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THAT SUIT IS HER; REDOING  
SUITABLE STYLES TO SUBVERT  
FEMININE IDENTITIES IN THE  
PROFESSIONAL WORKPLACE

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**Masters of Design In Fashion**

at Massey University Wellington New Zealand

**Claire Hacon 2011**

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ABSTRACT  
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The homogeneous western business suit typically worn by female professionals is, I would argue, disempowering because it functions as a reductive version of male power dressing and denies its wearer any opportunity to express her individuality. This practice-led research project has involved re-figuring the woman's business suit. This suit type been interrogated, analysed and reflected upon; this activity has formed a significant part of the research study. As tailoring is the central discipline of my practice, I utilise these skills to offer women multiple suit forms to challenge stereotypes of feminine representation in professional organisations.

My project is situated within the context of research from the perspective of the fashion practitioner and utilises conceptually-led design methods (Bugg, 2006, p. 2). A multi-method approach has been taken to interrogate the design practice and this includes the application of different pattern-making and tailoring methods to various suit studies and the analysis of wearers and viewers responses to these suits.



SETTING  
THE  
SCENE





**OPPOSITE**

Figure 2 Claire Hacon's Titled # 'Kiss my be-suited arse' from her Suit Series. Photographer Olivia Claire Taylor shows a range of self-transformations wearing Hacon's reconstructed women's business suits. Hacon's suits offer the wearer and viewers an unlimited amount of readings.

**ABOVE**

Figure 1. Cindy Sherman's Untitled #122 from her Fashion Series that shows a range of self-transformations. Sherman reconstructs various characters that are very stereotypical, femininity is deconstructed by way of presenting recreations of archetypes of fashion models, house wives or career women. Sherman's images offer viewers an unlimited amount of readings (Buikema & van der Tuin, 2007, p. 151).

*Since the mainstream feminine mode [the suit] is the adult female version of the male suit, its brand of sexuality is similarly adult and essentially self respecting, rather than exuberant, boastful, infantile or perverse. Its eroticism is unfailingly discreet, and it is therefore inescapably respectful. Consequently this mainstream modern mode for women has lost a certain public éclat, especially in the fashion press, which must uphold the subversive element in fashion, and seek to praise the forms of novelty that seem reliably disruptive and playful. Modern classic simplicity can appear to betray the present spirit of extreme free expression for all, in all contexts; but the tailored, discreet mode for both sexes is visibly holding its own without the need of fanfare. In the Haute Couture it remains a constant challenge for the best creative talent* (Hollander, 1994, p. 114).

This project follows on from my graduate collection of strictly tailored garments that the models said made them feel empowered and confident on the catwalk. I have always been interested in how clothes affect how the body behaves and moves. They for example make us feel empowered, restricted, sensual, vulnerable, fat or thin, and this idea of the garments being ego-supporting was very interesting. Clothing is not only a symbolic non-verbal form of communication but can be expressive of the emotions we feel (Tombs, 2010 ). I became more interested in this idea after reading *Morality and Fashion* by Dirk Lauwaert (2006). He describes visiting a luxury clothes shop and trying on a three piece suit that “fits like a glove right away-an extraordinary revelation. Immediately you start moving differently; you sense the suit changes something really important, namely the relationship between your body and space...your movements become less effortless, at once more conscious and elegant, and you occupy more territorial space, with more grace. Just like dance music, the suit tempts you to make movements, movements that define space” (Lauwaert, 2006, pp.

16-17). Lauwaert goes on to explain this elegance the suit makes him feel is felt from within and this is more important than its affirmation from the gaze of others. This self experience he links to the tactile moment of the clothing, “how the suit makes me feel and be felt” (2006, p. 17). The way clothing makes you feel yourself he describes as autoerotic. I liked this idea of our eroticism being determined by clothing very much and decided to explore the idea of auto-erotic suits. My interpretation of this began with the idea that structural armour-like, floaty, furry, slippery, gaping, restricted suits could empower their wearers by making them literally feel themselves and not just sexually but anything they desired; confident, provoking, informing, divided, enveloped, extended, confronting and so on.

The first six suits in the concept development series emphasised external structure. I created some weird forms by breaking traditional tailoring rules, and this produced new shapes that could not only create different body shapes but affect the wearer’s movements in some way.

I started making suits, shape-inventive suits using intriguing tailoring methods, reinventing and redefining traditional suit forms. This goes against the principles of tailoring because the whole essence of tailoring is to tailor to the body. I did not allow the body’s silhouette to dictate the shape as you would with traditional tailoring methods. Instead I took these methods and combined them with shapes and elements gleaned from current fashions, to come up with new suit designs. I also experimented with using fabric types not usually associated with traditional tailoring. It is very difficult to reduce this to written text and I wish there was another way to represent the complexities of this very hands-on process. This juxtaposition of varying shapes and fabrics, for example contrasting transparency and heavy weight fabrics to build up different effects, not only signals different messages but different “felt self” experiences. By putting together a suit with lots of different unexpected components, the experience of the final suit, though prescribed in a sense by me as the designer, is still very much the prerogative of the wearer. My suits are merely a suggestion of the possibilities. For the next six suits rather than reworking tailoring traditions of ‘outside in’ I decided to try ‘inside out’. These suits were exactly the same externally but internally offered the possibility of communicating to the wearer in some way. These suits were driven by an inherent awareness of how the body would experience the garments on the flesh; I was after a sensual response. Like most dressmakers, I always have the body in mind when making and creating details and silhouettes but for this project I dramatically changed

OPPOSITE

Figure 4. Suit Series Titled#  
Suitable-shelter.  
Photographer Olivia Claire Taylor.  
Author’s own (2010)





**TOP**

Figure 3. Author's Graduate collection Fashioning the Doll (2007)

**BOTTOM**

Figure 5. Suit Series  
Titled# Quilted phallic-suit.  
Photographer Olivia Claire Taylor.  
Author's own (2010)



the shape from the body and exaggerated proportions and details because I wanted to exact some unusual body and mind experiences. These internal details were not visible to the viewer and I wondered if they would make the wearer communicate their response in some way.

The external and internally reworked suits worked well as experiments. The jacket shapes dictated various movements and the linings produced felt-self narratives. Though this was very interesting the work seemed rather banal and trivial, nor did it constitute substantial or meaningful research. At this stage I had read only general fashion theory and concepts, nothing specific to suits.

I realised that I needed to research the suit, and discovered it is a remarkable phenomenon especially when looked at within the broader context of social change and sexual differentiation (de Kuyper, 2006, p. 113). Anne Hollander, in *Sex and Suits* not only outlines the evolution of the suit but exemplifies its role in contrasting the ways men and women use clothing to express their sexual identity and values. I reviewed a substantial body of literature that covered the business suit and more particularly how the suit acts as a symbolic garment that communicates meanings about our identity and social relationships in the professional workplace. Women entered the professional workplace in increasing numbers in the 70s and adopted the male suit to armour themselves in what was essentially a hostile male environment. This form of dress was prescribed in dress manuals such as *Dress for Success* to help women assimilate into the male working environment. It was very prescriptive and essentially meant women had to walk a tightrope as far as their dress and appearance was concerned. They were not allowed to appear too masculine because this would threaten their male colleagues, and not to appear too feminine as this could lead to discrimination. Many women dressed in this plain way to minimize their sexuality, practically making themselves invisible in skirted suits in subdued colours. This covering up or assimilation however has not helped women climb the corporate ladder in numbers anywhere near those of men (Siegel, 2009, p. 179).

I agree with Jane Siegal in her article *It's not about the clothes* (2009, p. 144), in that it should not matter what a women wears to work and that "We have become obsessed with what women wear and we become even more obsessed the closer women get to power whether it is political, corporate financial and so on this is bad for women because every time we

talk about a woman's appearance we are not talking about her brains talents beliefs or what she does in the world". Just think Helen Clark's trousers, Hilary Clinton's pants suits and Michelle Obama's bare arms. "To focus on women's appearance is to diminish her substance, it reduces her to an object to be decorated"(2009, p. 144).

*"History has repeatedly shown us that radical thinking threatens established hierarchies, synthesizes into new ideas that challenge complacent traditions, and ultimately is accepted into mainstream ideologies"(English, 2007)*

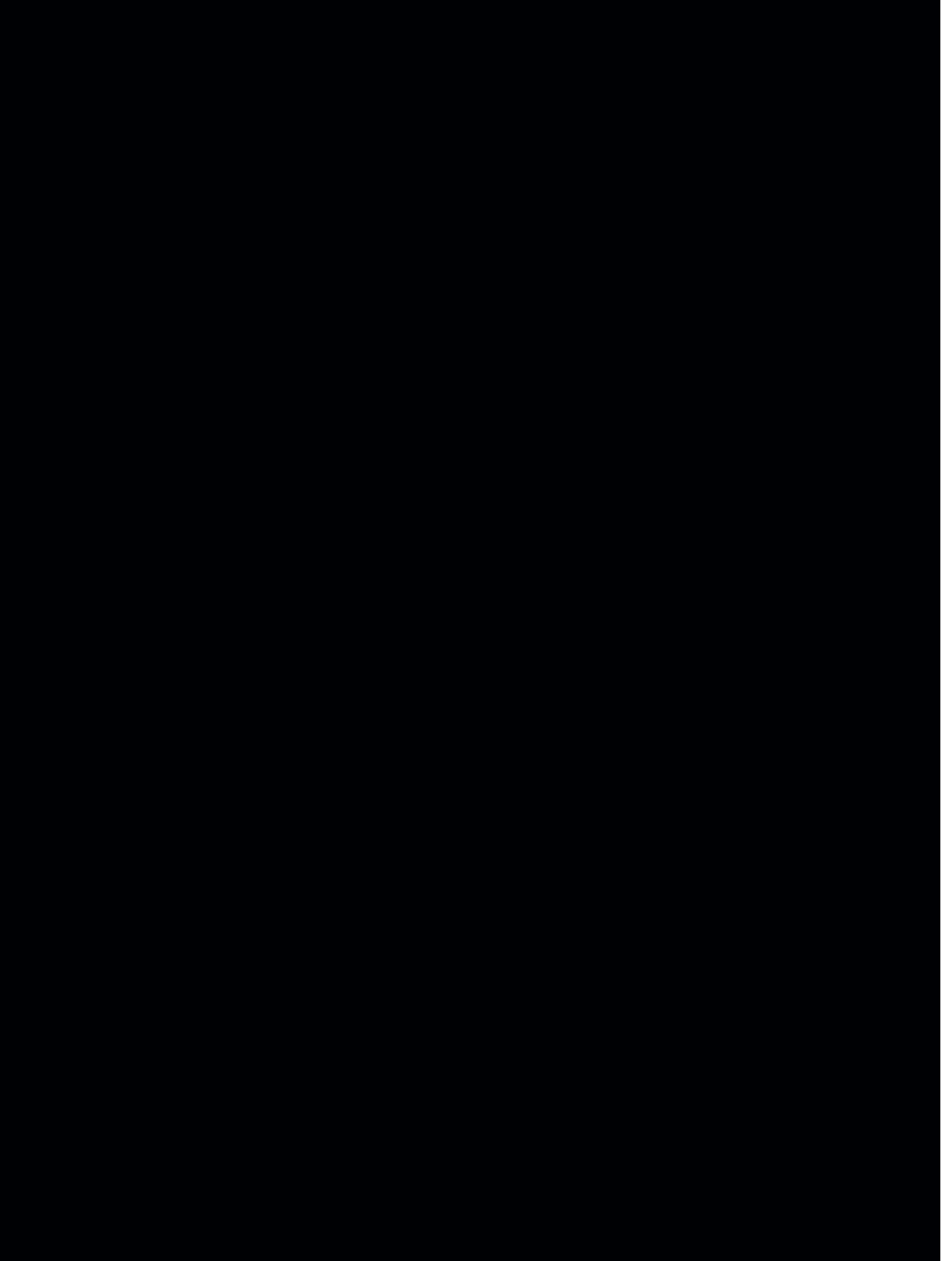
OPPOSITE

Figure 6. Suit Series Titled# Multiple fem-suit. Photographer Olivia Claire Taylor. Author's own (2010)

Bonnie English wrote this about fashion and I think it could easily be applied to my suits being used as an oppositional strategy to challenge conventional gender roles and representation in the professional workplace. Dress and appearance is still a significant workplace issue when it comes to a women's autonomy and it has equality implications. This presents me with a conundrum because on the one hand I am saying clothing should not matter and that women should wear clothes that better suit their own values and tastes. In other words we should minimize the importance of women's appearance and maximize their diversity, talents and skills. On the other hand I am saying my unconventional suits communicate meanings and identity, and what it means to perform, and behave in certain ways depends on the clothes you wear. I am in a sense reinforcing the importance of dress and appearance as a basis for judging individuals and constraining women.

My rationale is that ultimately we all have to wear clothes and that it is possible to have it both ways i.e. to retain the creative, subversive potential of dress without at the same time strengthening its potential to oppress. The final collection of conceptually led suits make strange the usual codes of the professional business style, inducing playfulness in the fact they are still recognisable as suits but disturbing, uncanny, ironic and interrogative, and this game has the potential to undo the usual power processes in professional organisations. My approach, in designing these suits as strategies for the elimination of oppressive gender-role expectations, is to accept that social meanings and signs are present already in the suit and that rather than trying to eliminate them I am trying to re-invent and improve them. If the suits are about playfulness, imagination and creativity they could be a way to remove the oppressive power of workplace dress and to stop sex-based stereotypes being applied to women and their appearance in that workplace, with the subsequent discrimination that that brings.





# RESEARCH DESIGN



**OPPOSITE**

Figure 7. Suit Series Titled# Flying-suit Photographer Olivia Claire Taylor, Author's own (2010)

**ABOVE**

Figure 9. Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons Fall 2010 (Mower, 2010)

As I am a practicing dressmaker my research draws on experiential, haptic and tacit knowledge as part of the process of my making. My methodology also includes using a range of technical skills including pattern making and tailoring and manipulating of design principles to achieve the design outcomes. These skills, particularly tailoring, have their own codes, conventions and complex histories which I have needed knowledge of especially when it came to subverting the social codes inherent in the suit. Joanne Entwistle asserts that as bodies are dressed the experience of embodiment is almost always mediated through clothes (Entwistle, 2000). My suits are therefore an example of the potential for variations of experience of the clothed body and they in turn could suggest a certain sense of action or performativity.

One of the first problems I encountered in my project was how to remove my own preconceptions of the communicative potential of my suits. Early in the research process, I organized a fashion shoot of some of my suits. When I presented these images for critique, it was pointed out that the photography was not doing what I had expected it to, because the images were conforming to the fashion conventions which re-present the dressed body as objects of the male gaze.

Because of this I have collaborated with performance designer Sascha Perfect and photographer Olivia Taylor for this project. The role of Sascha and Olivia within each suit study and their input into the development and communication of the work has been central to this project. Olivia Taylor took on the role of photographer and recorded her own performance. This was done for several reasons, one being to remove any issues that related to the effect of the male gaze of a photographer and also to eliminate the issues of being watched. Olivia elected to photograph herself wearing and performing the suits. This method was informed by Cindy Sherman's work where she records herself staging various reconstructions of stereotypical feminine identities such as the archetypal fashion model, housewife and career women. Sherman's transformations of self-image are disturbing in that they unsettle our beliefs in the social structures that construct feminine identity (Buikema & van der Tuin, 2007, p. 151). I did not direct Olivia's photography, or make her aware of the suits intentions in any way. Sascha Perfect is a performance artist who I filmed wearing and responding to the suits. This allowed me to test the suits on the body in movement and record how she responded to them physically and emotionally. Once again I did not dictate or direct her responses at any point and this allowed me to



objectively investigate the relationship between my design intentions and her interpretation of the suits.

Clothing has the ability to change and restructure the human form, affect the way a body behaves and move and change the way bodies are perceived (Bugg, 2006, p. 25). Clothing can be employed to alter or define a silhouette to physiologically and psychologically increase a feeling of control, power and status. There are many examples of clothing used to restrict movement, alter behaviour or to meet specific cultural aesthetic standards. Crinolines in the Victorian era significantly altered the dimensional elements of the body and corseting in the 17th and 18th centuries to achieve the ideal 'S' bend shape. The Mantua skirt shape of the early 18th century changed the shape and the physical behaviour of women; it was difficult to sit and the huge skirts altered the way wearers walked. In the Renaissance garments were padded, layered and oversized to increase the sense of spectacle. Clothing affects our physical behaviour and the perception of our bodies; it also has the ability to transform bodies. Vivienne Westwood's bondage trousers of the 1970s connected the legs of the wearer to create a more restrictive stance. High heel shoes alter the stance of their wearers, projecting the bust and backside outwards thus altering the wearer's walk (Bugg, 2009 ; Koda, 2001).



