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Un i form

“consisting of one”

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Abstract

Uni form is an exploration into the act of getting dressed. The act of dressing or assemblage of dress is negotiated and explores how personal identity is constructed. My design research contributes to a current understanding of self, dress and social identity. I begin with an analysis of wardrobe as a personal collection and I propose that, in our everyday dress, much of what we choose to wear constitutes a uni form of one sort or another. Focusing on the shirt dress as an 'ordinary' everyday style of generic dress, I set out to experience the wearing of a personal uniform. What emerges from this research is a proposal that a uni form – a metaphoric garment – can meet the needs of everyday life in the postmodern urban metropolis.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Wearing only my underwear, I stand uninspired at the open doors of my wardrobe. I am thinking about the day ahead... work, shopping, socialising with friends in the early evening, before returning home for a late dinner with my family. I am attempting to select an outfit to wear. Ordinarily, I have mentally planned what I would be wearing, but it is mid week, and on this particular morning, with the complexities of my everyday life, I stand wondering what to wear. Starting with my black knee-high boots, I pull out my black skirt and cardigan, but what to wear with it? I try one of several black shirts. I put it on. It's the wrong shade of black. In desperation, I select my black shirt dress, buckle a black belt, pull on my knee-high leather boots and, with a fleeting look in the mirror, I feel satisfied. I feel comfortable and I can concentrate on the day ahead. This outfit is 'me'.

On this particular day, I am trying to create an outfit that will fulfil a different set of functions. I am a secondary school teacher so the outfit needs to meet prescribed dress codes – modest and conservative – not be distracting and display a little bit of authority. But, equally, I am a creative person so I like to show individuality in my teaching dress and when I socialise with friends. Despite living in one suburb, I work, shop and socialise in other areas and so I still want to feel that the outfit is 'me'. This account of how I put together an outfit exemplifies many of the negotiations that I make when choosing what to wear each day. This 'wardrobe moment' happens once a day. When I choose an outfit from my wardrobe, I stand looking at my reflection wondering whether I have got it right for a particular occasion and for someone my age. I may also worry whether my hips are too big or that my knees are covered. Through the

procedure of looking at these intimate and ritualistic selection processes, light is shed on a macro issue within the fashion context, which includes the issues of dressing for self and social identity. I discuss the way in which dress is routinely attended to as part of the presentation of self in everyday life (Goffman 1971).

Much of the material presented in this exegesis is lead by a personal account of my experience of wearing a uniform on an everyday basis. I use my personal analysis to explore questions such as: Why, when I have a wardrobe of clothes, do I only wear a small percentage of them? What impact does living a fragmentary lifestyle in the city where I work, socialise and live have on my dress and my dressing habits?

Action research and components of reflective phenomenological experience are integral to the design process in this research. I explore the idea of uniformity in the everyday by wearing a shirt dress. I am able to then illustrate how the shirt dress can be seen as a uniform, and I reflect on the experience. The shirt dress is a starting point for my design explorations that began with a series of studies where I tested various design concepts relating to modular component design, which then informed the development of a design outcome. What emerges from this research is a proposal that a uni form – a metaphoric garment – can meet the needs of everyday life in the postmodern urban metropolis.

Chapter 2 Literature review

The theoretical framework of the study is primarily based upon the public presentation of self. Goffman (1971) is influential as he analyses the ordinary and everyday people in everyday life. In *The presentation of self in everyday life*, Goffman seeks to show how everyone sets out to present themselves to the world around them, always trying to maintain the role they have selected for themselves. More significantly, he contends that impression management is a function of social setting. Goffman portrays encounters in which one is attempting to sell a particular self identity and, accordingly, a particular definition of the situation.

It is important to define the term 'dress' within this research. Clothes are seen as a kind of second skin and an extension of our bodies (Rouse 1989, p50). They are an indication of personality or revelation of one's "true self", and some see them as "putting across an image" (Rouse 1989, p51). The broadest definition is proposed by Kaiser (1997, p4) "Clothing refers to any tangible or material object connected to the human body. This definition encompasses such items as pants, skirts, tops and other related body coverings." Kaiser sees the word 'dress' as either a verb or a noun. According to her, the verb 'dress' refers to the act of altering or adding to appearance. As a noun, 'dress' refers to the "total arrangement of all outwardly detectable modifications of the body and all material objects added to it". Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992, p1) also indicate that a comprehensive definition of dress includes both body modifications and supplements to the body. They further define 'dress' as free of personal or social value or bias, usable in descriptions across national and cultural boundaries. According to this definition, the dress of an individual is an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body. Dress, so defined, includes a long list of possible direct modifications of the body, such as

coiffed hair, skin colouring, pierced ears and scented breath as well as an equally long list of garments, jewellery, accessories and other categories of items added to the body as supplements.

Entwistle (2000, p7) states that the ubiquitous nature of dress would seem to point to the fact that dress or adornment is one of the means by which bodies are made social and give meaning and identity. The individual and the act of getting dressed is an act in preparing the body for the social world, making it appropriate, acceptable and, indeed, respectful and possibly even desirable. "Dress is the way in which individuals learn to live in their bodies and feel at home in them. Wearing the right clothes and looking our best, we feel at ease with our bodies, and the opposite is equally true: turning up to a situation inappropriately dressed, we feel awkward, out of place and vulnerable. In this respect, dress is both an intimate experience of the body and a public presentation of it. Operating on the boundary between the self and the other is both the interface between the individual and the social world, the meeting place of the private and the public." (Entwistle 2000, p7). Therefore, if clothing is seen as the external form of the self, it is evident that women can use clothing to help create their sense of themselves and who they are (Woodward 2007).

Symbolic interactionist Mead proposed that the self is defined through interaction with other people (as cited in Woodward 2007). Goffman (1971) sees "dress as part of our interactions with others who act towards us, in part, on the basis of the meanings of our dress". Dress is part of defining self identity to others; we choose items that reflect our interests, personality, roles, membership in groups, age, gender, socio-economic status and more. Of course, some situations or roles limit the amount of choice in self expression; an extreme example of

conformity is found in the dress of prison inmates who wear uniforms that mask personal identity and emphasise only the prisoner role (Mead as cited in Woodward 2007, p7).

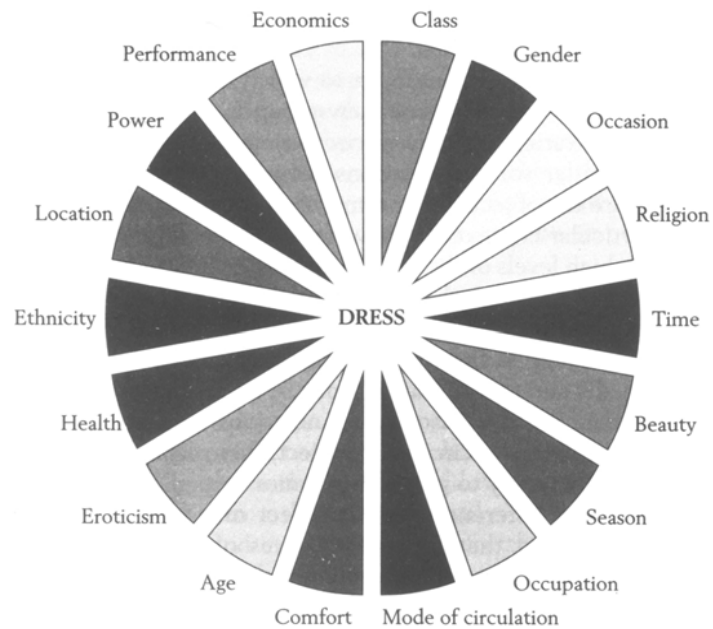
Woodward (2007) argues that “the self is understood not as a psychological entity that is simply expressed through clothing but as something that women question, try on and construct through material, embodied practice. This practice is always particular to individual women, as their sense of self is refracted through their social positioning, such as their occupation identity, ethnicity or religion” (Woodward 2007, p15).

Gell (1998) states that women are able to see aspects of themselves in the external form of clothing. Ranging from former selves to fantasy selves to work personas, the diverse aspects of the self are distributed through the array of items of clothing in the wardrobe (Gell as cited in Woodward 2007, p157).

These multiple identities for various life roles contribute to the total self (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992). Occupation, kinship, religion and marital status are among the aspects of identity that may be shown through dress and appearance.

