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Finding Hybridity
through Fashion Design:
*How to re-wild the foot for a more-than-human
future life.*

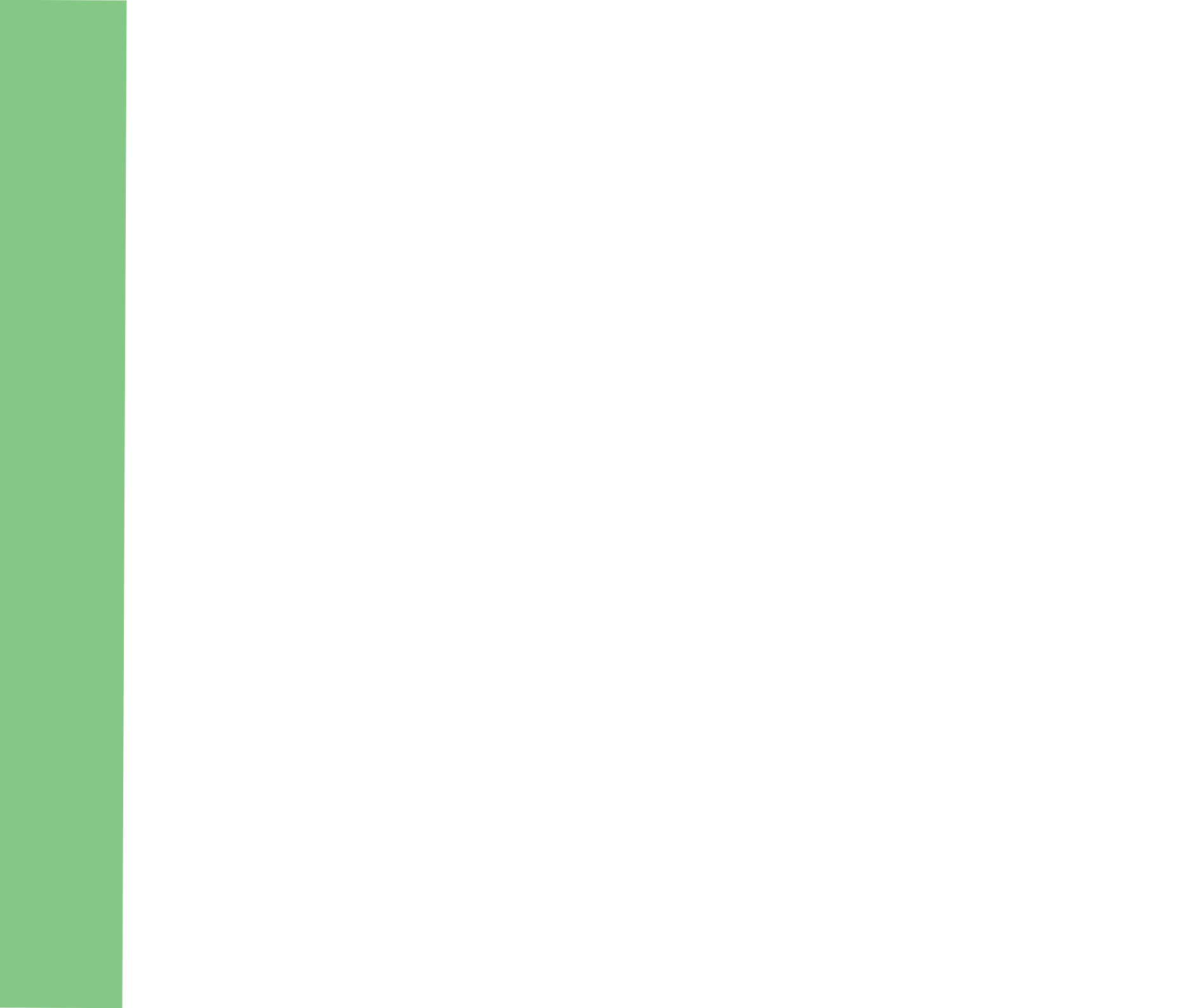
**Kimberley Franklin
2021**



A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of a Master of design at Massey University,
Wellington, New Zealand

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Acknowledgments

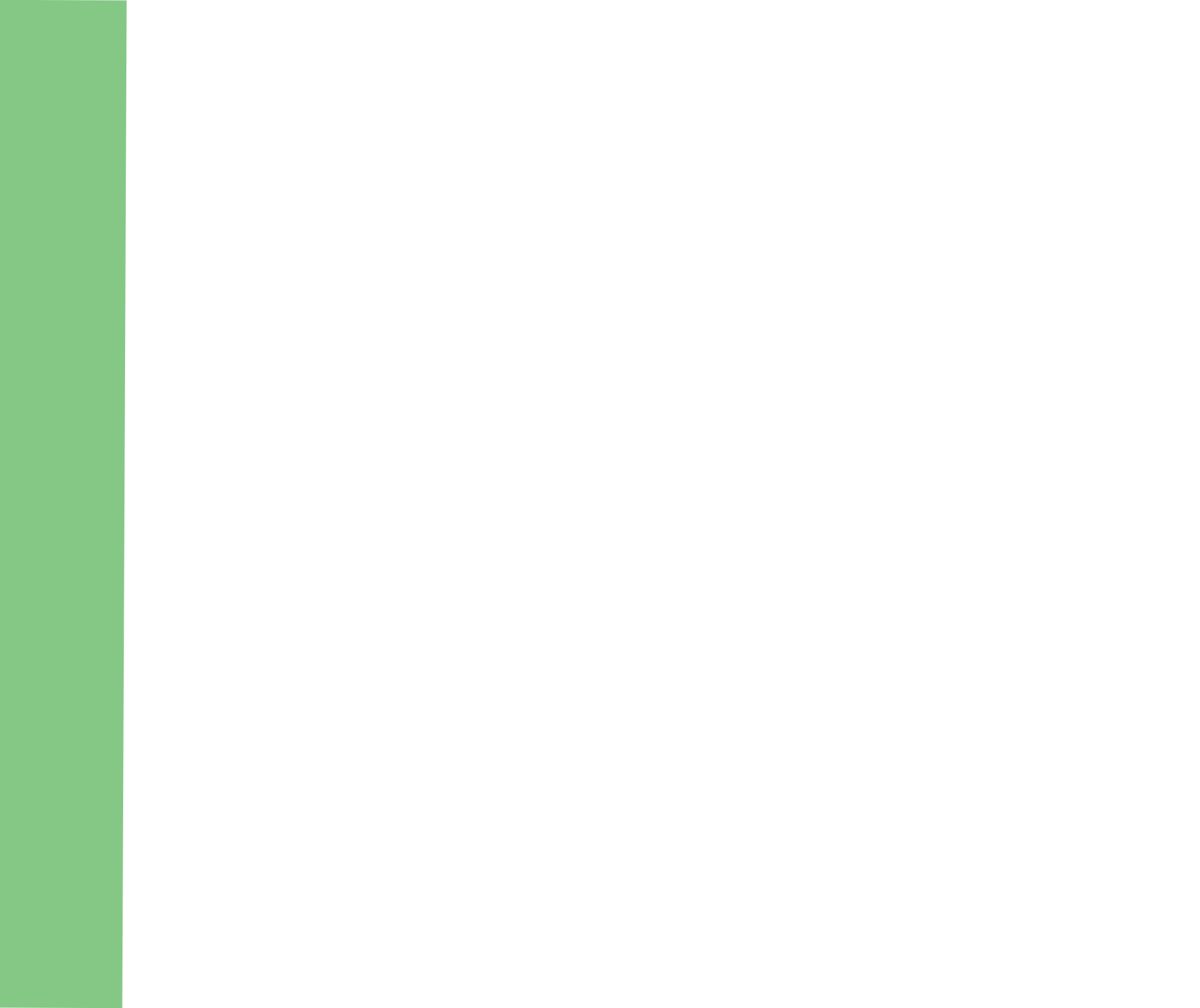
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Abstract

Finding Hybridity through Fashion Design: How to re-wild the foot for a more-than-human future life.