Jessica Bugg is a fashion designer who works at the interface of fashion, fine art and performance disciplines. Bugg's work is particularly informative with regard to the reading of clothing-based work in different contexts; she states that understanding the body and clothing is a complicated process which is mediated through emotional responses and personal understandings of the body and clothing. She has undertaken some remarkable practice based work where she has analysed the responses from both wearers and viewers of her concept based fashion designs in various context scenarios (Bugg, 2006). For example Bugg's (2009 p. 18)

*Toothpick Spine* and *Shoelace Bustle* garment was designed to enhance or encourage particular movement or behaviour and her *Red Shoelace Dress* explored the potential of weight in garments to encourage movement on the part of the wearer (Bugg, 2009 p. 19).

These examples of clothing restricting or emphasising movement informed the development of the 'Structure' series which have been created to alter or exaggerate behaviour. These suits integrate clothing structure and body movement to explore the way that clothing can affect the dimensions and aesthetic of the body and its potential for communication. To begin with I sourced imagery of forms that had the potential to emphasise given movements. These ideas were sketched out in Adobe Illustrator by cutting and pasting various extensions and shapes onto the basic suit shape. Sources included silhouettes from historical, theatrical and dance costume. I was also inspired by the innovative pattern making ideas from *Pattern Magic* where Tomoko Nakamichi offers many unusual ways to cut a pattern to create unique sculpting shapes (Nakamichi, 2005 2007).

My research also looked at designers such as Hussein Chalayan, Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons and Martin Margiela who work conceptually with structure. These designers are very original in their approach to garment construction and particularly in the way they combine conceptual influences with their concern for shape and form. For instance Martin Margiela designed a collection of oversized garments which his models performed on top of oversized tables. His audience were positioned at a lower vantage point thus challenging their perception of self importance (Duggan, 2001). Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons has also designed collections that focus on form. Her Fall 2010 collection consisted of pillow form outcrops of padding placed on the shoulders, hips, backs and bodices of garments. Like her "lumps and bumps" collection of Spring 1997 they completely distort normal patterns of garment structures on the body. In this collection Rei Kawakubo also defies conventional notions of the female body and adds bulk to all the places that fashion generally tries to flatter (Duggan, 2001; Mower, 2010). These designers have articulated the female body in different ways and their designs have challenged culturally determined ideas about how the female body should look (Evans & Thornton, 1989, p. 154). Their work has directly influenced my project in that I am also moved to use different garment structures to challenge people to look at business suits and the female body in a way that challenges convention.

#### OPPOSITE TOP

Figure 8. *Toothpick Spine* and *Shoelace Bustle*, J. Bugg, 2005. Photographer: Roy Shakespeare. Seen here in performance for the final shoot, 2006 (Bugg, 2009 p. 26)

#### OPPOSITE LEFT

Figure 10. Maison Martin Margiela. Sleeveless Jacket of a Two-piece Suit, enlarged 148 per cent, March 2000 with protective white-silk paper | Autumn/Winter 2000-01. Art Direction: Maison Martin Margiela | Photo: Marina Faust | First published in *The Fashion* (Koda, 2001, p. 109).



CONCEPTUAL  
DEVELOPMENT  
**SUIT SERIES**



ABOVE  
Figure 13. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Flying-  
suit'. Author's own (2010)

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

SUIT SERIES  
TITLED#  
FLYING-SUIT



The following series of suits are part of an earlier phase in my design concept development. They were about building on the structural qualities of given garment shapes and the way they enhance a sense of wanting to move in a certain way. For 'Flying-suit' I looked at Oskar Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet* costumes. By studying the dimensional effects of clothing in this ballet I was able to explore how clothing can function with body movement. Dance costumes can also be designed to accentuate body movement and behaviour. With this in mind I decided to apply the saucer shapes from the *Triadic Ballet* costumes to the base of the business suit jacket. I simply drew a large circle base section, divided it into four with the two front sections taking up more of the diameter than the back sections. I then measured these curves and fanned the front and back jacket sections to match (Nakamichi, 2007, pp. 26-27). The base was double fused and a wide bound opening made for entry. Olivia responded to the sensory properties of the stiff based suit and how it tilts up and down and side to side much the same as a tutu. The base is difficult to control; it appears to have a mind of its own and flips independently to the rest of the suit. Olivia demonstrated a strong physical response particularly in the lower half of her body and this one encouraged her to leap and fly. The physicality of Olivia's performance is realised by this suit's form and shape. Her emotional and physical responses are central to understanding my concepts. The suit is conceived around concepts of workplace visibility and performance and this is realised in its physical manifestation.

#### OPPOSITE

Figure 14. Photographer Olivia Claire Taylor performing 'Flying-suit'. Author's own (2010)

#### RIGHT

Figure 11. Costumes for the *Triadic Ballet* (Gropius & Wensinger, 1996 p. 46)

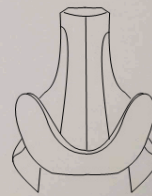
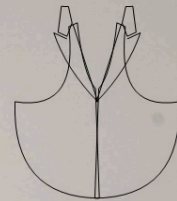
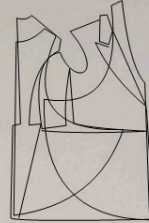
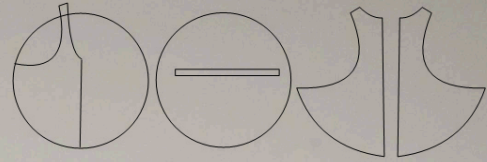


**BELOW AND OPPOSITE**

Figures 15-16. Photographer Olivia Claire Taylor performing 'Flying-suit'. Author's own (2010)

**RIGHT**

Pattern development and working drawings for "Flying-suit". Author's own (2010)





BELOW

Figure 17. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Distorted  
suit+body'. Author's own (2010)



CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

SUIT SERIES  
TITLED#  
DISTORTED  
SUIT-BODY





**OPPOSITE**

Figure 20. Photographer Olivia Claire Taylor performing 'Distorted suit-body'. Author's own (2010)

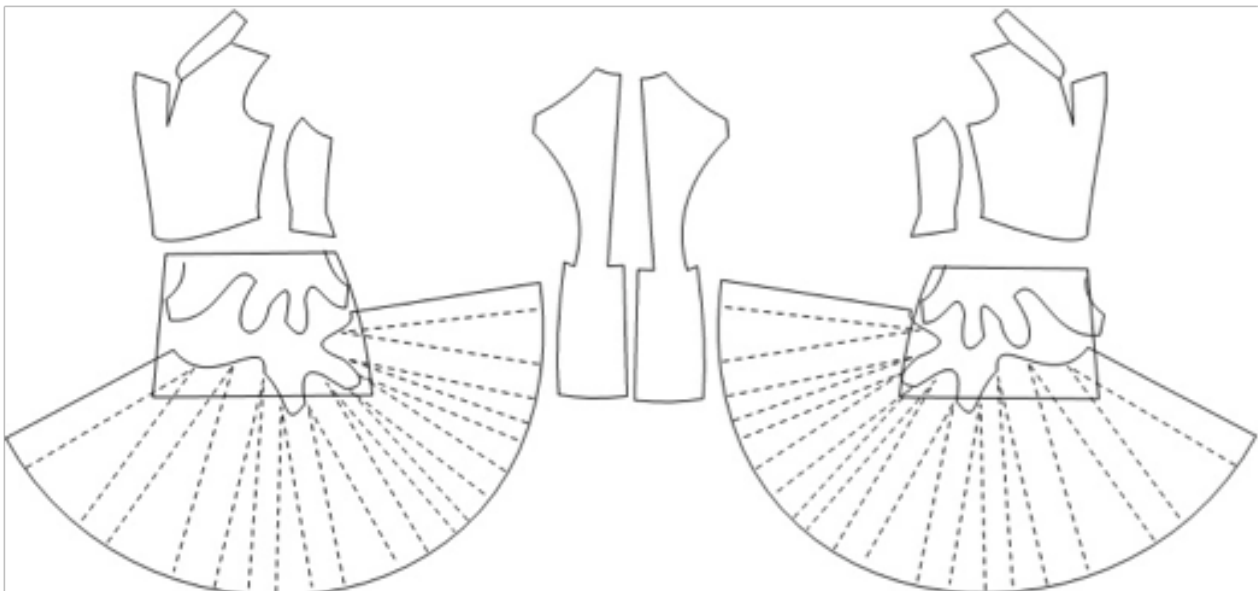
**TOP**

Figure 18. Applying distorted pattern process to jacket bodice. Author's own (2010)

**BELOW**

Figure 19. Pattern development and working drawings for 'Distorted suit-body'. Author's own (2010)

For this suit I concentrated on the concept of an altered or distorted female shape. This time I attempted a complete distortion of the normal suit jacket pattern. The skirt section was cut into two sections in a random undulating line, the lower section was then slashed and spread and reattached to the upper section (Nakamichi, 2005 pp. 70-75). I tried the same process on the bodice section, and although it made for some interesting shapes I felt it was no longer recognisable as a suit jacket. Olivia responded to the very full skirt with spinning circular movements, but I think aesthetically this suit had more static value in that its lumpy protrusions distorted the lower torso.



BELOW AND OPPOSITE  
Figures 21-23. Photographer  
Olivia Claire Taylor performing  
'Distorted suit-body'.  
Author's own (2010)





BELOW

Figure 27 Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'suit-  
reduction.' Author's own (2010)



CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

SUIT SERIES  
TITLED#  
SUIT-REDUCTION



**ABOVE**

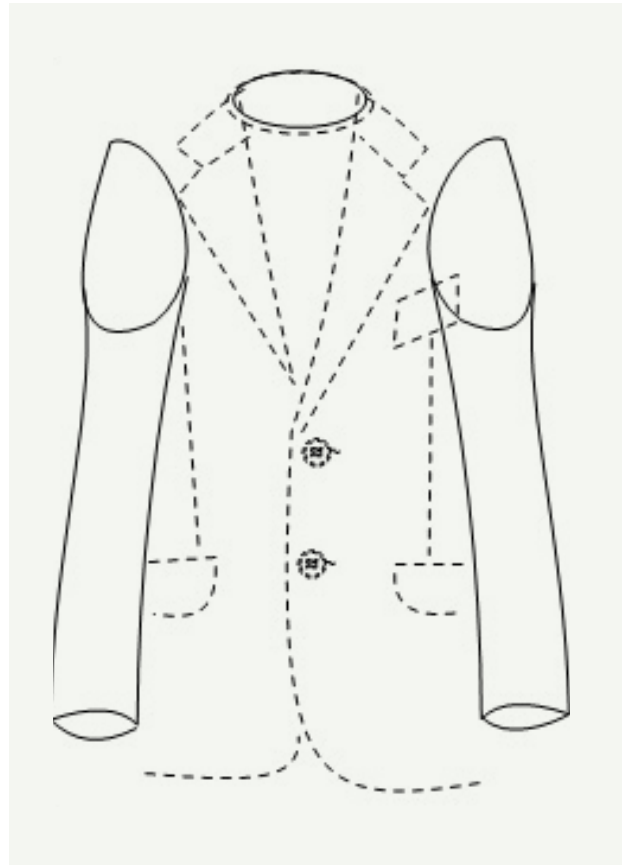
Figure 23. Martin Margiela Spring-Summer 1998 collection 'flat' garments (M. Margiela, c2008 p. 97)

**TOP**

Figure 26. Pattern development and working drawings for 'Suit reduction'. Author's own (2010)

**RIGHT**

Figure 25. Martin Margiela Spring 2009 Collection (2009)





## ABOVE

Figure 24. Ara Jo's Central St. Martins graduate collection *Hypnosis* (Jo, 2009)

Martin Margiela has designed collections related to structural shape, for example ideas like "Flat", in which he displaced armholes and sleeves and reformatted them to lie flat when they were not being worn (c2008 p. 97). Ara Jo's Central St. Martins graduate collection *Hypnosis* (Jo, 2009) also presents the female body in some interesting and challenging forms. My next suit study applied these pattern making principals to the suit jacket and at the same time practically explored emotional and aesthetic issues pertaining to restriction. Working on a square flat form I laid out the typical components to the suit jacket: lapels, collar, front button closure and upper welt jet pockets. The sleeves were also positioned flat on the fabric surface. I chalked out these shapes and cut two circular holes for the sleeves. I then took the outside in and quilted the jacket silhouette, just leaving a vague impression of a business suit. I really liked Martin Margiela's idea from his Spring 2009 collection in which he featured a fabric sheath with a ghost print of a jacket (2009). I think this suit flirts with the idea of representation, as in 'when is a suit not a suit'. Instead of suiting fabric I made this suit out of a high performance sports fabric so it can be slipped over the head like a T-shirt, a garment not considered suitable in the professional workplace. The upper body is the focus with this suit, the armhole positioning forces Olivia's shoulders into a submissive position, connoting the suit as restrictive and restricting of feminine individuality. It is also not a real suit just an imitation; it renders the women's business suit as an imitation of the male model.

BELOW

Figure 30. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Skirting  
the Issue'. Author's own (2010)



CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

SUIT SERIES  
TITLED#  
SKIRTING  
THE ISSUE

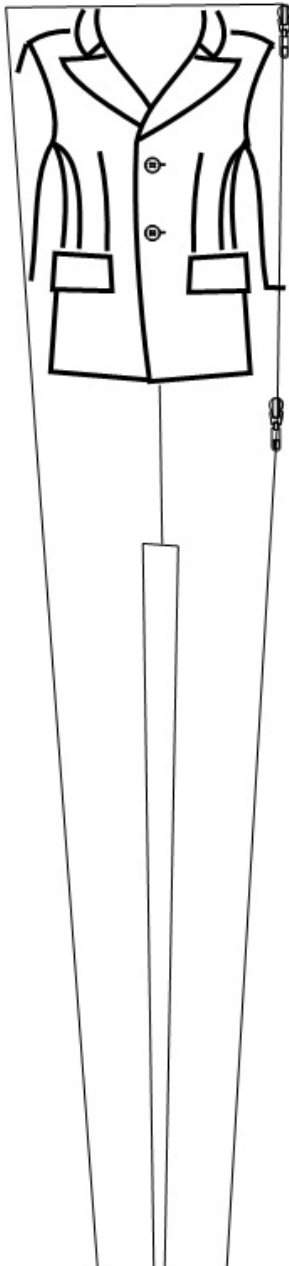
**BELOW**

Figure 30. Photographer Olivia Claire Taylor performing 'Skirting the Issue'. Author's own (2010)

**OPPOSITE**

Figure 29. Pattern development and working drawings for 'Skirting the Issue'. Author's own (2010)





The next in the series functions in a similar way, the suit's symbolism reduced to an outline of its former self. The usual visual associations of the business suit are disturbed. I extended the trouser block into a large bag shape and taped the outline of a suit in white bias strips. You can not actually put the jacket section on. Well in fact you could, but your whole upper body including your head would be enclosed or bagged up. I love the way Olivia plays with the draped aspect of this suit, slinging it over her shoulder in a rather dismissive way or holding it out as if a matador engaging a bull. This suit was loosely structured around Anne Hollander's amusing article *The Issue of Skirting* where she discusses female professionals adoption of the skirted business suit mode so as to "not dress as if they were non-sexual beings, and most emphatically not to dress in the recognized mode of female sexual achievers, the aggressive trappings of erotic ambition: high-heels, see-through blouses and all the rest of it...they must look exactly and only like powerful, successful women, the skirt has been the unchallenged badge of the female sex since the early middle ages"(1977). My interpretation of this emblematic garment of traditional femininity was to literally toss it to the side. It formed, along with the symbols of the masculine business power suit, 'a pleasant draped piece'.