Corrigan (2008) suggests that to understand dress in everyday life requires the acknowledgment of a wide range of social factors that frame individual clothing decisions. Figure 1 illustrates the factors that Corrigan believes need to be taken into account when analysing dress. Corrigan states that these “factors will not necessarily be present in all contexts and some will prove to be more important than others on given instances and at given time.

Some dimensions may be so dominant that the others fit within them rather than operating autonomously." (Corrigan 2008, p162).



Therefore, it can be seen that a woman's personal aesthetic is formed throughout her life, through socialisation and the continuing development of personal preferences. If clothing is seen as the external forms of the self, it is evident that women can use clothing to help create their sense of themselves and who they are.

Fig. 1. Peter Corrigan's dimensions of dress.

Identity is not a substitute for 'self'. Lillethun (2007) suggests that "instead identity reflects a persona location within a social context. George Stone in Welters and Lillethun (2007) states that "when one has identity, he/she is situated – that is, cast in the shape of a social object" (Stone 1962 cited in Roach-Higgins 1995, p23). Goffman (1971) argues "that appearance is part of identity: the individual presents himself or herself in social contexts and others perceive and assign meaning to his or her presentation. People manage their appearance: each person participates to some degree in appearance norms or else suffers social consequences" (as cited in Welters and Lillethun, 2007).

Therefore, how women manage and construct their appearance involves the consideration of specific social situations as well as the wider social and cultural context (Kaiser 1997, p58). The broad context of social expectations is refracted through individual style preferences, social networks and women's biographies (Kaiser 1997, p58).

Identities can include private, public and secret selves that may have many dimensions – cultural, ethnic, subculture, gender and sexual. While many people manage their appearance in order to represent identities they perceive as congruent with their objectives and goals, others may perceive the presentation differently than intended. Since meanings are negotiated in social interaction, the meanings underlying the appearance may be diffused, unclear and undetermined. In the postmodern condition, shifting and overlapping meanings may result in misunderstood and ambiguous identities (Welters and Lillethun 2007).

In appearance, an individual expresses only a small portion of multiple identities. Woodward's (2007) case studies found that several aspects of identity are seen in women's business appearances every day. They communicated roles, such as female gender or office manager, as well as situational meanings, such as casual days or formal presentations to important clients. Damhorst Miller and Michelman (1999) found that businesswomen realised that they carefully planned their appearance to express subtle aspects of their positions and capabilities in the business community. For example, they incorporated traditionally masculine suit style components to express characteristics of efficiency, seriousness and professionalism but they tried not to look too masculine. They also expressed a feminine aesthetic without looking too feminine or sexy, they dressed to look up-to-date and knowledgeable about fashion without being too fashion-forward, and appearing conservative and business-like was important. The women all had other roles in their everyday lives, but none of them expressed all aspects of themselves in their work dress (Damhorst Miller and Michelman 1999, p128).

Goffman (1971) has defined personal identity as "persisting over time, consisting of multiple capacities, which are dependent upon particular social situations" (as cited in Woodward 2007). The wardrobe can be seen as everything women 'are', yet the selection of a particular outfit is when women draw together certain attributes and capabilities that women have. Therefore, choosing what to wear is an act of both "surfacing" and also "presenting" disparate aspects of the self (Woodward 2007).

In social life, individuals like to know with whom they are dealing, and they have to be able to recognise each other's social identity. They need to know the role or roles each person plays, the groups they belong to, their status within those groups and even their status within society

as a whole (Goffman 1971). The importance of the publicly presented self was recognised by Goffman (1971) who sees everyday life as a performance in which the self is enacted. A crucial part of this performance of the self involves living up to the individual; therefore, he argues that personal expectations of the self are equally important as social considerations (Goffman 1971, p34).

Woodward (2007) maintains that the public presentation of self is always created in private and that women deliberately define themselves through the clothes they select. Woodward's case studies illustrate the idea that women project many different selves and that clothing helps them to do this.

Goffman's concepts provide some understanding of the dressed body. He sees the body "is both the property of the individual and the social world; it is the vehicle of identity but this identity has to be 'managed' in terms of the definitions of the social situation which impose particular ways of being on the body. Thus the individual feels a social and moral imperative to perform their identity in particular ways and this includes learning appropriate ways of dressing." (Entwistle and Wilson 2001, p47).

Not only does dress form the key link between individual identity and the body, it also provides the raw material for performing identity. Dress is a fundamentally subjective and social phenomenon – an important link between individual identity and social belonging. Davis (1992, p25) argues that "the body frames our embodied self, serving as a kind of visual metaphor for identity and as pertains in particular to the society in the west for registering the cultural

anchored ambivalence that resonates among identity.” In other words, in everyday life, dress is the insignia by which we are read and come to read others.

“Thus in the presentation of self is a social interaction, ideas of embarrassment and stigma play a crucial role and are managed, in part, through dress” (Entwistle and Wilson 2001, p48).

Entwistle and Wilson discuss how dress is intimately connected to our rather fragile sense of self, which is, in turn, threatened if we fail to conform to the standards governing a particular social situation (Entwistle and Wilson 2001, p48).

However, while these social factors mediate everyday dress, they do not, in themselves, produce a singular and uniform way of dressing for a particular class or peer group. Most individuals do not wear the same clothes to all occasions but rather adapt their dress for each particular social context they are to enter. This is particularly the case for women who work in the corporate world. Woodward (2007) suggests these women adapt their dress for occupation, and when they are in the privacy of their own home, they adapt their dress to the demands of their weekend activities.

The individual and the self intersect through practices of socialisation in terms of both dispositions and tastes that are calculated in the act of dressing, as women balance normative ideas of femininity with their individual preferences and body shape. Therefore, dressing involves considerations of whether clothing is socially suitable for the occasion, status, age and occupation of the women. In turn, these considerations must be balanced with whether a woman feels an item reflects herself (Woodward 2007). Dressing involves the construction of the self through socially acceptable modes of dressing. As such, notions of roles and

expectations are negotiated with items that touch the body, and it is impossible for such concerns to remain entirely social. The social expectations are largely engaged with in terms of how the body looks, as women see themselves through the eyes of others. Choosing what to wear becomes the act of constructing the 'social individual' (Mead 1982, p102); the 'I' takes the position of how both specified and generic others will see the 'me', as such. Women are always relational in positioning themselves as viewers of themselves. The 'I' is the social self, as it is constructed through the gaze of others and learnt, internalised social expectations (Entwistle and Wilson 2001, p47).

The concept of habitual clothing is discussed by Woodward (2007). She describes habitual clothing as a core group of clothing items worn on a regular basis that require no thought or planning (Woodward 2007, p135). Habitual clothing requires no extensive deliberation, as the individual 'knows' it works. This knowledge is part of an embodied cultural practice; therefore, the individual knows that the clothing is appropriate for the social occasion. Clothing worn to the office is then both appropriate for the normative dress codes for work, yet it still can fit the individual's personal aesthetic. Goffman (1974) defines a role as "a person's specialised capacities, which becomes a 'social role' when attached to a particular status or position. Habitual clothing helps women to draw out these specialised capacities. Such roles emerge out of a more constant personal identity which is 'perduring over time... has a biography' (as cited in Woodward 2007, p135). The implication of Goffman's theory is that an individual has a constant personal identity, and social roles are drawn out situationally. However, when women's identities are considered through clothing, it does not follow that, when woman are alone and thus freed of social constraints, is when they enact their core identity through clothing. Woodward (2007) argues that women project many different selves, and that clothes help them do this.

Therefore in deciding what to wear, women face multiple and wide-ranging factors, so I explore how women, rather deliberately, define themselves externally through the clothes they select. The complexities of dress, self and identity have often been explored through a design process by artists and fashion designers.

Fashion designers often recontextualise the uniform in the name of postmodernity (Spindler, 2000). This statement reveals an interesting concept of those designers who make a living from embracing fashion. It is commonplace in the fashion industry that successful designers, like Marc Jacobs, have been able to create a uniform look identifiable as their own or that a signature piece can be used to cement their creativity, for example, Jean Paul Gaultier's Breton fishnet suit.

Miuccia Prada (see Fig. 2) in a discussion with Spindler says, "I think if you dress in a uniform you feel very comfortable and neutral, your personality is hidden beneath the uniform, you only show what you want to show. You don't have to worry about how to dress. You don't have to think about fashion. It's a way of refusing fashion." (Spindler 2001, p165).