My exegesis critically examines and creatively responds to questions of future human evolution and our human relationship with fashion. As fashion designers, I argue, we design the interaction we have, not only with dress but also between ourselves and the world we live in. This has led me to an examination of what a rewilding design methodology and a rewilding design practice can offer to shift our relationships to our dress, to challenge what we perceive as fashion design and how we design (Payne, 9). This exegesis has been written through an autoethnographic understanding given I argue my own mother is beyond human and sits at a hybrid human conjunction. I offer my mother and her relationship with her wheelchair as an example of evolving the human. The Actor Network Theory (ANT) is explored through the narrative example of my mother's wheelchair in terms of how this actor/actant relationship has structured, mediated, and affected our lives. I further examine fashion and the theory of dress in relation to ANT, considering how fashion and dress may help break down the subject-object divide and positively renegotiate our understanding of lived experiences. I also draw on Jane Bennett's 'thing-power', a concept in which what are commonly perceived as inanimate nonhumans/ objects/ things are in fact vibrant matters that affect our lived experiences and remind us that we are just one being amongst a planet of life (Bennett, 12). Rewilding methodologies are then employed to critique and challenge traditional design thinking in the hopes of producing a morphological footwear design that pushes the boundaries of our being in the world, helping us achieve an empathetic and environmentally sustainable hybridity. I believe that as designers of fashion we must consider designing for the "active corporeal presence" that are human beings and the agentic qualities of the materials used if we are to challenge and change what is fashion design (Bruggeman, 50). This thesis project is my personal journey of the pursuit of a rewilding design methodology and philosophy to establish a future for rewilding design.



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Introduction

Finding Hybridity: How to re-wild the foot for a more-than-human fashion future life. The following exegesis critically examines and creatively responds to questions of the future and our human relationship with fashion. Discussing what the future means for humans and how we all can live towards a more-than-human future through fashion and design. It must be thoroughly stressed that the aim of this project has been a creative design expression with no finalised outcome but rather an example of a ritual for dress and exploration and embodiment of the philosophy of ‘rewilding’ design and critical theories. The need for this research is to challenge current fashion design thinking and to provoke further critical thinking into what we design and how we design for the body. This project has been purposely left open-ended due to the desire to continue researching, possibly what may be a lifelong passion of research and design outside of the current Master of Design requirements.

This exegesis has been written through an autoethnographic understanding given I argue my own mother is beyond human and sits at this hybrid conjunction I am exploring. Autoethnography allows me to analyse the relationship I share with my mother. Multiple autoethnographic passages are woven through this exegesis and have guided the examination of critical theory with passion and connection.

This exegesis delves into the topic of Transhumanism and whether this pursuing of a future human form is suitable and sustainable and I question the implications of these concepts. Transhumanism is the pursuit of creating a mastered human form in which we achieve desires and self regulated evolution for a “salvation from the burden of our earthly woes and mortality” (Hauskeller, 165). While exciting, I argue perhaps this is not what may be best for the future human. My project also examines ideas of hybridity, particularly through the Actor Network Theory (ANT). ANT understands that we as humans live in a more than human world and that humans are not the be-all or end-all. Rather, everything around us, every nonhuman, objects, nature, things all subject themselves into our lived experience and play affect. ANT recognises this effect and pays respect (Nimmo, 110).

Jane Bennett similarly discusses the agency of the non-human actants as 'thing-power' (Bennett, 4). I argue that implementing ANT thinking into our lives evolves the human into a hybrid state. The hybrid human takes on board and lives within this holistic world as one amongst many. Fashion and design then becomes the medium to which these theories critically respond to. Fashion is a system of perpetuating consumer cultures, an ego-ic system. As humans we have become accustomed to the ever-increasing manufacturing of fashion leaving our relationship with dress construed and contorted (Bruggeman, 29). It appears our obsession with constant materialism is in fact anti-materialist (Bennett, 5). I question the design of fashion and explore how design can impact the human experience leading to a philosophy of 'rewilding' design. Rewilding refers to many things but in the context of design, rewilding asks us to re-imagine the system. The system being both what we design and how we design. Rewilding refers to re-designing, re-inventing and/or re-configuring. I have chosen to embark a re-design rewilding philosophy to design. Using working prototypes for rewilding footwear design I am examining an aspect of the fashion design system that shifts the ritual of footwear and what our footwear does. I am aiming to design the interaction we have not only with fashion and dress, but also between ourselves and the world we live in.



Figure 1: Franklin, Kimberley. *In the Grass*, 2021. Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand. Working prototype.

28 Years Ago

28 years ago my mother's birth deformity in her left foot began to riddle her with a chronic pain that still envelops her life today. My younger sister and I were born within this time. My mother had me whilst in chronic pain and using crutches. She didn't receive a wheelchair until I was the age of three and only after a failed surgery and infected epidural that nearly killed her. After occupational therapists denied her insurance claim she was granted a 'home visit'. This 'home visit' began with my mother answering the door on her knees and dragging me in a laundry basket behind her. I do remember my father and I rushing to the hospital when my mother's epidural became infected; it was late at night and my father kept me in my pyjamas, dressing gown and slippers. I remember being so shocked and appalled that I was wearing my inside clothes outside. Luckily when my mother became pregnant with my sister she had a wheelchair. My sister is much different from myself. She was given the nickname 'whirlwind' by our gran. From as young as six, my sister and I have been asked by all sorts of people, what was wrong with our mother? To me there was never something wrong, just an experience of being human that so few of us encounter.

It wasn't until I was 15 that I questioned my mother's health, disability, or her humanness. In 2012, my father was travelling for business, this time to an obscure part of Turkey; we were at home with my mother. One night my mother's pain began to overwhelm her and due to a cocktail of prescription medication that after 20 odd years started to negatively affect her. I didn't know what was happening. My father always said to me before he travelled to look after my mother, this time I felt like I had failed. My sister and I thought we were losing our mother. We called for an ambulance and rushed our mother to the hospital. Our aunt and uncle took care of my sister whilst I traveled with my mother as I was her next-of-kin. We didn't know what was going on, my mothers health took a turn for the worse. I said goodbye to my mother that night. There is still an ambiguity about what happened to my mother but we made it through together as a family.

In 2015, my mother was approved for a spinal cord stimulator- a sort of pacemaker that connects to multiple chosen electrodes in the central nervous system in an attempt to stop pain signals heading to the brain.



Figure 2: Franklin, Joe and Wendy. *Wedding Day*. 1987,
Auckland, New Zealand. Photograph.

When the operation was completed a year and half later we were left disappointed as there didn't appear to be the same coverage as had been sought in the trial. In February 2020, a second spinal cord stimulator was placed into my mother's spine finding better coverage to absorb the distressing pain. But unfortunately left her riddled in pain in her right leg (and continuing in her left leg). An area that had not been in pain before, leaving her mobility choices grossly inadequate, despite what the occupational therapists may have thought. We were told the expected recovery time is two years. A year and a half has passed and my mother is doing better except her mental health is certainly at an all time low. My mother is overcome with pain.

My father (God bless him) has never given up hope on helping my mother become pain free. Or at least to provide us with a good, healthy life in which we are comfortable, educated and fed. My father is an incredible man who has never ever stopped and continually fights for my mother and our family. My father operates the family business and spent most of my childhood concocting new experiments for the many aquaculture farming systems projects he has been involved in. The glow in the dark rope spent many years hanging on our swing set and the electrical 'Mussel Cultivation Rope' spent many months and trials in our swimming pool. All in the name of progress as my father might say. Part of me would like to think the swimming pool addition was not for us children's benefit but a new device for efficient research and development.



Figure 3: Family, Franklin. *Wildlife Adventure*. 2007. Whangarei, New Zealand. Photograph.



Figure 4: Family, Franklin. *Christmas Day*. 1998, Cornwall Park, Auckland, New Zealand. Photograph.

When I imagine human evolution. A Transhumanist belief.