BELOW AND OPPOSITE  
Figures 31-32. Photographer  
Olivia Claire Taylor performing  
'Skirting the Issue'.  
Author's own (2010)





BELOW

Figure 33. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Corporate  
Reality'. Author's own (2010)



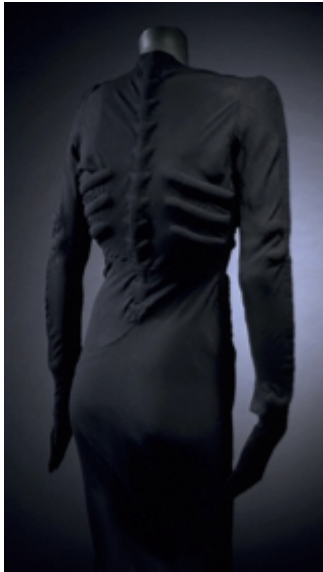
CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

SUIT SERIES

TITLED#

CORPORATE-REALITY





**ABOVE**

Figure 34. Elsa Schiaparelli, Skeleton Evening Dress. Silk crêpe with plastic zips. 1938. V&A: T.394-1974 (Wood, 2007 p. 148)

**OPPOSITE**

Figure 38. Model Hannah Shand wearing 'Corporate-reality'. Author's own (2010)

This suit has been designed around women's biological associations with their appearance in the professional arena. I wanted to make a comment on the problematic issues of her pregnant or potentially pregnant body in the professional workplace, and how this can limit her progress up the corporate ladder. Historically a women's worth has been judged on her appearance and her maternal ability. Naomi Wolf describes how women have historically been valued on their appearance, the ability to find a good husband and to reproduce. She called this "the beauty myth" (Wolf, 1990). With this in mind I thought I would bring the insides out. I did this by cutting a spiral shape into the lower jacket, and extending a long tail section. This tail section was stitched, bagged out, stuffed and coiled back into position in undulating mounds on the jacket exterior. Salvador Dali and Elsa Schiaparelli also worked with the idea of corporeality, one of their most famous collaborations being the skeleton dress. The interiority of the body is literally brought to the surface by quilting the skeleton on a fine matt jersey fabric (Martin, 1987; Wood, 2007, p. 65). I also wanted to reference under organs being brought to the surface here, however Olivia made visual associations to a snail and responded with a backwards creep. Oh well, I suppose she could slip in between the cracks of corporate power, leaving a silvery trail of refashioned feminine identity.

**BELOW**

Figure 39. Model Hannah Shand wearing 'Corporate-reality'. Author's own (2010)

**OPPOSITE TOP**

Figure 35. The Cutter's Practical Guide, c. 1893. Morning coat (Vaugh, 1994, p. 146).

**OPPOSITE BOTTOM**

Figures 36-37. Pattern development and working drawings for 'Corporate-reality suit-body'. Author's own (2010)





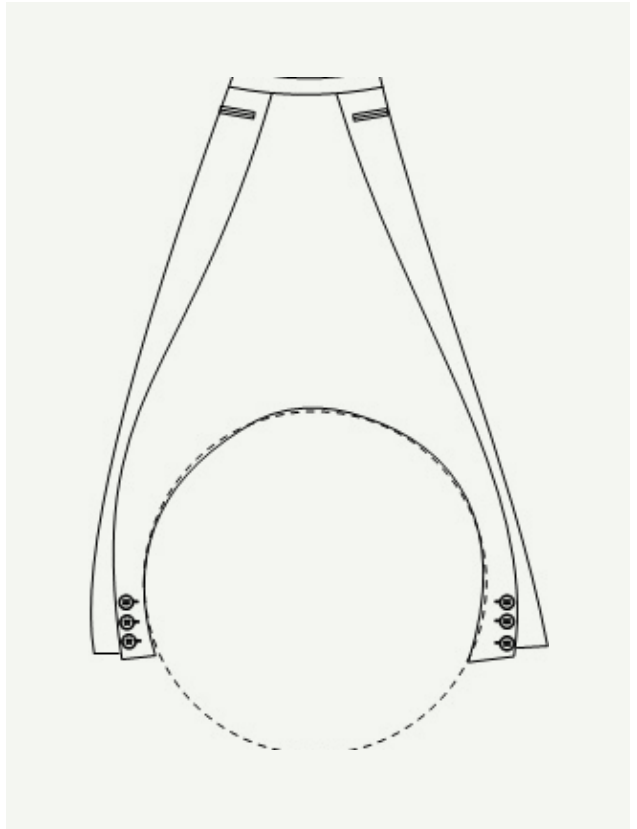
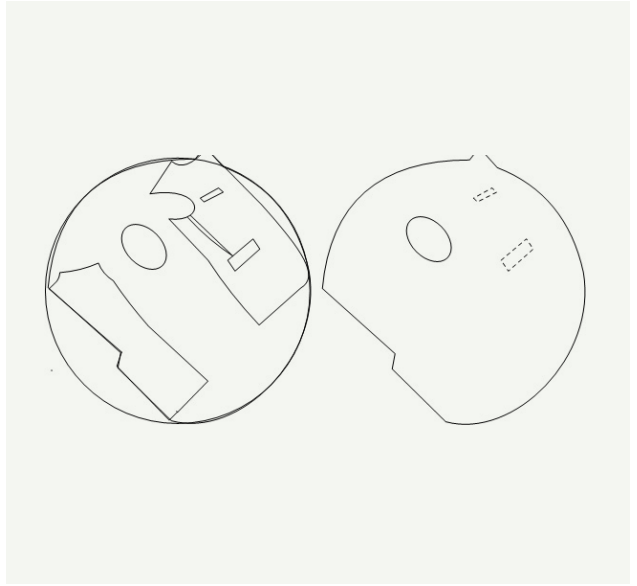
BELOW

Figure 40. Photographer  
Olivia Claire Taylor performing  
'Slippage-suit'. Authors own (2010)

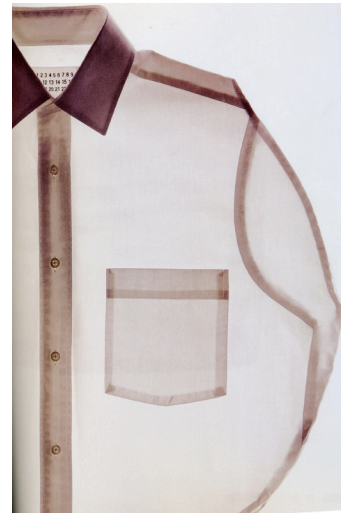


CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

SUIT SERIES  
TITLED#  
SLIPPAGE-SUIT



In the next suit I was looking at mixing a perfectly tailored suit on one side and an ill-fitting tailored suit on the other. I wanted to disturb the wearer and the viewer by displacing the features of the jacket on one side and having the other side perfectly fitting and tailored to the body. I toiled various ways to try and skew or distort the jacket. Starting with the base pattern I made incremental shifts with the pattern outline down one side jacket front and back section then went in the opposite direction with the other side. This worked well but the whole jacket was skewed, so I tried inserting a twisted lining into just one side of the jacket, cutting it larger and anchoring it at certain points in opposing directions to the jacket outer shell. This was visually disturbing but did not make a great deal of difference to the feel of the jacket on the body. I had read about how Maison Martin Margiela experimented with cutting a traditional shirt in a circle (2009). Maison Martin Margiela has deviated significantly from the standardized body prescribed by fashion in many of his collections. In his Spring-Summer 2000 collection he worked with what he termed stereotypes of garments, and to emphasise their basic formal characteristics he introduced aspects of abstractions, for example 148% enlargement (M. Margiela, c2008 ). I too am working to alter stereotypes, as in the female executive and the business suit that conforms to a standardized image. I applied a circle from the centre back of one side of the traditional suit jacket pattern. Working with this flat circle shape, I cut a hole for the sleeve to be inserted into and positioned the collar and lapel on the circles edge. I worked the trousers in a similar way by inserting a circular section into the crotch area that extended down the inner leg seams. Olivia responded by holding a tight pose with the tailored side of her body and a more relaxed, loose posture with the draped side. The suit tends to put a sway on the body and each side demands a different body posture, I like the way it is annoying and you feel the need to try to adjust it back into its standard or usual form.



**ABOVE**

Figure 41. Martin Margiela Spring-Summer 2000 (2009)

**OPPOSITE**

Figures 42-45. Pattern development and working drawings for 'Slippage-suit'. Author's own (2010)

BELOW AND OPPOSITE  
Figures 46-47. Photographer  
Olivia Claire Taylor performing  
'Slippage-suit'. Author's own (2010)









**LEFT**

Figures 48-50. Model Hannah Strand showing front, side and back views of 'Slippage-suit'. Author's own (2010)

BELOW

Figure 51. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Suitable-  
shelter'. Author's own (2010)



CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

SUIT SERIES

TITLED#

SUITABLE-SHELTER

**BELOW**

Figure 52. Photographer  
Olivia Claire Taylor  
performing 'Suitable-shelter'.  
Author's own (2010)

**OPPOSITE**

Figure 53. Martin Margiela  
Autumn-Winter 2005-2006  
trench coat (c2008 p. 57)





With this suit I wanted to change the 1980s power-dressing silhouette considerably. The shoulders were a vital component of the power-suit and they were essentially cut to reflect a man's proportions. I thought I would displace the shoulders to create second shoulder line. I sourced a triangular silhouette from *Pattern Magic* (Nakamichi, 2007, p. 29) which I thought would absorb the shoulders into the silhouette, and flow into the widening triangular line. Using this triangle in the construction of the jacket gives a three-dimensional shape starting with a very wide bottom that narrows as it reaches the upper parts of the jacket to finish with a narrow elliptical collar at the tip of the head. In doing this I have actually ended up reversing the power-suit silhouette completely, which started narrow through the bottom of the jacket widening as it reaches the upper parts of the suit. In its communication it plays upon the masculine ideal of the broad-shouldered power look. It reminds me of Maison Martin Margiela's trench coat, where he elongated the shoulder lines so that the coat can be worn as a hood (c2008). Margiela's coat evokes the look of someone sheltering from the rain; I think perhaps my jacket could be seen as sheltering as well. Olivia interpretation of this suit's shape and structure made visual references to insects or some sort of bug. I think this suit is successful in that it affords a protective covering, or even a place to hide.



**OPPOSITE**

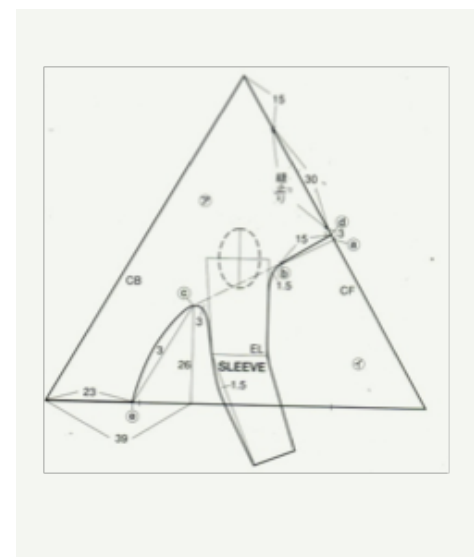
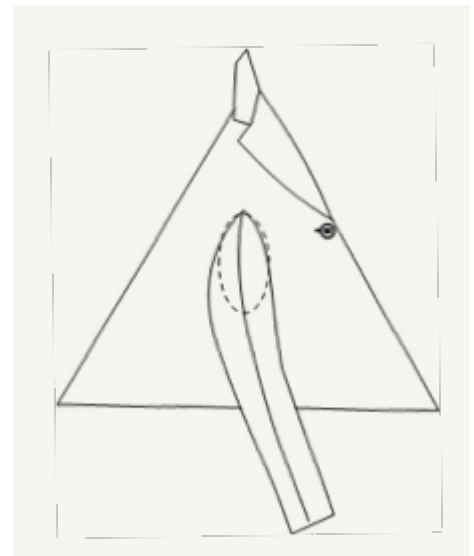
Figure 56. Photographer Olivia Claire Taylor performing 'Suitable-shelter'.  
Author's own (2010)

**RIGHT**

Figure 55. Pattern development and working drawings for 'Suitable-shelter'.  
Author's own (2010)

**BOTTOM**

Figure 54. Triangular shape from Pattern Magic (Nakamichi, 2007, p. 29)



BELOW

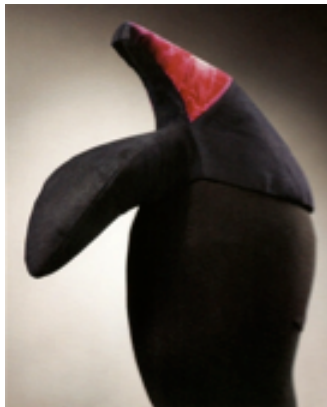
Figure 57. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Psycho-  
suit'. Author's own (2010)



CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

SUIT SERIES  
TITLED#  
PSYCHO-SUIT





**ABOVE**

Figure 59. Elsa Schiaparelli and Salvador Dali, Shoe Hat. Wool felt and silk velvet. 1937. Private Collection (Wood, 2007 p. 145).

**TOP**

Figure 62. Pattern development and working drawings for 'Psycho-suit'. Author's own (2010)

**OPPOSITE**

Figure 58. Photographer Olivia Claire Taylor performing 'Psycho-suit'. Author's own (2010)

This reconstructed suit is informed by the symbolic value of clothing and garment parts. It utilises surrealist's ideas of displacement within the structure of the business suit. In *The Psychology of Clothes* J. C. Flugel (1930), outlines the fact that clothes may arouse sexual interest and symbolize sexual organs. So playing on the phallic symbolism of the suit I thought I would displace its features to see if it would symbolize something else. I have always found Elsa Schiaparelli's *Shoe hat* fascinating, not only because it exploits the sexual and psychological implications of clothing but because of its humorous displacement (Wood, 2007, pp. 62-65). Following on from this I wanted to displace everything possible on the suit jacket and do something as ridiculous as putting a shoe on a head. I did not however want to just supplant each feature in a different place, rather I wanted lapels, collars and sleeves to actually evolve out of the existing garment and literally transform from one thing to another. This was the most complicated pattern making and tailoring of all the suits in this project. The jacket lapels grew into a shirt front, the shirt collar sprouted from the shirt front and extended into a hood, the hood grew sleeves. Instead of armholes there are more collars and the jacket fronts merge into a shirt back. I use the term reconstruction here not just to characterize the technical procedure of making this suit but also in a philosophical way as a demonstrative gesture to offer new symbolism in the women's business suit.

Olivia's response was theatrical; she read it as a costume piece and performed accordingly. I think this suit has multiple, performative possibilities. I am not sure how a psychoanalyst would read the redistribution of symbols but looks it like a fetishistic nightmare to me.

BELOW AND OPPOSITE  
Figures 60-61. Photographer  
Olivia Claire Taylor performing  
'Psycho-suit'. Author's own (2010)





BELOW

Figure 63. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Leaky-suit'.  
Author's own (2010)



CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

SUIT SERIES

TITLED#

LEAKY-SUIT



## OPPOSITE

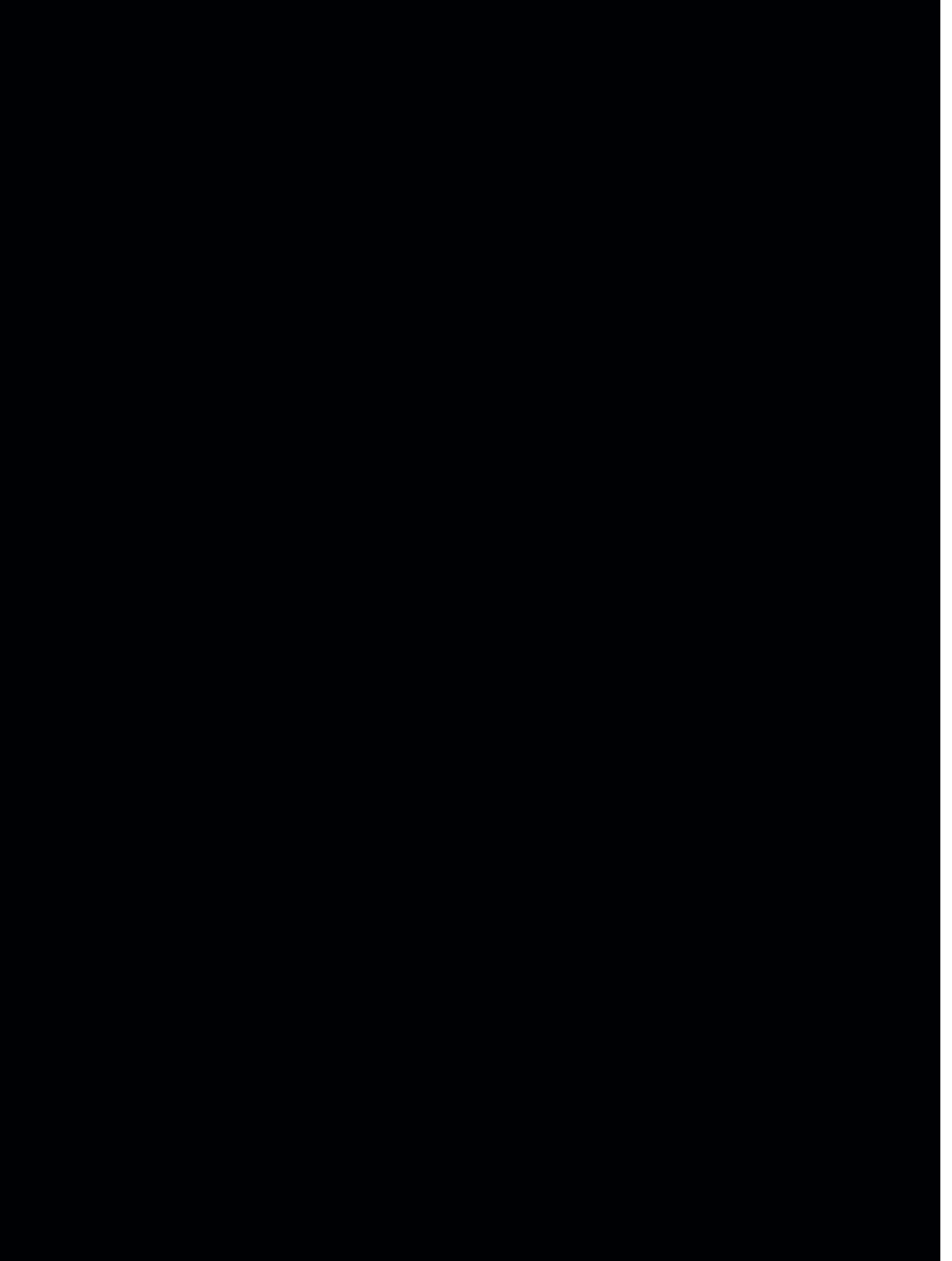
Figure 64. Photographer Olivia  
 Claire Taylor performing 'Leaky-suit'.  
 Author's own (2010)