To respond to the complex and fragmentary nature of city life, many designers of supermodern clothing rely on a modular form of dressing to simplify the complexities of modern urban life. A modular system is based on separate units, such as skirt, trousers, shirt, jumper, jacket and coat, that can be assembled according to the needs of the individual. The supermodern wardrobe's roots are found in designer's collections such as Jean Patou and Chanel, who both emulated sportswear separates and sold them to a monied clientele. American designers, such



*Fig. 2. Women in fashion:
Miuccia Prada.*

as Bonnie Cashin, Vera Maxwell and especially Claire McCardell, brought them to the masses in the 1930s, at a time when the world was becoming obsessed with motorised travel. These separates were adapted to help the woman of the time cope with her new urban environment (Bolton, 2002). As well as being variable according to the social situation or context, modular clothing allows for the individual to construct her own personal style (Bolton 2002, p28).

In 1934, Claire McCardell introduced a precursor to the capsule wardrobe: a five-piece system of interchangeable wool jersey separates, which was “sophisticated enough to go from office to opera” (Bolton 2002).

Yeohlee Teng is a designer who sees that urban dwellers are more likely to occupy several habitats throughout the day for longer periods than spent at home. Her analysis of modern life inspires her to experiment with new forms and fabrics to produce clothing that is both practical and beautiful at the cutting-edge of fashion (Quinn 2002). Her designs work on a variety of practical and psychological levels and meet the demands for a comfortable, multifunctional wardrobe for urbanites on the move (Quinn 2002). The principle of modularity is central to Yeohlee’s thinking. Her minimalism scales down the wardrobe to layered interchangeable components that facilitate individual expression (see Fig. 3). While Yeohlee’s garments are not modular in the sense that they transform into completely different garments, many of the separates maximise the utility of each garment through subtle tailoring that can offer a single design different looks (Quinn 2006).



*Fig. 3. Yeohlee Teng:
black dress with holster pocket.*

Chapter 3 Methodology

Research methodology is the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes (Leedy, 1999). The methodology provides a rationale for the choice of methods and the particular forms in which the methods are employed.

The principal research methodology that will be used in this research project is research through design using action research methodology to develop a multi-use uniform garment embracing modular component design.

Downton (2003) states that research through design is a way of researching and producing knowledge and using that knowledge of “doing” together with knowledge “gained for research” to produce a drawing, a model or an object.

Action research can be defined as “research through doing or research through reflecting. It is likely that in the research process, questions will be formed, analysis undertaken, a return to the questions for modification and the cycle repeated maybe up to six times in the research process.” (Cherry 1999, p1). I continue to move through the processes of writing, designing, making, reflecting and questioning, even as I work through the construction of this document. Therefore, the process can be described as a continuous cycle of planning, action and review of the action for design.

The process of action research can be described as a continuous cycle of planning, action and review of the action. Action research is inherently an iterative/circular and repetitive process. Lewin's (1988) design process (see Fig. 4) requires planning at the outset, which involves gaining an understanding of the problem in a variety of ways, before using this knowledge to devise a plan for change. The next action involves taking steps to intervene in the problem situation and do something differently in order to implement change. The changes are then evaluated by observing their effects. By reflecting on the implications of the change the researcher, is led to reconsider the problem.

Therefore, action research methodology has a specific relevance to design practice. It aims to integrate action and reflection, so that the knowledge developed in the inquiry process is relevant to the issues being studied. It aids the researcher to develop skills of reflective practice. The researcher develops a deeper understanding of their own practice and of the belief and assumptions that frame that practice.

Scrivener (2002) suggests that design research is a complex series of iterative stages that is recorded systematically and is subjected to a high degree of subjective interpretation and personal discovery.

An investigation of design process models reveals exemplars such as Press and Cooper (2002) and Heufler (2004) that illustrate similarities to the action research process model, as they promote an iterative cyclic process where feedback and reflection are integral to the design outcome.

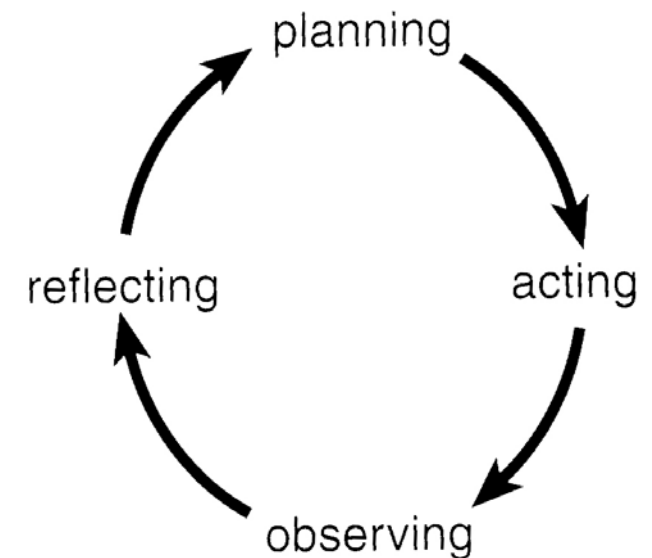


Fig. 4. Lewin's scheme of action.

I will use components of phenomenological research as a method for reflection within the design process. The focus of phenomenological research is to describe an experience from the participant's point of view in that it studies individuals with a focus on the lived experience. It deals with personal experience and is completely subjective; it seeks to describe the personal perceptions of individuals and does not seek to explain.

Phenomenology is defined here as a "research methodology that attempts to understand the participants' perspectives and views of social realities of everyday life. The objective of the research is to undertake a comprehensive analysis of a specific group or phenomena (a person, event, process or object of interest) in order to understand a specific occurrence." (Leedy 1999).

Phenomenological research is central to Alex Martin's (2006) little brown dress project, where she challenged the idea that women best express themselves through clothing. This research included the wearing of the same brown dress every day for a year. "The design of the dress was based mostly on practicalities – what can I wear every day for a year, in as many situations as possible, allowing for layers in cold weather, indoors and out... also, big pockets for my wallet, phone, and keys... not frilly but can pass for 'nice' if needed." (Martin 2006).

As part of her methodology, Martin created an online journal to record her experience and a blog to allow responses from others, thus allowing her to reflect on the experience of wearing the dress.

Another designer, Andrea Zittel, used phenomenological research as central to her methodology. Zittel (2006) collaborated with clients to gain an understanding of their lifestyles and specific needs and created customised uniforms. To qualify for the research, the customer agreed to wear the uniform exclusively, removing all other dresses or suits from their wardrobe. Although the duration of the regime was negotiated with the clients, her intent was to enhance their lives and sense of personal identity and to alter their perception of fashion. The ultimate goal was to provide the owner with a multi-use garment suitable for the varied events in their lives. An example is the A-Z Collector's Coat for Frank Kolodny (see Fig. 5), which Zittel designed for him to wear when attending art events and functions at galleries and museums. The requirements were a corporate look with features that addressed precise needs, such as a large pocket for monthly art trade directory *Gallery guide*.



Fig. 5. Frank Kolodny.

Andrea Zittel is also of specific interest in this project because of her interest in repetitiveness and the desire for efficiency in everyday dress. Zittel's investigations into self-imposed uniforms are driven by the designer to eliminate the superfluous.

The A–Z uniform series sought to create clothing that could be worn on a day-to-day basis for all work and social occasions for six consecutive months (see Fig. 6). Her first was a black linen dress that became her one and only outfit for six months. “It may sound like an experiment in sensory deprivation, but she insists that ‘I really liked the dress and I felt good in it.’” (Zittel 2006).



Fig. 6. Andrea Zittel: A–Z series.

Chapter 4 Design process

Wardrobe audit

My research begins with an analysis as to why I wear the clothes that I wear. I go behind the scenes and look at the process of my selection and rejection of clothes, within the privacy of my bedroom. Choosing what to wear begins with opening the wardrobe doors. The spatial organisation of my wardrobe consists of a closet where clothes (coats, jackets, dresses, trousers, skirts and tops) are hung. Cardigans and jerseys are stacked on open shelves, and underwear and gym clothing are stored in drawers (see Fig. 7).

I undertook a wardrobe audit in order to ascertain how many items of clothing I own and how often I wear each item. I also kept a personal diary to record my clothing selections. The number of items represented in Fig. 9 are based on my wardrobe audit on 1 October 2007.