When I imagine human evolution for a future world, I am confronted with the imagery of cyborgs, meta humans, inter-space colonisation, flying cars, warp speed and many other tropes manifested in science fiction culture. However I never realised the most real case study of human evolution was my own mother. The implementation of spinal cord stimulator technology into my mother's spine, I argue, classifies her as beyond human; a borderline cyborg due to the insertion of technological material that would appear to empower her life (Chong). My mother's battle with chronic pain has been helped with the implantation of this technology (although not consistently) and in future will hopefully enhance her life to lessen her pain more over time. In essence I guess this is what all these science fiction dreams wish to accomplish- to lessen the growing pains of being human. In being merely human it is a grievance. We develop desires and ambitions but are let down by the fragility and limitations of our physical frame. This dream is a desire for justice, to become something beyond human (Hauskeller, 163). Is it justice? I want justice for my mother and our family. But should all humans desire this justice? Should this even be considered a need for justice?

Transhumanism is a theoretical network belief in finding the beyond post-human form, whether that may be to become metahuman or other. The Transhumanist belief takes on board human-related criticism and in turn hopes to use innovation and technology to further the human species in search of a post-human condition that improves limitations associated with the human body (Manzocco, 162). The human is seen as a "non-fixed and mutable condition" (Ferrando, 27). Transhumanism has become a highly sought after area of research. Prominent Transhumanist Nick Bostrom opened the think tank "Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies" at Harvard which is dedicated to the Transhumanism effort (Pearlman). Elon Musk's venture with 'Neuralink' also reiterates the transhuman cause (Musk). Engineer Kevin Warwick tinkers with the intention of 'upgrading' the human body by experimenting with the human nervous system and digital interfaces. 'Project Cyborg', iterations One and Two are Warwick's most well known projects. Warwick placed a tiny microchip in his body for 'Project 1' and 'Project 2' required 100 electrodes surgically implanted into his left arm median nerve fibres. Warwick gained abilities, such as the microchip doubled as a security card reader and would open lab doors as he walked through.

The projects were considered highly successful that his body actually took to the technology implanted, hence ensuring his belief that “humans themselves are destined to become a subspecies” (Manzocco, 169). Why a subspecies? The homo sapien has not been the only primate, but we are the current form. Homo Habilis, Homo Ergaster Erectus, Homo Antecessor, Homo Heidelbergensis and the Neanderthals are all past primates, while the Homosapien is the subspecies that we humans are today (Green).

Transhumanism is a belief of forced and permanent evolution, believing that the natural process is overly time consuming (Sandberg, 60). Thus forcing evolutionary change, ‘upgrading’ or perhaps granting a sort of technological metamorphosis involves actuality splitting away from our conventional Homosapien existence to something perhaps beyond human.

To successfully conduct research for a beyond human form requires indulging ‘morphological freedom’, however dangerous this may be. Morphological freedom is a belief that all humans experience complete autonomy over their human body, encouraging a cultural evolution of transformation as transcendence (Sandberg, 57). Morphological freedom promises a proactionary management to technology and human transcendence.

Proactionary management means that the pursuit of technological advancement is put first at the expense of human suffering and natural habitats (Sandberg, 61). In 2021, current beliefs on morphological freedom and technological advancement gently reside in the precautionary approach. Transformation or upgrading the human body with autonomy is a common goal for many transhumanist thinkers. So much so Michael Anissimov, a well known transhumanist, has named ten upgrades he wishes to be achievable in the future (Manzocco, 181)

- 1) Disease immunity
- 2) Telemicroscopic- full spectrum vision
- 3) Telepathy- brain/computer interfacing
- 4) Superstrength
- 5) Improved appearance
- 6) Pyschokinesis
- 7) Autopoiesis/ Allopoiesis
- 8) Flight
- 9) Super intelligence
- 10) Immortality

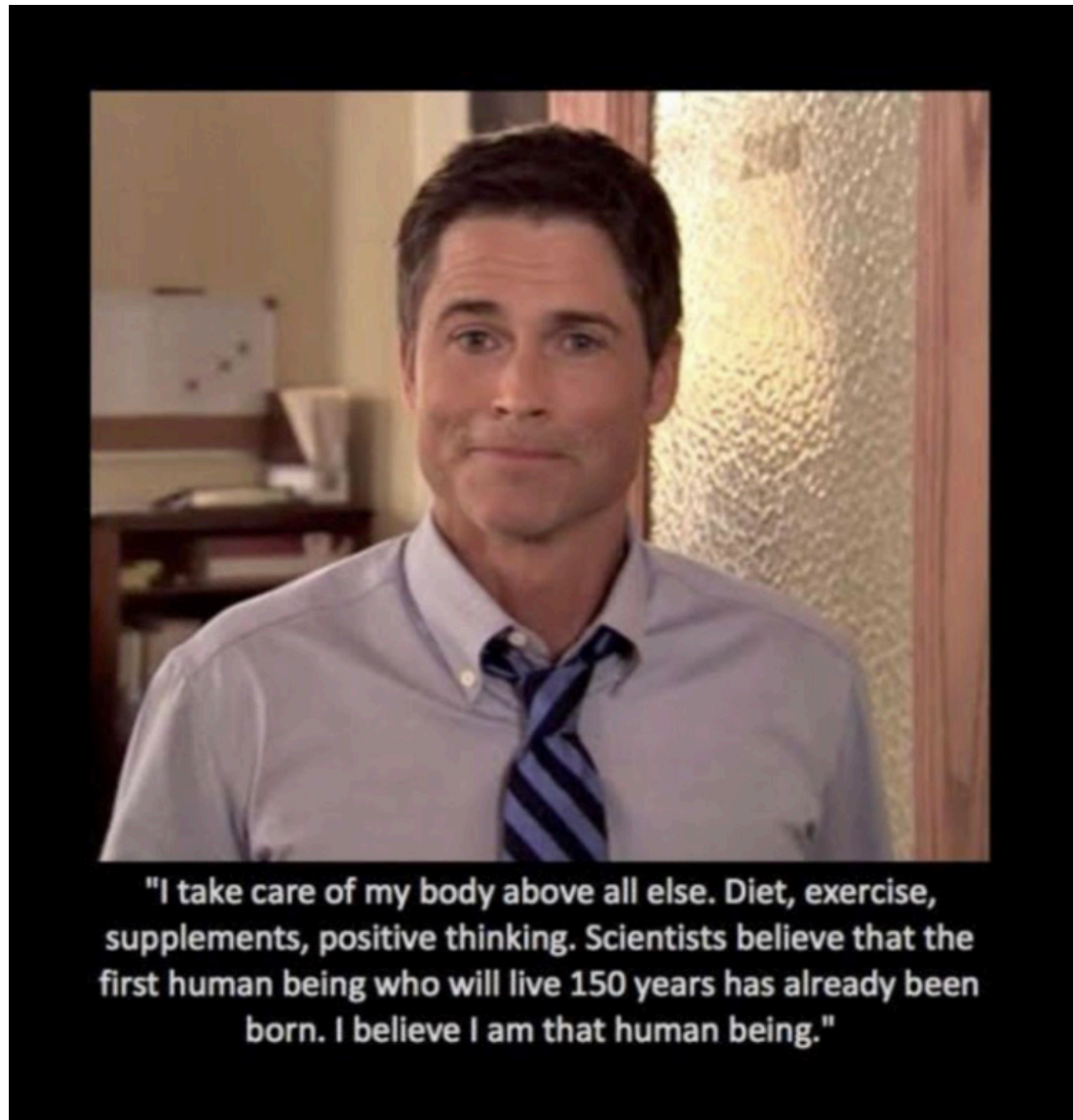


Figure 5: *Chris Traeger meme*. <https://worldwideinterweb.com/funniest-parks-and-recreation-memes-of-all-time/>. Meme.

It Feels Easy. A Transhumanist Belief.

It feels easy to be pulled into the excitement of metahuman dreams, as of course I would love to be able to fly, or at least live a prolonged life span. Yet, the question must be asked, if these technologies of morphological freedom come to fruition, what happens to humanity? Should transcendence of the beyond human form be a sacred duty? (Hauskeller, 166) Would 'upgrades' be democratised? What about our natural environments, is upgrading the human form going to help us find balance with the natural world? Would 'upgrading' the human form create more complications for an already overly complicated world?

