waste from another student's weaving project. Adding to this moment of bricolage design I embroidered a *Make/Use* neckline over the top, attaching and partially encasing the wool yarns. This became the embellished (bearded) neck of a tee shirt. The form was fairly simple but hand stitched, and very fun to wear – like wearing a long wig, swinging in the wind.

Subsequent evolutions involved a dramatic haircut, the addition of a Rorcsharch style print when it was in its flat state, and an iteration where it divided up to become a necklace and a skirt (form 3). As I made these pieces, I usually listened to podcasts and watched documentaries. It was while unpicking the second 'form' of this piece in silence that I realised I was remembering the documentary I had watched while sewing up the seams. I realised that these pelts not only recount their own shapeshifting story to an observer in their surface, but also act as a diary for the maker – in my case at least. I started to listen for this in the unpicking of other pieces and found the same thing occurred. I wonder if this memory-stimulation would happen if the forming and flattening happened over a much longer period of time.

**PELT 4**  
grey wool



healing cuts with conspicuous needle felt tip...  
I feel like the cream will snake all over the  
surface and eventually envelop all of the grey.  
---

the contrasting haptic qualities of the two wools: heavy, felted, grey and soft, cloudlike, cream.  
They merge together in violent action, pierced repeatedly by barbed needles.  
I only stab my finger once.





FORM 1



FLAT 1



FORM 2



FLAT 2



FORM 3



FLAT 3

No stitching was needed to construct the forms from this pelt, which uses needle-felting to join the seams. It seems appropriate that felting is a technique associated with nomadism, these forms seem nod to that life somehow. I could take my little needle-felter and change this while travelling too, with no sewing machine needed.

This is a piece I would like to see evolve through many more iterations, and (as in the scribbled notes to the left) see the cream wool snake over the surface and envelop the grey. The structure and fall of the fabric would change substantially.

**PELT 5**  
immortal jellyfish



pie-piped pattern (sort of) do I follow the guidelines?

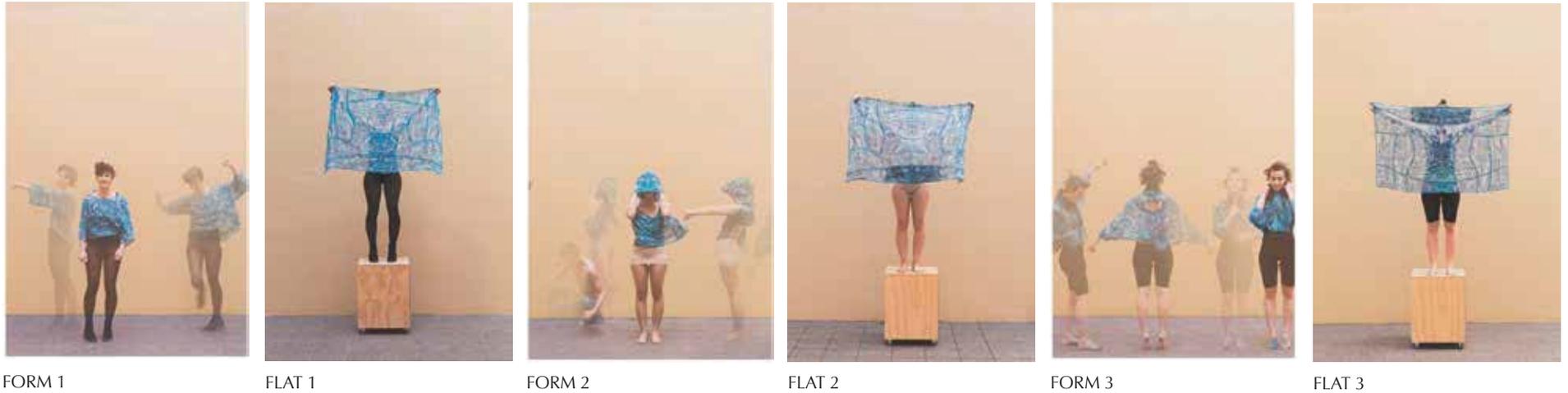
(second form)

This bonnet-veil-halterneck chimera is the oddest garment so far!

This process does call forth the absurd.

The heavy bonded-cotton area (left over from the hat brim) begs to be a collar - starts the next form.