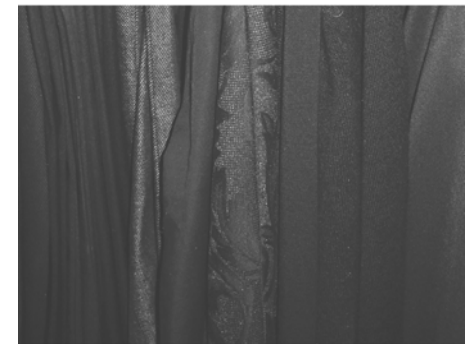
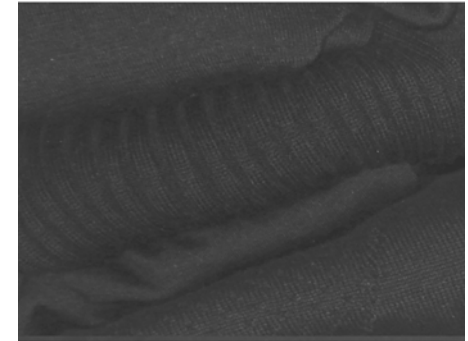


Fig. 7. Julie's wardrobe.

Type of clothing	Number of items of clothing	Number of black clothing items	Number of repeated styles of clothing items	Number of inactive items of clothing	Number of active items of clothing
Suits	3	3	0	1	2
Dresses	8	6	2	2	6
Tops	31	22	3	10	21
Shirts	5	5	2	1	4
Pants	17	17	1	9	8
Skirts	14	9	0	6	8
Special occasion wear	9	8	0	6	3
Leisurewear	27	18	8	10	17
Underwear	54	41	0	15	39
Jackets	5	5	0	2	3
Coats	3	3	0	1	2
Total	176	137	16	63	113

Inactive clothing includes unworn clothing and formally worn clothing.
Active clothing includes work clothing and clothing worn often and habitually.

Fig. 8. Wardrobe audit showing the total numbers of clothing items, the type of clothing items, repeated styles of clothing items and the percentages of inactive and active items.

The patterns emerging from the data show that I am extremely habitual in my choice of clothing, since I have a small number of items that I wear all the time, in order to meet my daily everyday needs. The number of items in my wardrobe has reduced as I have got older. I do not keep any items that have been unworn for a year or items that I feel are not 'me'. I only have one item of clothing that is more than ten years old, and this is my wedding dress. Nowadays, I am more discerning about my clothing, since I know my personal style and I prefer to buy quality brands, especially New Zealand designer clothing. I also try to avoid impulse buys.

Rarely worn items include clothing I have bought for a special occasion such as a ball or a black tie event.

The general organisation principle of my wardrobe is based upon clothing that is hung up and clothing that is folded, with the undesignated areas of the wardrobe, such as the bottom of the hanging area, being invariably filled with shoes. The key determinants that emerge, when positioning the clothing to be hung or folded, are whether the clothes are 'special', the materiality of the item (fabric, type) and the season and contexts in which the clothing may be worn.

Therefore, in my wardrobe, the ordering relates to my everyday life. Dresses, skirts, pants and tops and cardigans are always hung according to the type of garment. There are separate drawers for underwear and t-shirts, which are divided into long or short sleeved, and light coloured or dark coloured. Gym wear and holiday wear are placed in another drawer. In addition to type, fabric and occasions, a fundamental ordering emerges in relation to organisation into domains: home, work, holiday, functional (such as gym wear) and special occasion clothing. Organising work wear clothing is central to my lifestyle. Clothing specifically for work is grouped together according to clothing type, which facilitates ease of access.

By ordering clothing in terms of the type of clothing, an item is selected from a category, such as bottoms or tops. The outfit is conceptualised as an assemblage of different types of clothing (such as a skirt, top and cardigan). The first decisions are made in regard to the types of clothing that are being selected, and then the subsequent points for deliberation are the colours and fabrics.

The organisation of my wardrobe clearly reflects the general sense of order in my life. In particular, in the case of my work clothing, it enables me to dress appropriately for work, for being a mother or for socialising with friends.

As my wardrobe audit shows, I have acquired a system of being able to dress quickly for everyday life, through having a core group of items that are worn on a regular basis, each of these items requiring no thought or planning (see Fig. 9). These core items of clothing can be intermixed and they include a:

- pair of tailored black pants in wool suiting
- pair of flared black pants in cotton twill
- lined black skirt in wool suiting
- straight black skirt with frills in black twill
- black mesh cardigan
- black wool cardigan
- black merino fitted long sleeved top
- black fitted mesh top
- black singlet knit top
- sleeveless black knit top with satin bow detail
- sleeveless v neck black knit top with waist ruching and metal ring detail in centre front
- sleeveless black singlet top with armhole frills
- black leather jacket
- pair of knee-high leather boots
- pair of black boots with metal stud detail.



Fig.9. Julie's clothes.

I dress in this way most days, until I am prompted by an unexpected event after work or a special occasion. Then I look into my wardrobe and cry. "I have nothing to wear!" Such an occasion can occur when my husband has given me a day's notice to prepare for a corporate event. I will often empty out my wardrobe, selecting, trying on and rejecting items, as they appear to be dull or it may be the same outfit that I wore to the last similar event. I often do not find the clothes that feel 'just right' for me. Since I do not generally wear formal clothing, I either end up 'making do' or buying a new outfit, and I hope that someone else at the event does not appear wearing the same outfit. My wardrobe audit reveals, to a great extent, a self-imposed uniform, with a dominance of black clothing and a limited range of garment styles, fabrics and shapes. Therefore, in my everyday dress, I have effectively created a wardrobe of uniforms that look distinctly the same. A great many of the items I choose to wear constitute a uniform of one sort or another, which is a result of the imposition of my personal taste and my desire for efficiency. This situation leads me to think about how many pairs of black pants, dresses, tops, skirts, jackets and cardigans one woman needs. Considering how few garments I actually wear, could my needs be met by one outfit – a personal uniform?

Uniformity in everyday dress

Christian Dior 1954

You can wear black at any time.

You can wear black at any age. You may wear it on almost any occasion.

A little black frock is essential to a woman's wardrobe.

Mendes 1999

The little black dress exemplifies a high level of uniformity within fashion design. The reasons for the enduring success of the little black dress include its ability to combine what is timelessly chic, currently fashionable and enormously comfortable. A little black dress answers a variety of wardrobe demands. A woman in a little black dress makes a statement, without looking as if she has tried too hard. "Donna Karen likens a little black dress to a security blanket" (Edelman 1997, p141). A woman can slip into one, whilst knowing it is appropriate for almost any occasion. Black's absence of colour allows for limitless opportunities for self expression. The little black dress becomes a canvas upon which the wearer can express her creativity and originality, whilst its rightness assures its wearer immediate acceptance (Edelman 1997, p14).

The little black dress solves the problem of keeping up with fashion, and it protects women from the risk of dabbling in trends, whilst still creating a fashion phenomenon unto itself.

“In the seven decades since its birth, the little black dress has become a uniform that expresses the modern woman’s contradiction and celebrates her independence. It is emblematic of a woman’s freedom of choice, her equal participation in the world, and her declaration that, this time, she is dressing for herself.” (Edelman 1997, p149).

McCardell was famous for her archetypal shirt dresses. She designed clothes that served a purpose and necessity; clothes that spoke clearly of the designer’s attention to solving problems. She believed that a woman’s choice of clothes should be determined by her way of life, rather than by anything else. Throughout her life, McCardell’s most consistent source of inspiration for her collections was to remain herself and the life she led. She believed that clothes should be useful and designed for comfort and utility.

Curiously enough, high fashion adopted a similar form. Christian Dior’s influence on the 1950s’ style dress began with his new look collection in 1947, which almost single-handedly defined the postwar silhouette. It was a shirtwaist dress with softer shoulders and with more volume in the skirt. Dior took the already well-established form of the shirtwaist dress and created a new haute couture version. Whilst this was not necessarily an early reincarnation of the now common trend of turning street fashion into couture, it does suggest Dior’s “willingness to work with an established form but to complicate its construction and render it idiosyncratic” (Martin and Harold 1996). Over time, the new style slowly influenced all price points and social classes.

The strategy of working class women at this time, according to Partington (1993), was to sample and remix styles in ways that enabled them to articulate their own specific tastes and preferences (as cited in Barnard 2002, p153).