During my mother's life she has had numerous surgeries in the hope of 'upgrading' her bodily situation, many centered around her left leg. As much as she has no metahuman qualities she has the ability to literally charge herself- well the stimulators in her back have this ability- a quality no 'non-upgraded' person has. In my understanding it is hard to know whether the surgeries have actually been positive in achieving the intended outcome. As the multiple operations my mother has had during my life have only brought more complexity and stress to my mother's situation. In contrast to this ongoing conversation, I ask is Transhumanism really the answer? Although my mother is 'beyond human' with the technology at her fingertips, her life and our family's lives have only been more impeded. Although the past 20 plus years have involved finding solution after solution, cover up after cover up for my mother's pain and mobility, very few have worked out positively. Except when she became eligible for a wheelchair.

Gaining a wheelchair was a huge decision for my parents. They have told me many times that if my mother was given a wheelchair like she was then, it would be excruciatingly hard in future to get my mother out of the wheelchair. Perhaps this is true, it has been 21 years and my mother is more reliant on her wheelchair than ever. I have chosen to not think this way, I have never known my mother to be physically able to walk (easily at least). A humorous memory I remember is when I was about eight, we as a family went for a walk along the North Shore beaches in Auckland. My little sister was still very young, she was tucked into her pram, my mother pushed this pram whilst my father pushed my mother; I remember watching this and thinking my family was a train. I on the other hand was happily walking all over the rocks in denim platforms that my mother warned me would wreck my precious ankles.

Perhaps I just cannot think past my mothers wheelchair as this is all I have ever known. When I think of my mother I think of her wheelchair simultaneously, it is her silhouette in my mind. After my mother's most recent surgery she spent 3 weeks in hospital, writhing in pain. Her right leg had now somehow succumbed to a deep pain she had never felt before. This is a devastating blow to our family. A dream to once get my mother more physically mobile and out of her wheelchair now seems lightyears away. Over this time I have begun to understand that the wheelchair is not the enemy to my mother but almost a saviour. If I could imagine my mother up and about, walking, running, living- I guess what we consider freely is something I cannot fathom. I have never known what this is, or what this would look like. All I have ever known is my mother and her chair. My mother and her wheelchair are one.



Figure 6: Franklin, Wendy. *Wheeling in the snow*. 2019. Chateau Tongariro, Whakapapa, New Zealand. Photograph.

My mother and her wheelchair are one. A hybrid theory.

My mother and her wheelchair are one. I argue my mother's wheelchair has been enormously influential and in fact I declare my mother not a beyond human but in actuality a hybrid human being. However, it has been difficult for the wider human networks to acknowledge my mother's simple humanity. You needn't only have to notice the steps into shops, the lack of accessible parking and sloping pedestrian paths to realise this is not just a personal experience but rather a completely societal and bureaucratic slandering of those less abled. My mother is a hybrid being as her life is led through the lens of her wheelchair, including the technology within her. My mother has merged with the external tool of her wheelchair and lives simultaneously as a human and as a portable chair.

The hybrid being is a concept composed by Donna Harraway as a branch of post-human theory. Post-humanity is a division of thought that critiques "the basic tenets of humanism" hoping to "resist binary categories and, instead, integrate the human and the nonhuman" (Forlano, 20). Harraway, author of the well known essay "The Cyborg Manifesto", where she admits her want "to be a cyborg over a goddess" opened the hybrid debate by defining the hybrid being as an immediate intersection, caressing over a "multiplicity of bodies, with life itself as a fluid intersection of humans and plants and animals and minerals" (Kroker, 9). The hybrid being is a "labyrinth of knowledge" (Kroker, 8). Post-humanist Roberto Marchesini alternatively believes as humans today we are already hybrid beings because "using a computer, wearing glasses or a hearing aid, or even just keeping a schedule of commitments is a form of empowerment, and that humanity has tried to overcome itself from the moment it came in to the world" (Manzocco, 162). The difference between these definitions appears that Marchesini sees the current human condition as something exhaustive and limiting and to be hybrid is for objects to be used to better the human experience. Whilst Harraway's ideally manifests a living within culture in which the hybrid being is sought to clear up the antagonism of human and nonhuman boundaries, creating a conjunction of being and rejects the binary (Lauro and Embry, 94). Perhaps the hybrid being I have stuck in my mind is at the intersection of these two characterizations. As a designer for the body, I am intrigued by our relationship with the 'nonhuman' and how the nonhuman plays a part in our human lived experiences. The nonhuman should be clarified as a multiplicity of different humans, tools, nature, animals, minerals and technology.

For my mother, I argue, the hybrid human being that she has become has integrated objective tools into her subjective being and thus informing her lived experiences. Except that my mother and her wheelchair live within these states of being, there is a flow, an intersecting drift between her human and her chair. When in movement the wheels on her chair make this faint clicking sound that I know only my mother could make and alerts me that she is near. 'She' as in a singular idea, she, my mother is her chair and her chair is my mother. Is this the hybrid experience?

The idea of hybridity as the use of objective tools which I believe could be considered for the future of the human race, and our life on Earth. Hybridity evolves the human and enhances the human experience. We should focus on our relationship with tools/ objects, technology and nature in that everything becomes an assemblage to the human experience. An assemblage being the act of assembling, a coming together, a finalising. I believe the human body is not a finalised being and our use of tools, objects, subjects, other humans, technology and nature is proof of such a concept. If humans did in fact live a meaningful life without tools, objects, other humans, technology and nature then of course I would believe that pursuing metahumanity perhaps would be the right form of transcendence for humans. But because I believe we are not a finalised being we must reconsider using the listed compartments as mere ends-in-themselves and become a hybrid one with our use of tools to further embrace human evolution. It is important to consider this hybrid future given we are at the precipice of new technologies and that we must consider how we as humans will interact with such technologies given the likely impact they may have on our current world. One possible way to inquire about a hybrid life is through the 'Actor Network Theory' (ANT).

The Actor Network Theory. A social theory.

The 'Actor Network Theory (ANT) "posits hybrids of 'societies-natures', heterogeneous assemblages in which humans and nonhumans are inextricably mixed up together" (Nimmo, 109). ANT is embedded within social theory and emerged during the later 1980's. ANT offers a relationship of actor/actant and/or mediators/intermediaries- the former being the more customary terminology. ANT notes that tools and "objects such as seatbelts, door grooms or door closers are the 'missing masses' that stand in for human actors" (Forlano, 21). As described, missing masses are a form of materiality that places any kind of affect onto a lived experience, thus not limited to human only experience. Missing masses are not limited to the tools, objects, technology, nature, subjects and other humans surrounding our lived experiences, establishing attention to these listed creates an animated experience. These 'missing masses' are noted as 'actants'- actants being a form of matter that is "neither an object nor a subject but an intervener" (Bennett, 9). ANT offers an intermediary hybridity, in that the mass actant receives attention and significance for the commitment to human actors, thus hoping to remove the divide of human subject and mass object and reach hybridity (Nimmo. 109). Or in other words, ANT aspires to create a level playing field where we understand that as humans, we are only one amongst a planet of life, objects, nature, technology etc. And all are subjected to create affect on to us, in which we create affect on to them too.

Social theorist Richie Nimmo explores the "ambiguous status of nonhumans" and inspects ANT's argument that such divide of subject and object has been wrought through "modern knowledge practises", specifically that such divide is "in fact an invention of modernity" (Nimmo, 110). Similar to ANT, Jane Bennett's philosophy of 'thing-power', makes the case for the nonhuman actant (similar to mass actant) as having agency. Actant can be defined as a material of which action is pursued with or on, material is not limited to nonhuman or human (Bennett, 9). Actants continue vital material action regardless of motivation or if an unwanted commodity. Hence, searching for the vibrancy of this animation informs the lived experience for hybridity or a sort of blurring that preserves all human and non human life as active corporeality. The materiality is not "something static, fixed or passive, waiting to be modded by some external force, rather it is emphasised as "a process of materialisation"" (Ferrando, 31).