This suit is a demonstration of the way the female body in Western culture has been dissected by garments, exposing and covering various parts of the body to give emphasis to other parts (Harvey, 2007). Men in suits never show more than their faces and their hands and this is to indicate that the body that is covered claims more power and authority. Gender is made visible in the professional workplace by women generally showing more of their body. Recent body theorists have placed emphasis on women's bodies also being less contained than men's. According to Mary Douglas they are "leaky", they menstruate, lactate and have babies, as opposed to men who are more reserved and "self contained"(1973). John Harvey applies this idea of containment to not just the body but to feeling and emotions, stating "men do not show their bodies as women do, and men do not show their emotions as women do". He goes on to say women's clothes generally allow more freedom of movement and likens this to emotional freedom (2007, p. 85). I like the idea of a woman's business suit leaking so I radically re-portioned it revealing the whole leg on one side, demarcating off the genital area. I have allowed further freedom of movement by using a high-tech sports fabric on one side and stretch wool suiting on the other. The suit offers Olivia plenty of scope for body movement and she responds by flexing her limbs; and if we are to believe that our feelings leak through our clothes this suit has influenced Olivia "internally through cognitive and emotional responses" (Tombs, 2010). I think the suit looks uncanny. Normally a naked leg would be erotically charged but this suit disturbingly presents an ambiguous nudity. By offering the sex appeal of a naked leg within a garment that at same time recalls the classic male business suit which was intended to make nakedness invisible, we are thrown off balance.

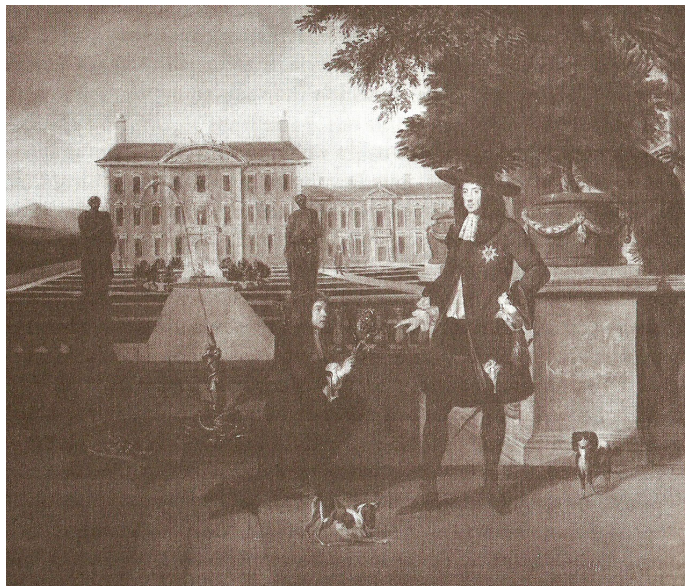
BELOW AND OPPOSITE  
Figures 65-66. Photographer  
Olivia Claire Taylor performing  
'Leaky-suit'. Author's own (2010)







A SHORT  
HISTORY OF  
**THE SUIT**



According to the art historian Anne Hollander the modern tailored suit was first introduced approximately two hundred years ago, when men's dress, in contrast to women's, turned away from decorative adornment and instead opted for functional simplicity (1994, p. 79).

Until the 18th century both men and women of the upper-class wore colourful, luxurious fabrics, silk stockings, ruffled lace and embroidered garments. It was not considered effeminate for men to wear these garments and men were as concerned about fashion as women. These clothes set the upper classes apart from the rest of society, functioning more as an emblem of wealth and power than gender. This changed around the time of the French and American Revolutions when plainer dress was linked to patriotism and virtue. The elaborate style of dress, which was perceived as aristocratic pretension, was replaced with a neutral and more restrained look.

**OPPOSITE TOP LEFT**

Figure 67. The 1666 vest as drawn by the earl of Sandwich. "The habit was taken up by the King and Court of England November 1666 which they called the vest." By permission of The British Library. 10807. e.9. (Kuchta, 2002, p. 83)

**OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT**

Figure 68. Charles II is portrayed dressed in the plain English style in this ca. 1675 painting attributed to Hendrick Danckerts. (Kuchta, 2008, p. 502)

**OPPOSITE BOTTOM LEFT**

Figure 70. Portraits of famous men were often used for fashion plates. Charles Dickens wears a short, double-breasted frock coat, single-breasted waistcoat, light trousers and top hat; Benjamin Disraeli models a less formal single breasted lounge suit and soft hat. The Tailor and Cutter July 1870 (Costume Research Centre Bath) (Byrde, 1979, p. 84)

**OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT**

Figure 71. A variety of men's suit coats from the late 19th century, including the sack, morning, cutaway, frock, and the Chesterfield. Courtesy of the Costume Institute Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Reilly & Cosbey, 2008, p. 496)

Men's dress moved away from the decorative qualities it shared with women's in what Flugel (1930, p. 111) termed "The Great Masculine Renunciation", where ideals of men being associated with industry and simplicity rather than leisure and ornament, contributed to the change in male attire (Clark Smith & Peiss, 1989, pp. 12-14). This change to a comparatively plain, homogenous, utilitarian style was to profoundly influence gender-roles in the West for years to come. Hollander writes:

*Tailored suits put a final seal of disapproval on gaudy clothes for serious men, whatever their class. At the same time, they confirmed and approved a sharpened visual separation between the dress of men and women, whatever their class* (Hollander, 1994, p. 7).

Although a man's suit could also be viewed as inexpressive and unimaginative, particularly when compared to the more theatrical female clothing of the period, Hollander thought such theatrical modes of women's dress were conservative in comparison to men's fashion, which in her view took a radical leap forward paralleling other cultural advances of modernity (Hollander, 1994, p. 7). She asserts that the tailored man's suit in particular embodied this leap and as such developed to "express classical modernity, in material design, in politics, and in sexuality" (Hollander, 1994, pp. 103-115). Aesthetically, it was devised to minimize bodily differences among men and to invoke the idealised male form of antiquity. It lent itself to diverse uses and was easily adapted to emerging modes of production and consumption. Arising in an era of technological rationalisation and revolutionary political reform, the suit not only offered versatile function and widespread availability,



**TOP**

Figure 72. Harrods 1929 Black jacket and striped trousers with black bowler and rolled umbrella for business wear; morning coat and striped trousers with top hat and walking stick for formal occasions. Double and single breasted lounge suits. Harrods catalogue 1929 Photograph, Batsford Collection (Byrde, 1979, p. 85)

**MIDDLE**

Figure 73. There are many jobs that have “changed sex”-as when the male clerk was replaced with the secretary. Yet when ever such changes occurred, new sexual stereotypes developed. The “business girl” in this 1913 Ivory Snow advertisement wears the recommended tailored costume with some feminine touches; she is an efficient-looking, attractive subordinate. Her boss presents a more professional, authoritative image in his dark sack suit (Steele, 1989, p. 65)



**BOTTOM**

Figure 76. Joan Crawford in the classic film Mildred Pierce, 1945 (Bordwell, 2009)



but also provided a democratising uniform for everyday life, a uniform that would ostensibly help level and even order the social world. Under these conditions the tailored suit emerged as one of the quintessential garments of modernity and as emblematic, in particular, of modern masculinity. Fashion, and concern for one's appearance, was now considered feminine. What is of relevance to my project is that these new rules for male and female appearance accompanied the development of new roles for men and women and the elaboration of new beliefs about male and female nature.

The so-called bourgeois suit reflected and reflects the idea that plain clothes represent a basic requirement for a functioning democratic society. It has survived for so long because of its versatile function as a garment that contributes to meanings and interpretations such as stability, orderliness, self control and virtue. These facets became important criteria for middle class men as they could be interpreted as a rejection of everything excessive or extravagant. With this new bourgeois-male clothing culture, the aristocratic lifestyle was denounced and the perception of fashion as restricted to the female domain was established. In this way the middle class clothing culture became a sign of power and these systems of ideas, values and concepts of democracy formed in the 18th century are reflected in the current clothing practices of present day professionals.

The style of the suit remains relatively unvarying, characterised by the same basic form; a jacket with buttons down the front, tailored sleeves hemmed at the wrist, a collar, a lapel and a matching pair of trousers (or a skirt in the case of the women's suit). The suit has evolved with slight changes in cut, colour, fabric and decorative detail, however unlike other types of clothing it is less sensitive to fashionable change and has remained relatively stable in its reflection of societal representations of each era.

Hollander argues that historically fashion was progressively divided into so called respectable tailoring for men and frivolous "fashion" for women. This division and its ensuing normative gender categorisation was just as much about the techniques of making clothes as about questions of consumption and identity. This was determined as early as 1675 when Louis XIV of France permitted the formation of a guild of female tailors for the making of women's clothes, believing the guild would allow French women, "independence for their taste" (Hollander, 1994, p. 65). Louis' principle exists to this day in the concept of women fashion designers designing for women, for example Rei Kawakubo, Vivienne Westwood and Anne Demuelemeister. However it is my contention that for business attire, the spirit of independence has been lost

**BELOW**

Figure 69. Baron Schwiter by Eugène Delacroix 1826 (Byrde, 1979, p. 38)



and that women's suits are not independent but merely ape those of their male colleagues.

Towards the end of the 19th century the percentage of western women in employment began to rise. This came about as a result of economic expansion and the beginnings of universal education. Technological developments such as the introduction of the typewriter saw an increasing automation of white-collar work, and this opened up opportunities for female employment resulting in an increased feminisation of jobs previously the preserve of men. Skilled labour such as bookkeeping in banks, once performed by male clerks, was increasingly mechanised and the automatic and repetitive nature of the work came to be seen by employers as more suited to women. As women moved into office jobs, social commentators raised the question of what they should wear. This consideration was important because fashionable women's dress at the time was supposed to represent their homebound role. Therefore women entering the workplace had to find a way to dress as efficient, business-like workers without contradicting the ideology that women were naturally linked to the domestic realm and not the world of work. The office job was even more problematic because the women would be working in close quarters with men. The correct business attire advised by women's magazines for the modern women suggested the best tailoring worn by men and with just a touch of femininity (Kidwell & Steele, 1989, p. 84).



Suits continued to gain importance in the women's wardrobes throughout the 20th century, when female fashions began to change dramatically with the emergence of female fashion designers such as Madeleine Vionnet, Elsa Schiaparelli and Coco Chanel. These designers claimed to understand women's needs and wants better than men. They created clothes that enabled women to move, work and to engage in sports. Chanel feminised the man's suit with her jersey suits in the early 20th century. By appropriating elements of male clothing Chanel offered women practical garments that afforded ease, comfort, functionality and freedom to move in the world (Menkes, 2000, p. 69). Hollander stated Chanel defined the true nature of the suit:

*The suit for women - a tailored jacket worn with a skirt - could thus become a costume expressing a purely female sexual independence in the modern world, finally achieved without using any manly references, either severe or coy* (Hollander, 1994, p. 135).

By the mid-thirties, the elegant women of power played by Joan Crawford, the sexually mysterious women portrayed by Marlene Dietrich and the androgynous women of mystery depicted by Greta Garbo all dressed in the male silhouette. They appeared on the screen as strong, complex characters, in tailored suits having many characteristics which in real life would be considered masculine. The perversity of this practice was exploited by the film industry. These stars started wearing trousers suits on and off screen at a time when wearing trousers in public was unacceptable and dangerous. It was as if by doing this women were annexing the power of an item of male dress (Evans & Thornton, 1989).

Many fashion historians cite World War 2 as a significant moment in history for both women's work and their dress. Also significant at this time was the influence of film. Joan Crawford in the classic film *Mildred Pierce* in 1945 portrayed a tough, independent and career-minded business woman with a wardrobe of tailored suits to match and the following year Ingrid Bergman, as psychoanalyst Constance Peterson in Hitchcock's *Spellbound*, opts for attire which, like *Mildred Pierce*'s, connotes toughness and masculinity. Linda Williams notes that some feminist theorists see *Mildred Pierce* as reflecting

OPPOSITE

Figure 74. The couturier Chanel, 1928, wearing one of her classic, understated outfits (de la Haye, 1988, p. 55)

RIGHT

Figure 75. Marlene Dietrich, taken in 1933 (de la Haye, 1988, p. 70)

FAR RIGHT

Figure 77. Helmut Newton, fashion photograph, suit by Yves Saint Laurent, from *Vogue* September 1975 (Evans & Thornton, 1989, p. 178)



an emergent women's consciousness which paved the way for feminism in the 1960s and 1970s (1988, p. 27).

By the 1970s, the rise of women in the workplace boosted the popularity of masculine-inspired suits. Yves Saint Laurent reconfigured male costume for women and Suzy Menkes (2000, p. 70) states "his tuxedo that he reinvented for women was the ultimate expression of twentieth-century fashion: pants for equality and jackets for women standing shoulder pad to broad shoulders in a man's world". He not only designed some of the best examples of pantsuits, he also introduced his female tuxedo called *Le Smoking*, cut to the most stringent levels of male tailoring. He used it to exploit the sexual and social associations inherent in women wearing male clothing (Evans & Thornton, 1989).

Giorgio Armani introduced relaxed tailoring in the 1980s. Suzy Menkes (2000, p. 69) regards Armani's achievements as important in the progression and development of women's tailoring as those of Gabrielle Chanel. He was to break with the traditions of stiff heavy tailoring by injecting the ease of sportswear into suits. He tailored suits that were versatile, easy to wear with flattering lines that worked with the female body. He favoured fabrications and techniques that draped the body. Armani made his suits a feminine statement and his trouser suit exerted more influence at every level of fashion in the 1980s than any garment created by other designers in the fashion capitals of the world (Mendes & de la Haye, 1999). Its universality was based on a formula of soft structured tailoring that flattered any figure type. Consequently it became an essential item for women professionals in the 1980s and 1990s because it gave them credibility in a masculine world, without sacrificing femininity (Mendes & de la Haye, 1999).

During the 1970s and the 80s, the "dress for success" look was promoted to women entering the work force, particularly those pursuing careers in business and the professions (Davis, 1992, p. 46). This look according to Llewellyn Negrin was the "feminization of the masculine business suit... and continues to hold sway today" (Negrin, 2008, p. 149). Negrin goes on to say the "dress for success" outfit advocated by John Molloy (1980) meant that women emulating men by their appropriation of the male suit would take on the male qualities of power and authority assigned to this garment. However so as not to appear too masculine the feminine version of the male business suit typically took on the form of the tailored skirt. The skirt was cut straight with a lowered hemline and matching jacket cut fully enough to cover the contours of the body to avoid looking like a secretary or looking too sexy

(Negrin, 2008, p. 149). As women entered the work force in substantial numbers in the 1980s, they achieved more confidence and exaggerated the tailored qualities of the suit with wide lapels and padded shoulders, subverting its formality with short skirts and stiletto heels. This look became known as “power dressing” (Entwistle, 1997).

Patricia Kimle and Mary Damhorst (1997) have conducted a study relating to more recent changes in women’s construction of business identities. They discuss how women are taking a more creative and fashion orientated approach to business dress and that in this process have reclaimed self-definition. As women have more choices for business dress this offers them more communicative potential and multiple possibilities for self expression. Although some appearance modes could possibly threaten women’s business credibility and success, generally taking a more creative approach to work dress was seen by the women in their study as empowering (Kimle & Damhorst, 1997). However this current dressing culture with its emphasis on very reserved fashionable modifications still reflects the expectations imposed on the professions and their representatives by organisational normative processes. Accepting these long established dress codes and ‘fitting in’ on professional levels helps women to be portrayed as professional however adopting this style of dress is not advancing them up the corporate ladder nor is it keeping pace with the creativity and diversity of an increasingly globalised world.