Martin Margiela (2007), in his *Wardrobe for Women Collection 4*, states that “the shirt dress is a garment that evokes timelessness” (see Fig. 10). “Its foundation is a personal approach to dressing, fixed on taste rather than seasonal approach to design or a particular age group. Its sensibility bridges that of traditional, sartorial and structured clothing” (Margiela 2007).



Fig. 10. Martin Margiela shirt dress.

Conceptual development models



Using the shirt dress as a starting point, my design explorations began with the next series of studies where I tested various design concepts relating to silhouette, fit, colour, materials, function and lifestyle. These studies took the form of half-scale models, which enabled me to explore ideas in 3D form (see Figs.11 - 14). By analysing the shirt dress I explored modular components that will inform further design practice. Further developments resolved issues that considered Corrigan's (2008) social factors that frame individual clothing decisions.

Fig. 11. Concept models.



Fig. 12. Concept detail models.



Fig. 13. Concept development models.



Fig. 14. Concept development models.

A personal uniform

Focusing on the shirt dress as an 'ordinary' everyday style of generic dress, I set out to experience the wearing of a personal uniform.

I choose to wear a shirt dress, which was an outfit that already existed in my wardrobe and clothing revealed in my wardrobe audit as being the one I wear the most frequently (see Fig. 15). The shirt dress that I have adopted as my personal uniform is created by New Zealand fashion designers World for Deane uniforms. I was intrigued when I saw it advertised in *Black* magazine. It is designed for high-end businesses, in order to project a professional image for both casual and formal occasions. Since World is already one of my favourite designers, I had unconditionally high expectations that this shirt dress would be the perfect outfit to wear every day, for the next two weeks.

In addition, I documented my personal observations and recorded my reactions to people and conversations, when I was wearing the shirt dress. The following section is the diary I wrote, when reflecting each day on this experience (see Fig. 16).



Fig. 15. WORLD black shirt dress.

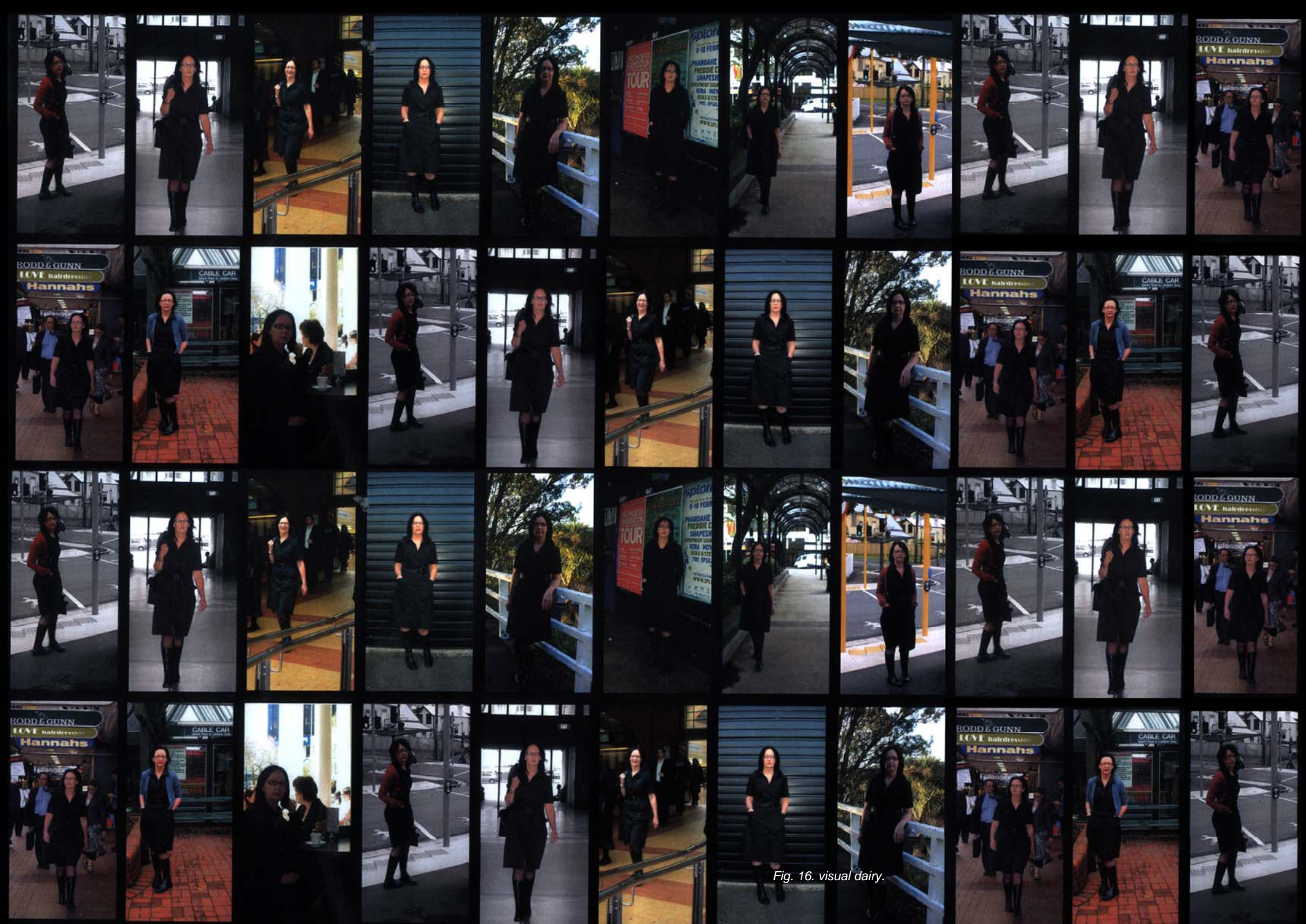


Fig. 16. visual diary.

The black shirt dress diary

Monday 4 November 2007

Imagine waking every morning and not worrying about what to wear because you can slip into the perfect outfit, with no doubt or stress: This is 'me'. My first day wearing my personal uniform: the World shirt dress. I have high expectations.

I put it on and it immediately feels like a uniform/lab coat. It's less fitting than I expected. It isn't me. This is disappointing and causes me some anxiety, since I had already visualised that this dress would be perfect for me. How am I going to wear this dress every day? With no time to look in the mirror and a resolve to carry on with the research, I am out the door to face the rigours of my everyday life.

Throughout the day, I repeatedly catch glimpses of myself in the mirror. As the day goes by, I begin to feel comfortable in the dress. The skirt length is great: it's just below the knee and my favourite pair of black boots works well with it. I can button the dress so that the neckline is not too revealing and therefore it fits in with the normative codes of dress for a secondary school teacher.

Tuesday 5 November 2007

A freshly ironed dress. I'm amazed it dries so quickly. Cotton poplin works well in the city and provides practical, easy care clothing. The fabric is almost dry when it emerges from the machine wash and requires little ironing.

Wednesday 6 November 2007

Today, I'm wearing the shirt dress to an exhibition opening. I gaze into the mirror and see the shirt collar and the black fabric. This outfit needs something to make it more individual. I find some lacy tights and my black pointy studded boots. I am amazed during the evening that my dress is recognised by my friend as the World dress in Black magazine. She recognised it by the detailing and told me that, when reading the article, she considered the idea of purchasing it. However, she expressed anxiety about the blandness of the uniform.

Thursday 7 November 2007

I love the idea of getting up in the morning and not having to decide what to wear and, therefore, I now have some extra time free to do something else.

The dress is beginning to feel like a second skin: the fabric is softening, so that it envelops my body. Habitual clothing is useful for allowing me just to 'be' and to continue with an unselfconscious, routine relationship in regards to my clothing. However, choosing what to wear is not just the perpetuation of our habitual selves. On numerous occasions, I feel bored with the clothing and I am tired of wearing the same easy things all the time.

Friday 8 November 2007

I do not like the tie belt – the way it folds and doesn't sit flat – so I have replaced it with a leather belt, which cinches the body and defines the waist shape. Today is cold, so I am wearing a mesh top under the dress and a cardigan for warmth.

Saturday 9 November 2007

When dressing for the theatre tonight (a corporate function), I pause to think about the expectations to conform and wear a short elegant cocktail dress – yet to still feel comfortable. How shall I wear a dress that is safe and fits normative expectations, yet still look interesting and exciting. I look through my wardrobe and pull out a silk/satin layered skirt. I decide to change the buttons on the dress and leave the skirt as part of the unbuttoned dress. I cinch the waist with a satin belt and, wearing sheer tights and heels, I feel that I will feel 'fit in', whilst at the same time showing my individuality.