Such corporeal presence of all materiality may help to harness transformation and transcendence that is key to evolution. Perhaps this is more a cultural evolution given the holistic community approach of hybridity is more than the individual but rather the more-than-human world we live within. Transhumanism, perhaps, is an individual pursuit of evolution. Like my mother, whom I believe is already a hybrid being, the merging of the subject and object has affected her lived experience and has mostly enhanced her life. “Each human is a heterogeneous compound of wonderfully vibrant, dangerously vibrant matter. If matter is lively, then not only the difference between subjects and objects is minimized, but the status of the shared materiality of all things is elevated” (Bennett, 12-13).



Figure 7: Family, Franklin. *Kimberley's 21st Dinner*. 2017. Cordis Hotel, Grafton, Auckland, New Zealand. Photograph.

Despite being born with a disability.

My mother is a hybrid being embodying vibrant matter. Despite being born with a disability, my mother lived a childhood of somewhat normality for the time she grew up in. Being the youngest of five children, my mother's disability was overlooked and treated as if non-existent. Forced into various family physical activities and walking the steep hills of Glenfield to and from school, possibly creating irreversible future damage. I am told my mother had managed to wear footwear on both feet and needed two different sizes. My mother has told me many times how she wished her parents had listened to her aching pain more, except they continued to ignore the situation. When my mother was 25, on holiday in Hawaii, my mother's struggle with her left foot was about to conquer her life and my parents' marriage. A year to the day they were on holiday my mother had her first ankle fusion surgery. A surgery that unfortunately left her in chronic pain and did not achieve the goal set. No longer could she bear weight on her left foot, even limping became impossible. My mother visited many specialists with my father right alongside her. Unfortunately again, my grandparents, I am told, did not believe this downfall of pain that had overturned her actively able life. My mother has told me how her parents visited this specialist to find out if my mother's condition was true, again, I am told they did not believe this information from a trained specialist. My mother has told me that her parents confronted her, told her to stop making up such health issues and get back to normality. Despite my gran having passed away many years ago, my grandfather still refuses to acknowledge my mother's disability and pain. I wonder how different our family life might have been if my grandparents had actually listened and cared for my mother in a more loving way? I wonder if this trauma and lack of care has impacted on my mother and how she views the world? I wonder if these past experiences have shaped the way my parents have raised my sister and I? All I know is that the preservation of our feet was a highly important conversation in our family home.

This year I will be 25. Despite having not been born with any disability, or am living in any physical pain. To turn 25 has haunted me my entire life. To turn 25 means I will be as old as my mother when her world was turned upside down. Will my world be turned upside down too? My childhood was relatively active and today I spend the majority of my waking hours on my feet. I often neglect my feet; I wear Doc Marten boots almost everyday. In my mind, I wear these boots as protection, I am hiding my feet from the world around me. Perhaps I am ashamed of my feet, perhaps I think of my feet as weakness and therefore must hide them, protect them. Even in the summer months I continue to gravitate towards my boots, despite the heat and lack of breathability in the leather. I have come to think of myself and my boots as one, a simultaneous relationship of protection and hiding. My boots have 'thing power' however I choose to neglect this 'thing power'. My boots have the ability to affect my lived experiences except I exploit my boots for selfish reasons. My boots live to serve the purpose of hiding my feet. My boots are an incredible resource and this relationship we have has led me to a realization. The realization about how I now see that my boots inhibit my natural feet movement. This flat surface between the bottom of my foot and the external ground separates myself from the world around me when I believe the future evolution of the human is immersing ourselves within all aspects of this world. I don't want to feel like my choice in footwear inhibits or hides an aspect of my being that I now realise are amazing. But I also want to feel immersed, I want to feel like a hybrid, and my feet have been so thoroughly a part of how I view myself, my family and my personal relationship with the world. My feet allow me to travel from a to b. I can run, I can walk, I can skip, and I can trip over. My feet should be cherished. No longer will my feet hide, and no longer I will hide either.



Figure 8: Franklin, Kimberley. *My boots and I*. 2021. Wellington, New Zealand. Photograph.

Footwear encases the foot. Fashion theory.

Footwear is a type of dress, a form of external body modification that places affect on to the wearers lived experience. Dress sits at the subject object divide, in which we as humans are the subject and the object of our dress can directly impact our daily being. Similar to ANT there is a direct correlation to dress in which our dress acts upon us as much as we act upon dress and within dress. We notice when our belt is too tight, or our hem is too long. We can recognise the affect that the dress at that moment is having on our lived experience of being human. Dress is a vibrant matter that requires a bond between human and dress, to which as humans we become recognisable to the world around us. Dress is a mutual becoming- a constant evolution to our person, a continuous bodying that impacts and can have further impact on our becoming (Entwistle, 37). Footwear modify's our human lived experiences by encasing the foot, generally out of protection due to environmental factors and to ease locomotion but also footwear "communicate(s) who we are, what we do for a living and what we think" and like dress, footwear has come out of necessity (Kawamura, 1). There are many different needs required of footwear, to accommodate for all different modes of being, functional/ protection/ athletic, decorative religious, political etc. Today, there is a resurgence of footwear fashions, particularly in streetwear cultures, and our relationship with footwear can often be influenced by the system of fashion (Kawamura, 1).

Fashion is a system of perpetuating ego creation of cyclical dress styles deemed worthy of being worn at particular times. The fashion system today is more about creating consumer demand than exciting lived experiences and enriched relationships with the creative output. This creative output is deemed the creation of dress. In *Dissolving the Ego of Fashion*, Danielle Bruggeman discusses that fashion has become a system of consumer culture in which our human bodies are used as a surface. Our human bodies are designed for incessant productivity, and our humanity is seen as problematic and we must adhere to following the status quo, rather than embracing the characteristics that enable our inexplicable humanness (Bruggeman, 30). Fashion lacks acknowledgement of "our subjective human dimension" or the hybrid power fashion could potentially create (Bruggeman, 29). Our bodies are treated as passive, aesthetic and commodified surfaces, as if our lived experience is worth little discussion. Whilst Bruggeman continues to believe that "fashion is about the intimate relationship between body and materiality" (Bruggeman, 51). As designers of fashion we must consider designing for the "active corporeal presence" that are human beings and the agentic qualities of the materials used (Bruggeman, 50).



Figure 9: Franklin, Kimberley. *Happy Baby Modular Shoot*. 2021. Wellington, New Zealand. Photograph.

Acknowledging the subject human. A fashion design theory.

Fashion needs to acknowledge the subjective human and the subjective dimension of dress. In *Fashion futuring in the Anthropocene*, Alice Payne speaks to ways in which we can actively challenge this current perpetuating arrangement and establish a better future for fashion systems and dress in which acknowledging the subjective human can be ingrained within fashion systems. Payne notices two methods of possible change for the fashion system in the Promethean ‘Taming’ and Soterian ‘Rewilding’ (Payne, 2).

‘Taming’ regards a techno-fix pathway in which technology is continually developed to create a mend or to ‘tame’ fashion’s less than environmental practises. 3D printing, waterless dyeing, e-textiles, smart accessories are all considered taming efforts, even theories of circular economies and resale/rentals too are considered taming. Taming from what I can understand, is a future of fashion in which the way dress operates could be different, and perhaps more inclined to servicing the needs of the human. This being said, the mindset of the wearer would not change, and the way we would view fashion and dress would be more problematic given the stark environmental issues at the forefront of our entire existence. Fashion and dress in a taming world, perhaps would help in future evolution but the system itself would be largely unchanged. Perhaps this could be a good thing, but I am more inclined to challenge this method given I wish to see fashion and dress understood as a living experience in which we live with and through (Payne, 6) (Payne, 167).

The next method Payne discusses is the Soterian ‘Rewilding’. ‘Rewilding’ has many possible interpretations. ‘Rewilding’ most often has been associated with conservation efforts in the most literal sense, referring to efforts aimed at restoring and protecting natural processes and wilderness areas (Payne, 159).

'Rewilding' conservation hopes to re-establish wild places through protection to essentially allow nature to do as nature does. Earlier this year Scotland voted to reintroduce wild wolves into open areas given the wolves are native to the land and their predatory behaviours bring balance to the local ecosystems (Driver). Prominent rewilding actions being undertaken include the European Greenbelt, and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Batycki). Creating environmental balance through restoring key natural environments appears to be the key to rewilding.