The 'Immortal Jellyfish' moniker I've given this piece comes from listening to a podcast – as became my habit while I made the forms. This one happened to be an interview with Shin Kubota of Kyoto University's Seto Marine Biological Laboratory. He researches Japan's tiny *Turritopsis dohrnii* jellyfish, which, when damaged can return to a polyp stage and eventually become an adult again. While this was interesting at the time, I thought it was unrelated to the project, and I listened to many that day. Later I unpicked and flattened and healed the textile, and, remembering the story, inadvertently made a jellyfish-like healed patch in the cloth. It was an illustration of how spontaneous design draws from all surrounding influences, and an eerie parallel to the flat/form cycle I was enacting.



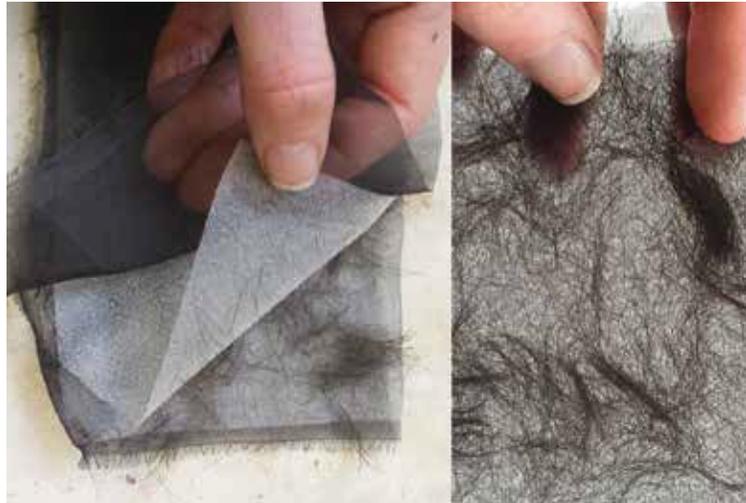
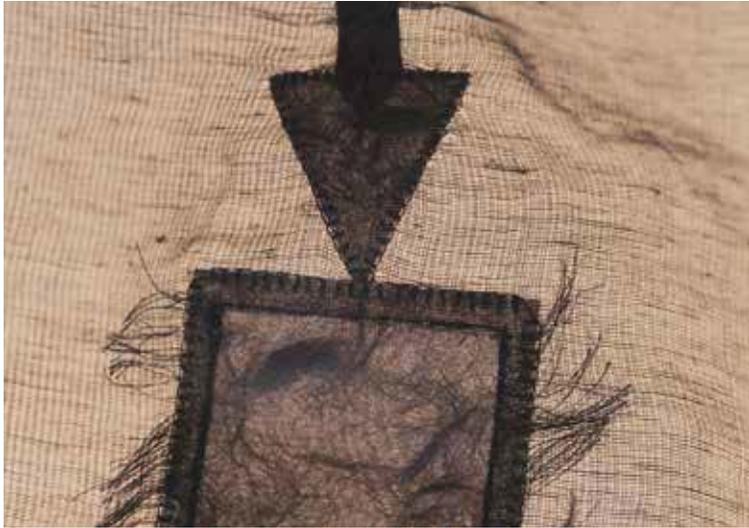
Figure 16. Artwork for the digital fabric print. Watercolour on paper with digital manipulation.

**PELT 6**  
black linen gauze

this piece is a ghost.

this fabric is so delicate - I'm not sure if it will last many incarnations.

I had a haircut this week. I sandwiched the hair between two pieces of found silk, and used this to patch a big hole in the cloth.

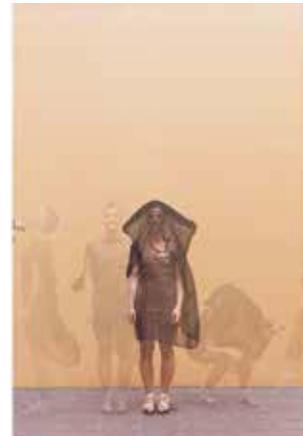




FORM



FLAT



FORM



FLAT



FORM



FLAT

Making and remaking with this wispy piece of linen was a challenge; I was daring it to fall apart. The result is a sheer fabric with an undulated surface, like skin losing its collagen. Trapped in the middle is a rectangle of hair encased in silk, marking a haircut from that point in time: a quick decision to encase some of my DNA in the cloth. The healings on this piece are very evident; they stand out as bold markers, often as arrows pointing into the distance. The arrows point in random directions, reflecting the serendipitous method used to drape and make each form. At certain points I took my time with this piece, and the hand stitching reflects the tender handling I allowed it. Other times I machine stitched it back together, and there is quite a difference in the finish of the healing between the two approaches.