Sunday 10 November 2007

Today is a leisure day, and this is when I feel least comfortable about wearing my dress. I'm going to a rowing regatta. Feeling overdressed, I wear the dress over jeans with black trainers. It's cold but, with a black feather down jacket to keep warm, I survive the elements of the windy Wellington foreshore.

Monday 11 November 2007

Yesterday's outfit was a success although, thinking about my project, I began to think about how realistic it is to have a personal uniform: one garment that will meet the needs of my everyday life. I have already layered the dress. I need to think about how I can design a shirt dress with a structure that will meet the needs of conditions in a varying environment and also be suitable for special occasions. How could I make the dress more functional? Pockets are an essential in the dress. Women's clothing does not offer functional pockets that will hold my keys, USB stick and my swipe cards.

Tuesday 12 November 2007

The dress is losing some of its colour: it's fading. I'm surprised, as it is designed to be a uniform. The pocket edges are wearing, and the fabric is becoming more creased. Since I like black, minimalist, clean, crisp clothing, this fading is not appealing to me. The cotton poplin is a crisp medium-weight fabric with a plain weave. As a result of this, the fabric is strong and durable, and it is able to maintain its shape as the dress softens with age. The more the surface is abraded through wearing, the more the dress loses colour, making this the embodied act of wearing. The softening of the fabric allows the dress to feel less generic by feeling personalised.

Wednesday 13 November 2007

I'm surprised at how few people have noticed or commented about my shirt dress. I believe that we're all too busy with our own appearance, family, work, etc. to keep a tally on everyone else's wardrobe rotations!

My senior design students were talking about my project today. I asked them if they had noticed anything about my dress. One said, "You have worn that dress a few times." I replied, "Everyday for over two weeks." "Wow," replied the student, "I thought you had worn it for only a couple of days." Although feeling invisible, I am reminded that a uniform is a short-hand, easily read at a glance garment. It defines the ostensible purpose, but under every uniform is a human story that is complex and often contradictory.

Thursday 14 November 2007

There is a powhiri at school today. This is a day when my ethnicity is exposed. I am of Maori descent. While I am revising the words of the waiata, my black shirt dress enables me to feel comfortable, because it is safe and meets normative expectations for the occasion, yet it still shows my creative side. I entirely fit in on this occasion since I am dressed in black and I am able to fully participate in the powhiri, while still feeling just like 'me'. I am able to conform to the generalised abstract ideal of having a unique self, through my resources and enactment of ethnicity.

On some occasions, ethnicity may form part of the self-conscious creation of the identity of a person. Generally, it is not something that I make visible through my clothing on an everyday basis. However, I am able to use my ethnicity as a resource. My clothing mobilises facets of myself and my family's past that I choose not to emphasise ordinarily. Stuart Hall (2005, p94) has argued that, whilst everyone is situated in terms of their ethnicity, this is not something that is always explicitly recognised.

Friday 15 November 2007

I'm walking down Lambton Quay. It's early evening, and the pavement is crowded. People are dressed in highly similar clothes, with the same predominance of plain dark clothes and the same unremarkable clothing Wellington is known for – dark, intellectual clothing. It is the capital of New Zealand, with many corporate workers and civil servants fitting into business dress codes.

Saturday 16 November 2007

I wake up early to drop Hannah off at rowing. I didn't realise how many people are up at this time. My neighbour is off to golf, and another is collecting a paper from the letterbox. I'm in my dress but I feel I should be wearing jeans and jersey. I feel too dressed up for the external world at this hour of the morning. Although the shirt dress is working for my everyday work day, at the weekend, I usually revert to my casual uniform of jeans and a black merino knit top. My jeans are more comfortable, since they have 3% elastomeric fibre in the denim, so they fit closely to the body and they are very comfortable to wear.

Sunday 17 November 2007

My last day of wearing the shirt dress – a personal uniform. I have liked the fact that the dress is useful for allowing me to be just me. It has met the daily routine of my everyday life, and it meets the normative dress codes that I am exposed to. However, I have, on numerous occasions, felt bored with the dress, and I have tired of wearing it all the time. I am looking forward to opening the doors of my wardrobe tomorrow and taking the time to choose my outfit for the day ahead.

Chapter 5 Development of a uni form

A final design has allowed me to resolve the issues of dress, self and social identity that have been revealed by wearing the shirt dress every day for two weeks.

I have identified that my outfit has to meet my discontinuous (non-uniform) lifestyle. Each context in which I operate calls for different sets of clothes to fulfil different functions. This complex lifestyle is typically negotiated by a collection of clothing. In order to respond to this fragmentary lifestyle, designers often choose to rely on a modular form of dressing. My proposal is different: I have developed a *uni form* that consists of one dress, with components that will meet the functional needs of my everyday life (see Fig. 17 - 23).

Uni form

uni – consisting of one

one – combined elements form one substance

form – to make; the essence of something

<http://uniform-studio.com/>

The shirt dress provided the inspiration for my personal uniform, and I promote the concept of metamorphic garments. These garments form part of a harmonious outfit that includes a range of structural forms, in order to make the garment more adaptable and versatile. Each piece allows for the creation of numerous variations by the use of zippers, buttoning, collars and sleeves that can be removed or attached. Also, skirts can be lengthened or shortened and pockets can be revealed or detached (see Fig.22- 24).



Fig.17. The uni form dress.



Fig.18. The uni form dress.



Fig. 19. The uni form dress.

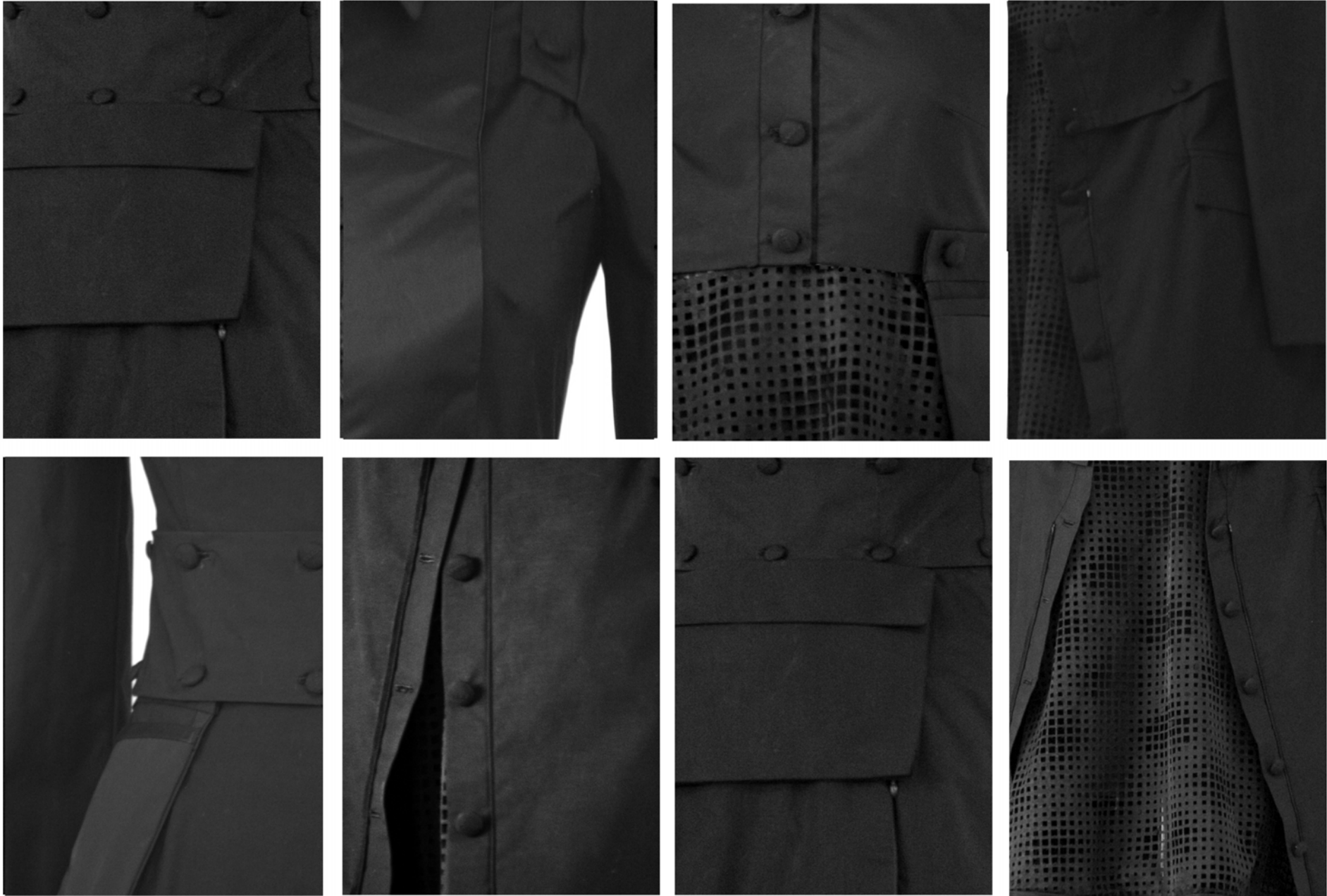


Fig.20. The uni form dress details



Fig.21. Forms of the uni form dress.