While Payne's Soterian 'Rewilding' speaks to ownership of design, or a hacking in which personalised practises are broadly used to refresh garments and reinvigorate long lost loves. Embroidery, screen printing, patchworking, homemade clothing, are all activities of rewilding (Payne, 9). As a consumer I see these activities as something I could partake in for fashion items that I have purchased but have now grown out of. Similarly, researcher Otto von Busch designs and organises workshops with fashion consumers to, as he put it, 'hack' and refresh the clothing so the garment was personalised to the person. In the workshops all types of methods were pursued, including those mentioned above. These activities create a direct bond between the human and the dress they have now developed for themselves (Brien). Taking ownership of design, creation, adaption, can create a bonded relationship between human and dress. I question this understanding of rewilding as I feel this does not necessarily create balance. Can fashion be rewilding from the onset of the design process? As a designer I ask, can design be rewilding? What would be a rewilding design? How would I design for rewilding? Yet if I am understanding what it means to 'rewild,' it appears to develop as finding balance whatever that may be. I feel that not only the "how," needs to be included in the processes we use to produce fashion, and needs to be discussed, but what in actuality is being designed and how this design will positively affect our being in the world. Payne has since further developed her 'rewilding' methodology with understanding of what rewilding design could be; "humans design objects, but designed objects and environments also 'design' the human. They design and act upon one, and one is changed as a result" (Payne, 163). Perhaps to find a rewilding balance for fashion and dress, as designers we need to challenge our design methods. I will embark on this journey of the pursuit of rewilding design for the creative detail of my project to establish a future for rewilding design.



Figure 10: Franklin, Kimberley. *Peek-a-boo Garters*. 2021. Wellington, New Zealand. Photograph.

How do you rewild design? A design theory.

How do you rewild design? Payne has further developed the rewilding theory in her recent book 'Designing Fashion's Future: Present Practice and Tactics for Sustainable Change'. Payne stipulates rewilding as a critical design method. Critical design is often used to stimulate questions and encourage theoretical challenge to our everyday lives. However, Payne assimilates critical design with 'meta-design'. Meta-Design includes a process of three pathways: 'Re-design', 'Reconfigure' and/or 'Reinvent' (Payne, 164). Although Payne does not define these new methodological terms, she notes the importance of these possible pathways through the idea of interaction design. As designers of fashion and dress, perhaps we forget that we are not only designing clothing to be worn for aesthetic appeal or functionality. Rather, we are designing the interaction we have not only with fashion and dress, but also between ourselves and the world we live in. In essence, to rewild fashion design appears to push designers to design for interaction with the intention of decentering the perpetual ego creation cycle we have in fashion today. Through designing for interaction rather than the product design itself, I hope we forge more meaningful relationships with fashion. I hope that in thinking this way we understand the intention behind our design actions, that we are not purely just creating for the sake of creating but are actually designing a way of living. That as designers we are acknowledging the subjective human and that our lived experiences are key to our relationship with dress given how closely these interact. I hope that fashion and dress becomes understood as this interaction, a thing-power, and not just as a material product.

It is important to analyse the work of the designers who have influenced me and have helped to cement my understanding of what a rewilding re-design methodology might look like creatively. Alexander McQueen's Spring 2010 collection, 'Plato' is an examination of the posthuman form and manifests fashion's power for adapting and evolving the human form. Scry Lab is wholly 3D printed footwear, labelled as a 'digital embryo'. And lastly, artist Nicole McLaughlin upcycles forgotten things from our daily lives into something humorously functional. These three key designers with their specific works have been chosen and are discussed below.

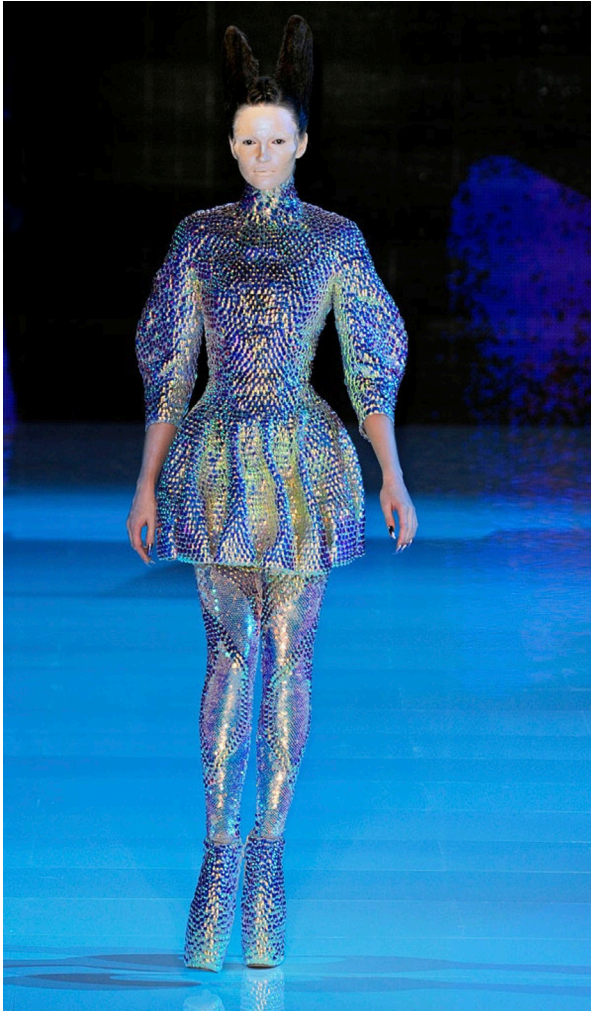


Figure 11: Maderia, Marcio. *Alexander McQueen Spring 2010 Ready-to-Wear, Look 45*. 2009. <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2010-ready-to-wear/alexander-mcqueen/slideshow/collection#45>. Photograph.



Figure 12: Maderia, Marcio. *Alexander McQueen Spring 2010 Ready-to-Wear, Details Look 1*. 2009. <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2010-ready-to-wear/alexander-mcqueen/slideshow/collection..> Photograph.

Alexander McQueen

Alexander McQueen's Spring 2010 RTW collection 'Plato' served as an imaginative manifestation of Atlantis in the present day through fashion as a means of adapting and evolving the human form.; "a people to come or, perhaps, a people long gone" (Seely, 247). There is a clear path of transformation throughout the collection masterfully playing out McQueen's envisioning of human evolution's exciting future. It was the footwear design that truly charmed my aesthetic conscience. The footwear is certainly a rewilding design, but more on a theoretical level. The footwear exudes posthuman intricacies that transform or perhaps adapt the human wearing the footwear. Perhaps I would not even call this footwear but instead a prostheses. The human wearing the prostheses is transported through the aesthetic of the entire look to become something else entirely but still recognisable. This post-human celebration of creativity exposes an evolving of the human within the natural world. An understanding of humans as not divine but together on earth, with a planet full of life. The foot or entire leg becomes like an armadillo (what the design was inspired by). The animal evolves the human and in turn inspires an ambiguity into humanness itself.

I adore this design and have taken this inspiration on board in my own design work, particularly taking note on how the foot might sit within the footwear, can this be challenged and still wearable? With this design the human wearer would become more conscious of the post-human adaptation as the prostheses leaves the lower leg and foot completely unrecognisable and perhaps would feel evolved within their lived experiences. Yet, when thinking about rewilding through re-design, I wonder how different the human wearer may feel, would they act differently with the world? How would or could they act in different ways? Would they feel different or evolved at all? These are questions I will continue to ponder, pose and explore through my own design works.

SCRY-lab technically is the epitome of a 'taming' design process and outcome. After years of research and development, the 'digital embryo' was created as a wholly 3D printed footwear that wipes clean the making processes leaving little to no waste at all. It is a pioneering design philosophy, executed to perfection aesthetically. Again I would consider this footwear more so a prostheses rather than footwear as the design seems to mould into the foot, appearing as an extension of the human wearer.