The second form included a piece of found foam covered in cotton, which I used to structure the shape of the garment. I chose not to leave this in the fabric, essentially creating waste. I have, however, kept this piece of foam with the pelt, and it feels similar to keeping a removed body part post-surgery.

**PELT 7**  
merino

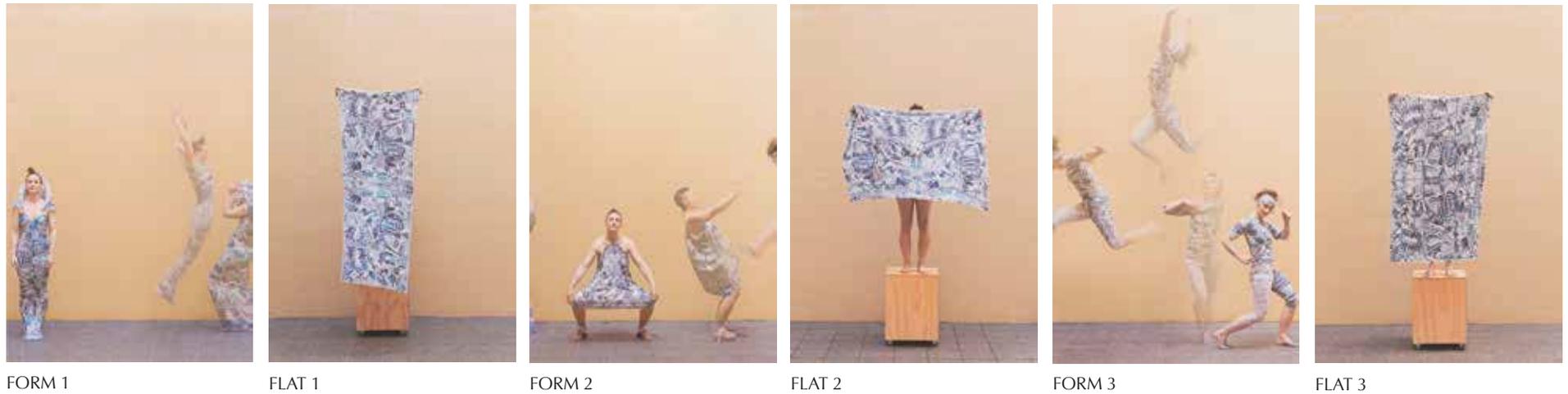


I feel like I can be bold with the form, making shapes I wouldn't if it was permanent.

First iteration - a tube dress with a copper skeleton. when I remove it, will it be like keeping a hip post-surgery?

Flattening this is hard - the stretch has permanently affected the fabric - even with the surface pattern as guide, it was hard to stitch back together.





For the first form, I constructed a frame from copper to shape the fabric. This did not end up staying embedded in the textile. As with the previous pelt, I have kept it, as if it were a bone removed in surgery (I have a family member who has their hip bone in a jar).

This is a digitally printed merino knit. I thought there was not much hope for this piece, that the knit would unravel or be impossible to sew back together. As a result, I was rough with it, and the back is evocative of Frankenstein's monster. I covered this effect up on the front by making cording, and sewing it over the top of the scars – a healing technique I then adopted into some of the other pelts. This piece turned out three very different shapes, from theatrical ice queen to clownish active wear. The photos show how much fun they all were to wear. At one stage, I cut a squiggly line through the fabric, and sewed it back on itself at a 180° rotation – this was the most disappointing form (I expected a more fantastical shape), and was the hardest to stitch back together; the stretching affected the surface. This difficulty is preserved in the slack and tucked areas.



Figure 17. Artwork for the digital fabric print. Watercolour on paper with digital manipulation.