**RIGHT**

Figure 78. Armani, Fall/Winter 1989-90 (Celant & Koda, 2000, p. 71)

**FAR RIGHT**

Figure 79. A typical “Dress for Success” ensemble, ca, 1990. Courtesy of Talbots (Davis, 1992, p. 49)





CONCEPTUALLY  
LED **SUIT SERIES**

BELOW

Figure 80. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Suitable-  
chaos. Author's own (2010)



CONCEPTUALLY LED

SUIT SERIES

TITLED#

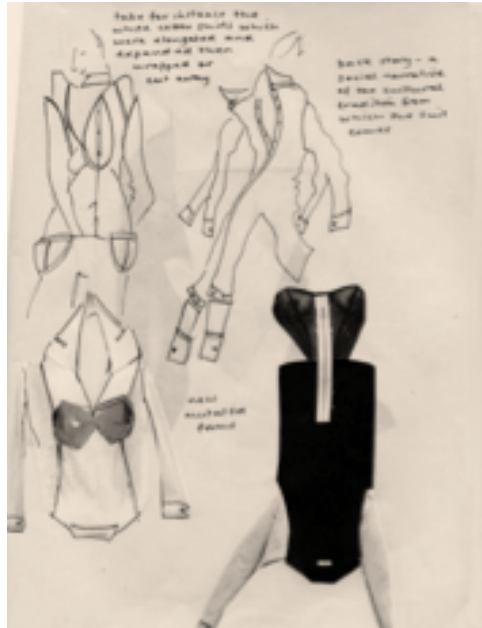
SUITABLE-CHAOS



RIGHT  
Figure 83-84.  
Journal development for  
'Suitable-chaos'  
Author's own (2010)

OPPOSITE TOP  
Figure 81. Working drawings for  
'Suitable-chaos' Author's own  
(2010))

OPPOSITE BOTTOM  
Figure 82. Process drawings for  
'Suitable-chaos'. Author's own  
(2010)





I wanted to reveal new ways of seeing and wearing the women's business suit. I thought by incorporating radical ideas into their construction I could shift people's ways of thinking and moving. I wanted this to action change. My impetus was to think about whether concepts and ideas can be embedded or designed into a suit.

'Suitable-chaos' was about exploring different garment cuts and how these could become the focus of physical responses from the wearers. Could these cuts encourage different movements?

The suit is the most conservative of garments. We have a historical consciousness of what it should look like. This expectation is linked to very formal social codes and tailoring conventions. I wanted to capitalise on these conventions by deliberately altering their symbolic attributes, creating incongruous messages and demanding the wearer or viewer see a different set of meanings.

With 'Suitable-chaos' I started with standard images of business women and men in suits, then joined their bodies together using collage to explore the potential shapes created between their two bodies. These collages were sketched over then inverted and layered on top of each other. New shapes were gleaned from the crossover lines and these subsequently formed the inspiration for the suit structure. Several designs and toiles were developed from the sketches.

BELOW AND OPPOSITE  
 Figures 85-90. Performance  
 artist Sascha Perfect performing  
 'Suitable-chaos'. Author's own  
 (2010)

The next stage involved placing complete garment sections on the form and cutting and rearranging them into into strange compositions. I then added other garment sections (for example a contoured bust section) my idea being to create shapes, proportions and details that do not mesh or agree with the traditional suit model. Because I wanted to turn ideas of business women in suits on their head, I literally turned jackets, trousers, shirts and skirts upside down and added pieces of other suits so extra sections trailed down to the knees or dangled from the back. I then started elongating sections, cutting and spreading; this began with the actual suits on the form then these rough sample pieces were taken apart, unpicked and laid out directly on the fabric, trued, chalked up and cut. I think it looks like a suit made up of business women and men with perhaps a third person in there, conveying the notion of multiple identities. There are multiple ways of wearing 'Suitable-chaos'. It can be literally inverted and worn the other way up with the extended sleeves become a woven bustle. The shoulders of the suit jacket are slashed; the intention is to reveal something underneath - not the body but another layer. The white cotton shirt was treated in a similar manner. The armholes have been elongated and expanded into cape-like forms that can be wrapped in the front or the back or left trailing out the slits in the jacket back. The collar has been grown on so it emerges in an upside down manner from the shirt front. Sleeves were split and multiplied. There are numerous ways to button and unbutton enter and arrange the shirt. The





form allows the wearer to enter the recesses, referencing Rei Kawakubo's garments that offer a multiplicity of wearing modes thus lending certain autonomy to the wearer.

The shapes were designed to alter the behaviour of the body within, however the aesthetic became just as powerful in reading and experiencing the suit. Aesthetically I had intended the suit to re-personalise by focusing it on their person, in order to convey an expression or emotion of how wearing the suit made them feel. I wanted the suit to change the wearer's felt perceptions, and for these to be communicated to others. In other words, to create an effect internally felt and externally communicated. For example one may wear a smart traditional business suit into a meeting to show feelings of confidence and power. Likewise one may wear 'Suitable-chaos' into a business meeting and express feelings of elevation, excitement and flight – I am going to fly right up and smash through that fucking glass ceiling!



Inseparable from this felt-self discourse is that 'Suitable-chaos' plays with symbolic attributes. Though still perfectly tailored, the tailoring is no longer uniformly perfect. It is still familiar but somehow strange and there is tension in these contrasts. So I have used the composition mechanics of tailoring and assembled the pieces in a different way, breaking the rigidity of the traditional business suit's aesthetic to endow it with a certain chaos. In other words the design has turned the suit upside down which brings the suit and its wearer into a state of uncertainty. Its category is no longer fixed and the prescribed idea of what is suitably feminine in the business world has been challenged.



The performance artist had a strong physical response conveying associations with birds, a large bird or albatross to be exact. This was useful to me because when making it I could only guess the behaviour of the suit on the body and Sasha's response highlighted the effects of visual and aesthetic associations made possible by my design. Sascha responded to the extra crisp cotton fabric either side of the multiple sleeves by flapping; she said the sleeves introduced a lot of air around the body as she moved. I am well aware that what is read as liberating in a performance context could be equally be read as eccentric antics in an actual workplace context. Nevertheless it has been a useful exercise to explore the suit design as a driver to communicate the vocabulary of my actions. For example 'slash and spread', 'unpick or open the seams' and has provided a visual metaphor of literally investigating, exposing or interrogating workplace dress issues for women.

BELOW AND OPPOSITE  
Figures 91-93. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Suitable-  
chaos'. Author's own (2010)





BELOW AND OPPOSITE  
Figures 94-99. Model Hannah  
Strand showing multiple ways  
of wearing 'Suitable-chaos'.  
Author's own (2010)





BELOW AND OPPOSITE  
Figure 100. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Travesty-  
suit'. Author's own (2010)



CONCEPTUALLY LED

SUIT SERIES

TITLED#

TRAVESTY-SUIT

BELOW

Figure 110. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Travesty-  
suit'. Author's own (2010)





ABOVE LEFT  
Figure 101. Spring/Summer 2004. Hair Shoe. Photograph by Anders Edstrom. Courtesy of Ann-Sofie Back (Granata, 2007, p. 393)



ABOVE MIDDLE  
Figure 102. Spring/Summer 2005. "faux wasp-waist" dress. Photograph by Chris Moore. Courtesy of Ann-Sofie Back (Granata, 2007, p. 399)



ABOVE RIGHT  
Figure 103. Mimi Parent Masculine-feminine. 1959 (Mahon, 2005)

Professional workplace cultures shape and reinforce appropriate dress practice for men and women. 'Travesty-suit' draws on a performativity framework which assumes, according to Judith Butler (1990) that gender is socially constructed through gendered performance. According to Joanne Entwistle (2000, p. 178) femininity can literally be put on by men and masculinity worn by women, and there is no natural connection between female bodies and femininity or male bodies and masculinity. This suit blurs pre-assigned gender identities and explores the feminine constructs and clichéd signs that transvestites use to become women thus creating an unsettling and ironic effect by merging feminine signs within the essentially masculine business suit. It explores ideas of hiding and transforming one's identity as opposed to using standard workplace dress to present a true and authentic self, in other words it plays with the artificiality of identity. I have drawn on the work of Ann Sofie Back who works with themes of the artificiality of fashion. Of particular relevance to my work is Back's inspiration from the way transvestites can look very convincing when they adopt stereotypical feminine garb. In this way Back's work posits the idea that femininity is an illusion, something you can put on. Ann Sophie Back's Spring/Summer 2004 collection featured customised Shelley's stock shoes made with artificial tresses entwined as straps, which recall the Surrealist's incongruous juxtaposition of objects as in Oppenheim's fur covered tea cup. The inspiration of these shoes came from the clichéd signs that transvestites use to become women, as in a blonde wig, fishnet stockings, a trench coat, etc. It is like a "woman-mask" that is more woman than a real woman (Granata, 2007, p. 392). Surrealism challenges the order and acceptance of everything, logic is turned upside down, inside out and new meanings come

OPPOSITE TOP LEFT  
Figure 107. The Cutter's Practical Guide, c. 1893. Frock-coat (Waugh, 1994, p. 146).

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT  
Figure 104. A variety of men's suits from the late 19th century, including the sack, morning and frock, coats. Courtesy of the Costume Institute Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Reilly & Cosbey, 2008, p. 496)

OPPOSITE BOTTOM LEFT  
Figure 105. Coat 2 (Morra, 2008, p. 78)

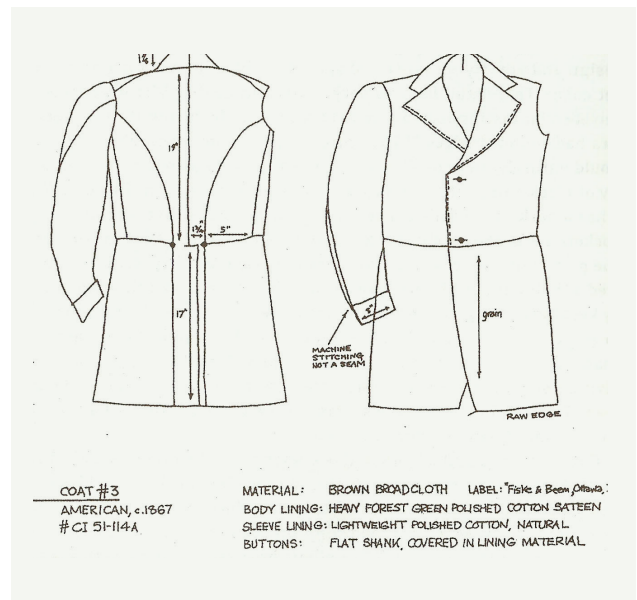
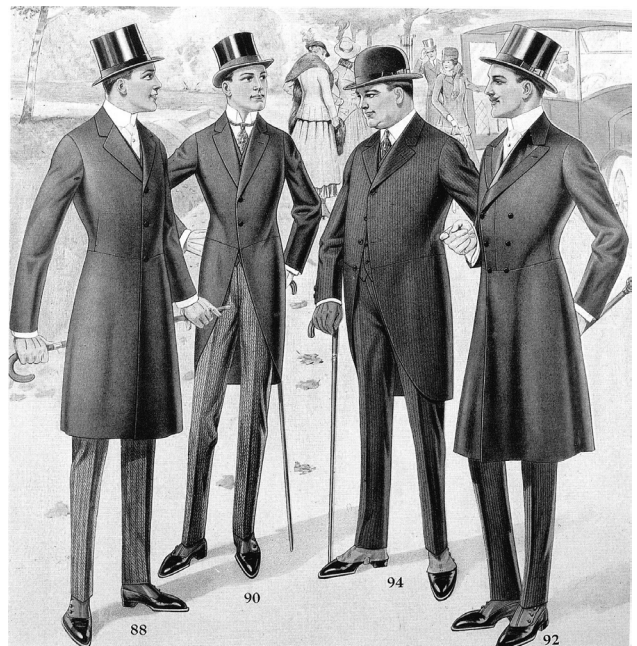
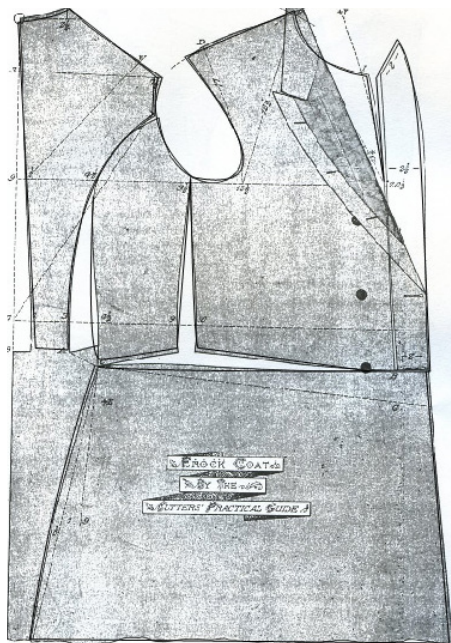
OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT  
Figure 106. Coat 3. (Morra, 2008, p. 80)

into being from unlikely juxtapositions. Mimi Parent's *Masculine-feminine* 1959 is a good example of an object that "enacts a gender 'troubling' in addressing cross dressing and the fetishistic power of hair in a male tie made from female hair"(Mahon, 2005, p. 152). I thought I would take this concept, and apply it to the women's business suit to challenge the status quo. As cross dressing reveals the arbitrariness or masquerade of gender I decided to insert Priscilla, "Queen of the Desert", into the business suit. Stephen Elliot, director of *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen Of The Desert* which was inspired by drag queens thought, "Wouldn't it be great to put some of that locked-up in the city stuff in an outback environment where it doesn't fit?" (Knight, May 1, 2009). So I thought I would put Priscilla's garb where it does not belong- into the business suit. I was thinking of a "frock coat" and building on this I sourced some wonderful specification drawings of men's coats from the 19th century (Morra, 2008). Initially I chose them because they offered cross-gendering possibilities with their detail and silhouette. Reading into Marisa Morra's writing, in which she traces the changes in men's suit from 1840s through to 1870s, she aligns these changes in silhouette, tailoring methods and style to social values, attitudes and lifestyle changes in the same period. Relevant to my work, during this period the suit coat became increasingly gendered masculine and this masculinisation was aligned to its tailoring methods. Morra begins with the frock coat which she states is an example of how "clothing became more articulated with certain garments designated for specific occasions" (2008, p. 75). Coloured coats which were worn with contrasting trousers were replaced with dark colours reflecting Victorian sensibilities of the time. Coats of the 1840s still retained traces of the curvaceous Romantic period; they reflected ladies "redingote" style, close fitting with nipped-in-waists and flare to the back and sides of the skirt. These coats have no shoulder pads but are padded and quilted from the breast to side area. By the 1860s attitudes to fit changed. Loose garments were introduced by the military due to the discomforts of tight clothing in battle, and these garments were later adapted to ordinary wear. The armhole was cut more loosely, the sleeves more baggy, and the 1860s shoulder became broader and boxy. With this increase in fullness came more interlining and padding especially in the shoulder area. The skirt was still cut in one piece but much straighter and the proportions more similar giving rise to a square solid silhouette, considered more respectable. The morning coat now displaces the frock coat for more social functions. The silhouette continues to narrow with the sack coat which is worn with matching trousers and a vest and is considered appropriate for business wear, street wear and informal occasions. It has shoulder pads

SUIT SERIES TITLED#TRAVESTY-SUIT

and is interfaced with horsehair instead of being quilted and this gives an even more stiff, straight silhouette (Morra, 2008). A widening circle of men from all levels of society began to wear the suit as a symbol of authority, respectability, and both conformity and defiance. Technical advancements in production allowed manufacturers to produce ready-to-wear versions at reasonable prices.

By using a combination of the specification drawings and a pattern for a frock coat from the 19th century that I found in Norah Waugh's *The Cut of Men's Clothes 1600-1900* (1994, p. 145), I drafted the base for Priscilla's suit



BELOW LEFT

Figure 108. The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen Of The Desert (Knight, May 1, 2009).