Is this a rewilding re-design? No, I would not consider this rewilding, rather it sits firmly within the taming narrative. The design is aesthetically driven, and if I was the human wearer I would not expect my mindset would change. I would expect this footwear to serve my lived experience and not help me question my humanness at all. I would consider my design aesthetic to be transformed however; the design appears so futuristic to me, I would feel excited and challenged to live a more technology driven life. I do expect that in the current system of fashion we will see more technologies like this creating products and objects for the human experience, rather than adapting to a hybrid human design focus. Why might this happen? I believe that this future may be most likely to happen given the consolidating of the design process and lack of waste output that makes this future completely viable.

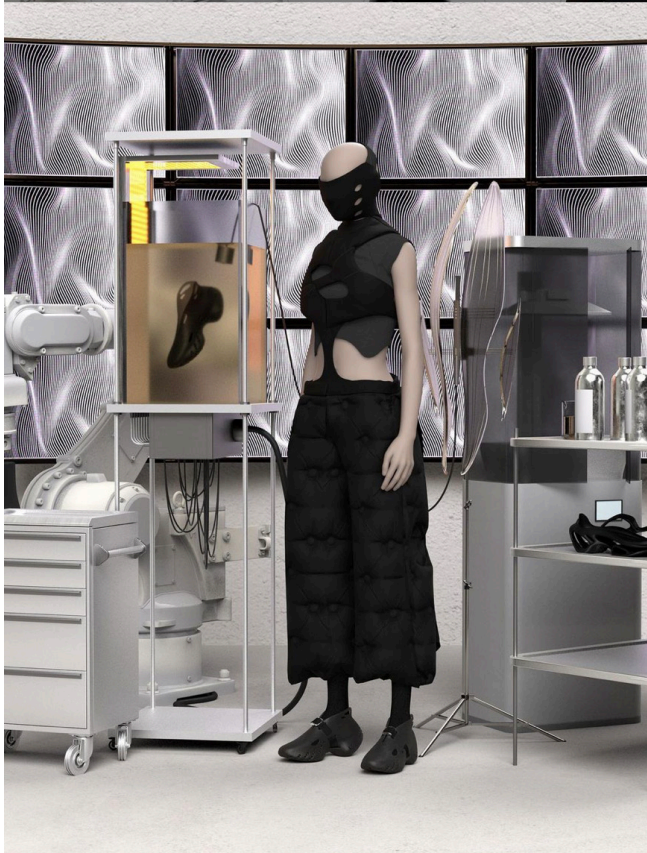


Figure 13: Lab, Scry. *CORE* aims to return to the original form of all complex evolution, simple and appropriate. 2021. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CQ3MbcjV34/>. Footwear Prototype.



Figure 14: Lab, Scry. @nuage_celeste_4 #scrylab. 2021. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CLHbw9rp0gW/>. Footwear Prototype.



Figure 15: McLaughlin, Nicole. *some of y'all need this*. 2019. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B6bCrICFvdE/>.
Footwear Prototype.



Figure 16: McLaughlin, Nicole. *all packed up with nowhere to go*. 2020. https://www.instagram.com/p/B_FozSJDZSX/.
Footwear Prototype.

Nicole McLaughlin

Nicole McLaughlin is an US based artist who enchants her followers with upcycled- reworked garments that challenge conceptions of what it is to upcycle. I am inspired by her reworking of footwear, which is somewhat humorous in the application of design. The multi-function aspect of the design is flawless in that there is a lasting engagement and nostalgia that establishes an in depth relationship between the human wearer and footwear or actor and actant. Her use of upcycling uncovers lost items that I and many others, recognise from our childhoods and McLaughlin alters them into a garment for the human body that is completely ambiguous. This footwear multi-function is an assemblage of the lived experience. McLaughlin's work appears to challenge the human experience by bringing attention to our lower legs and feet and offers familiarity that appears to be a holistic approach to humanness. Although I am unsure if that is her approach, this is how I have come to analyse her creations.

Is this rewilding? Yes definitely I would argue McLaughlin takes onboard a rewilding design process. Expansive materials are up-cycled into fresh designs that are purely ambiguous and rewilding in design. Although this may come from a different concept/ theory for McLaughlin, her work transcends those ideas into a rewilding context too. I am hugely inspired by McLaughlin's designs, particularly this idea of multi-function and ambiguity in design, as this is what a re-design rewilding philosophy is all about. The current industrial design processes do not accurately reflect or analyse the possibility of the human experience and so solely focus on aesthetics within minimal function.

I am determined to embark on a re-design philosophy. A design theory.

For my project's creative design component, I am determined to embark on a 'Re-Design' philosophy. I have chosen to understand re-design as taking an existing 'thing' and challenging the design process to create something that ideally performs similarly, or to the ideal standard of the designer, than the original tool. In doing so, I aspire to create a sense of ambiguity about the original tool. All aspects of design are considered, above all interaction and aesthetics. In my project, I hope to successfully re-design as a means of creatively understanding critical theory and to perceive any impact to human lived experiences as a method of evolving the human. This involves greater nonhuman-centric interaction in which everything is understood to be invested with life and as humans we are just one amongst many. An open hybrid spectrum of being and becoming are all mutually accessible.

To pursue this creative design pathway, I have embarked on a practise-led design method informed by autoethnographic understanding. I have also chosen the key critical design concepts of ambiguity and associative design as conversed throughout the design guide: *Critical Design in Context*, written by Max Malpass. Ambiguity means to design with intention for more than one interpretation and associative design involves the subversion of expectations and interaction with ordinary, everyday product design (Malpass, 63, 92). The design is reliant on a user's familiarity with the pre-intervened object in design. I believe these key design concepts will help me to creatively explore what it means to rewild and to re-design for a positive future through the lens of footwear.

So what is footwear?

Footwear is a type of body modification that encases the foot for protection. Often footwear eases our human movements. But what would subvert the general knowledge of footwear? What are the key elements that make up footwear? A sole piece, an internal shaped sock piece and the aesthetic design of the footwear. What would happen if you compartmentalised these three ideals into separate pieces. How could this change our interaction with footwear, our understanding of footwear? How can this be designed to rely on a participant's familiarity? Does this open up footwear for further interpretation?

Sole:

What is a sole? A footwear sole in my understanding is the actant foundation which is situated between the bottom of the human foot and external grounding. In looking at my feet for many hours, and given the vast time I spend on my feet weekly, I began to question, the ball of the foot/ toes and the ankle are in some respects the only skin to touch the ground. So why does my current footwear extend a fully flat surface? It is understood that this is for protection and important for many people who may struggle with their feet and may need extra support. As much as I detest being in bare feet, I lose so much natural movement when I put on my boots. And how do I become a hybrid being if I am shutting myself away in boots or non-malleable footwear. In questioning all this I embarked on a sole creation journey that I have no idea how to put into words how amazing it was. To view a video snapshot of my design process, please [visit this link](#). The next stage in this practise-led design making would be to 3D model the actants and then mirror each to create left foot design. Then to 3D print each model to create a final mold which can be used to create the next stage prototypes. Following with extensive ritualised wearing to further understand the lived experience through these footwears.

The right foot sole piece that has been created and lived through, emulates more natural human foot movement while still creating a protective surface to the ball/ toes and ankle areas. The original idea was that the sole would be a small foundation that tucked itself under the foot. However when trialed this did not appear or feel successful and rather tripped me up on more than one occasion. It felt necessary to lift the sole specifically around the toes to stop this dragging. The sole was also lifted around the ankle in order to secure the outside of the ankle and to allow for the elastic velcro straps.

The separation of the sole creates agency as a system in which we begin to understand the impact the sole foundation has to our lived experience and not as a mass made product. In this system there could be multiple different designed soles that each specify or engender a different lived experience and the soles could be worn together or separately. This requires active decision making to modify our lived experiences in the choosing of which sole to wear and where to wear it. We could become hybrid as we become further in tune with the world around us. In a perfect world I would have completed a right and left foundation actant, however given this area of design expertise is a completely new venture, it is appropriate to leave the technical learning experience open and highlight this creative activity as an expression of design theory.



Figure 17: Franklin, Kimberley. *Hybrid sole with elastic straps*. 2021. Footwear Prototype.