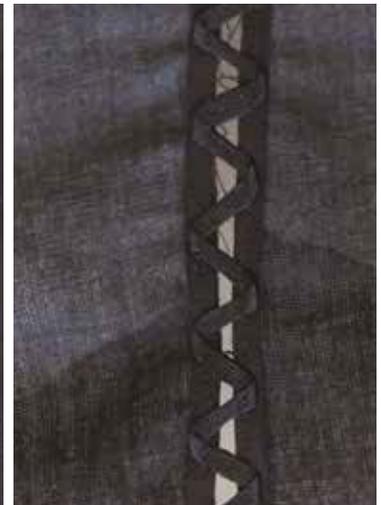
**PELT 8**  
black handspun/woven



I loathe to cut this - hand spun & woven by a friend.  
perhaps I will screenprint it first...

Freedom! No registration, spontaneous printing.  
I'm having fun now.

This is a game! quick thinking, quick decisions.  
two meters is ~~so~~ much fabric for this way  
of working though, maybe I can reduce it  
by smocking some...





FORM 1



FLAT 1



FORM 2



FLAT 2



FORM 3



FLAT 3

This piece had inherent value from the beginning, having been gifted from a friend. I was reluctant to cut into it, and decided to screen print it first. True to the spirit of the process, I pulled out some paper from the recycling bin, ripped it up, and arranged the pieces into a curved shape, which I then exposed on to a screen. The printing was free, no registration, spontaneous, using paste destined for disposal. I took care to preserve cut edges, trying to make them quite subtle in the beginning. As it went on I experimented with more obvious healing techniques, accepting that they are story-telling marks, and don't need to be hidden. This resulted in a number of different types of 'scarring' in one piece, from multiple methods of healing. Smocking was used to reduce the surface area, as zero-waste patterns tend to need less fabric and I was drowning in the cloth. There are still whispers of the smocking left in the surface of the fabric.

**PELT 9**  
silk georgette



deep breath. no mistakes right? i'll have to  
except that this might fall apart.

that wasn't so hard!! enjoying this freedom!

- the surface pattern REALLY helps put bias cut  
Silk back together (almost impossible otherwise)

oh I love this piece - could play for so much longer.





FORM 1



FLAT 1



FORM 2



FLAT 2



FORM 3



FLAT 3



FORM 4



FLAT 4



FORM 5



FLAT 5



FORM 6



FLAT 6

The digital print file for this piece was the same as the padded linen fabric. I had time to take one pelt through twice as many flat/form rotations as the others, and chose this silk georgette.

Gender studies researcher Stephen Seeley observes "clothes that are produced for quotidian wear and mass consumption are designed in tandem with the demands of capitalism (i.e., a productive body that is able to work in what it wears)" (Seeley, 2013). Sitting outside of these boundaries, I could also further explore the opportunity to make garments that don't function as garments are 'supposed' to. Form 5 was a glorified hospital gown covered in gaping holes: something I made because I knew it didn't have to be permanent.

I forgot to bring a singlet that day, and instead painted my exposed nipple for the photo. It didn't quite dry in time, and small traces of paint are scattered over the surface of the textile from where nipple and cloth met as I played around for the camera.

The earrings in form 4 are made from small off-cuts of the fabric, wrapped around the metal shafts of broken needle-felting needles (collected in the making of 'Pelt 4 grey wool').

The conversation with this cloth was stunted at first, but flowed with ease as time went on.



HEALING KIT

This image: 'Healing Kit', groups together an assortment of tools and materials I used to mend cuts in the fabric after unpicking a 'form', to return it to a 'flat' state. It includes needles, thread and scissors, used to rejoin the edges, and cord (made with a cording machine) and digitally embroidered patches, which were used to cover and reinforce the joins.

A catalogue of healing techniques is listed in the appendix.

## CONCLUSION

In a world straining under the pressures of unsustainable overconsumption, an alternative approach is needed. Taking cues from Kate Soper's 'Alternative Hedonist' philosophy (Soper, 2008), and methods learned from my involvement in the 'User Modifiable, Zero Waste' clothing project Make/Use (McQuillan, 2015), this work visualises an alternative relationship with textiles, reimagining them as valuable, evolving second skins. The resulting artefacts are presented alongside images of their past iterations. The journey is written abstractly on the surface of the textile, and concretely in the photographic imagery, which document each 'flat' and 'form' stage. As these pieces are to be thought of as liminal - changeable and transitional - this exhibition of the work presents a point in time, not an end point. Enacting an alternative relationship with cloth took the flat/form/flat idea from supposition to application, and doing so allowed discoveries to be made about what such a method might look and feel like.