BELOW RIGHT

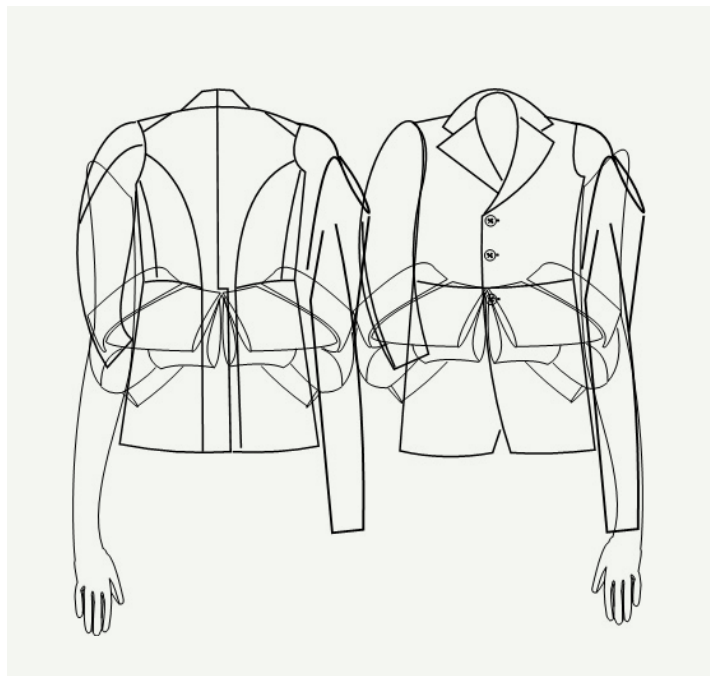
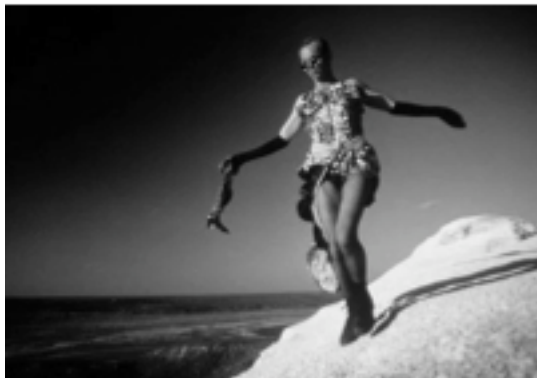
Figure 109. Working drawings for 'Travesty-suit'. Author's own (2010)

OPPOSITE

Figure 111. Photographer Olivia Claire Taylor performing 'Travesty-suit'. Author's own (2010)

jacket. It had a waist seam which meant I could inset the fro-fro skirt section. The front dart and side bodies allowed me to get a closer fit. The tight, sloping shoulder seam eliminated the need for shoulder pads. As the armhole was also tight, this enabled the garment would still sit to the body when I slashed the underarm and inserted Priscilla's full length gloves. 'Travesty-suit' offers up possibilities for the negation of gender representation within professional organisational structures. It is literally a performance piece and therefore uses Judith Butler's idea of 'making trouble' by subverting commonly held ideas about gender (Entwistle, 2007, p. 178).

Olivia responded to the exaggerated feminine details of this suit, positioning herself or staging herself in stereotypical feminine dance positions. I think it made her look like a woman in drag; the fro-fro skirt and gloved sleeves looking misplaced on the business suit. I am happy with this as these hyper-feminine details are all the more powerful because of this. I think it has produced an estranging effect of cross-gendering where its impact has been redoubled because it is combined with the business suit. The suit works in that it reveals gender to be malleable or performed and in so doing deconstructs categorisation of identities based on gendered appearances. Hopefully it gets the message across that gender is just one way to categorise identity and that if it is unstable, then all the better as it may encourage business people to look at other categories of identification such as your skills and talents.





BELOW AND OPPOSITE  
Figures 112-113. Photographer  
Olivia Claire Taylor performing  
'Travesty-suit'. Author's own (2010)





BELOW

Figure 114. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Hirsute-her  
suit'. Author's own (2010)



CONCEPTUALLY LED

SUIT SERIES

TITLED#

HIRSUTE-HER SUIT





OPPOSITE

Figure 119. Photographer Olivia Claire Taylor performing 'Hirsute-her suit'. Author's own (2010)

RIGHT

Figure 115. Development work on the dress form for 'Hirsute-her suit'. Author's own (2010).

FAR RIGHT

Figure 116. Walter Van Beirendonck, 'Finally Chesthair' T-shirt. Printed viscose, 1997. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (Wood, 2007 p. 189).

In the 1970s the rules for business dress were laid down in dress manuals, such as John Molloy's, *Dress for Success* (1975) and *Women: Dress for Success* (1980). These manuals provided a formula which Molloy termed "wardrobe engineering". He prescribed the conservative dark tailored suit. However while this trouser suit works for men, it is not the case for women. Molloy establishes that dress at work is gendered, both reflecting and reproducing sexual difference. According to Molloy (1980), the ways men and women acquire status and power at work through dress is different, and for women this meant managing her sexuality, as her body is sexualized in a way that the male body is not. Molloy argues that a woman's potentially sexualized body places her in a socially disadvantaged position in the business workplace and if she is to dress for authority her body must be appropriately covered. For women, Molloy prescribed the skirted business suit softened with accessories and he warned women against trying to "ape" men by appearing too masculine (1980). These self help books emphasized the need for women to conform to a particular version of femininity, one that complies with dominant expectations, while at the same time avoiding overt sexuality in appearance. This skirted business suit subsequently became the "power suit" in the 1980s, with the addition of some shoulder pads (Entwistle, 1997). This mode of dressing worked, in that it visually defined the career women as a professional and avoided any overt sexualisation. However this form of dressing is based on ideas of dominance and difference, frameworks that work only to reinforce and reify stereotypes of gendered behavior. They all draw on the view that stereotypically masculine dress styles are the norm in the workplace.

Second-wave feminism has since worked to dismantle dominant social and political discourses surrounding the female body and sexuality, and has achieved much in areas related to the pursuit of equality in the public sphere. Later postfeminist discourse assumes any remaining barriers to women's equality can be overcome through individual efforts, as opposed to the second wave's collective action at a systemic level. In this emphasis on individual action, individual choice and empowerment, postfeminists embrace a celebratory attitude to increased female sexuality and individual expression of that sexuality (Hammers, 2005, p. 171). However Michele Hammers (2005, p. 176) writes that "any deployment of sexuality as a source of power is potentially problematic for professional women because this operates within a larger set of discourses that are all too eager to co-opt female displays of sexuality as evidence that women are not otherwise able to compete in the professional world" (2005, p. 176). "Otherwise" in this case meaning they do not have the professional traits of reason or competency necessary to be professionals.

## OPPOSITE

Figure 118. Rei Kawakubo  
for Comme des Garçons' Fall  
Collection 2004 (Holgate, 2004)

'Hirsute-her suit' evolved because I wanted to make a suit that explores an alternative feminine sexuality to challenge masculinist norms that dominate the professional workplace. I wanted this suit to draw attention to gender biased standards of dress. I did not want to do it in a way that encourages women to use their sexuality to control and dominate men because this undermines a woman's professional competence and represents one of the worst stereotypes about professional women. These attitudes merely serve to undermine potential discourses of individual expression and empowerment and they only work to reify negative associations already in place between women and their body in the context of the professional workplace. 'Hirsute-her suit' explores this idea of women's sexuality being a form of professional empowerment and develops a subversive streak to play with ideas of representing female sexuality as a source of individual pleasure, autonomy and power. I wanted to twist the idea of women adopting the form of the male suit as a familiar camouflage. My idea was to take the female business suit and confuse its meaning by incorporating symbols of stereotypical masculine sexuality into its construction. The furry sleeves and crotch strap offers women the possibility of transgression and expresses a defiance of the aesthetic conventions of the business suit. I have used Surrealism's device of displacement to avoid references to obvious female sexuality. The displacement is used to renegotiate the sexual meaning of objects, for example crotch straps are found on paratroopers' jackets and serve to stop their combat jackets ballooning as they descend from the

plane. I lined this one with fur and attached it to a standard business jacket. The association of fur and pubic hair plays against the functionality of the crotch strap and in this way displaces obvious sexual meaning. In other words it first appears overtly sexy and then that disappears as it is seen as a utilitarian piece and this functions to confuse and take on new meaning. In this way 'Hirsute-her suit' encourages viewers to classify it on the basis of decategorisation. The visual result is confusing. There is just enough of the original suit to make it readable, but by introducing ambiguous elements it becomes uneasy, this conflict is clearly my desired outcome.

My approach to this suit was to start by making garment sections. These were sourced from a variety of garment types and I used fabrics not normally associated with traditional business suits. I made fur sleeves and shoulder sections, a silk metal breast plate with exposed zipper, bellow pockets and a crotch strap from military uniforms, lace trouser sections with displaced military cuffs, lapels, and collars. I then placed these garment sections on the form and started arranging them in various combinations. I wanted to push the boundaries of the suit's communication possibilities and make it look confusing but still believable as a business suit. I thought making camouflage type trousers in lace would send out mixed messages. How would a hyper-masculinised garment, made from lace be perceived? Could it make people think, or change and transform feminine representation in the workplace? The fur naturally brings an animal otherness to bear on the traditional business suit but I was really playing with ideas of a masculine hairy body, enabling women to literally put on masculine sexuality and reflect it back on dominant masculinistic workplace cultures. I got this idea from Walter Van Beirendonck's *Finally Chesthair* T-shirt which he used to convey hard-core gay messages (te Duits, 2007, p. 189). The extra large bellow pockets were taken from Elsa Schiaparelli's "cash and carry" pockets on suits that eliminated the need for handbags (Blum, 2003 p. 236). I placed these on the backs and fronts of the suit. I have drawn from the relative indeterminate gender of Rei Kawakubo's designs which offer variation to the wearer. This autonomy of dressing one's own body offers a different kind of eroticism to Western fashion that essentially divides the body into fetish like partial objects. Rei Kawakubo has rethought the entire appearance and construction of clothes and of particular relevance to my project is her analytical consideration of construction, the body and social role of women.



'Hirsute-her suit' has different layers of meaning and these meanings are uncertain, the idea being to destabilise conventional representations of female

BELOW LEFT

Figure 117. House of Schiaparelli. Fashion sketch of suit with scarf, 1940. Musée de la Mode et du Textile, Paris. Collection UFAC, D 73.21.2379(Blum, 2003 p. 236).

OPPOSITE

Figure 120. Photographer Olivia Claire Taylor performing 'Hirsute-her suit'. Author's own (2010)

sexuality. The point I am making with 'Hirsute-her suit' is that taking a more intelligent approach to expressing one's sexuality through dress will be more effective than dressing in a stereotypical feminine sexy way, as in plunging necklines, body hugging, clinging clothes with short hemlines. Vivienne Westwood's work pivots around the idea of a feminine sexuality which is autonomous and subjectively defined. Westwood fosters the idea of a self defined feminine sexuality that communicates individually through dress outside the constraints of male definition (Evans & Thornton, 1989).

I think as women now have an increased presence in professional arenas they are in a better position to experiment with their appearances and challenge masculinistic cultures and discourses. Eventually, with continuous exposure, professional organisations will be brought under pressure to revise their traditionally negative valuation of the female body. However given the extent to which the professions maintain their primarily male dominated insulated distinctiveness they will remain more resistant to change than the wider social sphere. Therefore professional women should exercise intellect in their individual efforts to deploy their bodies or attain sexual power in ways that deviate from existing professional standards.

Sascha's aesthetic and emotional responses were strong with 'Hirsute-her suit'. She identified that she was aware of the furry feeling of the suit and responded with moves, twists and positioning of her body. She clearly demonstrated and drew associations with a powerful sexy beast. Sascha liked the feel of the suit on her body and wanted to touch herself, especially the "obvious furry muff" and it "felt nice between her legs". Sascha wondered about the lace trousers. Was that really her skin underneath? She found that very exciting. Sascha was affected by the way the suit felt and by its aesthetic links to other objects. Its eroticism was also very much for the self.



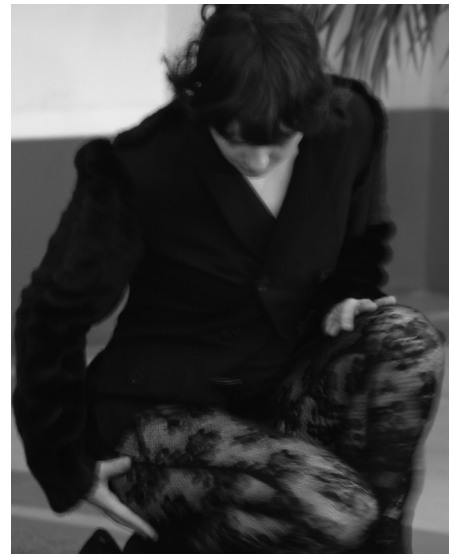


BELOW AND OPPOSITE  
Figures 121-122. Photographer  
Olivia Claire Taylor performing  
'Hirsute-her suit'. Author's own  
(2010)





RIGHT  
Figures 124-128. Performance  
artist Sascha Perfect, performing  
'Hirsute-her suit'. Author's own  
(2010)





BELOW

Figure 129. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Body-suit'.  
Author's own (2010)



CONCEPTUALLY LED

SUIT SERIES  
TITLED#  
BODY-SUIT





OPPOSITE

Figure 140. Photographer Olivia Claire Taylor performing 'Body-suit'. Author's own (2010)

RIGHT

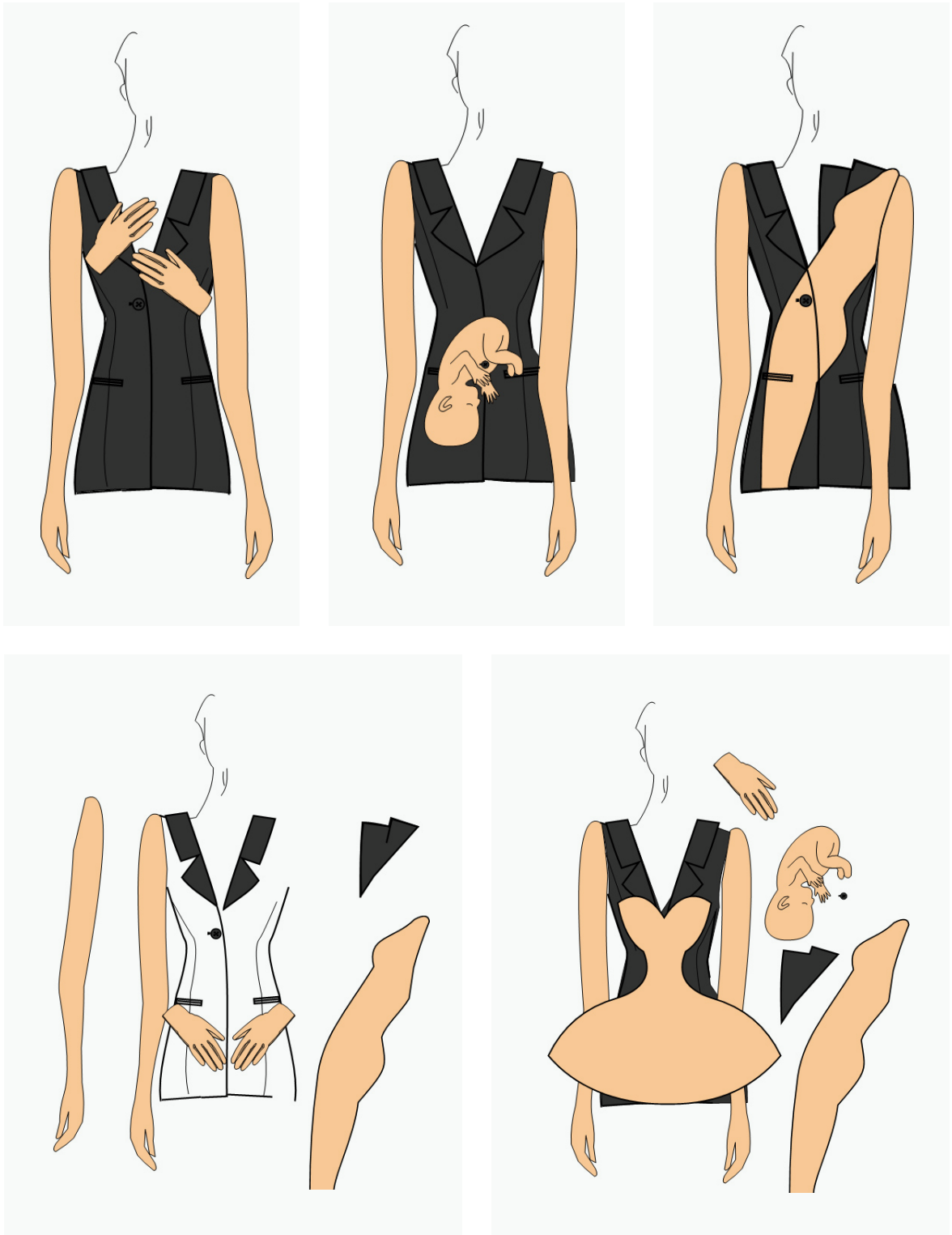
Figure 132. Francois Lesage (French, born 1929). Hand Belt, 1986(Martin, 1987, p. 101).

FAR RIGHT

Figure 130. Elsa Schiaparelli and Jean Cocteau, evening jacket. Embroidered linen, gilt metal thread, bugle beads and paillettes, autumn 1937. Philadelphia Museum of Art(Wood, 2007 p. 154).