Fig.22. Forms of the uni form dress.

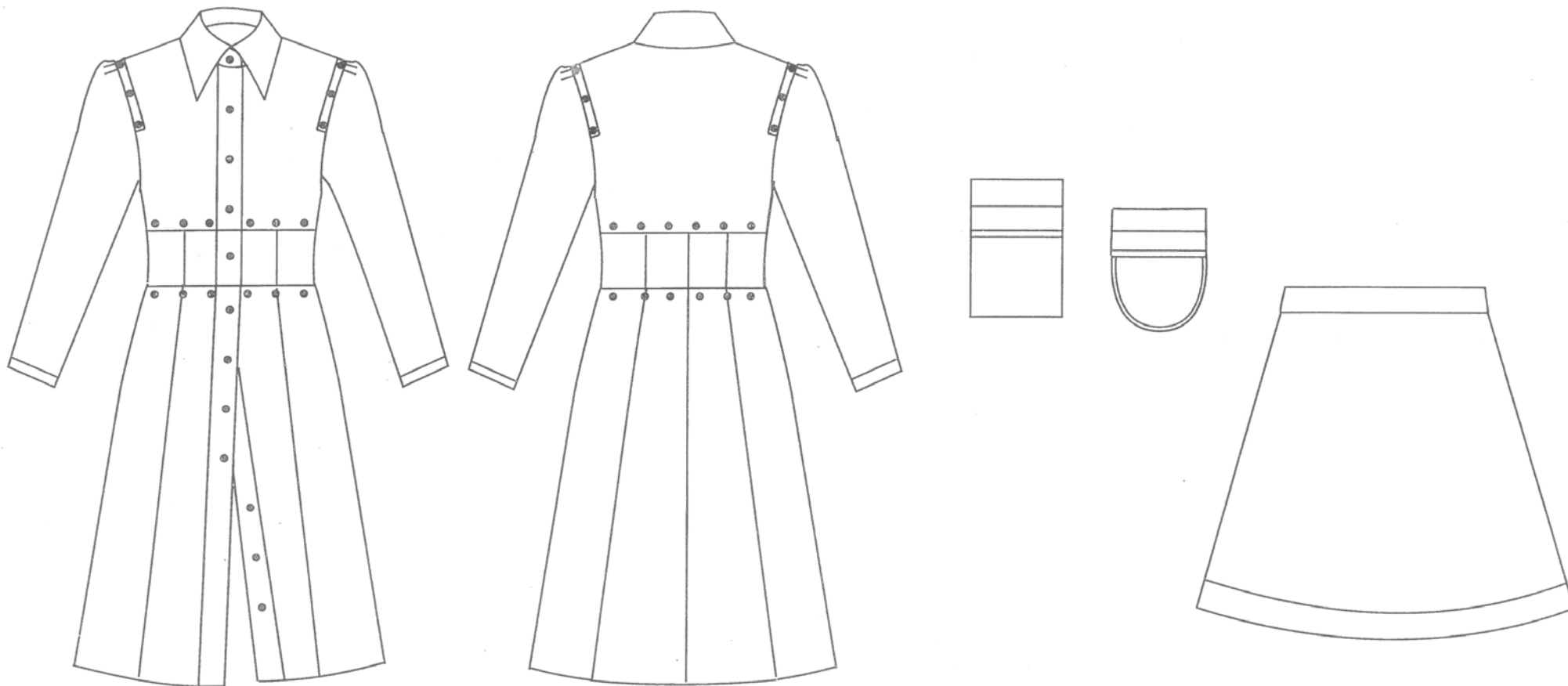


Fig.23. Forms of the uni form dress.

The large functional pocket with separate compartments holds my pens, student roll, keys, USB stick and sewing equipment, as I move about the classroom. The angular hip pockets offer easy access, and they are designed to hold my school keys (see Fig. 24).

The composite item, which includes a removable collar, epaulettes, pockets and back yoke, allows for protection against the weather. A double layer provides wind protection and access to a cable car card that I need when I am walking to work.

For the outer shell, I chose black cotton lycra poplin because of its high performance properties. This is a plain weave fabric that is durable and offers protection from the environmental elements, such as dirt, wind and light showers. I live in Wellington and the



Fig.24. Components of the uni form dress.

Weather conditions are a significant influence on the outfits that people wear in their everyday lives, as they move about the city. When designing a personal uniform to wear in Wellington city, the fabric needs to meet the local conditions of strong winds, without any extremes in temperature.

Typical summer daytime maximum air temperatures range from 19°C to 24°C, and seldom exceed 30°C. Annual sunshine hours average about 2,000 hours, more than many of the other major centres.

Winter is normally the most unsettled time of the year. Typical winter daytime maximum air temperatures range from 10°C to 14°C. Frost occurs inland during clear calm conditions in winter. Due to Wellington's exposure to weather systems from the Tasman Sea, it can get windy.

<http://www.wellingtonnz.com>

The wind can be so strong that, when you walk down the street, you can be lifted off the ground. Umbrellas are redundant, since they blow inside out, and wearing a circular skirt can be hazardous as it may blow up and reveal your underwear.

Although the fabric met these functional needs, I needed to address the plainness and drabness of the fabric. Personalising the outfit led me to think about creating a fabric that reflected me. This could be achieved by designing a fabric that shows who I am. In this instance, I chose to reveal my ethnicity.

I'm of Maori descent – Ngai Tahu. Aoraki is the ancestor of Ngai Tahu to Ngai Tahu. Aoraki represents the most sacred of ancestors, from whom Ngai Tahu descends, and who provides the iwi with its sense of communal identity, solidarity and purpose.



I have, therefore, developed a motif inspired by Aoraki (see Fig. 25) that incorporates the urban landscape in which I live, as a starting point for the repeat pattern that forms the basis of my final design. Laser cutting the design onto the cotton fabric makes the fabric more aesthetically appealing and personal to my identity (see Fig. 26). Through laser cutting the cotton lycra, I have been able to achieve a fabric that appears light and delicate but it is also strong, durable and water-repellent.

Fig. 25. Mt Aoraki.