Sock:

The sock actant is the centre piece of this system. It is designed to be a hugging compression-like actant that creates support to the arch and ankle of the foot. In a perfect world these socks would be knitted given the internal seams that are bothersome. I have created three pairs of socks from different knit materials in hopes of being a breathable comforting actant to the lived experience. Putting on the sock normalises and familiarises this experience and ideally comforts the foot to gently challenge the past lived experiences.



Figure 18: Franklin, Kimberley. *Sock Actant*. 2021. Sock Prototype.

Overshoe:

What I have called an overshoe over the past months constitutes an actant of aesthetic extension of fashion. The overshoe is not limited to any design, function, colour, or print but is rather an ambiguous piece of thing power. Why can't my feet have frills? Why can't my feet have pockets? The overshoe elaborates on the blank space we leave open at our lower leg, compartmentalising further dress we may wear. Perhaps not the most functional of ideas, it is certainly plausible. The overshoe enhances the lived experience and elaborates on hybrid human ideology by acknowledging further than functional design. Say I wore flared trousers and chose to wear pocket garters on one leg, not only would I now have a pocket at my ankle, but I would feel layered. I would feel more-than-human, the garters introduce a new concept to my being, they bring their own 'thing-power', they might make me walk and feel the air around my legs in a different way than my other shoes. My lived experience, and in turn the garters entangled each other. Where would the garter end and my being begin? A question not worth answering in my opinion as this entanglement exudes the embodiment of pursuing a hybrid being future. Each experience is individual, a collective choice between human and the unwavering support of 'thing power' that exudes from the design. No matter when or where, 'thing power' continues to live and manifest in our surroundings. Perhaps as an aesthetic choice for future hybrid humans, instead of matching the shoes with the handbag or other incessant aesthetic ideas. Perhaps the idea could be to match your overshoe actant to your digitally printed garment, biodegradable dress and the grass you walk on.

I have designed three overshoe actants: linen pocket garters, frilly shin-pads, and a shearling slipper. These initial designs are inspired by current functional actants we have access to in our lives today.



The linen pocket garters are elasticated at the top, ideally sitting just below the human knee. There is a zip closed pocket and a triangle slip pocket to highlight the blank space surrounding the lower leg. The garters were inspired by wet-weather camping garters that keep your feet and lower legs dry whilst tramping.

Figure 19: Franklin, Kimberley. *Pocket Garters*. 2021. Overshoe Prototype.

The frilly shin-pads were influenced by active shin-pads one might use for protection in sports, except designed for an aesthetic touch. The initial thought was a play on this idea of protection through a familiar look but in execution being ambiguous. Why can't there be frills on my shins?



Figure 20: Franklin, Kimberley. *Frilly shin-pads*. 2021. Overshoe Prototype.



Figure 21: Franklin, Kimberley. *Shearling Slippers*. 2021. Overshoe Prototype.

The shearling slipper is almost a sock piece except with a beautiful soft lamb leather shearling outside and internal to the sock. The internal shearling sits at the ankle and toes for a soft slipper-like feel contrasting to the initial idea of hardness of footwear. The ambiguous nature of the design is almost animalistic, hopefully transporting the human wearer to a space of hybridity.



Figure 22: Franklin, Kimberley. *Creaturely shearling hybrid sole*. 2021. Footwear Prototype.



Figure 23: Franklin, Kimberley. *Bendable hybrid sole*. 2021. Footwear Prototype.

Reflection

Wearing this ambiguous, disrupting design is unlike any footwear I have worn before. Perhaps I am biased. My foot sits tight within the sock. My foot glides into the foundation soles and sits securely strapped in a criss cross pattern on top of my foot. The soles have my toe imprint into the bottom and we merge as one together. Wearing the sock and sole tends to tick the boxes of what I might feel in my boots. While the separation of the soles and the breathability of the sock leave me feeling at peace. I feel protected, secure, yet free, open. I am not gripping, I am not stomping, I am gliding, I am skipping, we are entangled. Then when I put on the overshoe with the sole and sock, our entanglement gains further complexity. We are a conjunction of things. Although hybridity aims to resolve antagonism of the human form. I argue this conjunction in actuality antagonises the visual of what we know to be footwear. Our entanglement has been worn throughout the university campus, at our home and to my family's home. My mother created her own entanglement and understood the process of three actants together was an experience she had not had. She felt more intune with herself, as it wasn't this grab and go idea. But she took the time to put on the sock and then the shearling slipper and then sole which she tightened to her desirable tension. She was reminded of the individual 'thing power' each piece brings to our being. The physical assembling of the pieces on to her humanity, requires understanding and a holistic point of view to live the day through the vestments. The gap in the soles give my human foot openness. I do not feel tied down, stomping around. I glide through the steps. I feel at one with these pieces and with the ground I walk on.

A passage from Peter Wohlleben's beautiful book *The Secret Network of Nature* helps me to reflect on my research and design outcomes. "Instead of debating my ideas, however, most critics from the world of forestry took a different approach. The language I used was too emotional, they said. I described trees and animals in such a way as to make them seem human, and that wasn't scientifically correct". (Wohlleben, 251). As humans we have an incessant need to be seen as the top of the food chain, as much as this may be scientifically correct. How we live through the world does not need to reflect this fact. We are a single being amongst a whole planet of life. If it is taboo to see the humanity in nature, to empathically give voice to nature as companions, then how can posthuman forms of hybridity, 'thing power' and anthropomorphising be welcomed? Then there is no value for my own research in this world. However, this will not stop my own pursuit of hybridity. The next decade will be a time of change, we must be open to this change, we must challenge inequality, champion those who cannot fight for themselves, protect our natural environments, search for the hybrid spectrum, search for the lost wilderness of rewilding in nature and design. We must search for the hybrid spectrum in rewilding design through fashion and dress to evolve our humanity.



Figure 24: Franklin, Kimberley. *My boots and Hybrid Conjunction*. 2021. Overshoe Prototype.

Conclusion

It has been an exhilarating year of exploration. My final creative design outcomes are nothing I would have developed had it not been for the year of dedicated research. Although I must stress, I never set out to create any finalised outcome, I am extremely proud of what creation has been born. I set out to build my passion for fashion and design and have found myself again thoroughly enjoying the exploration and critical thinking. I feel this design application and methodology is only at the beginning of what could be achieved. I declare this adventure is not over but only at the start of what I assume may be a lifelong journey.

This modular footwear challenges our conceptions of footwear and attempts to make us think of how our footwear shapes our life. As in ANT, as actors, to pursue a future of fashion we must consider developing further relationships with the actants that so humbly affect our lives. We must realise their vital materiality and create a shared status of being. Finding a rewilding 're-design' method is paramount. For as designers we must continue to ask ourselves, how can we create/ design for lives of the future, how can we create engagement, how can we create further relationships for positive future development. As the humans we are today, evolution and technological innovation are going to be at the forefront and I believe it is necessary to include fashion design within this innovation for evolution. There are plenty of material developments for further sustainable materials but what about the actual design, how can we design better, how can we design for further human life? I feel this research could play a helpful part in at least asking these questions and I feel this could be pursued as further study or perhaps a PhD project.

Like my Mother and her wheelchair I hope to emulate this relationship within my design work. My mother's life has depended on her chair. It has taken an equal partnership between my mother and her chair to live a life more positive than without the chair. Our family Cat, Smudge, has also adored my mother's chair, often competing with my mother for a share of the chair and often claims the chair when my mother may not be using it. Smudge too, sees the value of shared lived experience through actor and actant. I do, however, hope that my mother sees the value of my research and how endlessly I am inspired by her strength. I hope that she even tries on my footwear design. As I love all members of my family, I hope my mother realises that as much as she has been in pain for so long, her journey has not been in vain. Out of our struggles as a family we have a unique perspective and experience that I believe has potential to be helpful for our futures as humans. I wish to thank my mother for always believing in me and to my father too for his belief and giving me the greatest gift of life. I hope to engage with this life to the best of my ability and to one day become a hybrid being.



Figure 25: Franklin, Wendy. *Hybrid footwear, smudge, wheelchair and mum*. 2021. Footwear Prototype.

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