The female business suit, once considered empowering for a woman because it dealt with her sexualised body, I consider a constraining play of power over the female form. It is a disempowering vision of feminine identity. 'Body-suit' plays with the politics of women's ever present bodies in the professional workplace and draws on Joan Riviere's (1929/1986) paper, *Womanliness as a Masquerade* in which she describes the process of over-compensation whereby women entering previously held male professions put on a mask of femininity as a defence to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men. Caroline Evans (1999, p. 7) explains here "the mask" metaphor operates like clothing in that it can conceal or transform what lies beneath and expands on this arguing there is "no beneath" and that female identity is all culturally constructed surface. The surface applications in Elsa Schiaparelli's designs articulates this idea of femininity as an illusion representative of women.

I thought I would have a go at subverting this idea of women's power and achievement being linked to their surface appearance (rather than earned through hard work). I wanted to destabilize the conventional association of women with the body and highlight the artifice of the construction of femininity translated into artificial body on the body. By using dissecting panels with 'Body-suit', I was aiming for "an in-your-face" statement of a woman's body and identity being conflated. I wanted it to be shocking and/or offensive; a form of protest. Again I have taken an unusual approach to cut within a classic and familiar garment, this time using surrealist motif and tropes in the form of trompe l'oeil. Superimposing a female torso onto the business suit references Elsa Schiaparelli's grey linen jacket in which she



ABOVE  
Figures 134-138 Preliminary  
working drawings in Illustrator for  
'Body-suit'. Author's Own (2010)



ABOVE  
Figure 133. Yves Saint Laurent. "Pop Art" Dress, 1966. Like Magritte's invasion of the body by another form, Saint Laurent's dress shares the form of the wearer with another figure seen in silhouette. Thus the fictive figure is ever at odds with the form of the garment suggesting discomforts of body and veracity (Martin, 1987, p. 92).

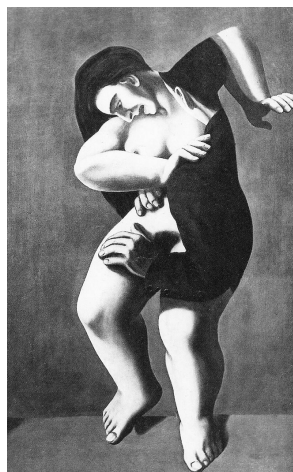
RIGHT  
Figure 131. Rene Magritte. The Titanic Days, 1928. Oil on canvas, 45% x 31% in. Private collection, Brussels. Superimposed on the body with a figural credibility by outline, but in apparent discord with the figure in narrative and specific description, the male attacks the female in a struggle made horrific by the merging of the two figures in an ineluctable union of invasion and molestation (Martin, 1987, p. 92).

FAR RIGHT  
Figure 139. Development on the dress form for 'Body-suit'. Author's own (2010)

creates discord between the fictive embroidery of a women's silhouette and the wearer (Martin, 1987, p. 100).

The traditional suit form was cut up in a surgical way, supplanting a surface body, the idea being to denaturalise women as sexual bodies in the workplace. The flesh coloured body and gloved sleeves mimic nakedness. The fetishist treatment of details, especially in the way elements of tailoring and cut are isolated within the garment, is all the more powerful on a very conventional business suit.

My process began using Adobe Illustrator, starting with a standard suit jacket and tracing body parts and layering them on top. This enabled play with placement, dissection and configuration of imagery. These sections were then scaled up and formed the panel line guides to the jacket. Toiles were cut and placed on the form using wrapping, masking and draping procedures paying particular attention to the colour blocking of the hour glass silhouette and strategic placement of seam lines where they intersected details such as jet pockets and flaps. I wanted the structural and visual references to suggest a body emerging out of a business suit, so it was tailored into the structure of the suit as opposed to applied design. The resulting garment demonstrated the potential to achieve a synthesis between the visual and the tactile element of the suit form which was necessary for its sensory reading. Sascha, somewhat predictably said this suit was all about the hands. She experienced an increased awareness of her hands, but was not sure if they were hers or someone else's or even another set. Sascha felt the gloved sleeves were directing her in some way, as in controlling or being controlled. It felt very like a uniform, similar to what a foreign traffic controller would wear. The shape outlines she thought were a cartoon representation of her silhouette "a bit of a cartoony or not quite real her in a suit".



BELOW AND OPPOSITE  
Figures 141-142. Photographer  
Olivia Claire Taylor performing  
'Body-suit'. Author's own (2010)





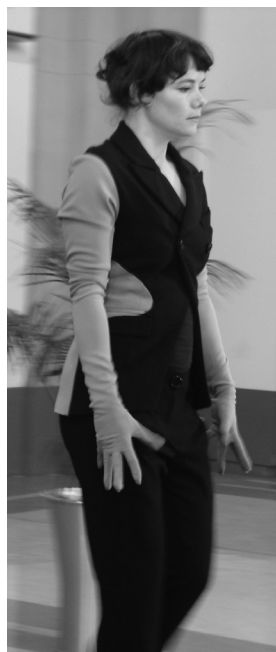
**BELOW**

Figure 143. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Body-suit'.  
Author's own (2010)

**OPPOSITE**

Figures 144-147. Performance artist  
Sascha Perfect performing 'Body-  
suit'. Author's own (2010)





BELOW

Figure 148. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Riding-on  
suit'. Author's own (2010)



CONCEPTUALLY LED

SUIT SERIES

TITLED#

RIDING-ON SUIT

BELOW

Figure 156. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Riding-on  
suit'. Author's own (2010)





RIGHT

Figure 149. Riding garments, and G.W.Clarke's safety habit skirt, T.H. Holding, *Direct System of Ladies Cutting*, 1901 (De la Haye & Wilson, 1999, p. 24)

FAR RIGHT

Figure 150. Dress reformer in an adaption of reform dress that anticipates the pants suit a century later (United States), 1866-70. Collection of Deborah Fontana Cooney (Crane, 2000, p. 110)

'Riding-on suit' has been designed around traditional menswear's influence on women's fashion. Despite the confines of women's role during the 19th century, they also began to adopt more sober and practical dress about the same time as men, although in a limited way. The motivation for this was that women were permitted to take up recreational and athletic pursuits that justified the wearing of more practical styles (Steele & Kidwell, 1989). Feminist reformers in the Victorian era also had an effect on women adopting elements for the male wardrobe. These reformers condemned the way in which narrow shoulders, tight waists and expansive petticoats constrained the locomotion of the female body. The dress of women was seen as irrational in that it contorted the body into unnatural shapes and was driven by the transient rhythms of fashion, considered unhealthy, archaic to a scientific age, wasteful and unnecessary. Various attempts were made in the 19th century to find an alternative, less restrictive female outfit. The first trousers for women were worn by those women associated with the Utopian movement of the 1820s to the 1860s, when a number of communities were established across the United States as an alternative to industrial capitalism and they subsequently devised their own uniform of trousered dress (Entwistle, 2007, pp. 163-166).

In the 1870s John Redfern began designing beautifully constructed and practical tailored garments to meet the needs of women engaging in various sports, from yachting and tennis to archery and riding. Before the mid-19th century, tailoring had been reserved for men's coats. Riding habits were one of the few women's garments available in a tailored style. Gradually demand grew for stylish, practical and hard-wearing outfits suitable for a wide range

TOP LEFT

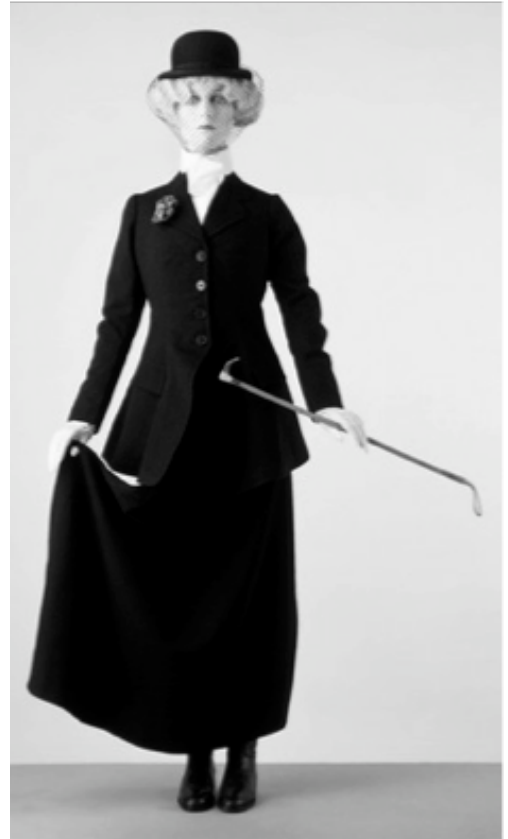
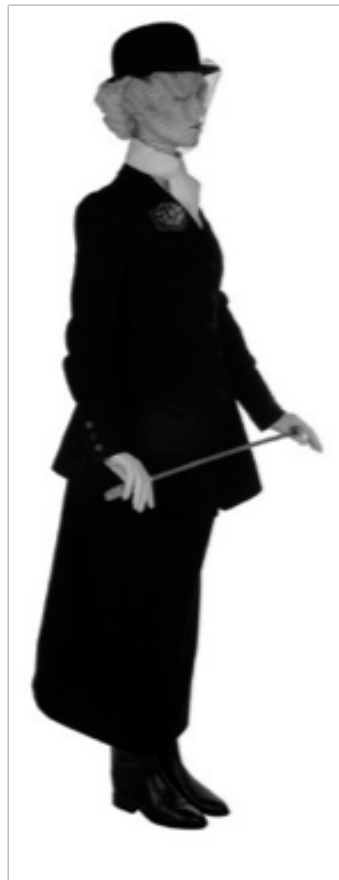
Figure 151. Yohji Yamamoto, Tulle bustle coat, fall-winter 1986. Photograph: Nick Knight for Yohji Yamamoto (Koda, 2001, p. 135).

TOP RIGHT

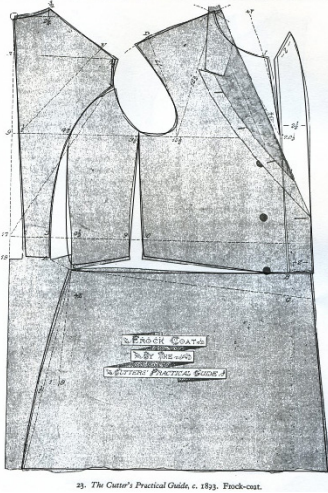
Figure 152. Christian Dior Haute Couture, fall-winter 2000, Sylvia ensemble, designed by John Galliano. Photograph: Courtesy of CORBIS (Koda, 2001, p. 103)

BOTTOM

Figure 154. Side saddle riding habit front and side views © V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, London <http://www.bergfashionlibrary.com>



of outdoor activities including shopping, travelling and walking. For much of the 19th century fashionable women wore dark woollen tailored jackets inspired by men's coats. 'Riding-on suit' is based on the riding habit.



ABOVE

Figure 153. The Cutter's Practical Guide, c. 1893. Frock-coat (Vaugh, 1994, p. 146).

The garment structures were adapted from the frock coat block from the 19th century, the dimensions were altered in certain areas and new sections were added. The shape came from the riding skirt which was shaped to go over the right knee when riding side-saddle (Winifred Aldrich, 2001; 2003). In the 1870s hoop skirts gave way to the bustle where the volume of the skirt was pulled close to the body in the front and the excess gathered up into the back (de la Haye, 1988). I have essentially followed this method with the skirt section of the frock coat. The pattern has been dramatically extended throughout the back section, adding fabric in one continuous bias section. This has given rise to an excess of fabric volume which has been used to form a bustle at the rear of the garment. There were many historical mechanisms for achieving the bustled look such as padded cushions, basket like tubes of wire or cane. They were attached by a waistband so they could be lifted when the wearer sat. These contraptions limited a woman's ability to bend except at the hip joint, and this resulted in a decorous, rigid sense of bearing. The bustle imposes a swinging side to side gait and has been aligned to animal parts. Many designers have reinterpreted the bustle in this way. Yohji Yamamoto referenced the rooster with under-structures of organza, and John Galliano literally saddled the body and created a bustle with tail-like horsehair (Wilcox, 2001). I thought if I bustled the business suit it would enable a woman to impose herself in the board room and give strength to her sense of bearing. The suiting fabric has been fused twice to make the skirt section rigid and the centre back tucks fold back to the interior of the garment applying a pleasant pressure on lumbar region. Structurally, this suit altered Olivia's posture, her spine is encouraged to lengthen and the shoulders pull upwards and back. The expanse to the rear makes her feel like she is floating. Olivia became aware of the balance of weight to the rear and adjusted her body in the opposing direction to compensate the swing of the tail end. She responded to the sculptural nature of the suit and moved her body into specific poses or expressions. With its formulations of shape, structure, materials, proportion and volume this suit challenges the traditional physical and psychological behaviour of the wearer. For a start the enormous scope of the bustle puts at a distance any physical contact with others. The suit encroaches on space, allows a play with distance and the representation of femininity in the professional arena is realised in a different and challenging shape.

RIGHT  
Figure 155. Pattern development  
and working drawings for  
'Riding-on suit'. Author's own  
(2010)



BELOW

Figure 157. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Riding-on  
suit'. Author's own (2010)



BELOW

Figures 158-159. Photographer  
Olivia Claire Taylor performing  
'Riding-on suit'. Author's own  
(2010)





BELOW

Figure 160. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Multiple  
Fem-suit'. Author's own (2010)



CONCEPTUALLY LED

SUIT SERIES

TITLED#

MULTIPLE FEM-SUIT

BELOW

Figure 161. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Multiple  
Fem-suit'. Author's own (2010)

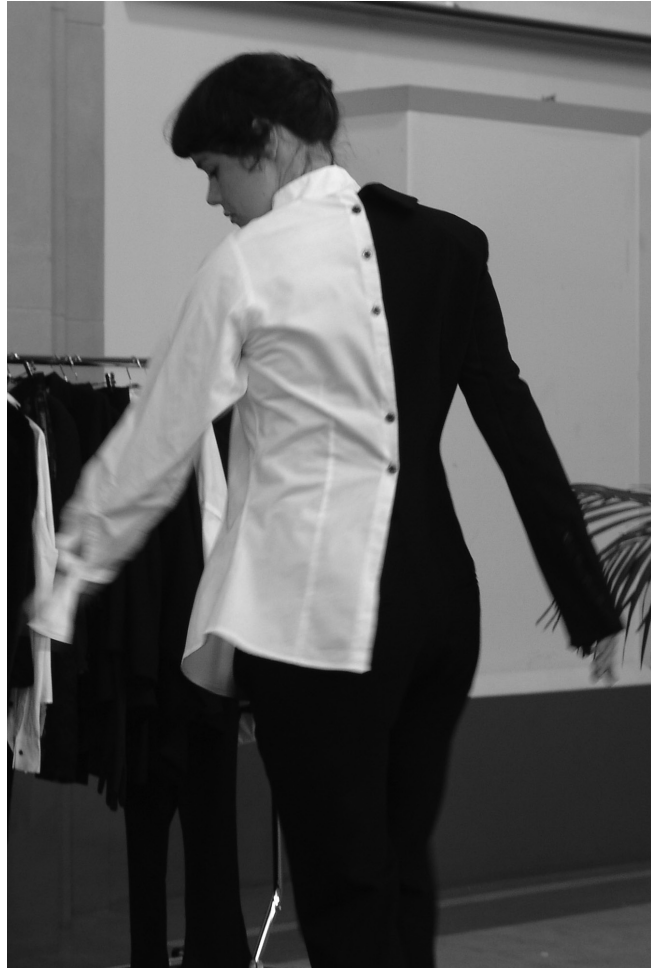


This is my favourite suit; I have designed it around the idea of femininity not being one fixed thing but many possibilities of things. A number of theorists have re-evaluated fashion in regard to femininity, they have sought to question earlier feminist assumptions of fashion being inherently oppressive and they promote fashion as an emancipatory avenue for creativity and self-expression (Evans & Thornton, 1989; Negrin, 2008; Silverman, 1986; Wilson, 1985). While this suit still uses elements from the stereotypical male business wardrobe it is very much set against the female body. This suit is different from every angle, the menswear influence is viewed from one side of the front and this exaggerates the traditional suit structure. But from the other side the feminine qualities are made visible. The back view changes again with the various graphic shapes emerging. The concept “possibilities of things” extends to the suit’s fabrication, the spandex fronts of the trousers accentuate the illusion of the female form and instead of looking purely masculine the female body emerges from the menswear silhouette as re-feminised. I think it renegotiates gender, in that rather than undermining categories of femininity and masculinity within the business suit it reconfigures them.