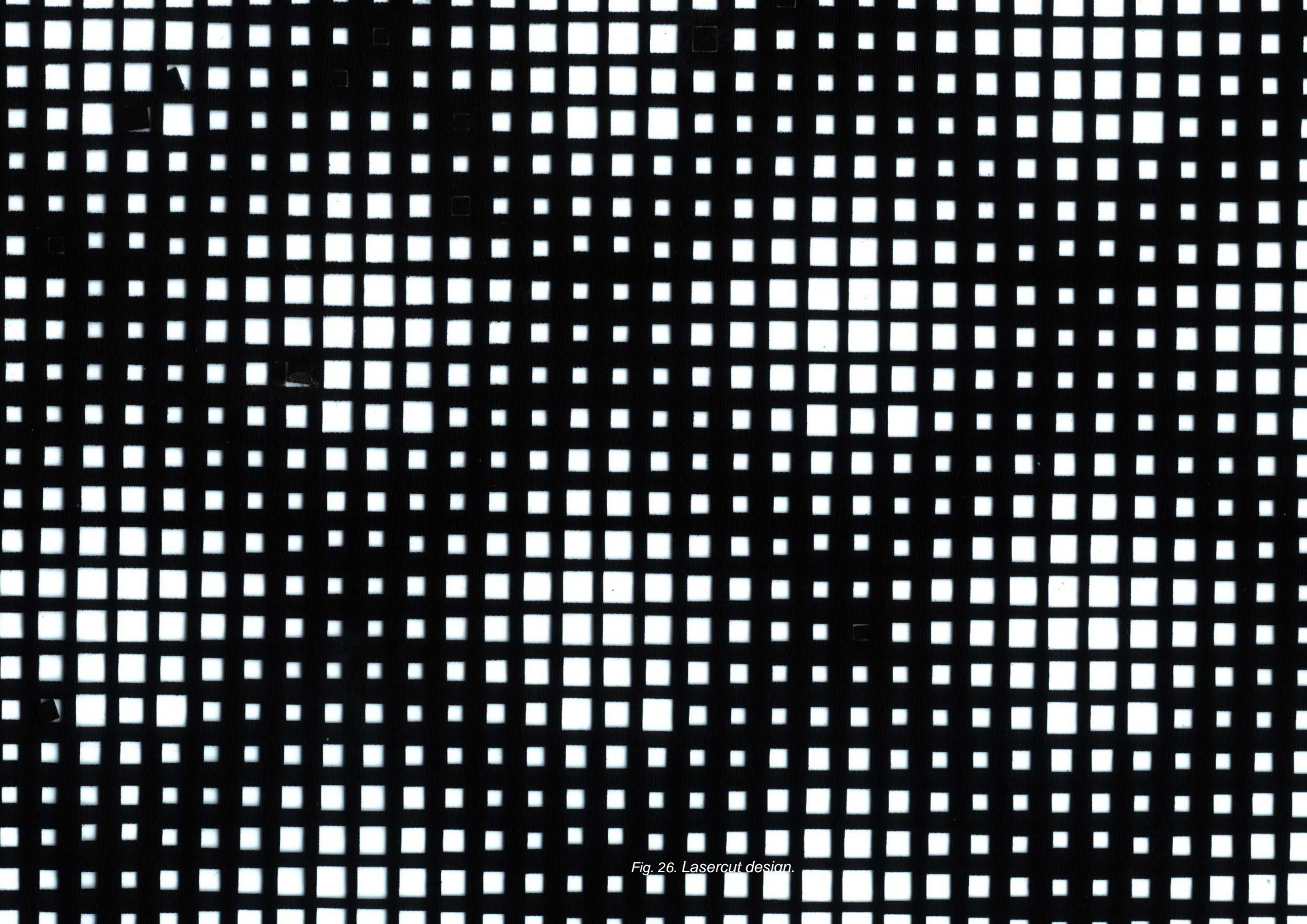


Fig. 26. Lasercut design.

The uni form diary

The following section is the diary I wrote when reflecting each day on the experience of wearing a *uni form* every day for seven days.

Monday 3 December 2007

I have laid out my uni form, and I look forward to wearing it for the day. I have made the decision not to use a bag so that I can see how well the pockets store my personal requirements.

I walk to school and catch the cable car. My swipe card is in my hip pocket, so it's easily accessible. December is an especially windy month in Wellington; therefore, my zips are closed and all my buttons are done up.

I unbutton the outer sleeve buttons at the neck when I get to the classroom and button on my equipment sack. I am ready for a day's teaching. The equipment sack is working, and I didn't misplace my keys once!

Tuesday 4 December 2007

The open-ended concealed zips, which allow me to remove the pocket zips, are difficult to use. The fabric catches and they don't slide easily. With no time to zip up the pocket, I fold it up and store it away. I would like to reveal the laser cut skirt below, so today I have removed the midriff section and buttoned the skirt to the bodice. I leave the buttons undone to reveal the skirt. The skirt flaps and catches on a table. I was hoping that it would drape but I discover that I need to button it back on itself, which then reveals the lining.

Wednesday 5 December 2007

Today it's early morning, teaching all day and parent interviews in the evening. I am finding the buttons tiresome, since they are time-consuming to button up. Some of the parents have heard about my study and are intrigued as to why a creative person should want to restrict her wardrobe. I talk about the ease of dressing every day and that this personal uniform allows for flexibility, so I can be creative and demonstrate my individuality.

Thursday 6 December 2007

The personal uniform is creating more interest than the World shirt dress. I'm welcoming the interest and the conversations. Colleagues are eager to play around with the components. An unexpected outcome occurs when I find I have the waist yoke buttoned and draped around the neck.

Friday 7 December 2007

Walking around the city, I find that the uniform protects me from the environment of wind and rain. It's like an outer shell and functions as a coat. For Friday night drinks, I remove the skirt shell and the outer shell sleeves. People are intrigued by the laser cut skirt. "Where did you get the fabric?" they ask me.

Saturday 8 December 2007

The personal uniform doesn't work for my private life when I am at home. I revert to my habitual clothing of jeans and a merino top. However, on Saturday night, I have a function to attend. I open the wardrobe doors and take time to assemble my outfit. Tonight, I plan to wear the laser cut sleeves. I find, after putting the dress on, that they have to be attached by someone else. The outer pockets are removed, although a small waist pocket is concealed under the skirt, which holds my keys and money for the evening.

Sunday 9 December 2007

Today brings brunch at the local café. I am sitting outside in the sun. It's a warm day, so I am only wearing the bodice and the skirt. I feel uncomfortable, as if I am dressed for work instead of a casual meal with my family.

The idea of the personal uniform shows promise for work wear but it does not function for leisurewear at the weekends, when I am doing household tasks or gardening.

Conclusions

My conclusions arise from a review of current literature of self, dress and social identity and out of my personal experience of wearing a uniform. What emerges from the design research is that there are multiple and overlapping factors that women negotiate in constructing their appearance in everyday life.

Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1995) define the self as a composite of an individual's identities communicated by dress and bodily aspects of appearance. An individual can occupy a number of social positions and hence can have a number of identities that contribute to the total configuration of self. From the perspective of symbolic interaction theory, individuals acquire identities through social interaction. As the individual presents himself or herself in social contexts, others perceive and assign meaning to his or her presentation of self in everyday life. Individuals manage their appearance: each person participates to some degree in appearance norms or else suffers the consequences. Therefore, people develop a self image or internal representations of their identity. Role theory suggests that, since people may have multiple roles to fulfil, they construct a variety of identities, constructed in part through dress and the environment in which they live (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1995). While people manage their appearance in order to present identities they perceive as congruent to their objectives and goals, others may perceive the presentation quite differently.

Corrigan (2008) suggests, in his some dimensions of dress model, that any or all of the factors may promote or constrain the way an individual communicates identity through dress. My design outcome – the *uni form* – offers a system that enables the individual to maintain a

constant aesthetic but adapt to the functionalities of everyday life. The individual can constantly change the array of components within the *uni form*. However personal reflections reveal that the *uni form* does not fulfil all functionalities in the every day, especially those that relate to lifestyle. Further conceptual development through the design process would address this issue.

In postmodern society, demographics show that more and more people are living and working within the urban metropolis. To respond to this fragmentary lifestyle, dress needs to meet the demands of the environment that we live in whilst still reflect the identity the person chooses to portray. Therefore, I proposed to create a design outcome with realistic lifestyle applications; a dress that is designed to 'able' and 'equip' the body.

The premise for developing a uni form was to respond to the urban context in which we live. Most clothing is defined by the context in which it is worn. The *uni form* is defined by the contemporary urban metropolis. The *uni form* promotes the idea that we can anticipate all contingencies and that our clothes can be complete and completely functional. It is designed to respond to the physical and psychological demands of living a transitional lifestyle.

The *uni form* offers individuals a rational and harmonious wardrobe that is adaptable to a myriad of social situations and contexts. As well as being variable according to the social context, the component system allows the individual to construct their own personal style. It enables individuals to mix and match components depending on their day-to-day needs. The addition and subtraction of elements becomes an important part of urban dress management. Therefore, the outfit is subject to variation as perceived by the individual and not by the design presentation. The *uni form* reflects a pattern of dress that emerges among individuals who

share similar and physical conditions, in this case, born out of the contemporary metropolitan experience. Therefore everyday perceptions of the restrictive nature of dress in post modern society can be seen as inaccurate as the *uni form* presents a freedom of dress and expression of identity.

Therefore, my research illustrates that the self and dress are an integral part of social identity. What emerges from this research is that a *uni form* – a metaphoric garment – can meet the needs of everyday life in the postmodern urban metropolis.

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