Enacting the Conversational Skins project has allowed me to engage in a self-reflexive exploration of my practice and research interests. In the process of making, wearing, healing and reflecting, I exposed possibilities for a mode of engaging in the shapeshifting performance of dress in a time where the word 'fashion' inherently conjures visions of frivolous waste and ecological degradation. I can play, flitting from garment to garment with wildly different silhouettes, and shapeshift between characters without throwing anything away. The joy of this process is visible in the performative photos accompanying the pelts.

There is a somewhat unsettling aspect to the skin analogy, and choosing to chop and alter an auxiliary epidermis might be seen to allude to the proliferation of cosmetic plastic surgeries, and idealised beauty standards in advertising. This is in opposition to the message of the work, which encourages a 'Wabi Sabi' mindset to appreciate 'imperfection' as beautiful, and turns the gaze back to performing for oneself. I proposed that the flat-form-flat cycle provides a channel to engage in the transformative performance of dress while enacting a use practice that diverges from problematic

consumption models, and that in doing this, a unique surface pattern is inscribed on the cloth. I asked: 'what might be allowed to develop?' The work shows the result of transformative processes, both in the textiles and in the performative images. The photos tell a story of the joy and playfulness that emerged in making this work.

The cutting and healing process has been revealing from a textile design perspective, visualising potentialities for emerging surface pattern that grows from multiple interventions. It has highlighted how useful printed surface pattern can be in concealing or complimenting these marks, while also providing a guide for piecing the cloth back together after dismantling a garment form.

Reflecting on future possibilities for the clothed body has been a great source of inspiration for this project, and discovering speculative design as an area of interest in the course of this work has been formative to my practice. "A seductive vision of alternatives to resource-intensive consumption is much more likely to influence behaviour than repeated warnings of environmental collapse" (Soper, 2012). Ideas of shapeshifting textiles treated as valued second skins have much potential for future research. Here they are presented in the context of a serendipitous, bricolage context, but could easily be applied to textiles developed with nano- and biotechnological advancements.

In terms of the next phase for this project, there is more to determine in terms of applying the flat/form rotation to a piece of cloth over a much longer period of time, or repeating the cycle to a saturation point. In addition, furthering the technical possibilities of an *ecological* paint-on edging paste for textiles could also be an area for development. Collaborating with a fashion designer to further push the forms may garner some interesting results.

As it stands, Conversational Skins is a discussion piece: a series of artefacts and images that will optimistically challenge convention in an engaging way.

The end  
(the beginning)

## IMAGE CREDITS

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Figure 1. Make/Use. 2015. *Artwork for digital fabric print*. Retrieved from: <http://makeuse.nz/make/long-tshirt/>. Image reproduced with permission.

Figure 2. Make/Use. (2015). *Long Tshirt*. Digitally printed silk. Retrieved from: <http://makeuse.nz/make/long-tshirt/>. Image reproduced with permission.

Figure 3. Roberts, J. (2013). Garments from 'Free Cutting' workshop. In: Roberts, J. (2013). *Free Cutting*. Retrieved from: <http://subtractioncutting.tumblr.com>. Image reproduced with permission.

Figure 12. Akiko Shinzato. (2014). *Another Skin*. Brass, leather. Retrieved from: <http://www.akikoshinzato.com/#!collection/c4jn>. Image reproduced with permission.

Figure 12. Von Drimmelen, S. (2014). *Painted*. Silk, cotton. Image provided by Saskia Von Drimmelen, reproduced with permission.

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## APPENDIX

List of 'healing techniques':  
(does not picture all, just examples).

### Sealing edges of a cut:

- Painting
- Bias binding

### Re-joining the fabric (flattening):

- Needle felting
- Machine stitching
- Machine stitching plus machine-made cording
- Cord or ribbon sewn across gap
- Hand stitching
- Hand stitching with handmade cording
- Covering with digitally embroidered patch
- Inserting patch to fill hole
- Sewing together fringing from previous addition
- Filling in gap with heavy machine stitching, using wash-away fabric to facilitate.  
(not pictured, see Pelt 2 padded linen)



Painting



Painting



Bias Binding



Needle Felting



Machine stitch



Machine + cording



Cord across gap



Hand stitching



Hand stitching + cord



Patch - cover



Patch - insert



Joining fringing