However this suit is more than symbolic manipulation of gender codes. It takes into account the corporeal nature of the experience of wearing it (Negrin, 2008, p. 154). I have designed the suit to integrally relate to the body that is wearing it. For example when Sascha wears this suit she feels and acts differently and not just because of the suit’s historical and social connotations. The way it is cut and its materiality both enables and constrains certain movements; each angle simultaneously encourages a certain posture and demeanour. Sascha reads this suit as multiple personalities, a harlequin-like garment that utilises performance to liberate her from any fixed notions of the self. This demonstrates that clothing can enhance movement and be imbued with meaning that has the potential to be communicated to wearers through touch, feel and association. In other words it can affect the way a wearer responds and subsequently how they communicate to others.

RIGHT  
Figures 164-166. Performance  
artist Sascha Perfect performing  
'Multiple Fem-suit'. Author's own  
(2010)





BELOW

Figures 162-163. Photographer  
Olivia Claire Taylor performing  
'Multiple Fem-suit'. Author's own  
(2010)





BELOW

Figure 167. Photographer Olivia  
Claire Taylor performing 'Corporate-  
coverall'. Author's own (2010)



CONCEPTUALLY LED

SUIT SERIES TITLED#  
CORPORATE-COVERALL





OPPOSITE

Figure 171. Photographer Olivia Claire Taylor performing 'Corporate-coverall'. Author's own (2010)

RIGHT

Figure 168. 1942 photograph from the Bureau of Public Relations shows a team of women together assembling an airplane (Kidwell & Steele, 1989, p. 81)

FAR RIGHT

Figure 169. Author in dungarees 1956-sadly not Comme des Garçons

Feminism was to have a major affect on the fashion system and in particular on how fashion was to relate to femininity (Teunissen, c2007). Radical feminists of the second wave, protesting against fashion's portrayal of the ideal female image, converted to wearing practical clothing such as dungarees and overalls. They essentially thought fashion was an instrument of oppression used to control women by associating feminine identity with the attainment of an idealised image as opposed to femininity being anything of substance (Negrin, 2008, p. 32). Sadly the supposed functionality of dungarees was ultimately exposed as a myth by Elisabeth Wilson (1985), due to its exceedingly difficult management when going to the loo. However despite this the overall could still be understood as an aesthetic medium for the expression of feminist ideas, desires and beliefs not just for that time but historically representative of women's achievements in many aspects of an active life. I personally associate the overall with female work; my mother wore them when she served in the air force during the Second World War and again later as a farmer's wife. I too was raised in them as a child.

I thought I would design an overall type women's business suit out of respect to the hard work second wave feminists did to improve women's workplace equality. According to Lisa Ehrich in her article *The Problematic Nature of Dress for Women Managers* "identifying dress as a significant issue for women managers is a trivialization of a serious situation" (1994, p. 29). Ehrich goes on to discuss how dress is used to deflect more serious issues confronting women managers such as gender bias in relation to recruitment and promotional policies, and argues for a women's competence

BELOW

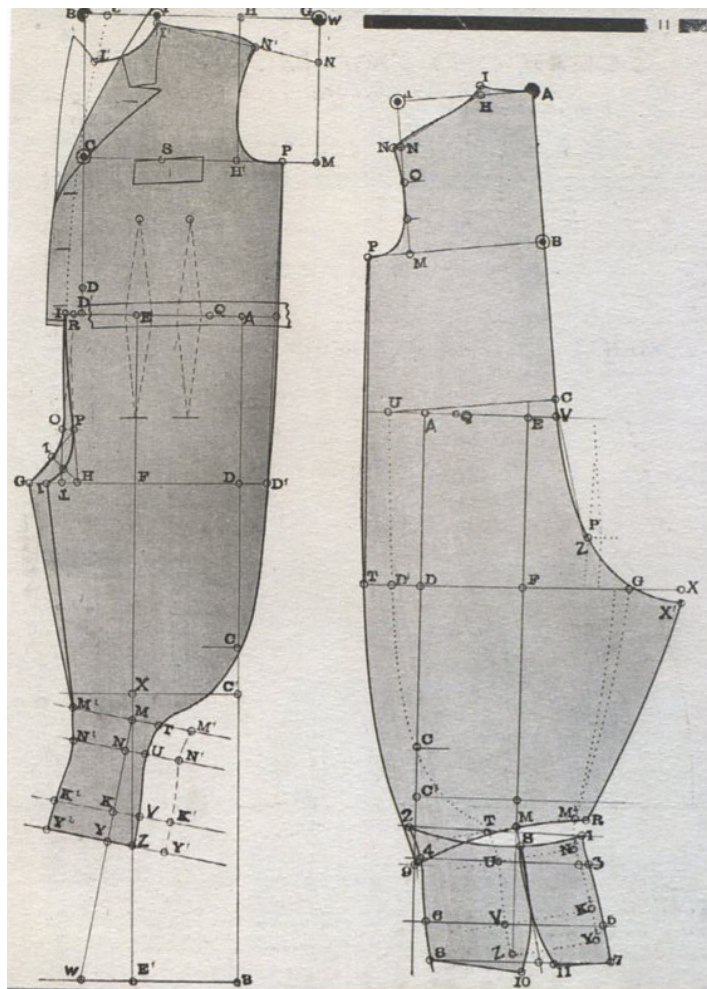
Figure 170 Model of outfit for motorcyclists. *Snob*, XI, n. 93-94 (September-October) 1931. Courtesy BPSR (Mario Lupano & Vaccari, c2009, p. 167).

OPPOSITE

Figure 172. Photographer Olivia Claire Taylor performing 'Corporate-coverall'. Author's own (2010)

foregrounding her image (1994, p. 30). I think in this sense the overall suit signals work as opposed to any gender specificity and could readily suit these ideologies of a work centred dress mode. The practicalities of war brought significant changes to women's dress; women who served in the military or worked in factories either wore masculine looking uniforms or overalls (English, 2010, c2009 p. 90).

I reworked a pattern for a 1930 motorcyclist garment to create the overall suit, this amazing pattern had the formal elements of the business suit, such as collar, lapel, breast pocket and front button closure, all in one with the overall (Mario Lupano & Vaccari, 2009, p. 167). As regards toilet practicalities, I inserted an enormous buttoned front fly which remains open; there is only one quick release jacket button. If you want to remove the jacket section to get down to work, the business shirt underneath has additional sleeves that tie back to stop the whole thing falling down. Olivia felt dandy in this one and performed accordingly.





BELOW  
Figures 173 - 174. Photographer  
Olivia Claire Taylor performing  
'Corporate-coverall'.  
Author's own (2010)





# CONCLUSION



This MDes research project began with the practice of making women's suits and I have explored my research questions through a studio based paradigm which firmly situates creative practice as both a vehicle of enquiry and research in its own right (Gray & Malins, 2004). The suits I made have been interrogated, analysed and reflected on and this has formed a significant part of the thesis.

The intention of this body of work has been to critique the stereotypical representations and containment of idealised or normative definitions of femininity in professional organisations and examine how this affects women's professional dress practice in contemporary western workplaces. This practice-led approach was taken in response to an increased interest and need for fashion practitioners to articulate and analyse their work. Fashion in an academic context has predominately been discussed by theorists and historians who have sought to understand fashion design through existing ideas associated with cultural studies, social sciences, semiotics, psychology, feminism and so on (Griffiths, 2000, pp. 73-74). Andrea Eckersley writes in her conference paper titled *A Non-Representational Approach to Fashion*, "whilst much of this analysis has been worthwhile, this work typically fails to address the art and practice of making clothes, just as it so often ignores the lived experience of the dressed body" (Eckersley, 2008, p. 2).

This project could go into a broader sociological context and I would love to deploy the suits in the professional workplace. However this raises a range of practical and ethical problems at this stage and is beyond the scope of a master's project. Dress practice is just one aspect of a complex and multifaceted situation concerning gender relations within professional organisations. This work could possibly contribute towards integrated, multidisciplinary research to explore and resolve inequalities in the professional workplace in the future.

The project proceeds from my assumption that within a historical and contemporary context professional organisations have channelled meaning in such a way that it has formed stereotypes. Through continuous re-presentation, certain styles of dress, particularly the skirted suit have become idealised and as such synonymous with being a female professional. Through experimental tailoring practice I have created suits that allow the wearer to discover a resistance to hegemonic business masculinity. This resistance is felt via the altered haptic perception of wearing the suits, as well as experienced visually through their altered codes. These visual codes play with repressed aspects of the professional business subjectivity.



# DEFINITION OF TERMS

A series of terms are used throughout this thesis that relate to the area of investigating the women's business suit. Specific terms have been employed with a specific meaning for the purposes of this research and the following terms form a frame of reference for this thesis.

**A profession** is an occupation that meets the following criteria: application of skills based on technical knowledge, requirements of advanced education and training, formal testing of competence, controlled admission, professional associations, code of conduct and sense of responsibility to serving the public (Benveniste, 1987). Occupations vary in the extent to which they meet the above criteria and are classified on a continuum of professionalism.

The term **professional** traditionally referred to an individual who was employed in a profession, however this term is currently applied more broadly, to refer to any individual who is responsible for providing a particular service to their internal clients, as in co-workers or external clients as in customers (Maister, 1997).

**Professionalism** refers to the extent to which one identifies with his/her profession and accepts its values (Morrow & Goetz, 1988). Professionalism can be evidenced by an individual's ability to meet normative expectations by effectively providing a given service.

**Professional image** is defined as an assemblage of strategic constituents, as in superiors, colleagues, clients, perception of one's competence and character. This definition refers to one's externally orientated public persona, with a focus on reflected perceptions of how others perceive us as opposed to one's self-image, or how one perceives oneself (Ibarra, 1999). Professional image plays a critical role in organisational life due to its implications for achieving social approval, power, well-being and career success (Baumeister, 1982 ; Ibarra, 1999).

**Professional image construction** is a complex, socially embedded process which involves assessing and managing impressions of one's personal and social identities simultaneously. People who construct viable professional images are perceived as being capable of meeting the technical and social demands of their jobs (Ibarra, 1999). As such individuals invest a considerable amount of energy into constructing viable professional images by enacting personas that convey qualities that they want others to ascribe to them for example, intelligence, confidence, trustworthiness and seriousness about one's work (Goffman, 1959; Ibarra, 1999; A Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993). Existing research on professional image construction focuses primarily on how the projection of one's personal identity, or uniquely held personal attributes shapes others' perceptions of one's competence and

character. For example studies show that people that are poorly dressed are perceived as less competent and less capable of fitting into the organisation's culture, which detracts from the construction of a viable professional image (Morem, 1997; Rafaeli et. al.,1997; A Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993).

**Stereotype** is a person or thing that conforms to a standard image

**Post modernistic fashion** relies on visual paradox- underclothing becomes over clothing, new is replaced by old, and propriety in dress is replaced by total lack of respect for the display of status and value systems. Highly priced, slashed and torn garments symbolise an economic irrationality, where literal deconstruction of fabric seemingly reflects the deconstruction of past values.

**Professional dress:** professional apparel, which typically is formal in style and tailored in construction. The single most important garment that communicates professionalism remains the jacket in association with pants or a skirt.

**Concept:** The idea which informs the design of the suit garments

**Garment:** This thesis addresses terminology in relation to clothing and fashion however the term garment is used throughout this thesis to refer to the work produced

**Context:** The physical space in which the garment (suits) are worn/seen; this includes the context of the specific wearers body and space in which that wearer and garment (suit) are located as in professional organisations.

**Researcher:** The researcher is the author of the text as well as the designer of the suits.

**Practice-led:** Is a research project where the investigation is dependent on practice as a means of interrogating the hypothesis. Comparative analysis and reflection on practice form the significant element of the thesis and inform the conclusions (Bugg, 2006, p. 14)

**Wearers:** The wearers are the people who wear the suits in a performance scenario and for this project have been used for feedback appropriate to the situation of experiential clothing (Bugg, 2006, p. 14)

**Viewers:** In this project the viewers (tutors/colleagues/the author) have been used as a way of gaining feedback at presentations.



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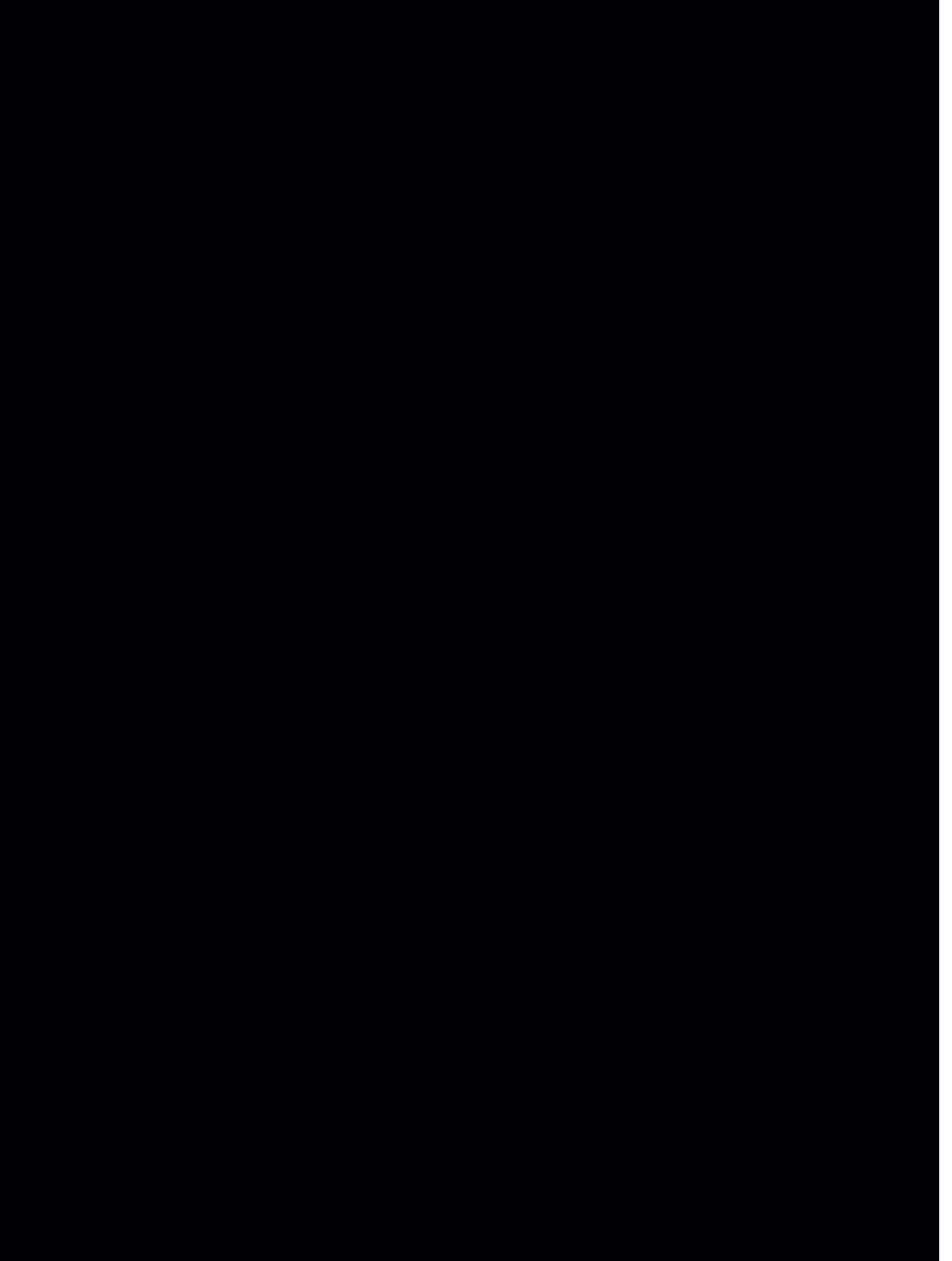
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# — APPENDICES —







## MASSEY UNIVERSITY

18 August 2010

Claire Hacon  
80 Tasman Street  
Mount Cook  
WELLINGTON 6021

Dear Claire

**Re: Refiguring Suits/Replacing Femininity**

Thank you for your Low Risk Notification which was received on 16 August 2010.

Your project has been recorded on the Low Risk Database which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committees.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis that it is safe to proceed without approval by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

**A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:**

*"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.*

*If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, e-mail [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz)."*

Please note that if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to provide a full application to one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

John G O'Neill (Professor)  
**Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and  
Director (Research Ethics)**

cc Ms Catherine Bagnall  
Fashion Design  
Wellington

Ms Amanda Bill  
Fashion Design  
Wellington

Mr Rodney Adank, Acting HoI  
Institute of Design for Industry and  
Environment  
Wellington

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Massey University Human Ethics Committee  
Accredited by the Health Research Council

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